

**Problems Encountered by Sudanese Students in Paragraph Development at Tertiary
Level**

Hassan Mohammed Abd Elhadi Ali ¹

**English Language Department, Faculty of Education, Bakht-er-Ruda University,
Alduweim, Sudan 1**

dte.hm22@gmail.com

Send Article Date: 1 / 2 / 2026

Date of acceptance of the article: 1 / 4 / 2026

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the difficulties encountered by Sudanese students in paragraph development at the tertiary level. Paragraph development is a fundamental aspect of academic writing, yet many university students struggle to produce coherent and well-structured paragraphs in English. The researcher follows a descriptive analytical method to analyze the data collected. The students of Bakht-er-Ruda university, faculty of Education represents the population of the study. A questionnaire was designed and administered to the sample of the study. The sample of the study consisted of 40 students drawn from the second year, college of Education. The data were analyzed using the statistical package of social studies program (SPSS) and excel which provided percentage results for the questionnaire. The study comes out with the following important results: the major difficulties include lack of clear sentences, poor organization of supporting ideas, limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies and inadequate use of cohesive devices. Moreover, many students struggled to arrange their thoughts in a logical and coherent manner that leading to disorganized paragraphs. The researcher recommends that teachers should emphasize paragraph structure, topic sentences, and supporting details through explicit instruction and guided practice. In addition to that universities should organize writing workshops or tutorials to strengthen students' paragraph writing skills. Moreover, instructors should offer detailed, constructive feedback to help students recognize and correct their weaknesses. Thus, the study is of great use for EFL teachers especially for those who are novice.

Keywords: Academic writing; Paragraph development; Writing difficulties; Sudanese EFL students; Tertiary Level

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي استقصاء الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب السودانيون في تطوير الفقرة علي المستوي الجامعي . وبعد تطوير الفقرة جانباً أساسياً في جوانب الكتابة الاكاديمية الأ أن العديد من طلاب الجامعات يواجهون صعوبة في كتابة فقرات مترابطة ومنظمة بشكل جيد باللغة الانجليزية إتبع الباحث المنهج الوصفي

التحليلي لتحليل البيانات التي يواجهها ويمثل طلاب جامعة بخت الرضا كلية التربية مجتمع الدراسة .وقد تم تقييم استبانة وتطبيقها علي عينة الدراسة . تكوين عينة الدراسة من 40 طالباً ثم اختيارهم من طلاب السنة الثانية بكلية التربية .ثم تحليل البيانات بإستخدام الخدمة الاحصائية لبرنامج العلوم الاجتماعية وإجزيل ، حيث وفر البرنامج نتائج مئوية للاستبانة . وقد أسفرت الدراسة عن النتائج المهمة التالية حيث تتمثل أبرز الصعوبات في غياب وضوح الجمل ، وضعف تنظيم الافكار الداعمة ،ومحدودية المفردات والاختفاء النحوية وسوء استخدام ادوات الربط . علاوة علي ذلك واجه العديد من الطلاب صعوبة في ترتيب أفكارهم بطريقة منطقية ومترابطة مما أدى الي فقرات غير منظمة يوصي الباحث بأن يركز المعلمون علي بنية الفقرة ،وحملة الموضوع ،

والتفاصيل الداعمة من خلال التعليم الصريح والممارسة الموجهة، بالإضافة الي ذلك ينبغي علي الجامعات تنظيم ورش عمل أو دروس تعليمية لتعزيز مهارات كتابة الفقرات لدي الطلاب . علاوة علي ذلك ، يجب علي المدرسين تقديم تغذية راجعة مفصلة وبناءة لمساعدة الطلاب علي التعرف نقاط ضعفهم وتصحيحها .وبالتالي، تعد هذه الدراسة ذات فاقد كبيرة لمعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كاللغة أجنبية ، ولاسيما المعلمين المبتدئين .

الكلمات المفتاحية : الكتابة الاكاديمية ، تطوير الفقرات ، صعوبات الكتابة ، طلاب اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية السودانيون ، المستوي الجامعي .

1- Background

Paragraph writing is a fundamental skill for EFL learners at the tertiary level. Despite years of English instruction, many students struggle to develop coherent, unified, and well-organized paragraphs. Factors such as limited vocabulary, poor grammatical competence, lack of writing practice, and ineffective teaching methods contribute to these difficulties. Understanding these problems is crucial to improving writing pedagogy and enhancing students' academic performance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

EFL learners at the tertiary level face persistent challenges in developing paragraphs effectively. These challenges hinder their ability to communicate ideas clearly in academic writing, affecting their overall achievement in English courses.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it identifies specific problems EFL learners face in paragraph development, helps teachers adapt teaching strategies to address these problems, provides insights for curriculum designers to integrate targeted writing support and contributes to research on EFL writing difficulties at higher education levels. The study also helps clarify the underlying causes of weak academic writing performance among university students.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to....

1. identify the main problems EFL learners encounter in paragraph writing.
2. analyze possible causes of these problems.
3. suggest strategies to overcome these problems in the EFL classroom.

1.4 Questions of the Study

1. What are the major problems faced by EFL learners in developing paragraphs at the tertiary level?

2. What are the causes of these problems?
3. What strategies can help EFL learners overcome these difficulties?

1.5 Hypotheses of the Study

- 1.. EFL learners face significant problems in developing well-structured paragraphs due to limited vocabulary and grammatical weaknesses
2. Ineffective writing instruction contributes to learners' paragraph writing difficulties.
3. Adopting focused writing strategies can improve learners' paragraph development skills.

1.6 Method of the Study

This study adopts a descriptive analytical method, using a questionnaire for EFL learners to identify their writing problems. Writing task analysis to examine actual paragraphs written by students. Interviews with writing instructors to explore pedagogical challenges.

2-Literature Review

Developing a paragraph is a fundamental skill in academic writing as it forms the building block of any Written text. A well developing paragraph provides a clear main idea, known as the topic sentence and supports it with relevant details, explanations, and examples. Effective paragraph development ensures coherence, unity and clarity in writing, allowing the reader to easily follow the writer ideas, For EFL (English as Foreign language) learners, developing strong paragraph is essential because it improves their overall writing proficiency, helps them express their thoughts logically and enable them to construct essays, reports, and research papers systematically. Therefore, understanding how to develop a paragraph with an appropriate structure-building topic sentence, supporting sentences, and conducting sentence is a vital step towards becoming a competent academic writer. (William 2004, 109-110)

2-1: Definition of Paragraph

A paragraph is group of related sentences that discuss one (and usually only one) main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or can be as long as ten sentences. The number of sentences is unimportant, however, the paragraph should be long enough to develop the main

idea clearly. A paragraph may also be one part of a longer piece of writing such as an essay or a book. We make a paragraph by indenting the first word about a half inch (five spaces on a typewriter or computer) from the left margin. (Oshima, A. 2006,P 2). Bailey (2011: 78) states that a paragraph is a group of sentences that deal with single topic. A paragraph is a set of related sentences that work together to express or develop an idea.

2-2: The Structure of a paragraph:

A paragraph has at least, three major structural parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

1. Topic sentence:

A topic sentence is a clear statement that gives the main idea. Here are two hints for writing a good topic. First get a reader attention. Second, avoid unnecessary word. A topic sentence is a sentence that starts the main idea of the paragraph. It should be carefully worded to express a limited main idea. It helps us focus our idea and helps the reader understand the main idea quickly. It also functions to control the content of the paragraph (Erlima, S. and Nirwanto, R. P13,2014). A topic sentence does not always have to come at the beginning of the paragraph. It can come at the middle or the end, it is the most important sentence in the paragraph. Usually, it consists of a complete sentence that contains a subject, a verb, and usually a complement, and expresses a complete thought. The topic sentence contains both the topic and the controlling idea. The topic is basically the subject of the paragraph. It is what the paragraph is about. The controlling idea limits or restrict the information that can be included in the paragraph. It is the summary of all the information which is contained in its paragraph. In a paragraph the controlling idea must be completely developed and explained. Finally, we can include that the topic sentence is the sentence that expresses the main idea of the paragraph (D'Angtlo.1980:330). The controlling idea makes a specific comment about the topic, which indicates what that rest of the paragraph will say about the topic. It limits or control the specific aspect of the topic discussed in the space of a single paragraph, (Erlima, S. Nirwanto, R. 2014 p.43)

2. Supporting sentences:

Supporting sentences are the sentences that give more information about the topic sentence. They develop the topic sentence. They also called development sentences. All the sentences must be related to the topic sentences. They explain the topic sentences by giving reasons, illustrations, examples, facts, statistics, and questions. There are at least two kinds of supporting sentences. First, a major support sentence. It develops the controlling idea of a paragraph by telling the reader something new or different about the idea. It directly supports the controlling idea by making the idea more easily understood. Second, a minor support sentence, develops its major support sentence and helps its major support sentence develop the controlling idea. It directly supports its major support sentence by making it more easily understood. Besides, it directly supports the controlling idea of the paragraph by helping its major support sentence to make the idea more easily understood (Hamid et al, 1988, P57)

3. Concluding sentence:-

Usually, a paragraph ends with a conclusion or summary. A conclusion, is judgment based on the ending and must be logical. The last sentence of a paragraph is concluding sentence. It does not add new information to the paragraph. It repeats the main idea using slightly different word. It signals the end of the paragraph and summarizes the important points briefly. Sometimes, we use an end-of-paragraph signals as follows: in conclusion, in summary, "Finally" and so on... (Erlima, S., Nirwanto, R. 2014 P45). A good concluding sentence brings the paragraph to smooth close. It may give a summary of the main idea or state the topic sentence again. A concluding sentence also gives a final comment and leaves the reader with the most important idea to think about. There are two different kinds of concluding sentence. First, paraphrases the topic sentence: i.e. the concluding sentence repeats the main idea of the topic sentence using different words. Secondly, summarizes the two main points of the paragraph, which are not specifically stand in the topic sentence. There are some steps for building the paragraph. First, selecting the topic. Second, writing a general statement (topic sentence) about the topic. Third, jotting down possible details about the topic. Fourth, developing those details into supporting sentence. Fifth, reading the whole paragraph and making whatever change we feel will be important to writing (Erlima,S. Nirwanto, R. "2014" P45)

2-3: Types of Paragraph:-

In academic and EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts, paragraphs are not all the same. They are designed according to the writer's purpose, audience, and the type of information being presented. Understanding these types helps develop clear and effective written communication.

1. Descriptive paragraph

The descriptive paragraph is one of four basic types of prose. It tells how a person, place or thing is perceived by the five senses. Descriptive writing appeals to our senses (sight, smell, sound, hear, taste) in order to evoke the concreteness of experience and perception. *A description is a verbal picture of a person, place or object* (Langan, 1984 :111).

Description evokes images and impressions. It can allow a reader to experience something new; it can renew a reader's appreciation of the familiar (Clouse, 1986:12). A descriptive paragraph creates a vivid picture. Vivid means "clearly and lively" (Warriner & Laws, 1973:367).

A description is a type of writing in which the ideas are arranged on the basis of space or location, such as in the description of a person, a landscape, a building, and so on. The order of the details in this type of paragraph is called descriptive order (Hamid et al., 1986:511). They are also arranged in spatial order. Spatial order describes details in relation to one another. Writing details in spatial order is important to describe the size, shape, or appearance of something. In the descriptive paragraph, we also use space order. Space order means that we tell about things in terms of their position or order. The details might be in order from top to bottom, right to left, outside to inside, near to distant, ceiling to floor and so on. Space order is good to describe the position of something. The details, particularly in visual descriptions, are usually organized in spatial order. It means that we present details from their position of order. With spatial order, the details are presented in a sequence that duplicates the order in which a viewer might notice them. This method is useful in organizing sensory details, primarily visual ones. *A good descriptive paragraph* makes the reader see, hear, as otherwise experience something (Warriner, 1973:378). When we describe something, we try to give the reader a mental picture of it. To create a clear mental picture, we often describe features connected with the five senses. A good description includes references to the senses: sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. Description can be found in almost any kind of writing, but it is frequently found in books of travel, history books, guide books, geography books, scientific articles, and so on.

2-Narrative paragraph

Narration is that kind of discourse which answers the question:” what happened?” It is concerned with times, actions, and events in motion (Warriner, 1986:461). Narrative paragraph tells a story by relating a series of events in time order. Narration includes all writing that provides an account of an event or a series of events.

(Eschholz & Rosa, 1993:55)

A narration is also a type of writing in which the details or the ideas in a sequence of events or the steps of the process are arranged on the basis of time. The details are arranged in chronological order. Here, the transitional words or phrases expressing time such as: soon, immediately, afterwards, as soon as, are commonly used. The use of these devices gives the readers a clear picture of the sequence of events. A narration is concerned with time. A series of events move through time, and what connects these events is a plot or sequence: a beginning and middle and an end. (Warriner, 1986:461). *Narrative paragraph* is used when we want to recount an event or an experience or to tell a miniature story. We relate the events in straight chronological order (Hairston, 1986:212). It can be stated that a narrative paragraph is one of four basic types of prose, which tells a story by relating a series of events in chronological order. To narrate is to tell a story, to tell what happened.

(Oshima, A. 2006 P19)

3-Persuasive “Argumentative” paragraph:

The persuasive paragraph is a special type of paragraph that gives reasons. It is also called argumentation. It usually contains a signal of its purpose in the topic sentence. It may also contain words such as: should or ought to, or words that express a judgment about a thing or idea. The reasons in persuasive paragraph must be chosen and organized carefully. Facts and statistics should provide strong support. To persuade is to convince someone that a particular opinion or point of view is the right one. *The purpose of persuasion* is to change someone’s mind (Fawcett & Sandberg, 1988:130). It is an attempt to prove a point or defend an opinion (Langan, 1984:111). It is also used to argue in favor of an opinion. It is also used to encourage others to adopt our views, more than just an explanation of a subject. A persuasive paragraph attempts to win people over to a particular point of view or convince them to take a particular course of action. Writers of persuasion must take care in selecting the topic. They must be sure

that their subject is in some way controversial. Certainly the readers will be someone who disagrees with us. So the purpose of our writing is to convince the reader to agree with us.

The persuasive paragraph begins with an argumentative point, stated in a focused topic sentence, and follows through with evidence aimed at the probable readers of the argument. To write a persuasive topic sentence, we must take a position that we plan to persuade the readers to agree with. Since persuasion must begin with the first word of a persuasive paragraph, the topic sentence states the writer's position and usually gives one reason why the writer holds that position. The position must be, of course, one that the writer can defend in one paragraph, and the reason helps to focus the paragraph (Kiefer, 1983:168). *A paragraph of persuasion* is a special type of paragraph that gives reasons. It usually contains a signal of its purpose in the topic sentence. It may also contain words such as should or ought to or words that express a judgment about things or ideas. The reason must be chosen and organized carefully because the purpose is to persuade others. The reasons are often organized from the least important to the most important. This helps to build strong support for the opinion (Littell, 1985:178). We use this pattern of paragraph to develop a paragraph when we want to explain something or to show why our opinion is a good one. The persuasive paragraph is a special type of paragraph that gives reasons. It is also called argumentation. It usually contains a signal of its purpose in the topic sentence. It may also contain words such as: should or ought to, or words that express a judgment about a thing or idea. The reasons in persuasive paragraph must be chosen and organized carefully. Facts and statistics should provide strong support. To persuade is to convince someone that a particular opinion or point of view is the right one. *The purpose of persuasion* is to change someone's mind (Fawcett & Sandberg, 1988:130). It is an attempt to prove a point or defend an opinion (Langan, 1984:111). It is also used to argue in favor of an opinion. It is also used to encourage others to adopt our views, more than just an explanation of a subject. A persuasive paragraph attempts to win people over to a particular point of view or convince them to take a particular course of action. Writers of persuasion must take care in selecting the topic. They must be sure that their subject is in some way controversial. Certainly the readers will be someone who disagrees with us. So the purpose of our writing is to convince the reader to agree with us. *The persuasive paragraph* begins with an argumentative point, stated in a focused topic sentence, and follows through with evidence aimed at the probable

readers of the argument. To write a persuasive topic sentence, we must take a position that we plan to persuade the readers to agree with. Since persuasion must begin with the first word of a persuasive paragraph, the topic sentence states the writer's position and usually gives one reason why the writer holds that position. The position must be, of course, one that the writer can defend in one paragraph, and the reason helps to focus the paragraph (Kiefer, 1983:168).

4-The expository paragraph

It is a paragraph that presents a certain amount of information about a subject. In expository paragraph, the writer provides information about a particular subject. The methods of development in expository includes: giving examples or illustration, supplying reasons, explaining a process, comparing and contrasting, defining, and classifying (Langan, 1984:111). As we have already known, all writing presents some information. In expository paragraph, the information is the main thing. The purpose is to tell the reader something he may not know and to tell him in a way that will understand (Warriner & Laws, 1973:415). The aim of exposition is to explain, to inform, or to give directions. It is usually arranged in time order. A good expository paragraph consists of a group of sentences aimed at explaining a single idea. It is important to know how to construct an expository paragraph. To produce a piece of writing in expository paragraph, we should learn how to construct an expository paragraph. First, we should learn how to arrange a good topic sentence, that is, the central idea of the paragraph. Second, we should consider the elements of a good paragraph, such as: unity, coherence, order, emphasis, and completeness. Finally we should learn how to develop the central idea by various methods of development.

2-4: Paragraph length:

Paragraph length refers to the number of sentences and most used to develop unified idea within a piece of writing. In academic context, a paragraph is not defined strictly by word-count but by the completeness of the idea it conveys. An effective paragraph contains a topic sentences, supporting details (Examples, Explanations, evidence), and a concluding sentence (Zemach, D.& Islam, C "2004", P: 4)

4.4.1: Recommended length:

Most writing manuals recommend 4-8 sentences or 100-200 words for an academic paragraph. This length ensures clarity, coherence, and adequate idea development without overwhelming the readers.

Short paragraphs (< 70 words) often indicates insufficient development. Overly long paragraph (> 250 words risk losing reader attention and clarity. (Bailey, S. "2018", P54)

2-4-2: Importance of balanced paragraph length:

Balanced paragraph length is essential for:

1. Clarity: Ensures that the main idea is expressed without ambiguity.
2. Coherence: Allows smooth flow of ideas without unnecessary digressions.
3. Reader Engagement: Maintains the readers focus and prevent fatigue. (Oshima, A, & Hogue, A. "2006" – P:16)

2.4.3: Factors influencing the paragraph length:

- (Longman, J. "2013"-P:102) states that the length of a paragraph can vary depending on:
- Purpose: Paragraph and analytical writing often requires more developed paragraphs than narrative or descriptive writing.
- Complexity of ideas: More complex arguments need more explanation, examples, and evidence.
- Discipline: Humanities writing often has longer paragraph than technical as scientific writing.
- Audience: Academic readers well-developed paragraphs, general audience may refer to shorter ones.

2.5 Challenges for EFL learners at the Tertiary level:

Zemach, D. & Rumisdek, L. (2005 P:24) point out that for EFL learners, a achieving the right paragraph length can be a challenge due to:

- Limited vocabulary: restricting their ability to decorate ideas.
- Grammar limitations: making it difficult to connect supporting ideas fluently.
- Lack of first language norms convention: Leading to extremely short or overly long paragraphs.

- Influence of first language writing norms: Which may have different expectations for paragraph size and structure.

2.6: Strategies for controlling paragraph:

Bailey, S. (2018” – P:55) mentions that:

-Planning before writing-outlining main points and supporting details.

-Using the topic sentence as a guide: ensuring all sentences relate to it.

-Avoiding repetition: Keeping ideas fresh and relevant.

-Using linking words: To create smooth translation without padding.

-Reviewing after writing: Splitting overly long paragraph and combining short ones where needed.

2.7: Paragraph coherence and cohesion:

Coherence in paragraphs:

Coherence refers to the logical flow of ideas within a paragraph so that readers can easily follow the writer’s message. It’s about meaning connections rather than just grammar. (Oshima, & Hogue, 2006. P: 20)

How it’s achieved:

Organizing sentences in a logical sequence (coherent).

Using cohesive devices (linking words like therefore, however, moreover).

Using pronouns to refer to previously mentioned ideas (this, these, it). Repetition of key terms or use of synonyms parallel grammatical structures. Example: The students found the assignment challenging, however, they are determined to complete it. The connector “however” creates cohesion. (Halliday & Hasan, “1976” P.4)

Coherence VS. Cohesion:

Coherence: Reader’s ability to understand the text because ideas are logically ordered.

Cohesion: Writer's use of linking words and references to connect sentences on the surface.

A paragraph can be cohesive (connected with linking words) but still not coherent if the ideas themselves don't logically fit together. (Richards, & Schmidt, 2010, P:21)

2.8: Spelling problems in writing:

Spelling is a key component of writing accuracy, but it remains a significant challenge for English for foreign language (EFL) learners especially at the tertiary level. Accurate spelling not only ensures clarity but also contributes to a writers' credibility in academic context. Inaccurate spelling can disrupt communication and cause readers to misinterpret the intended meaning. (Brown, 2001).

One major cause of spelling difficulties among EFL learners is the influence of their first language (L1), learners often apply the phonological or orthographic rules of their native language to English words. For examples in languages with phonetics spelling systems such as Arabic or Spanish, students expect a consistent sound –letter relationship, which contrast with English irregular orthography. "The spelling system of English contains many irregularities that requires memorization rather than rule-based application" (Cook, V. "1999" – P.46)

Another source of errors is English orthographic complexity. Homophones (e.g. pair and peer), silent letters (knife, honest), and in consistent vowel patterns (receive-believe) can confuse learners. This emphasizes that learners need repeated exposure and practice to internalize these patterns noting that "spelling in English requires the integration of phonological, morphological, and orthographic knowledge" (Nation, I.S.P. 2009 P.89)

Over reliance on phonetic spelling:

It's also common for learners to write words as they sound (e.g., definately for definitely). This often occurs because learners have not encountered the word frequently in print or have not practice its written form. limited vocabulary knowledge or lack of proofreading habits further exacerbate the problem. Impact on academic writing is considerable. Spelling mistakes can undermine the formal tone required in university assignments and research papers. (Richards & S.P. 2002 – p.218)

2.10: Grammatical Problems in EFL:

Grammar is an essential component of an accurate and coherent writing in EFL context. There are some grammatical problems among the most frequently reported difficulties for tertiary learners. These problems occur when sentences fail to apply standard English grammatical rules in sentence construction, resulting in errors that may hinder clarity, coherence, and academic formality. (Harmer, J. 2004. P.14)

Common types of grammatical problems:

1-Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Many EFL learners struggle with ensuring that the verb form matches the subject in number and person. For instance, sentences like: she go to class every day instead of “she goes to class every day are common. This often stems from differences between English grammar and the learners’ (L1) structure. (Harmer, J. “2004” – P.12)

2-Tense and aspect confusion

Learners frequently misuse verb tense, especially when expressing past events or describing habitual actions. This problem is compounded by the fact that the same language does not have the same range of tense and aspect distinctions as English.

3-Article usage

Articles (a, an, the) are another frequent change, particularly for learners whose L1 does not use articles at all-misuse includes omitting necessary articles or adding them unnecessarily, e.g. He went to school by a bus instead of He went to school by bus.

4-Prepositions Misuse

Prepositions in English are often idiomatic and not directly translatable from other languages, leading to errors such as discuss about instead of discuss.

5-Pronoun reference and Agreement

Incorrect pronoun forms (me instead of I in subject position) and mismatched pronoun intended agreements are common in learners writing.

Causes of grammatical problems:

1. Interference: Learners transfer grammatical rules from their mother tongue to English, causing structural mismatches.
2. Over generalization: Applying a known rule to broadly, e.g. Adding -ed to all verbs for the past tense, including irregular verbs.

(Richards, J.C, & Schmidt, R. “2010”. P.249)

3. Limited grammar instructions: Insufficient focus on grammar in EFL curricula can leave learners without explicit knowledge to avoid errors.

4. Lack of editing skills:

Learners fail to review and correct grammatical mistakes before submitting work.

5. Impact on academic writing:

Grammatical problems reduce readability of academic texts and can distract the reader from the context. Accuracy in grammar is not just a matter of formality, it is a necessary condition for the message to be understood as intended. Similarly, emphasize that persistent grammar errors may lead readers to question the writer's competence, even when the ideas themselves are strong (Harmer, J. "2004". P.12).

2.11: Problems of the sentences structure

Sentence structure problems are very common among EFL learners, especially when they are trying to develop paragraphs at the tertiary level. These problems usually appear when students struggle with subject –verb agreement, Run- on sentences, fragments, misplaced modifiers, or incorrect word order. Weak sentence structure leads to unclear meaning and affects the coherence of the whole paragraph. (Brown, "2001". P.362)

Sentence Fragments: learners often produce incomplete sentence that lacks subject or verb.

Run-on sentences: They sometimes join independent clauses without proper punctuation or conjunctions.

Word order issues: In English, the sentence typically follows subject-verb-object order, but EFL learners may transfer patterns from their first language. (Richards & Renandya 2002 P.303)

2.12: Problems of word choice:

One of the common problems faced by EFL learners in paragraph writing is inappropriate word choice. Learners often select words. That do not accurately convey their intended meaning, which makes their writing unclear or awkward. This issue arises because many students tend to rely on direct translation from their first language or overuse limited vocabulary. As result their writing lacks precisions variety and naturalness. (Richards and Renandya "2002". P.255). The second language learners frequently encounter problems in vocabulary use including misuse of words, limited lexical variety and inappropriate words choice, which negatively affect the clarity and effectiveness of their writing. Another aspect of word choice problems is

the confusion between formal and informal language. In academic writing , learners sometimes use colloquial words or phrases that are not suitable for formal context. For example: Instead of using “purchases”, they might write “buy” or they may insert slang expression that weaken the academic tone of their paragraph (Nation, I. “2001”. P.177).

Stresses that “A lack of awareness of register and context often leads learners to choose words that are grammatically inappropriate.

Finally, Words choice problems affects not only accuracy but also coherence and cohesion in writing. Poor lexical selection can create ambiguity and disrupt the flow of ideas, making it difficult for readers to follow the agreement. Therefore, developing vocabulary knowledge and awareness of collection is essential for effective paragraph writing, notes that “inadequate vocabulary knowledge is one of the most significant barriers to successful writing, since without the right words , learners cannot convey meaning precede or like ideas effectively (Laufer “1997”. P.141)

2.11: Punctuation Rules:

Using correct punctuation is important because punctuation conveys meaning just as word do. Consider these two sentences:

Eat children

Eat, children

Both sentences are commands, but the first sentence would be correct only in a society of cannibals¹, learn and practice the rules of punctuation until you are confident about using them correctly.

(Oshima, A. 2006. P.280)

2.13. Paragraph Writing:

A paragraph is considered the fundamental unit of academic writing. It is typically composed of a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence. The effective of a paragraph depends on unity, coherence, and adequate development. Note that “a paragraph is a group of related sentences that develops one main idea, and it should be clear, well-organized and adequately supported with specific details”, without these features students writing became fragmented, making it difficult for readers to follow their arguments (Oshima, A., & Hogue, A.,2007., P.18).

2.13.1. Writing Competence in EFL:

Writing competence in EFL involves not only linguistic accuracy but also the ability to produce coherence and meaningful texts. There are four competences: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. These are all essential in academic writing. Confirm this by stating that “Writing is the most difficult skill for “second language learners to master because of format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling, and mechanics”. This shows why tertiary students, who are often expected to write academically, encounter many challenges in paragraph development. (Richards, J.C& Renandya, W. “2002 .:303)

2.13.2. Paragraph Development at Tertiary EFL Context:

At the university level, students are expected to produce well-developed paragraphs that demonstrate critical thinking, logical flow, and use of evidence. However, many learners face difficulties due to limited exposure to English writing concentration and insufficient feedback on their work. Observers state that “Writing in foreign language is a very complex task which places demands on both linguistic knowledge and ability to apply appropriate strategies. This complexity becomes more evident at the tertiary level, where academic standards are higher and students are required to write essays, reports, and research papers that demand advanced paragraph organization and coherence (Nunan, D. “1999. P. 272)

3- Methodology

This study describes the methodology employed in conducting the present study. It outlines the population and sample of the study, the research method, the tool used for data collection, as well as the procedures followed to establish the validity and reliability of the instrument. The main purpose of this study is to explain how the research was designed and implemented to achieve the stated objectives.

3.1 Population of the Study

The population of the study refers to all individuals to whom the results of the research can be generalized. In this study the population consists of EFL learners at the tertiary level specifically students enrolled in Bakht Alruda university, Faculty of Education, English

language Department. These learners were chosen because they represent the group that frequently encounters challenges in developing well-structured paragraphs in English writing.

3.2 Sample of the Study

From the total population, a sample was selected to participate in the study. The sample included 25 students, chosen from 2nd year, English language department, Faculty of Education.

3.3 Method of the Study

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical method, which is suitable for identifying and analyzing the problems EFL learners face in paragraph writing. This method was chosen because it enables the researcher to describe the existing situation, collect relevant data, and analyze the findings to provide insights into learners' challenges and possible solutions.

3.4 Tool of the Study

To collect data, a questionnaire was designed and administered to the sample of the study. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items, divided into sections that addressed different aspects of paragraph writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, coherence, cohesion, spelling, and punctuation. The instrument was developed based on the objectives of the study and the review of related literature.

4-Data Analysis

Data Analysis and Discussion of the Results

Table (1) Analysis of Hypothesis one: EFL learners face significant problems in developing well-structured paragraphs due to limited vocabulary and grammatical weaknesses.

The Statement	The options			
		Always	Sometimes	Never
Many students have difficulty in writing clear topic sentences.	Frequencies	13	10	
	Percentages	56.5%	43.5%	
Students often fail to provide sufficient supporting details.	Frequencies	11	12	
	Percentages	47.8%	52.2%	
Students include irrelevant ideas in their paragraphs.	Frequencies	8	14	2
	Percentages	34.8%	60.9%	%8.7
Organizing sentences logically is a common challenge for students.	Frequencies	14	7	2
	Percentages	60.9%	30.4%	8.7%
Students rarely use transition words effectively.	Frequencies	14	9	
	Percentages	60.9%	39.1%	

Source : preparing by researchers from questionnaire data , 2024.

Table (1):

1. For Statement 1, we observe that 13 participants (56.5%) responded “**Always**”, while 10 participants (43.5%) responded “**Sometimes.**” The vast majority selected “**Always.**”
2. For Statement 2, we observe that 11 participants (47.8%) responded “**Always,**” another 12 (52.2%) responded “**Sometimes,**” so most of the participant selected “**Sometimes**”.

3. For Statement 3, we observe that 8 participants (34.8%) responded “**Always,**” 14 (60.9%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 1 (4.3%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “**Sometimes.**”

4. For Statement 4, we observe that 14 participants (60.9%) responded “**Always,**” 7 (30.4%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 2 (8.7%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “**Always.**”

5. For Statement 5, we observe that 14 participants (60.9%) responded “**Always,**” while 9 (39.1%) responded “**Sometimes.**” The majority selected “**Always.**”

Table (2) Analysis of Hypothesis two: . Ineffective writing instruction contributes to learners’ paragraph writing difficulties.

The Statement	The options			
		Always	Sometimes	Never
Grammar and sentence structure errors weaken students’ writing.	Frequencies	16	7	
	Percentages	69.6%	30.4%	
Students struggle with academic vocabulary.	Frequencies	15	5	3
	Percentages	65.2%	21.7%	13.1%
First language interference is a major problem in paragraph writing.	Frequencies	14	8	1
	Percentages	60.9%	34.8%	4.1%
Many students are unable to write effective concluding sentences	Frequencies	14	6	3
	Percentages	60.9%	26.1%	13%
Lack of regular writing practice negatively affects students’ progress.	Frequencies	16	7	
	Percentages	69.6%	30.4%	

Source : preparing by researchers from questionnaire data , 2024.

Table (2):

1. For Statement 1 , we observe that 16 participants (69.6%) responded “**Always,**” while 7 (30.4%) responded “**Sometimes.**” The majority selected “Always.”
2. For Statement 2, we observe that 15 participants (65.2%) responded “**Always,**” 5 (21.8%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 3 (13 %) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “Always.”
3. For Statement 3, we observe that 14 participants (60.9%) responded “**Always,**” 8 (34.8%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 1 (4.3%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “Always.”
4. For Statement 4, we observe that 14 participants (60.9%) responded “**Always,**” 6 (26.1%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 3 (13.0%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “Always.”
5. For Statement 5, we observe that 16 participants (69.6%) responded “**Always,**” while 7 (30.4%) responded “**Sometimes.**” The majority selected “Always.”

(3) Analysis of Hypothesis three : Adopting focused writing strategies can improve learners' paragraph development skills.

The Statement	The options			
		Always	Sometimes	Never
I explicitly teach paragraph structure (topic, support, conclusion).	Frequencies	10	11	2
	Percentages	43.5%	47.8%	8.7%
I provide students with model paragraphs as examples	Frequencies	17	5	1
	Percentages	74 %	21.7%	4.3%
I encourage students to pre-plan and draft their writing	Frequencies	18	4	1
	Percentages	78.3%	17.4%	4.3
I give detailed feedback on students' paragraph writing.	Frequencies	17	6	
	Percentages	73.9%	26.1%	

I believe peer review activities improve students' writing skills.	Frequencies	14	9	
	Percentages	60.9%	39.1%	

source : preparing by researcher from questionnaire data , 2024.

Table (3):

1. For Statement 1 , we observe that 10 participants (43.5%) responded “**Always,**” 11 (47.8%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 2 (8.7%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “**Sometimes.**”

2. For Statement 2, we observe that 17 participants (74 %) responded “**Always,**” 5 (21.7%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 1 (4.3%) responded “**Never.**” The majority selected “**Always.**”

3. For Statement 3, we observe that 18 participants (78.3%) responded “**Always,**” 4 participants (17.4%) responded “**Sometimes,**” and 1 (4.3%) responded “**Never.**” The vast majority selected “**Always.**”

4. For Statement 4, we observe that 17 participants (73.9%) responded “**Always,**” while 6 (26.1%) responded “**Sometimes.**” The majority selected “**Always.**”

5. For Statement 5, we observe that 14 participants (60.9%) responded “**Always,**” while 9 (39.1%) responded “**Sometimes**” The majority selected “**Always.**”

5- Summary, Findings Recommendations

This part of the study presents the summary, findings, and recommendations. Its aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by EFL learners in developing paragraphs at the tertiary level and how these challenges can be addressed effectively to improve their writing competence.

5.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems encountered by EFL learners in developing paragraphs at the tertiary level. The study focused on identifying the linguistic, structural, and organizational difficulties that hinder students from producing coherent and cohesive paragraphs. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected

through questionnaires, writing tasks, and interviews with both students and instructors. The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to identify common errors and challenges. The findings revealed that most students faced difficulties in organizing their ideas logically, using appropriate transition signals, developing topic sentences and supporting details, and maintaining grammatical accuracy. Instructors also reported that limited vocabulary, lack of writing practice, and insufficient feedback contributed to poor paragraph development skills among learners.

5.2 Findings of the Study

The major findings of this study include the following:

1-Poor Organization of Ideas:

Many students struggled to arrange their thoughts in a logical and coherent manner, leading to disorganized paragraphs.

2-Weak Topic Sentences and Supporting Details.

Learners often failed to produce clear topic sentences and relevant supporting details, which affected paragraph unity.

3-Limited Vocabulary and Grammar Mastery:

Insufficient vocabulary and weak grammatical competence resulted in unclear and inaccurate sentences.

4-Lack of Cohesion and Coherence:

Students had difficulties using cohesive devices (e.g., connectors, pronouns, transitions) to link ideas smoothly.

5-Insufficient Writing Practice:

Many learners lacked regular writing exercises, feedback, and motivation, which hindered improvement.

6-Teaching Methods and Feedback:

Some instructors relied heavily on teacher-centered approaches and provided limited corrective feedback, reducing opportunities for active learning.

5.3 Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1-Enhance Writing Instruction:

Teachers should emphasize paragraph structure, topic sentences, and supporting details through explicit instruction and guided practice.

2-Integrate Writing Workshops:

Universities should organize writing workshops or tutorials to strengthen students' paragraph writing skills.

3-Provide Regular Feedback:

Instructors should offer detailed, constructive feedback to help students recognize and correct their weaknesses.

4-Encourage Extensive Reading and Vocabulary Building:

Reading activities can help students internalize paragraph organization and expand their vocabulary base.

5-Adopt Learner-Centered Approaches:

Teaching methods should involve more collaborative and task-based writing activities to engage learners actively.

6-Use Technology in Writing Instruction:

Tools such as online writing platforms and grammar checkers can help learners self-correct and improve accuracy.

References

1. Bailey, S. (2018). *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students* (5th ed.).
2. Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.
3. Clouse, B.F. 1986. *The Student Writer: Editor and Critic*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
4. Cook, V.(1999) Going beyond the native speakers in Language teaching. *Quarterly*, 33(2), 185-206
5. D'Angelo, F.J. 1980. *Process and Thought in Composition with Handbook*. Massachusetts: Winthrop Publisher, Inc.
6. -Ertiana, S., Nirwanto, R. (2014). The use of technology in teaching English as a foreign language. *Journal of English language teaching*, 2(2), 45-52.
- 7.
8. -Eschholz & Rose , (1993). *Paragraph Development: A guide for students of English*. St. Martin's Press.
9. Fawcett, S. & Sandberg, A. 1988. *Evergreen: A Guide to Writing*. New Jersey: Houghton Mifflin Company
10. Hairston, M. 1986. *Contemporary Composition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
11. Halliday, M.K., S Hassan, R. (1976) *cohesion in English* London. Richards & Schmidt(2010)p 103.
12. Hamid, A.F., Anwar, S. & Priyamvada, S. 1986. *Buka Matera Poku: Writing Modul 1-5*. Jakarta: Karunika Universitas Terbuka.
13. Hammer, J. (2004). *How To Teach Writing*. Edinburg Gate. Pearson Education Limited.
14. Kiefer, K. 1983. *Making Writing Work: Effective Paragraphs*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
15. Langan, J. 1981. *English Skills*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

16. Langan, J. 1984. College Writing Skills. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc. Langan, J. 1987. Sentence Skills. New York: McGraw –Hill, Inc.
17. Laufer, B. (1997). Second language vocabulary acquisition (p 20-34) Cambridge University Press
18. Littell, J. 1985. Building English Skills. Illinois: McDougal, Littell Company
19. Longman J. (2013). college writing skills with Reading (6th ed). Mo Gram. Hill.
20. Nation. I, S.P (2013). Learning vocabulary in another language (2nd ed.). Cambridge university Press.
21. Nunan, D. (1999). Second Language Teaching and Learning. Boston. Heinle & Heinle.
22. Oshima, A & Hogue, A. 2006), writing Academic English (4th ed) - Pearson Longman
23. Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. 2007. Introduction to Academic Writing. 3rd Ed. New York: Longman.
24. Oshima and Hogue. (2006). Organization in Writing Paragraph. New York. Press.
25. Richards & Schmidt (2010). Language teaching and Applied linguistics, 4th edit, Great Britain
26. Richards, d. C., & Renandya W. A. (Eds.) (2002). methodology in language teaching: A anthology of Current Practice Cambridge University Press.
27. Sherman, W. (2004). Paragraph Development, New York, NY: Longman
28. Trimmer, J.F. & Nancy, I.S. 1984. Writing with a Purpose. New Jersey: Houghton Mifflin Company
29. Warriner, J.E. & Laws, S.Y. 1973. English Grammar and Composition. New York: Hartcourt Brace Javanovich, Inc.
30. Zemach, D., & Aslam, C. (2004)- Paragraph writing. Macmillan and Education.
31. Zemach, D., & Rumisek, L. (2005). Academic Writing: From Paragraph to Essay. Macmillan Educate