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Students' attitudes towards EFL university writing: A case study at An-Najah National University, Palestine

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Abstract

Writing has always been seen as the most troublesome and challenging area of language learning for all students without exception especially if it is to be done in a foreign language. Most of these students fail to meet the expectations of instructors both communicatively and linguistically. Those students are, in fact of varied backgrounds, different learning methodologies, varied levels of language skills and experience, let alone different insights, attitudes and conceptions about the writing skill. Consequently, it is significant to exhibit what these students think of writing and how they approach it. This study was meant to serve a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it aimed at examining what the Palestinian EFL students' attitudes towards writing in general are; and secondly, whether the Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in English and Arabic. The participant of this study were (102) EFL students enrolled in four writing courses offered by the English Department in the Faculty of Humanities at An-Najah National University in the Spring Semester 2016/2017. A 28-item questionnaire modified from Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Questionnaire and an open-ended question to help respondents freely express their attitudes towards writing were used to answer the questions. The study findings showed that students had positive attitudes toward writing, the various

writing courses offered by the university, the textbooks and teaching methods used, and their writing skills and strategies.

Keywords: Sociology, Psychology, Linguistics, Education

1. Introduction

People depend on writing to a large extent despite the high rates of illiteracy. If writing is seen as an act of communication, then more communication in the written form is being employed these days than the oral one because of the advent of the internet. There is no aspect of life uninfluenced by writing as it "offers ways of reclaiming the past", and "shaping the future" (Coulmas, 2003: 1). It is a matter of disclosing one's innermost thoughts, feelings, ideas, and desires so that others understand them and make use of them in a way or another.

According to (Kurt and Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989, 1991; Shrewsbury, 1995) writing is not easy; it is normally listed at the end of spectrum in the language skills for a number of explanations. It requires a combination of "various cognitive, memory, linguistic, motor, and affective systems, each of which makes its own unique contribution to the writing process and the text that gets written" (Singer, 2004: 2). Another explanation might be that all users of a language start to listen to their mother tongues then move to speak and read it before they finally begin to write in that language. Writing is also a productive skill that entails having a large reservoir of ideas and thoughts in addition to knowing the language rules thoroughly and adequately. Jahin and Idrees (2012) stated that writing entails coordination between content, vocabulary, spelling, organization and mechanics.

Ranging from "mechanical control to creativity, with good grammar, knowledge of subject matter, awareness of stylistic conventions and various mysterious factors in between" (Wall, 1981: 53), writing is deemed a hard, tough, intricate and demanding skill to master (Graham et al., 2005). If one needs to master writing skills, s/he needs to practice and work hard because writing is not a passive or static process but a dynamic, active one.

The complexity of writing as a task tends to increase levels of tension and puzzlement in students who are taking writing courses at university level. Gere (1987) and Sharples (1993) postulated that such confusion can often hinder and demotivate the student, and thus may result in negative reactions towards writing. Most students, irrespective of their level and achievement, find writing tough and unattainable and look at it as something obligatory and they just ought to survive through to pass certain exams (Yavuz and Genc, 1998). This may "relate to affective elements such as student attitudes, writing apprehension and self-efficacy in writing" (Erkan and Saban, 2011: 167). Therefore, proficiency at writing is unlikely to be

attained if students lack self-confidence and are unwilling to unfold their feelings through writing. These students "believe that writing is a natural gift rather than a learned skill" (Langan, 2000:12).

Most students tend to show negative attitudes towards writing. Even students who excel at other language skills face the same difficulties when they are asked to write; they fear making writing mistakes and they are not confident to exhibit their thoughts through writing as it is, in fact, beyond their capacity. Consequently, Erkan and Saban (2011) maintained that "success with writing in a foreign language may be related to attitudes towards writing, apprehension about writing, and self-efficacy in writing" (p. 168).

The English language is the most popular and leading language enjoying a prestigious place in different countries, including Palestine. It is taught at all stages of the educational system starting from the kindergarten. But despite being exposed to English for such a very long time, the majority of students learning English, as a foreign language, find writing really very demanding and beyond their capabilities and English majors and prospective majors, who represent the population of the study, at An-Najah National University are, indeed, no exception.

Students of English Department at this university face a lot of obstacles and barriers that affect their written production negatively. Among these difficulties include their low level of language abilities, in general, and writing abilities, in specific, both in the mother tongue and the foreign language as well (Badr and Jahin, 2007). Another factor is that these students are registered directly without sitting for a written placement test. Moreover, Jahin and Idrees (2012) claimed that "the clash between students' learning preferences and tutors' perceptions of these students' learning preferences" adds to the fuel.

2. Background

The way writing is taught has a significant impact on students' attitudes towards this crucial language skill. Therefore, beliefs are always changing about how to teach/learn writing. There have been little efforts to identify student's attitudes towards writing in a foreign language for general as well as academic purposes.

The correlation between students' attitudes towards learning a language is deeply related to their performance, Mathewson (1994) and Masgoret & Gardner (2003). Karahan (2007) postulated that when students have positive attitudes towards a language, the gain positive orientations towards that language and increases their achievement or proficiency. Brown (2009) supported these findings when he mentioned that such positive orientations increase learners' self confidence and self-esteem.

According to [Dornyei and Csizer \(2002\)](#), having positive attitude results in learning a foreign language easily; it facilitates the process while negative attitude hinders learning and; consequently, acts as an obstacle against it. Therefore, attitudes, negative, natural, and/or positive, decide, to a large extent, students' success or failure in their endeavors to learn not only a language but also other topics. This means that positive attitude plays a vital role and determines the learners' attitudes towards the language being processed. In other words, maintaining positive or negative attitudes towards a language is likely to result in difficulty or ease of learning.

The connection between students' attitude and writing has gained little attention. The attitude towards writing, as a whole, has a significant impact on achievement; it either enhances it or hinders it. [Graham et al. \(2005\)](#) stated that writing attitude is "an affective disposition involving how the act of writing makes the author feels, ranging from happy to unhappy" (p. 518). Yet, not all students incline to have positive attitudes towards writing; they may show negative ones. Putting it another way, some students refrain from writing and show unwillingness towards the skill. [Daly and Miller \(1975\)](#) defined writing apprehension as "a general avoidance of writing and of situations perceived by the individual to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing." Such apprehension results mainly from a writer having low self-esteem.

[Gungle and Taylor \(1989\)](#) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between writing apprehension and a focus on the form rather than on the content. They also examined the relationship between writing attitudes and students' willingness to register in other advanced writing courses. They found negative attitudes towards studying other advanced writing course, but the researchers did not find any relationship between the students' attitudes and content of their writing.

[Masny and Foxall \(1992\)](#) maintained that students' attitudes to and performance in writing depend on their academic achievement. They found that students with high academic achievement have positive attitudes towards writing than those with low achievement. Furthermore, the researchers found that students were interested in form rather than content, and that students with writing apprehension were unlikely to take other advanced writing courses.

[Aikman \(1985\)](#) argued that negative attitudes to writing are manifested in a delaying completing written assignments or homework. It results from lack of confidence, teaching practices, classroom atmosphere, and first language interference mainly translation.

The feedback that students normally get from instructors has a significant role on their attitudes towards writing not only in their first language but also in the second language ([Silva and Brice, 2004](#); [Hedgcock, 2005](#); [Lee, 2008](#)). [Ferris \(1995\)](#) and [Montgomery and Baker \(2007\)](#) stated that learners get tremendous insights about

the feedback they receive from instructors; these learners are usually looked at, by teachers, as active contributors according to [Hyland and Hyland \(2006\)](#) and [Lantolf and Pavlenko \(2001\)](#). That is, of course, because they review their teachers' notes about the writing. These notes are mostly considered helpful and useful in identifying their mistakes and points of weakness. The impact of such feedback depends greatly on its forms and objectives, let alone its source. Students who give their peers feedback were found to develop more in writing skills than those who receive it ([Lundstrom and Baker, 2009](#)).

Attitudes are envisaged differently by scholars. They are deeply related to preferences, likes and dislikes ([Bem, 1970](#)); certain tendencies towards things ([Eagly and Chaiken, 1993](#)); readiness or ideas that influence someone to behave or think in a particular way ([Triandis, 1971](#); [Travers, 1973](#)); and they are "mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" ([Allport, 1935](#): p.10).

Teaching methods and learning strategies play an important role in defining teachers' as well as students' attitudes towards writing ([Cohen and Brooks-Carson, 2001](#); [Casanave, 2002](#); [Griffiths, 2007](#); [Sasaki, 2007](#); [Fenghua and Hongxin, 2010](#)). [Griffiths \(2007\)](#) indicated that teachers encourage positive learning techniques used by their students during writing classes.

[Cheng et al. \(1999\)](#) carried out a study to investigate the relationship between classroom tension and writing tension. They suggested that classroom anxiety and writing anxiety are "two related yet relatively distinguishable anxiety constructs" (p. 436). [Gilmore \(2009\)](#) claimed that writing in the first language is not welcome by most students and that writing in a second or even a foreign language is more terrifying than that in the mother tongue.

[Kobayashi and Rinnert \(2008\)](#) found that students employ first language rules when they write in another language; language skills and writing techniques are transferred across languages. Some students tend to think in the first language when they begin to write in another language. [Cohen and Brooks-Carson \(2001\)](#) conducted a study to see whether thinking through the first language and even writing out a text first in that language may result in good writing in the second language. The researchers found that writing directly in the second language works better under time pressure. In another study, [Wang and Wen \(2002\)](#) confirmed that writing in a second language is a bilingual act.

As far as Palestinian students are concerned, [Hammad \(2016\)](#) conducted a study to examine Palestinian university students' essay writing and the various obstacles they face. The researcher's study sample consisted of 60 university students who were asked to sit for an essay writing test and then respond to an open-question

questionnaire. Three English writing instructors were interviewed by the researcher to collect data. The study findings show that students lack adequate linguistic knowledge, cohesion, and academic style; they also adopt word for word translation when they write.

In another study, [Hammad \(2014\)](#) investigated the effect of one of teacher written corrective feedback types (direct feedback) on the performance of a sample of Palestinian EFL university female students in essay writing. The sample of the study consisted of 60 participants who were divided into two groups. The experimental group received direct feedback over a 9-week period, while the control group received no-feedback at all. Two essay tests were administered. The study found that while teacher direct written corrective feedback enhanced high achievers' performance in a new piece of writing, it did not improve middle and low achievers' performance.

[Hammad \(2013\)](#) tried to investigate Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies, assess their writing performance, and examine the relationship between English writing performance and their writing strategies. The researcher administered a self-developed questionnaire, prepared an English essay test to 66 Palestinian university-level students and conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 students selected from the study sample. The study concluded that the participants did not exhibit a satisfactory level of strategy use when writing in English, and there was a strong positive correlation between the participants' use of English writing strategies and their EFL writing performance.

[Abu Shawish and Abdelraheem \(2010\)](#) carried out a study to identify the reasons why students who study English at three Palestinian universities feel anxious and stressed while they write. The study found that students' sex and academic level were not significant variables in the students' estimates of the causes of writing apprehension. Besides, students' belonging to academic institution affected their estimates of the causes and remedies of writing apprehension. They also found that high achievers in writing were more apprehensive than low ones.

[Abu Jarad \(2008\)](#) investigated the way Palestinian university students (intermediate and advanced) feel towards peer feedback in EFL writing courses. Twenty-five intermediate university students and twenty-one advanced students were asked to respond to a questionnaire that measures attitudes towards feedback; the researcher found that these students improved in maintaining the mechanics of writing, content, and organization; they also approved peer feedback to the extent that it started to be used at higher levels.

English can be taught and learned for pure academic purposes where students are taught, usually in a higher education setting, to use the language appropriately for study. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) helps students improve their language skills in listening, speaking, reading, grammar, and vocabulary development. In

addition, students are introduced to a new way of teaching, test taking, note taking, academic vocabulary usage, research and library skills. EAP has been shown to effectively prepare students in terms of language for undergraduate programs in college and university level.

Jordan (1997) argues that EAP is “concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems”. This field can be divided into two branches: English for specific purposes and English for general Academic purposes such as academic writing. One of the for writing courses offered by An-Najah University is set for academic purposes; it is the Technical Writing course. Writing and research is also like to be considered as a course which focuses on writing for academic purposes.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Problem of the study

Writing has always been seen as the most troublesome and challenging area of language learning for all students without exception especially if it is to be done in a foreign language. Most of these students fail to meet the needs of the institute they study at in terms of producing a written form that fits or meets the expectations of the instructors both communicatively and linguistically. Those students are, in fact of varied backgrounds, different learning methodologies, varied levels of language skills and experience, let alone difference insights, attitudes and conceptions about the writing skill. Consequently, it was significant to exhibit what these students think of writing and how they approach it from their own perspectives. Little research has been conducted to detect and identify the reasons for students' low writing performance at university level.

3.2. Purpose of the study

This study was meant to serve a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it aimed at examining what the Palestinian EFL students' attitudes towards writing in general are; and secondly, whether the Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in L2, i.e., English and L1, i.e., Arabic.

3.3. Research questions

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are Palestinian EFL students' attitudes towards writing in general?
2. Do Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in L2 and/or L1?

3.4. Significance of the study

This study is deemed significant for the following considerations. First, it seeks to answer two crucial queries relating to language learning. Finding sound answers would help educators, in general, and writing instructors, in specific, adopt suitable teaching methodologies to enhance university students' writing skills besides other skills mainly reading. Second, [Cross \(1995\)](#) argued that students' writing skills and capacities are essential in mastering a foreign language. Therefore, evaluating the relationship between students' writing skills and proficiency and other skills promotes teachers and educators to mind their orientations towards teaching a language in an integrative way. Language learning and teaching is an indivisible process, i.e. all skills should be handled together. Furthermore, this study attempts to examine a predisposition related to students' abilities in writing in the foreign language, which states that once they are enrolled in the English Department, they possess positive attitudes and insights about writing. Tackling students' reactions and attitudes towards language learning serves to scrutinize the effect of the sociopolitical context in which these students live. [Gardner \(1985\)](#) stated that conceptions and reactions stem from this context. Finally, [Hammerly \(1986\)](#) contended that students' attitudes play a vital role in learning a language; it affects their outcomes positively. Students' reactions, beliefs, and intentions are crucial in motivating them and enhancing their performance ([Olshtain et al., 1990](#)).

3.5. Methodology

3.5.1. Participants and instructional context

Ethical approval for this research was provided by An-Najah National University vice president of academic affairs and the Chair of English Language Department Ethics Committee. This questionnaire was conducted according to established ethical guidelines, and informed consent was obtained from the participants who were (102) EFL students enrolled in four writing courses offered by the English Department in the Faculty of Humanities at An-Najah National University in the Spring Semester 2016/2017. The first section included (25) students taking the first writing course, Writing 1, that determines acceptance in the English Department and introduces students to basic writing skills at sentence and paragraph level only. The second section included (25) English major students taking another obligatory writing course, Writing and Research. This course is based on the previous one and introduces students to more writing skills including essay writing as well as the basics of research skills. The third section included (27) students who take a slightly different obligatory writing course, Technical Writing, which is more specific and more demanding as it gets students to be aware of technical writing skills rather than academic ones. Students are introduced to writing different types of letters, emails, CVs, resumes, reports, etc. While the fourth section is the most advanced in the list; it studies Advanced Writing which relates to skills of paper writing, research papers, and

master's theses. The level of these students is different ranging from pre-intermediate to intermediate and finally upper-intermediate. English majors cannot study these courses in one semester; each student is to study each course in a separate semester. Some of these writing courses is for academic purposes (e.g. Technical Writing and Writing and Research) and others are for general purposes.

3.5.2. Design and instrument

To gather data from the participants, two major tools were used. The first was a 28-item questionnaire modified from Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Questionnaire and another questionnaire prepared by Ismail (2010) who classified the items into four sub-categories to answer the research questions adequately. The twenty-eight questions were followed by a five point Likart scale descending from (5) as strongly agree to (1) as strongly disagree. To ensure that students do not misunderstand the questionnaire, the researcher made up his mind to translate it into respondents' mother tongue, Arabic.

The questionnaire is proved valid and reliable by a panel of experts at An-Najah National University based on Alfa-cronbach coefficient method, method of correlation between question and whole (Item-total correlation) and reliability coefficient.

3.5.3. Data collection

Data were collected after the second exam which is normally conducted following the twelfth week of the second semester 2013/2014. An-Najah National University students normally sit for a couple of (one-hour) exams and a final exam.

3.5.4. Detailed questions of the study

1. What are Palestinian EFL students' attitudes towards writing in general?
2. Do Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in English and Arabic? The researcher asked students to rate their tendencies towards writing in general, writing in English, and writing in Arabic.
 - A- **Is writing important and/or useful for your study and/or future career?**
Items (1, 2, 7, 24, 25).
 - B- **Is writing, regardless of the language used, an enjoyable task?**
Items (3, 4, 5, 6, 27)
 - C- **Is writing, regardless of the language used, a difficult task?**
Items (12/ 13/ 14/ 15/ 17/ 20/ 21/ 22/ 28)
 - D- **Is writing in English an enjoyable task?**
Items (3/ 5/ 23/ 24/ 25)

E- Is writing in English a difficult task?

Items (8/ 12/ 13/ 14/ 15/ 16/ 17/ 18)

3. Third question (What are students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing?), the researcher asked students to rate these items (7/ 8/ 9/ 10/ 11/ 24/ 25/ 26)
4. The fourth question (What are students' attitudes towards the obstacles that Palestinian EFL students face before, during and after writing?), the researcher asked students to rate these items (16/ 17/ 18/ 20/ 21// 22).

3.5.5. Data analysis

In order for the researcher to adequately analyze the data, a number of statistical procedures and qualitative and quantitative techniques have been employed including the SPSS. The quantitative scale questionnaire is interpreted based on [Creswell \(2003\)](#) model and it is then backed by the researcher's observations of students' reactions and attitudes towards writing. Consequently, the researcher has incorporated his observations with the results obtained from analyzing the questionnaire items and the research questions.

It is worth mentioning that the interpretation and the analysis of the data has deeply concentrated on the various attitudes of university students who are enrolled in four writing courses i.e., Writing, Advanced Writing, Writing and Research, and Technical Writing that are offered, to English major students only, by the English Department at An-Najah National University. The researcher deliberately looks at and considers the findings of questionnaire the way the study questions are listed.

4. Results and discussion

The first question of this study is meant to trace and highlight the various attitudes and perceptions of Palestinian university students towards writing; it reads like this: What are Palestinian EFL students' attitudes towards writing in general? There are four basic language skills that should go hand in hand in any language teaching/ learning process. The most demanding and challenging one is, of course, writing not only for students but also for teachers who are required to employ a variety of strategies to effectively teach writing and learn adequately about their student's attitudes towards this skill. Negative attitudes may make the writing process even more demanding and more challenging.

Various attitudes of the study participants have been observed by the researcher who, himself, is the instructor of the all groups. These attitudes vary from utmost apprehension and fear to intimacy and appreciation. The former tends mostly to denote negative and anxious perceptions, feeling and attitudes while the latter is exactly

the opposite as students accept the task and spare no efforts in impressing their instructors due to the fact that writing is a communicative act of conveying messages about various things. As far as apprehension is concerned, the researcher contends that the writing process is very likely to be negatively affected by a number of factors including students' feelings about themselves as writers, about the atmosphere, or even about the writing task itself especially when it is being evaluated by the instructor. As the participants are university students, they are intellectually capable of conducting the writing task at hand; however, they show some difficulties with it due to anxiety, fear of criticism after assessment, time constraints, inability to organize thoughts and produce relevant ideas, students' linguistic knowledge level, instructional practices and mother tongue interference, etc.

The researcher has also noticed that fresh students, those who were studying, Writing 1, were more apprehensive and anxious than students in the other section due to many factors including the sudden shift from schooling systems to university ones, the extra reluctance and shyness they used to show, constraints imposed on them due to co-education, and new teaching techniques. In general, the researcher contends that the higher the level of students, the less anxiety and apprehension they show.

Research question two: Do Palestinian EFL students feel any difference between expressing ideas while writing in English and Arabic?

The researcher asked students to rate their tendencies towards writing in general, writing in English, and writing in Arabic using the following sub-questions.

A- Is writing important and/or useful for your study and/or future career?

To answer this specific question, the researcher used a modified Daly-Miller Apprehension Questionnaire especially the items (1, 2, 7, 24, and 25). [Table 1](#) below shows students' answers.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on importance of writing for study and future job.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Learning to write in English is a very important skill for my academic study at the university.	102	4.75	.67
2	I need to learn to write in English because it is a very important skill for my future job.	102	4.39	.99
7	I feel that I can be a good writer if I practice writing regularly.	102	4.62	.69
24	The EFL writing class(es) is/are useful for my academic study.	102	4.29	.64
25	I fell I learn a lot from EFL writing class.	102	4.15	.62

The table above shows that the majority of students strongly agree that writing, in general, and writing in English, in specific, is significant and useful for their academic study and future jobs. It also shows that neither the nature of nor the student level has an impact of student's tendency towards learning to write.

B- Is writing, regardless of the language used, an enjoyable task?

To answer this question, students were asked to consider items (3, 4, 5, 6, and 27). Students' responses are shown in [Table 2](#) below.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on whether writing is enjoyable or not.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
3	I like to write in English because I am a good writer in Arabic.	102	2.80	1.05
4	I enjoy writing in Arabic.	102	2.99	1.22
5	I enjoy writing in English.	102	3.85	.87
6	People seem to enjoy what I write.	102	3.24	.86
27	I enjoy the EFL writing course.	102	3.97	.76

[Table 2](#) above shows that students in all courses enjoy writing in English rather than in Arabic. The Standard Deviation of item (4) above is a little bit high; this means that students are not in favor of the fact that being good in writing in the mother tongue (in this case, Arabic) results in being good in writing in another language mainly if it is foreign. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of student majoring in English have positive attitudes towards the language and its skills including writing; they voluntarily chose to major in English.

C- Is writing, regardless of the language used, a difficult task?

To answer this question, students were asked to consider items (12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, and 28). Students' responses are shown in [Table 3](#) below.

The table below shows that a large number of students is against the item; many students inclined to the second choice i.e., Disagree stating that they look at writing as a basic ingredient of the language. On the other hand, the study results show that the majority of respondents were totally against the fact that writing is not important. As far as item (14) is concerned, the researcher noticed a discrepancy among students' responses; some are uncertain and others simply disagree with the item saying that they do not avoid writing as it is a significant for their study and job. The table also shows that the majority of students do not hate writing; however, the high Standard Deviation shows large variance or disparity in students' responses on the item. Most of them were against the item and some were uncertain about it.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on whether writing is a difficult task or not.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
12	I would like to learn all language skills except writing.	102	2.20	1.18
13	I avoid writing because it is not very important skill for me.	102	1.60	.71
14	I hate writing in English because I do not know how to write.	102	2.05	1.24
15	I do not enjoy writing in English because it is a very difficult skill for me.	102	2.21	1.14
17	I hate writing in English because I had some bad experience in the past.	102	2.08	1.07
20	I do not feel comfortable during a writing activity.	102	2.38	1.12
21	I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.	102	2.48	1.04
22	When I hand in a composition, I know I am going to do poorly.	102	2.41	.95
28	The writing course is a challenging course.	102	4.05	.92

The researcher also noticed that students are against the idea that writing in English is not a difficult skill to master; they stated that it is an enjoyable activity to do. The mean for respondents' answer is (2.21) which means students do not agree with the item. In other words, they see writing in English as an enjoyable act and that it is not difficult to attain. The same is true about item (17); students reported that they did not have bad experiences about the skill and consequently do not hate it. When the respondents were asked about their feelings while doing the writing task, they could not decide exactly. Most of their answers were centered around choice 3 (uncertain) because this kind of attitude is liked to a number of factors including type of writing task, atmosphere, time constraint, and whether the writing will be evaluated for identifying students' performance or not. This last factor was also measured in items (21) and (22). Students' answers on these items were almost similar as the majority of them expressed uncertainty about the quality of their writing as it is going to be evaluated by others, mainly the instructor. Consequently, they are right in their choice as what suits a person might not suit another. Finally, the researcher found that most students agree with the fact that writing is not that easy and the writing course is certainly challenging due to the fact that it demands encyclopedic knowledge and mastery of language rules mainly writing rules. The mean of this item (item 28) is 4.05 and the standard deviation is low which means that all students' answers were almost similar and inclined to choice 4, i.e. Agree.

D- Is writing in English an enjoyable task?

To answer this question, students were asked to consider items (3, 5, 23, 24, and 25). Students' responses are shown in Table 4 below. The results showed that more than half of the students expressed their love for writing in English; they liked the activity yet the justification provided in item (3) may be blamed for having a reduced mean. The researcher contends that the study participants do not like the writing skill because they are good at writing in their mother tongue. They just like writing in English as it is part and parcel of the language they chose to major in. The mean of item (5) is higher than that of item (3); this shows that being good in writing in Arabic is not an incentive for the students to enjoy it in English.

As far as the language used in the writing course is concerned, Table 4 below shows that students' responses ranged between uncertain and agree. In other words, some students write only in English and others write a hard copy of the task in Arabic and then transfer it into English. It is also possible that some students take note and prepare a tentative plan for their writing in Arabic and finalize the whole thing in English. Finally, the table also shows that all students agree that writing in English is very useful for the students.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on whether writing in English is an enjoyable task or not.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
3	I like to write in English because I am a good writer in Arabic.	102	2.80	1.05
5	I enjoy writing in English.	102	3.85	.87
23	I only write in English during the EFL class.	102	2.97	1.13
24	The EFL writing class(es) is/are useful for my academic study.	102	4.29	.64
25	I feel that I learn a lot from the EFL writing class.	102	4.15	.62

E- Is writing in English a difficult task?

To answer this question, students were asked to consider items (8/ 12/ 13/ 14/ 15/ 16/ 17/ 18). Students' responses are shown in Table 5 below. The results showed that **not** all students need help when they write in English; their answers to item (8) ranged between being uncertain and agreeing with more inclination to agreeing. On the other hand, the majority of the students disagrees with items 12, 13 and 14 and state that they do not hate the skill and they want to learn it as much as they can. For most of them, the skill of writing is an easy and enjoyable task (item 15); they can write in this good language (item 16); they did not have bad

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on whether writing is a difficult task or not.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
8	I always need help when I write in English.	102	3.19	1.05
12	I would like to learn all language skills except writing.	102	2.20	1.18
13	I avoid writing because it is not very important skill for me.	102	1.60	.71
14	I hate writing in English because I do not know how to write.	102	2.05	1.24
15	I do not enjoy writing in English because it is a very difficult skill for me.	102	2.21	1.14
16	I cannot write because my English is not very good.	102	2.21	1.10
17	I hate writing in English because I had some bad experience in the past.	102	2.08	1.07
18	I get lost when I start writing in English.	102	2.58	1.15

experiences in the past (item 17); and they know what they do and never get lost in the process (item 18).

It is crucial to know whether the type of course the students are studying has an impact on their attitudes towards writing or not. In other words, does the course have an effect on students' responses? Table 6 below shows the results which indicate that there is no impact of the type of the writing course on students' attitudes towards the writing skill.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations for students' attitudes towards writing based on the type of course.

Course Title	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
Writing 1	25	3.21	.33
Writing and research	25	3.25	.36
Technical Writing	27	2.98	.22
Advanced Writing	25	3.16	.31

The table above shows that students of Technical Writing whose Standard deviation is the least (.22) were very close to each other; their responses were almost the same.

To determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of the four unrelated groups, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used; see Table 7 below.

Table 7. Statistical difference between and within groups.

	Sum of squares	df (degrees of freedom)	Mean square	F (calculated)	Significance (P-value)
Between groups	1.075	3	.358	3.797	.013
Within groups	9.245	98	.094		
Total	10.320	101			

By looking at P-value in [Table 7](#) above, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, i.e. (There are no statistically significant differences, between the four groups, in terms of the course type and its effect on students' attitudes towards writing). As P-value (0.13) is less than (0.05), the results showed a different group. To identify the different group, the least significant difference was conducted. The results are shown in [Table 8](#) below.

Table 8. The least significant difference between the four groups.

(I) Course	(J) Course	Mean Difference (I – J)	Standard error	Significance
Writing I	Writing and Research	-.03995	.08687	.647
	Technical Writing	.22426*	.08525	.010
	Advanced Writing	.04407	.08687	.613
Writing and Research	Writing I	.03995	.08687	.647
	Technical Writing	.26421*	.08525	.003
	Advanced Writing	.08403	.08687	.336
Technical Writing	Writing I	-.22426*	.08525	.010
	Writing and Research	-.26421*	.08525	.003
	Advanced Writing	-.018018*	.08525	.037
Advanced Writing	Writing I	-.04407	.08687	.613
	Writing and Research	-.08403	.08687	.336
	Technical Writing	.18018*	.08525	.037

It is evident that the Technical Writing group is the only group that shows significant differences when compared with the other groups. For example, when the Writing I group was compared with the three other groups, P-Value of Technical Writing (0.010) was less than (0.05) and thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. When the Writing and Research group was compared with the other groups, again the Technical Writing showed significant differences and the P-Value was (0.003). Finally, the P-Value of this group (Technical Writing) is (0.037) and it is also less than (0.05).

Various accounts might be used to interpret these results. First, students of Technical Writing course were dealing with different types of writing tasks that were merely technical such as email writing, letter writing, cover letter writing, reports, research proposals and many others. Furthermore, this group was almost homogeneous in the sense that all were female students who were the same age group and who also scored high grades in the High School Examination. Finally, the techniques used

by the instructor might have played a significant role in changing students' attitudes towards the writing skill.

To summarize, the results of the first question showed that students reckon writing, in general, and writing in English, in specific, is very significant for their study and future career; and it is also an enjoyable and easy task to do in classes or outside. The overall means and standard deviations of students' responses in the four groups for each sub-item of the first question are shown in [Table 9](#) below.

Table 9. Means and standard deviations for items of first question.

Sub-items of the first question	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
A-. Is writing important and/or useful for your study and/or future career?	102	4.44	.44
B-. Is writing, regardless of the language used, an enjoyable task?	102	3.36	.58
C-. Is writing, regardless of the language used, a difficult task?	102	2.37	.65
D-. Is writing in English an enjoyable task?	102	3.61	.41
E-. Is writing in English a difficult task?	102	2.26	.70
Total	102	3.15	.32

Third question: (What are students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing?)

To answer this question, the researcher asked students to rate these items (7/ 8/ 9/ 10/ 11/ 24/ 25/ 26). The results are shown in [Table 10](#) below.

Table 10. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
7	I feel that I can be a good writer if I practice writing regularly.	102	4.62	.69
8	I always need help when I write in English.	102	3.19	1.05
9	I prefer to work with the teacher during a writing activity.	102	3.77	.96
10	I can write better when I work with other students.	102	3.20	1.18
11	I prefer to look at a writing model before I start writing in English.	102	3.75	.91
24	The EFL writing class(es) is/are useful for my academic study.	102	4.29	.64
25	I feel that I learn a lot from the EFL writing class.	102	4.15	.62
26	The writing textbook helps me write better.	102	3.78	1.04

It is clear evident that almost all students felt it possible to be good writers if they practice the skill at a regular basis; they believe strongly in the common saying (Practice makes perfect). However, some of them showed uncertainty when it comes to gaining help during writing. The researcher found that help is not to be systematically offered; it should be offered intermittently. They also showed some hesitance to the source of that help; most of the respondents inclined to options three and four (Uncertain and Agree) respectively. In other words, students need help, but the source of help is varied. The least trusted help according the results of this table is from other students as the mean is (3.20) which means it is closer to Uncertain than to Agree. The same is true about the writing textbook; students were not sure that the textbook is likely to be helpful in teaching them this productive skill. Finally, the researcher found that the majority believed that writing classes are good; they offer help and may improve their products.

The overall standing about the third question is shown in [Table 11](#) below which shows that the majority of students agreed with the items offered. The standard deviation (.35) is very low and the mean for the whole classes is (3.84).

Table 11. Means and standard deviations for all groups on the third question.

Question	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
What are students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing?	102	3.84	.35

However, when means and standard deviations were calculated for each group separately, the results showed that again the means are very close and the standard deviations were very close they ranged between (.32) to (.39) too. In other words, the course type did not affect students' attitudes towards the items discussed. For more details, see [Table 12](#) below.

Table 12. Means and standard deviations for each group on the third question.

Question	Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
What are students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing?	Writing I	25	3.87	.34
	Writing and Research	25	3.93	.35
	Technical Writing	27	3.75	.32
	Advanced Writing	25	3.84	.39

Fourth question: (What are students' attitudes towards the obstacles that Palestinian EFL students face before, during and after writing?) To answer this question, the researcher asked students to rate these items the (16/ 17/ 18/ 20/ 21// 22). The results are shown in [Table 13](#) below.

Table 13 below shows that a large number of students showed uncertainty and disagreement about the likely obstacles that may affect their writing; the means of all items ranged between (2–2.58). In other words, the majority of students chose the second option, i.e. Disagree with the items. The low values of standard deviations proved this. As stated earlier, most of the students enrolled in these courses were good at English and had good experiences when they were at school or fresh university students. The results showed also that the respondents did not feel lost or uncomfortable when they write; they had enough self-confidence as they did not expect to do poorly in writing.

Table 13. Means and standard deviations for students' answers on the commonest obstacles that Palestinian EFL students face before, during and after writing.

Item No.	Item	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
16	I cannot write because my English is not very good.	102	2.21	1.10
17	I hate writing in English because I had some bad experience in the past.	102	2.08	1.07
18	I get lost when I start writing in English.	102	2.58	1.15
20	I do not feel comfortable during a writing activity.	102	2.38	1.12
21	I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.	102	2.48	1.04
22	When I hand in a composition, I know I am going to do poorly.	102	2.41	.95

The researcher argued that the main obstacles that may encounter students before, during and after writing, as shown in the question, included the students' level of English, having bad previous experiences, fear of getting lost while writing, lack of comfort, confidence, and self-esteem, and having negatives expectations about their product before and after writing.

The means and standard deviations for each group on the fourth question support the previous results. No single group showed significant differences about this question as shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14. Means and standard deviations for each group on the fourth question.

Question	Group	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation
What are students' attitudes towards what helps EFL Palestinian students be good in writing?	Writing I	25	2.4	.64
	Writing and Research	25	2.5	.70
	Technical Writing	27	1.9	.58
	Advanced Writing	25	2.1	.74

5. Discussion & conclusions

This research was meant to explore and analyze students' attitudes towards EFL Tertiary Level Writing at An-Najah National University. The study findings showed that the participants had positive attitudes toward the skill of writing, the various writing courses offered by the English Department at the university, the type of textbooks or teaching methods used, and their writing skills and strategies. The study also revealed some further positive attitudes towards performance because most of the respondents showed willingness to do well at writing as they did not have negative conceptions about the evaluation process of their writing. Finally, the research found that very few obstacles, including lack of confidence and time constraints, might hinder them while writing.

There were several limitations of this study. Firstly, there was no comparison group employed in this study. Therefore, using a control group was strongly suggested for future studies.

The results of this study highlighted certain issues regarding writing in English as a foreign language. Language teachers and instructors may benefit from those results to enhance the writing skill when teaching foreign and/or second languages. Mother tongue interference should be taken into consideration during writing classes as the use of the mother tongue/first language may hinder or enhance writing performance in a foreign or a second language. When students attend writing classes, they tend to take their own cultural aspects with them; again this may influence writing in the foreign or second language either positively or negatively. A large number of respondents expressed satisfaction with their writing potentials and powers; however, this was not tested to make sure that their performance was satisfactory. This area needs to be tackled more in order to identify the reality and true nature of their writing. Another significant issue that needs further scrutiny is the various techniques that students employ when they write. Finally, further studies may assist in investigating and understanding the influence of first language writing conventions and cognitive activities in hindering and/or enhancing the writing skills in other languages.

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Author contribution statement

Oqab Jabali: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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