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Foreign Language Writing as a Developmental Process (Foundation, Expansion, Development, and Completion): The FEDCom Model

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Abstract

This study investigates the problems that are encountered in learning writing in a foreign language from primary school to university in the Turkish context. It focuses particularly on the problems that teachers/instructors face in teaching writing in English to students concerning students' challenges. Forty teachers were interviewed in all levels, ten participants for each. Here, the challenges that the teachers observed their students faced in the learning process of writing in English were identified. Then, ten students at a tertiary level institution were interviewed about their experiences in learning writing in English in a retrospective manner. The devised FEDCom model illustrated the development of EFL writing of learners in each level of education. The model may be considered as the big picture of learning EFL writing in all education level of Turkey. It may help researchers, teacher trainers, and teachers who want to put forth solutions to the difficulties that learners may experience in learning writing in English.

Key words: EFL writing, Developmental writing, FEDCom, Holistic writing model, L2 writing

Introduction

Writing is an important part of communication and writing skill is considered as the most difficult skill (Phuket & Othman, 2015; Richards & Renandya, 2002) among the four skills. Nunan (1999) stated that producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is the most difficult task for language learners. Although writing seems arduous for both native and non-native learners, it becomes almost the most challenging task (Pajares, 2003) to the learners in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL henceforth).

English has been taught as a compulsory subject from primary school to tertiary education in Turkey for about two decades with the 1997 education reform (Kirkgoz, 2007). However, despite the innovations in the curriculum and the efforts spent, it is difficult to claim that English is taught well across the country. Many studies have shown that there are still serious problems in teaching EFL in Turkey (Incecay, 2012; Oktay, 2015; Solak & Bayar, 2015). Since benefitting from emerging approaches, such as CLT (Ozsevik, 2010), which are more effective in teaching a foreign language is considered challenging, traditional methods are highly implemented in language teaching in this context. Accordingly, some components of language (grammar, reading, and vocabulary) regarding receptive skills are more focused on than the other components regarding productive ones (i.e. speaking and writing) (Kırkgöz, 2007). Thus, some skills are learned better than the others. Writing in a foreign language is among the skills which have not been focused as it deserves, and consequently the desired level of success in this skill cannot be achieved by learners of English nationwide Turkey (Dogançay-Aktuna, 1998).

EFL writing, the issue under investigation of this study, is different from writing in English as a second language (ESL writing) in some aspects although they take place under the same roof in the relevant literature (Cumming, 2001a; Hasan & Akhand, 2010; Lee, 2007; Nation, 2009; Susser, 1994). English is taught as a foreign language in Turkey, which means learners learn the language in classroom-like environments in general, and they have very limited opportunity to practice it outside the classroom. This has several critical negative impacts on learning both receptive and productive skills of language. Unlike in ESL contexts where English is the dominant language, in EFL contexts people outside class environments barely use the language, and the

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language only rarely plays a role in the mass media and in advertisements (Sivell, 2013). Thus, learners cannot be exposed to adequate amount of target language input and cannot become fully familiar with that language. Therefore, they cannot improve their listening and reading skills, which are essential for improving writing and speaking skills considering that listening and speaking, and reading and writing are interdependent (Moon, 2008).

Although there have been many studies focusing on writing in a second language, the relevant literature has paid insufficient attention to “the particular situation of writing instruction in non-English dominant countries” (Leki, 2001, p.197). The existing studies investigated such issues as peer and teacher feedback, instructor practices, improving students’ composing skills, improving students’ writing through study of semantic concepts, improving writing through micro-blogs, and using strategies to improve writing (Akyel & Kamisli, 1996; Alagozlu, 2007; Arslan & Sahin-Kizil, 2010; Bozkurt et. al., 2016; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Ozturk & Cecen, 2007; Trotman, 2010; Uysal, 2008). Since most studies concentrated on the ESL writing problems of students in center countries (Leki, 2001), little has been done about writing in EFL contexts.

Moreover, the majority of the research studies on EFL writing have focused merely on higher education. Additionally, the literature lacks a comprehensive picture of the issue in a holistic manner by taking all education levels into consideration. Therefore, this study is an attempt to explore the problems that learners encounter in EFL writing, from primary school to higher education. It intends to illustrate learners’ developmental stages in improving EFL writing in each education level, and to suggest ways (a model) to achieve success in learning EFL writing.

Literature Review

Writing requires considerable number of skills and conventions such as writing readiness and grammatical rules, and only by achieving these prerequisites well, may learners get ready to be proficient and effective writers (Emmons, 2003). Considering that one’s writing in his/her mother tongue is a complicated process, it can be claimed that writing in a second language (henceforth L2) should be more difficult and challenging. Cumming (2001b) states that “writing in a second language forms a focus for individuals to learn ways of cooperating with and seeking assistance from diverse people and resources; to adapt to and reflect on new situations, knowledge and abilities; to negotiate relations of work and power; and to gain and modify new senses of self” (p. 7). Consequently, it can be asserted that writing in a foreign language is a much more sophisticated issue.

Scholars like Zamel (1983), Flower and Hayes (1981), Choi (2016), and Li (2018) view writing as a complicated recursive process rather than a simple linear one. According to Zamel (1983) the process of writing is “non-linear, exploratory, and generative whereby writers discover and generate ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning”. He states that this process involves such sub-processes as planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting and editing. It is understood that in order for a learner to write well in an L2, it is necessary to control over all this process along with the sub-processes, which require them to possess specialized skills (Hyland, 2019).

In addition to the complicated nature of writing, another factor that makes EFL writing more challenging is social and cultural factors which affect the quality of EFL writings of learners. These entail both the distance between the languages, the first language (L1 henceforth) of the learner and the target language, and the cultural differences. A good example of this is the study by Steffenson, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) and Yu and Lee (2016) in which the researchers illustrate the impact that culture has on schemata of people, which affect people’s process of composing their writing.

Moreover, since different languages may have different rhetorical organizations, there may be negative transfer from L1 writing to L2. For instance, Ostler (1987) declared that “various cultures organize the development of ideas differently when writing expository prose” (p. 169). Bennui (2016), Kaplan (1966) and Derakhshan and Karimian (2020) express that failure in the second-language discourse rules is because of interference from the writer’s L1 rhetorical organization.

Each foreign language context may have different complication in learning writing in the target language. One of them is the structural and cultural differences between the mother tongue and the target language regarding some aspects in writing. For the current context, for example, while there is almost always one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence in Turkish, the case in English is different, which complicates the work of learners especially in dictation. Another problematic issue the results of which reflect negatively on learning EFL writing

is that profession choice in Turkey generally depends on the placement scores in the university entrance exam where foreign language competence is either not measured or only partially measured excluding writing. The professional self is not the structure that emerges suddenly. It progresses through certain stages from childhood to adulthood (Super, 1990; Ginzberg, 1972). In other words, it has a developmental nature. Although it is located among the objectives of the Ministry of National Education, applications for students to develop their interests and skills from a very early age is not sufficient in Turkey (Yesilyaprak, 2007, 2012). The lack of clarity of interests and abilities causes students to have a low level of commitment to academic goals and choices. This reality emerges as an important problem for teaching English with four skills as it is for other courses. In this sense, instead of developing skills that are not measured in high-stake exams such as writing and speaking in the target language, students generally study just to pass the course or get high marks from these high-stake exams. As a result, the goal of learning to write in English generally fails.

Public school students in Turkey start engaging in EFL learning at primary schools. They have 2 hours of English classes a week at primary school (starting from the second grade), an average of 3,5 hours and 3 hours a week at secondary school, and high school respectively for each grade. The students must answer English language questions which measures just reading, vocabulary, and grammar knowledge of the students in High School Entrance Exam (LGS henceforth) before high school. After high school, students except those who want to study at English language teaching departments or similar ones do not have to take the language test component of the university entrance exam, which again measures only reading skill and grammar knowledge. The students who attend to the universities that have English medium instruction must join preparation classes if they fail in the language proficiency exam; others just take 3 hours of English courses a week in the first grade of their departments. Considering the above information, it is clear that just reading component of four skills is assessed at high stake exams at all levels, other components including writing are not.

To conclude, what make writing in a foreign language a challenging skill on the part of its learners is that it is much more demanding than writing in someone's mother tongue. This is because social and cultural differences impact writing, and different languages have different rhetorical organization. All these factors cause EFL writing to be considered as a challenging skill to be learned and mastered.

Problems in Learning Foreign Language Writing

Since writing in a foreign language is a challenging skill, problems have always been observed in various foreign language contexts concerning writing in English. In her study, Leki (2001) put the challenges in writing, which have been frequently faced in any EFL context, into two main categories: daily experiences of writing teachers and ideological challenges. While the first includes crowded classes, time constraints, and accommodating local needs, the second group comprises justifying the large investment to teach English, resisting center-imposed and top-down methods and materials, and dealing with students about the role that writing plays in their lives.

Ezza (2010) tried to display that "educational policies can have their role in the learner's writing problems" in a foreign language (p. 33). According to him, learners alone should not be blamed for their failure in writing. He stated that such factors as "teacher/student ratio, the number of students in the classroom, the number of writing courses, course materials, and teaching methodology, (p. 33)" have influence on Arab EFL learners' failure in writing.

Moreover, Younes and Albalawi (2015) explored the most common types of writing problems of English language learners at higher education level. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling problems were found among the most salient problematic areas in their study. Chen (2002) investigated the problems of university EFL writing in Taiwan. The study uncovered students' inability to use words properly and precisely. It also revealed problems in vocabulary, grammar, generating ideas, and writing organization due to the differences between their own language and English. The study of Ahmed (2010) discovered that students encounter problems concerning cohesion and coherence in their EFL essay writings. All these studies tried to demonstrate the problems in learning EFL writing.

There have been many studies focusing on writing in a second language, however, the relevant literature has paid insufficient attention to "the particular situation of writing instruction in non-English dominant countries" (Leki, 2001, p.197). The existing studies on EFL writing investigated such issues as peer and teacher feedback, instructor practices for writing assessment, improving students' composing skills, improving students' writing through study of semantic concepts, improving writing through micro-blogs, and using strategies to improve

writing (Cumming, 2001a; McMullen, 2009; Mermelstein, 2015; Muslim, 2014; Schenck & Choi, 2015; Yang, Badger & Yu, 2006).

As for the research on EFL writing, there have been insufficient studies informing about the reality of EFL writing learning across all education levels in the Turkish context despite a clear need for finding out the problems in this issue. Additionally, the majority of studies in the relevant local literature focus on foreign language writing at higher education level. These studies tried to explore writing anxiety (Kirmizi & Kirmizi, 2015; Ozturk & Cecen, 2007) and writing apprehension (Erkan & Saban, 2011), use of blogs to improve writing (Arslan & Sahin-Kizil, 2010; Bozkurt et. al., 2016), teacher oral feedback (Trotman, 2010) and peer feedback (Mistik, 1994) on student writing, the comparison of L1 and L2 writing (Akyel & Kamisli, 1996; Uysal, 2008), motivating factors behind writing (Buyukyavuz & Cakir, 2014), and critical thinking in EFL writing (Alagozlu, 2007). L2 writing education in the levels before higher education, namely, in primary, secondary, and high schools, has been under-researched in the Turkish context.

Human development is an important process. Developmental psychology has explored this process within some perspectives (Miller, 2002). Many theorists have investigated the developmental changes in people's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. For example, while Piaget (1964) examined cognitive development of human beings, Erikson (1956) addressed the development of human ego. As an important field of behavior in foreign language learning, EFL writing should also be examined from a developmental point of view. In this regard, various scientists have come up with theoretical explanations at macro and micro level in this subject. For example, in macro level, Cumming (2001b) pointed out that writing in a second language is a sophisticated issue, and he hinted that it is a developmental process. To him, in this developmental process, each education level is a new situation requiring particular knowledge and abilities. On the other hand, it may be deduced from what Zamel (1983) stated on the issue that writing process has a developmental nature in micro level; and planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting, and editing are developmental stages of writing in the micro level.

Many researchers have studied the problems of EFL writing and solutions to these problems (Ahmed, 2010; Alharbi, 2019; Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova, 2014; Barkaoui, 2019; Chen, 2002; Ezza, 1990; Leki, 2001; Younes & Albalawi, 2015;). However, these studies are not developmental in nature, and also, they have not investigated the issue in a holistic manner. The purpose of this study is not to focus merely on one education level like the existing studies in the relevant literature, but to depict the whole big picture of learning EFL writing in each education level within a developmental perspective. It aims to display the problematic areas and recurring challenges in learning EFL writing of students from primary school to higher education from the viewpoints of teachers and students. It then intends to present a clear model of the learning of EFL writing in the Turkish context within a developmental perspective. The research questions that guide the study are given below:

1. What challenges do Turkish learners of EFL writing come across in their education life from primary school to university?
2. What are the reasons for the challenges that are encountered by the learners of EFL writing in each education level?
3. What can be the solutions to the challenges that are encountered by the learners of EFL writing in each education level?

Method

This study has two groups of participants. The first group is teachers of English at different levels of education. Then, the second one comprises a group of first-year university students.

The teachers: This research study was carried out interviewing teachers/instructors who teach EFL at any education level. The researchers interviewed with 40 teachers in total; ten teachers at primary school, ten at secondary school, ten at high school, and ten at university. Half of the teachers from each stage of education were male and the other half were female. The teachers' ages ranged from 33 to 55. All of the participants were EFL teachers or instructors in a major city of Turkey.

The students: After completing the interviews with the teachers, the researchers also interviewed with five female and five male students at prep class in a state university. The students' ages ranged from 17 to 20. All participants were public primary-secondary and public high school graduates. The participants started learning English from the beginning level at university although they had taken English courses since primary school.

Criterion sampling was employed in the current study. According to Creswell (2007) this type of sampling “works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” under investigation (p. 128). Teachers and students were randomly selected as participants among the individuals who meet certain criteria. Here, teachers should have at least ten years of experience. As for students, they should be university students who have low-level of English proficiency in spite of their previous language education. Since the teachers who have at least ten years of experience and who have taught English at different levels of education (primary, secondary, etc.), and the students themselves can be accepted as the most important source of information about students’ learning experiences of EFL writing, they were determined as the participants of the study.

Interviews

Before the interviews with the teachers and the students, their consents were taken, and they were assured that they can withdraw their consent at any phase of the study. Each teacher and student participated in an interview with the same researcher. A semi-structured interview protocol was designed so that some developing topics during the interviews could also be included in the questions. After informed consent was taken from each participant, interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed subsequently.

Firstly, the teachers and instructors were interviewed one-on-one starting from the primary school EFL teachers to university EFL instructors. While the interviews with the teachers lasted about 20 minutes for each, the ones with university students took about 15 minutes on average. Researchers tried to receive as much information as possible about teachers’ experiences on the difficulties and challenges that their students encounter in learning EFL writing. After these interviews, the students from university were also interviewed. In these interviews, students were asked about the current experiences as well as the practices they did in the past school years on EFL writing. The purpose of this second series of retrospective interviews with the students was to identify the students’ own experiences concerning the challenges in learning EFL writing, and to triangulate the data that were obtained from the interviews with the teachers.

Trustworthiness

The researchers applied multiple procedures to ensure the trustworthiness and the credibility of the study (Guba, 1981; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the process of member checking, ten per cent of both groups of participants reviewed and responded to their transcripts of the interviews. Then, some colleagues of the researchers carried out peer reviews. The intercoder reliability was found as 88.88 percent based on the calculations stated in Miles and Huberman (2015). Additionally, feedback was received from many colleagues on the evolving theory and the interpretation of the data. The researchers identified the concepts in the data and examined them across the stages of the model. Grounded theory is not generalizable, but it may be transferable to other contexts. The degree to which this grounded theory is transferable is based on the thick descriptions provided in the study.

Data Analysis

Constant comparison method within a systematic design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was applied in this research study. The data were started to be analyzed as soon as the data collection started. The data were analyzed by using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The content was analyzed in sentences or groups of sentences converging in a single idea in the open coding. These units were coded to indicate that idea. All items were identified, and these were formed into abstract concepts in the axial coding. During selective coding, these abstract concepts were combined into one central category. Any new data were analyzed and constantly compared to the emerging model through the existing data. It was either integrated into the emerging model, or shaped the existing model through new emerging themes within itself. This process continued till the data saturated. Then, the FEDCom Model was formed along with four categories: a- foundation b-expansion c-development d-completion. Attributes of each of these categories were also identified. Developing codes, categories and themes were formed in an emerging manner rather than applying predetermined categories on the data (Creswell, 2007).

Findings and Emerging Theory

The data from each education level were analyzed first, and then the FEDCom model was produced by integrating the findings. For this reason, firstly, the findings for each level of education are provided. Following this, the integrated findings are presented within the devised model. The findings are provided in a way that each part of the all quadripartite (i.e. relating to primary-secondary-high school and university) research questions are addressed in the consecutive sections in terms of the level in question. The titles in the findings are presented from the most stated to the least one, the frequency numbers are not provided since they are thought not to illustrate much, though.

The Difficulties of Learning EFL Writing at Primary School

After the whole analysis, it was discovered that primary school is the *foundation* level for writing in English. The participant teachers stated that they help students establish foundation at this level for EFL writing. For example, teacher T₆ said this:

“Students have just begun writing in English at primary school, and this is the basis of the problems. It would be unfair to expect too much from new learners. They have been establishing the basis yet.” (T₆)

As an answer to the first parts (i.e. relating to primary school) of the research questions, this section provides the causal and intervening conditions of the challenges that Turkish EFL writing learners come across in primary school level and the strategies that they apply to overcome these challenges.

Causal Conditions

Five causal conditions were determined based on the data about why students at primary school cannot improve their EFL writing. These causal conditions and some representative examples pointing to them were listed below:

Negative transfer: While writing in English, students try to write using Turkish language components. Most primary teachers stated that students transfer some of graphemic, syntactic, and semantic components of their L1 in their EFL writing. The teachers observed that primary school students mostly transfer graphemic structures. The effect of negative transfer of some graphemic forms can be illustrated in the below expression of T₆ who is an English teacher at primary school:

“For instance, they do this: You know the letter ‘i’. In English, it is written as ‘i’ if it is not capitalized, and as ‘I’ (without a dot over it) if capitalized. We cannot get the students accept this. “Why is not there a dot in the capitalized one?” they say. Another example is that they use the letters found in Turkish but not in English like “ç” and “ğ”. They do not want to use the letters ‘w’ and ‘q’ because they were not in the Turkish alphabet until quite recently. They match up English with Turkish.” (T₆)

(Notes: 1- The letter “i” is written as “İ” with a dot over it. If you do not put the dot it represents another letter. 2- These letters and numbers in the parentheses point to the owner of the quotes.)

Lack of transfer of writing skills: Since the students do not have enough writing skill in their mother tongue, they cannot transfer those skills to writing in an L2. The teachers claimed that the students do not write enough in their L1 to gain such basic skills of writing as making sentences and putting them together to have a meaningful unit; thus, they cannot transfer such basic elements of writing skills to their EFL writing. One of the primary school teachers states that:

“We mostly do not write in English in primary school. We most particularly never write in the second grade since the students get difficulty writing even in Turkish...” (T₁)

Lack of writing experience: As students do not have enough writing experience in English, they cannot achieve the desired level of success in writing. It was observed that students generally do not try to write in English outside school. Teachers relate this to the fact that they cannot allocate enough time to practice different writing genres in classes so the students cannot do any practice on their own. The below expression of an English teacher at primary school displays this case clearly;

“We have so little writing activity in primary school... that we do not have them write at all. In fact, writing can be improved with homework and by writing more and more, but we do not assign homework. The more they write, the more they improve their writing skill. But do they write?” (T_5)

Lack of phonological awareness: The fact that students cannot comprehend enough the sound-symbol relationship in English language affects their writing negatively. The below answer to a question by a primary school teacher demonstrates students' lack of phonological awareness:

“They want to write whatever sounds they hear. They do not recognize sound differences. For example, when they hear “how are you”, they write it as /hav ar yu/ since they got used to writing as they hear.” (T_2)

(Note: In Turkish, generally there is one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence.)

Lack of imitative writing: Primary school students sometimes cannot even copy the writings on the board. Considering that this is a very basic sub-skill for writing, it can be claimed that such students are not ready to write even in their L1. T_8 says:

“English writing of our students at second and third grades are very problematic. They certainly cannot copy the writings on the board.” (T_8)

The above findings indicate that primary school students get difficulty in writing in English due to negative language transfer, less writing experience, and their being unready for writing in an L2. Now, the following section will present the strategies of students that they use to cope with these difficulty areas.

Strategies to cope with the problems

In the analysis, it was found out that there were four strategies to cope with the challenges in learning EFL writing at primary school. These strategies can be seen as the positive counterparts of the abovementioned problems. These are positive transfer, enhancing writing experience, increasing phonological awareness, and achieving imitative writing.

Positive transfer: It is a fact that students' application of L1 writing knowledge and the strategies that they make use of while writing in their mother tongue sometimes facilitate their writing in English. Transfer of sub-skills of writing helped them to write well in the L2. The L1 composition classes seemed to promote their EFL writing:

“There are writing activities in Turkish that can facilitate writing. For example, they write compositions in Turkish. Since there are writing practices in other subjects, they get accustomed to writing, and this eases their writing in English.” (T_9)

Writing Experience: The teachers observed that the more they do writing practice with their students and the more their students engage in writing activities, the better the students learn and practice EFL writing. Some teachers also asserted that even writing in L1 enhance students' L2 writing. To some teachers, the key word to improve EFL writing is ‘writing more and more’.

Phonological awareness: As mentioned above the phonological differences between Turkish and English make writing challenging in some respect. Becoming aware of the phonological differences between these languages make EFL writing more convenient for the students.

“At first, they write whatever and however they hear. This happens when they first get acquainted with English. Then, they recognize phonological differences, especially at 4th grade. However, this problem keeps going in the least.” (T_2)

Imitative writing: In some activities of junior primary school writing classes, students are given example sentences including some target chunks and they are supposed to write some other sentences by imitating the given examples. This imitative writing gets them accustomed to writing in full sentences and in a coherent way. One of the primary school teachers explains the reason why achieving imitative writing is important in learning EFL writing is as follows:

“When we give a chunk and tell them ‘you will write like this.’, they can write then at 4th grade. For example; introducing family. When I ask them to introduce all members of their families, if I do not give the model in chunks, they fill just the names of their fathers, or age in the blanks like ‘Ahmet, 38’ etc. rather than in full sentences.” (T_6)

So far, the causal conditions behind the problems of EFL writing in the primary school and the strategies to cope with these problems have been presented. In addition to these conditions some other factors that influence students’ EFL writing were discovered. These factors are provided in the following section under the name of intervening conditions.

Intervening Conditions

The analyses of the data displayed that some factors can either complicate or facilitate the process of learning EFL writing. Nevertheless, the majority of these intervening conditions emerged from the data were evaluated as complicating factors in that they aggravate students’ writing in English. For the first developmental stage, the data revealed nine intervening conditions:

Curriculum: Curriculum has frequently been criticized by the teachers and instructors as being irrelevant and intense. Although defined as intense, it is evaluated as lacking in guiding the writing process. Primary school teachers’ statements show the important role that the curriculum plays in learning EFL writing:

“As for our curriculum... Our books, the topics in them and topic distribution are definitely not suitable for primary school level. There are unnecessary topics. For example, the kid does not know what the simple present tense is in Turkish, but we try to teach it in English. But the kid does not know! Again, the subject ‘adjectives’ is given in the 3rd grade book. The 3rd graders do not know what an adjective is in Turkish! And we try to teach them in English (what an adjective is and how it is used). We need Turkish base first, only then can we design the curriculum, and teach English in parallel with their counterparts that are learned in Turkish.” (T_8)

Teacher: Teacher is of course a factor that can either facilitate or debilitate the process of EFL writing. Teacher participants themselves explained that if they get learners do more writing practice, if they make the courses interesting to learners, and if they try to make writing in English a part of learners’ life, the learners both get motivated and achieve more success. Otherwise, students cannot achieve the desired level of success in EFL writing. While some of the teacher participants stated that they could be more helpful in teaching writing to students, some others claimed they do as much as they can in guiding them to write:

“Not only the students themselves but we, teachers, have influences on their writing. We can facilitate their learning of writing by endearing writing.” (T_8)

“When the teacher (form tutor) does not broaden a kid’s horizon or when she does not have him/her read books, then the kid gets difficulty in learning reading, and therefore, writing in English.” (T_3)

Insufficient Training Hours: Almost all the participants are of the same opinion in that foreign language training hours are not adequate. Thus, they say they cannot allocate enough time for writing. Some teachers claim that if adequate time was given for the training, students would surely be better in writing in the L2 language since more time would be allocated for writing classes:

“Time is not enough; I mean lesson hours. We cannot finish activities. If I could allot some other time for writing, then maybe we could write more and get over this problem. We have 2 hours a week. Our books are heavily focused on listening. Writing is totally left aside especially in primary school.” (T_4)

Cursive Writing: Primary school teachers observed that their students get difficulty in integrating some specific letters that are not in the Turkish alphabet into the words they write in cursive writing. So, it is among the factors that negatively affect EFL writing:

“First of all.. The process of cursive writing has affected them negatively. It’s clear that as they haven’t been trained for such letters as x, w etc. they get difficulty while trying to write them in cursive writing.” (T_10)

(Note: Letters such as x and w are not in the Turkish alphabet)

Material: Participants also mentioned the role of materials in teaching writing effectively. While some of the teachers and instructors who have adequate and appropriate materials stated their satisfaction, the majority who

lack these materials reported this as a significant obstacle before teaching writing. Most teachers complained about inadequate and inappropriate materials that were provided to them for writing classes. Although there were some teachers who were satisfied with the materials, most of them had negative statements about them.

Method: The method that teachers and instructors apply in their classroom has an either facilitating or a complicating effect as well. Both cases were reported as below by the participants:

“We teach most with visuals. They accommodate visually not auditory. I do not do dictation exercises until fourth grade. Therefore, they can write it as soon as they see the picture because they learn it in that way. If you say it, they cannot write, they are not get used to it.” (T_5)

“It can be presented as a game. Writing with the smart board banners may come differently to them, more enjoyable. We can make use of them; I use them in fact.” (T_4)

Motivation: Primary teacher participants’ observation on their students is that they are motivated to learn how to write in another language. In this sense, motivation was found to be more as a facilitating factor in learning EFL writing in primary school. However, as motivation can be in any point between two ends of a continuum, it should be regarded as an intervening factor.

Information Processing Capacity: The fact that primary school students process limited information at a given time makes it difficult for them to think and compose during writing. The following quote from a teacher explains this case:

“They are slow and they make mistakes because they are very younger. They do spelling mistakes as well, particularly 2nd graders. However, when they proceed to 4th grade, they are getting better. They write faster, and they make fewer mistakes.” (T_7)

Family/Culture: Families and the environment in which students live also have influence on their learning of EFL writing. While the students whose families are interested adapt to writing more quickly, those who come from indifferent families have trouble in achieving success.

“I think the background is a bit of education families give their children. The child is successful if he is educated in literacy, science, and so on in family. It starts from the family.” (TS_9)

“Families need to be informed about English teaching, and its importance.” (TS_2)

It was found that primary school is the level at which students lay the foundation of EFL writing. They suffer from interference, lack of writing experience, lack of transfer of writing skills they had in their L1, and lack of some sub-skills of writing in an L2 in this foundation stage. The causal conditions of EFL writing failure in the foundation stage, the strategies to cope with the problems, and the intervening factors in students’ learning of EFL writing can be illustrated smoothly in a figure.

In figure 1 below, the findings for the foundation level were presented in a refined manner as part of the FEDCom Model which was provided at the end of the findings section. The reason why cursive writing is shown in red is that it is found unique to the foundation level.

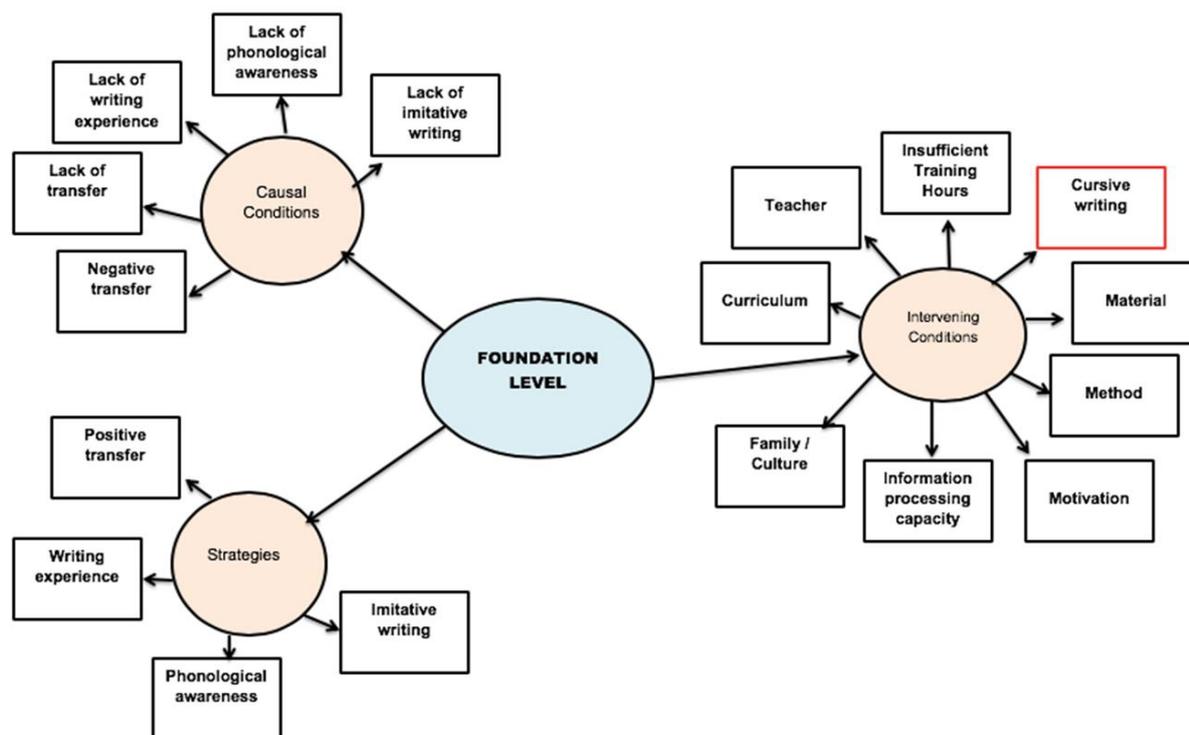


Figure 1. Causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions of EFL writing problem at *primary school* level

The Difficulties of Learning EFL Writing at Secondary School

Secondary school was considered as the period of expansion for writing. It is deduced from the participants' views that EFL writing, the foundation of which was laid on in primary school, is expanded during this level. For example, a lower secondary school English teacher made the following statement:

"They improve it (their writing) at the end of the 5th grade. The spelling mistakes reduce. We want them to make sentences with the words they have learned so that the vocabulary will be permanent. They learn more about writing when they move towards the 7th and 8th grades." (T_7)

In this section, the findings from secondary school data were presented as an answer to the second parts (i.e. relating to secondary school) of the research questions. At the end of the section, the expansion part of the FEDCom model was illustrated in a figure.

Causal Conditions

It was discovered that the same causal conditions namely negative transfer, lack of transfer of writing skills, lack of writing experience, lack of phonological awareness, and lack of imitative writing are also valid for secondary school students' EFL writing failure. One extra causal condition, lack of grammatical knowledge, which was not seen in the previous stage, was revealed in this one. The secondary school teachers stated that one of the most problematic areas they encounter in EFL writing classes is grammar. Some example expressions of the participants which are representative of the case were provided in the appendix.

Strategies to cope with the problems

From the analysis of the data, it was ascertained that strategies/solutions to cope with the problems in learning EFL writing in secondary schools were nearly the same as those in primary school: positive transfer, increasing the amount of writing experience, raising phonological awareness, achieving imitative writing, and improving grammatical knowledge. Although the names of the strategies are the same as those in the primary school level,

the content and quality of these strategies differ. For instance, while writing basic sentences that students always hear and see can be a “writing experience” in the primary school level, in the secondary school this “writing experience” might be writing diaries including simple sentences just as one of the secondary school teachers expressed:

“In order that the students improve their writing skills, they have to engage in a variety of writing exercises. For instance, they can write what they do during a day in their diaries.” (T₁₃)

Intervening conditions

In addition to the causal conditions of the phenomena, the data revealed eight intervening conditions, the majority of which is almost the same as those detected for the first stage. These are curriculum, teacher, insufficient training hours, material, method, motivation, information processing capacity and family/culture. Although they were named the same as those in the previous stage, they are different from them in terms of content and quality. For instance, *Motivation*, in contrast to the previous stage, was found as a more debilitating factor in secondary school EFL writing. Students want to prepare for LGS (Liselere Geçiş Sınavı-High School Entrance Exam) in which there is multiple-choice English test which has little weight on the overall exam, rather than learning English for communicative purposes.

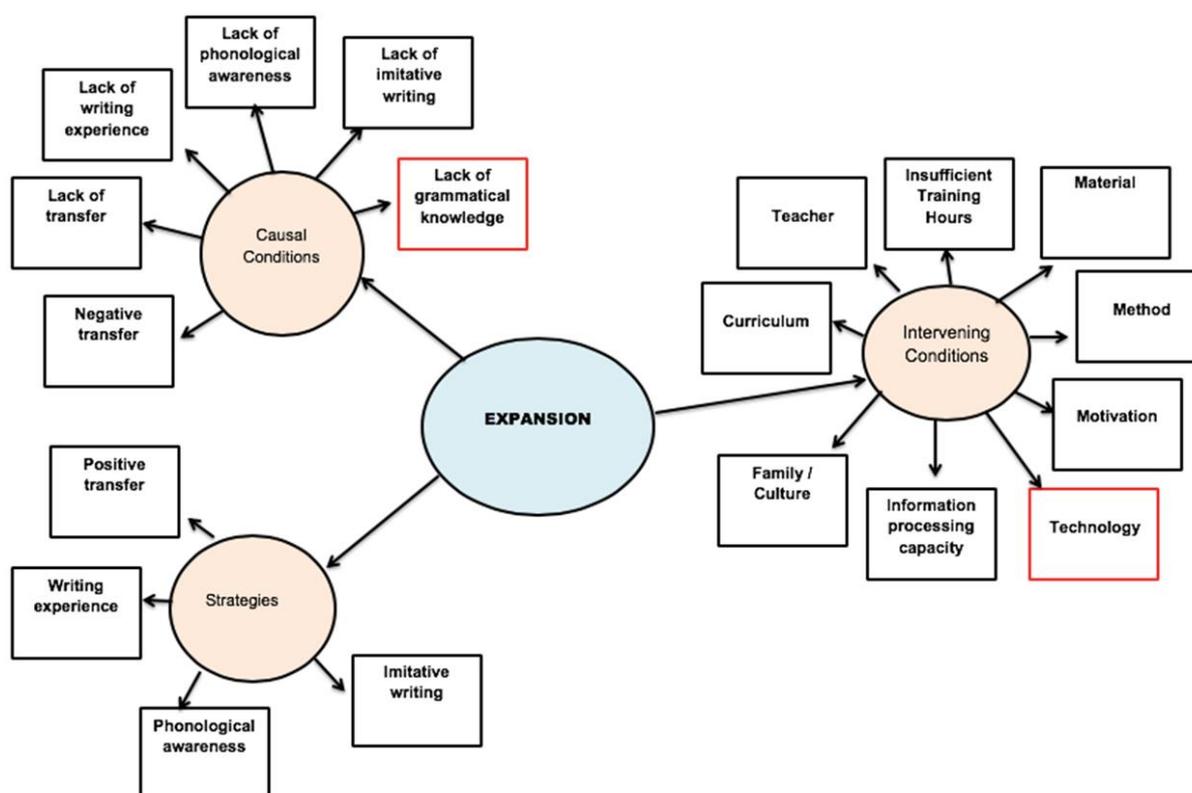


Figure 2. Causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions of EFL writing problem at *secondary school level*

Technology emerged as another debilitating factor in this level although it was not observed in the data relating to primary school level. The teachers complained that students engage in mobile devices too much and this prevents them from writing. They think that playing with recent technological devices is easier for the students than engaging in any kinds of writing which students see a challenging task:

“They like playing with computer or phone. They are not struggling with writing. There is too much distraction.” (T₁₈)

The conditions that caused failure in EFL writing in secondary school (Expansion) level, the strategies to overcome the challenges and the factors which sometimes facilitate but mostly debilitate learning of EFL writing can be seen in figure 2 above as part of the FEDCom model.

The Difficulties of Learning EFL Writing at High School

High school years were described as *development* period in terms of students' EFL writing. The teacher participants indicated that in this period students move further ahead of the level that they reached at secondary school. The below statement of a high school English teacher is an example among many which pointed this case:

"They are beginning to write simpler. But later on, in conjunction with the subject, the writings are further developed when the examples are given in front of them. They move their writings further ahead the level they achieved before high school." (T_23)

In this section, the findings addressing the third parts (e.g., relating to high school) of the research question regarding the causal and intervening conditions of the challenges that Turkish EFL writing learners encounter in high school were presented. At the end of the section development part of the FEDCom model was illustrated in a figure.

Causal conditions

The majority of the factors that negatively affect high school students' EFL writing are almost the same as those in the previous stages. The causal conditions in high school level are negative transfer, lack of transfer of writing skills, lack of writing experience, lack of grammatical knowledge, limited vocabulary, and lack of productive writing. On one hand, it can be observed that the causal conditions 'lack of phonological awareness' and "lack of imitative writing" which both emerged in the previous levels did not emerge among causal conditions for high school students' underdeveloped EFL writing. On the other hand, two extra causal conditions, "limited vocabulary" and "lack of productive writing", which were not seen in the previous two stages, revealed in this one. The participant teachers from high school stated that students lack the necessary vocabulary for writing. They added that students are not productive enough to express themselves in writing. The below quotes from two different high school teachers show the case clearly:

"Writing is really a skill. In other words, you have to have vocabulary knowledge, and grammatical knowledge to produce something. They get in trouble at this point. The vocabulary of the students is not sufficiently developed." (T_30)

"Speaking and writing are productive skills. You have to produce something, and those who are not so imaginative cannot achieve it. That's a complication." (T_24)

Strategies to cope with the problems

The strategies that should be used to overcome the challenges in writing English in secondary school were positive transfer, enhancing writing experience, improving grammatical knowledge, having rich vocabulary, and productive writing. Different from the ones in the previous stages, "having rich vocabulary" and "productive writing" emerged as the new strategies to cope with the problems in EFL learning at high school level. Teachers emphasized the importance of rich vocabulary and productive writing in learning EFL writing:

"As students' vocabulary [knowledge] increases, their writing gets richer." (T_22)

"By giving an example, you can say, "Here is how it is written; you can do it like this". You might want something like their rewriting something by changing a few words. It is first because of creating the feeling "I can write"." (T_26)

Intervening conditions

Some factors that were emerged from the data were found as having either positive or negative effect on learning EFL writing. The intervening conditions discovered in the data relating to high school level were almost the same as those in the previous levels. However, two new different intervening conditions also emerged in high school data, which are "individual differences" and "change in developmental task".

High school teachers stated that the ability to write in a foreign language change from based on the individual. While some students are really good at EFL writing, some others are really inadequate as if writing was not for them:

“Some people like to work individually. Some of them enjoy group work. There are individual level differences too. Some students may be able to write better than others.” (T_22)

In adolescence, individuals form their identity and develop their autonomy (Erikson, 1956; Steinberg, 2005). These changes in developmental tasks are reflected on their writings. For example, a high school teacher made the statement below:

“Another factor is they are in adolescence. They cannot express themselves well. They cannot express them in a planned way. When they write something, they do it very complex and complicated. However, they get happier if we help them plan and guide them. But they also complain about it: “You are limiting us.” First, you will not block their autonomy. You will leave them free. It (the thing they write) should be more flexible. You cannot expect students to be autonomous in teacher-dominated class.” (T_26)

The conditions that prevented success in EFL writing at high school level (Development), the strategies to overcome the challenges of the issue, and the intervening factors -sometimes facilitating but mostly debilitating learning of EFL writing- were presented as part of the FEDCom Model in the figure below:

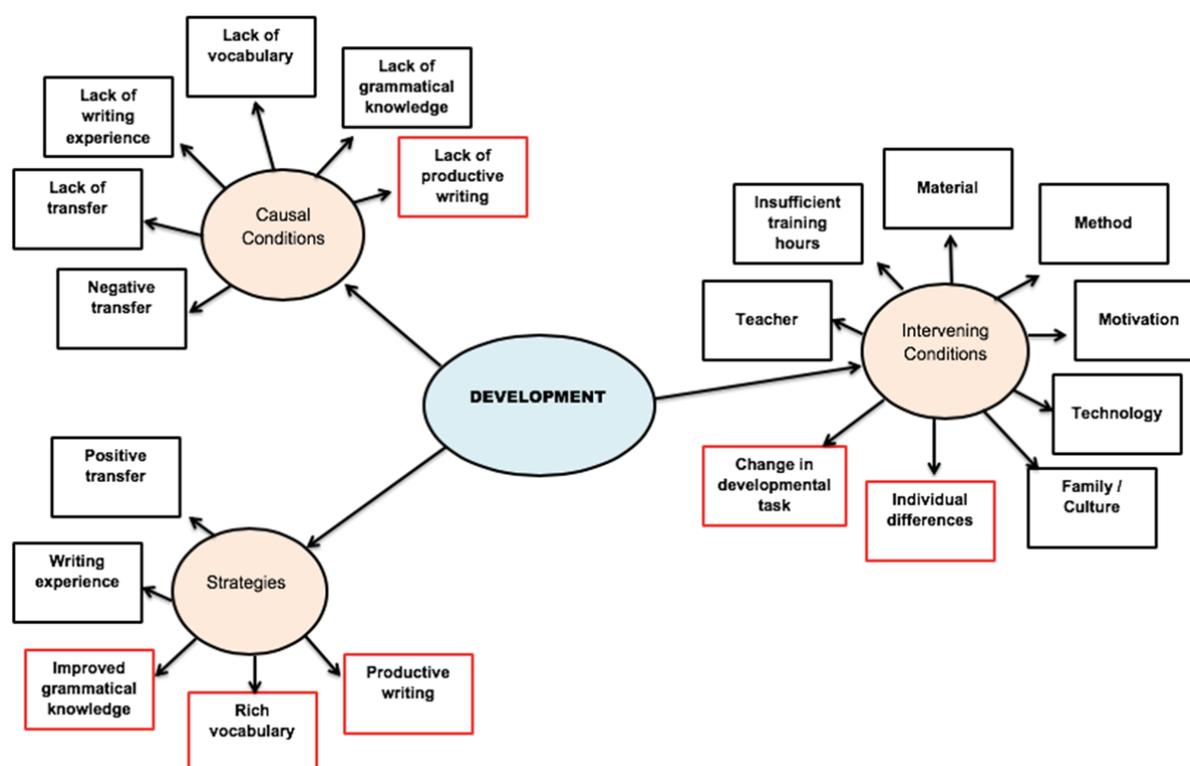


Figure 3. Causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions of EFL writing problem at *high school* level

The Difficulties of Learning EFL Writing at University

University years were considered as the *completion* level with regard to students' EFL writing. Based in primary school, expanded in secondary school and developed in high school, students' EFL writing is completed at university. Participants in the study also stated that this period was the period in which they nearly completed learning how to write on their own:

“A little more emphasis should be put on writing in pre-university education. It gets a little difficult (late) to acquire writing skill at college. They should acquire it in the previous stages.” (T_32)

In this section, the findings from high school data were presented. At the end of the section both the development part and the whole FEDCom Model were illustrated in a figure.

Causal conditions

The causal conditions of students' underdeveloped EFL writing that were discovered at university level were negative transfer, lack of transfer of writing skills, lack of writing experience, limited vocabulary, lack of grammatical knowledge, lack of productive writing, and lack of rhetorical organization. All these factors, except one, were also observed in the previous stages (ie. primary, secondary, and high school). Although almost all these factors have the same titles, they may differ from each other on the basis of content and quality. To exemplify, while writing basic sentences that students always hear and see can be a "writing experience" in the primary school level, the "writing experience" at university can be writing in a variety of genres and writing essays that are rich in vocabulary.

The only different causal condition emerged at this level was "lack of rhetorical organization". The instructors working in the preparation school of a large university observed that their students cannot organize their ideas in writing an essay. One of them commented on the issue as below:

"Generally, they cannot organize sentences, ideas, etc. in a proper and smooth fashion. We observe that they see writing as a task. They do not want to seek ways for improving their abilities on writing organization." (T_31)

Strategies to cope with the problems

In addition to the strategies (i.e. writing experience, positive transfer, improving grammatical knowledge, having rich vocabulary, productive writing) that were found in the previous levels, "learning rhetorical organization" was discovered as another strategy to cope with the problems of EFL writing at university. In order to show that the strategies having the same title with those in the previous ones are different from them, two representative examples were provided below:

Positive Transfer: "I'm trying to raise their metalinguistic awareness. 'See why we are learning bla bla, because of bla bla'. I raise their awareness. The structure of each language is different. You cannot translate a sentence that you set in your mind in mother tongue to foreign language. I say that you have to express it in its simplest form in the target language according to the rules." (T_34)

Productive Writing: "First, you need to write essays together with students. Secondly, you need to have them write in class. Otherwise, it is not all right when you want them to write at home. And they need to write on different types and issues. They have to experience it to produce something original on their own later." (T_39)

Intervening conditions

The factors which either facilitate or debilitate learning EFL writing at university level were determined as teacher, material, method, motivation, technology, family/culture, and individual differences. All of these factors were observed in the previous levels. However, the fact that they have the same names as those in the former levels does not mean they are the same. In fact, all of these elements, both conditions (i.e. causal conditions and intervening conditions) and strategies in each level may differ from each other in terms of content and quality

For example, while *method* as an "intervening condition" in the primary school may mean using visuals in writing classes, method as an intervening condition in university may mean guided writing or free writing. To illustrate, it is useful to highlight this difference by giving two sample examples from the data relating to primary school level and university level respectively:

"We teach most with visuals. They accommodate visually not auditory. I do not do dictation exercises until fourth grade. Therefore, they can write it as soon as they see the picture as they learn it in that way. If you say it, they cannot write, they are not get used to it." (T_5)

“When we first established the prep school, METU had a writing book. And we started with guided writing there. For example, it is written there; I, 25, London, student etc. The student wrote by combining these prompts. Free writing followed this. First guided and instructed writing then free writing. Step by step because it is always recommended in seminars and conferences. Personalization is very important. For example, like and dislike. I am asking immediately; ‘what do you like / dislike?’. They learn more easily. They will learn chunks first. I am opposed to starting with free writing.” (T_39)

The causal conditions behind the challenges in EFL writing, the strategies to overcome the challenges, and the intervening factors which mostly make learning of EFL writing difficult were given in the figure below:

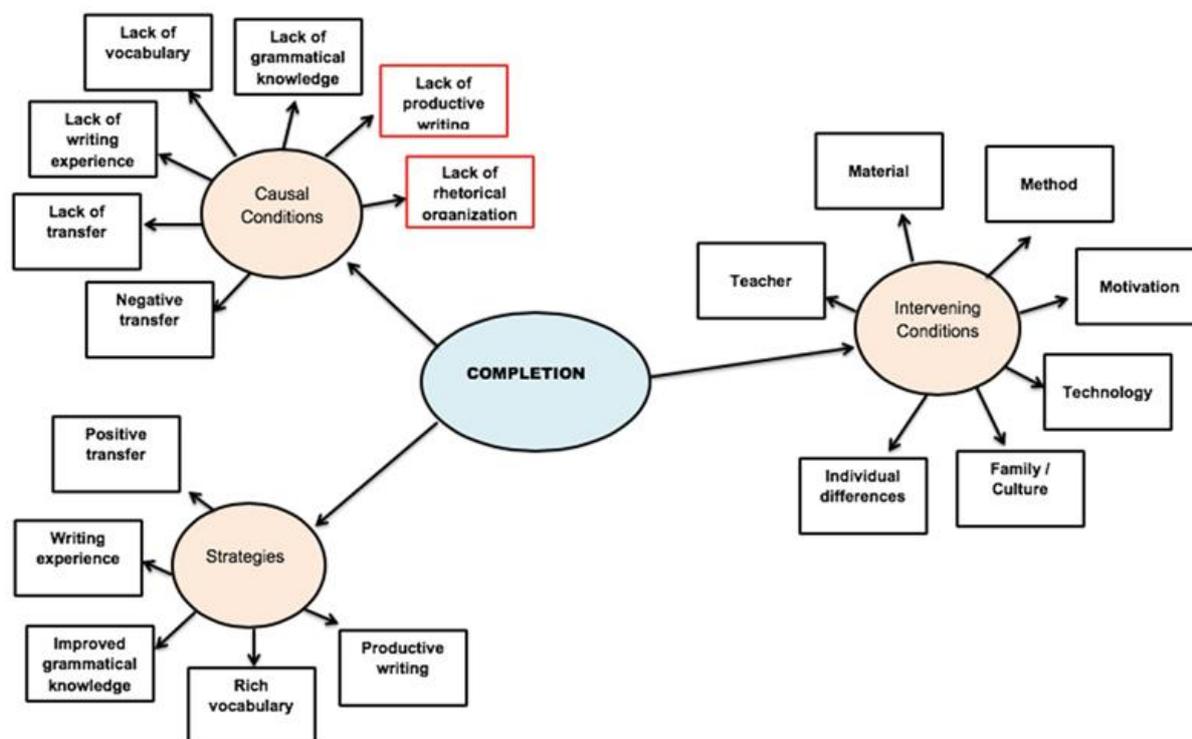


Figure 4. Causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions of EFL writing problem at *university* level

The findings obtained from the teachers from each stage of education display an integrated structure with the FEDCom model. The expression of the participants supports this argument. The following expression points to the whole of the FEDCom model:

“Language learning in general and writing in particular require continuity. If you say I learned everything in the class and go home and do not practice, you will not achieve success. The research shows that if you repeat the same day no matter which subject you learned; you will know 80 percent of that subject. You can never hold over most particularly in writing. It needs continuity. It should start at primary school, be developed in secondary and high school, and students should be ready to write in a foreign language till university.” (T_40)

Results Relating to the Retrospective Interviews with the University Students

The results of the retrospective interviews with university students confirmed the model discussed in the study. All of the causal factors, strategies, and intervening conditions that were emerged from the interviews with the teacher and instructor participants were also seen in the data obtained from the retrospective interviews with the university students.

Some of the statements of the university students that point to the FEDCom model were provided below. Some students gave the answers below to the question concerning their writing lesson experience in primary school, secondary school, high school, and finally in university. These statements can be accepted as an indication of the fact that primary school, secondary school, high school and university are where learning of EFL writing is founded, expanded, developed, and completed respectively.

Foundation:

“What we were doing .. In our elementary school, for example, there were pictures, and we were supposed to write what we saw in those pictures. After you already knew simple words, you could do this. We were writing on word basis.” (S_3)

Expansion:

“In 7th and 8th grades, we were doing some studies on what we learned in elementary school. In 6th, 7th, 8th grades, we would write much more than we do in the primary school. We move on to write sentences instead of writing just words.” (S_9)

Development:

“We were placed according to our level of English. The ones who reached a certain level in English would join the higher level class.” (S_7)

Completion:

“I think we integrate the knowledge and skills on writing in English at the university that we brought with us from high school. Everyone in college must write in their area of expertise and gain independence in writing.” (S_2)

The two statements of different students below point to the FEDCom model in a whole:

“Writing should be taught starting from primary school and then gradually be progressed.” (S_1)

“I started learning English in third grade. In class four, we gained both grammatical knowledge and other skills. Our vocabulary level rose. When I came out of primary school and began secondary school, we started to write short paragraphs gradually. I move on to the high school I improved my writing a little bit further. I reached the point where I could write an essay in my own field.” (S_6)

The findings show that writing is developmental in nature. The data obtained from both teachers and students supported the FEDCom model. The model incorporating conditions of EFL writing at all levels of educations is given in figure 5 below.

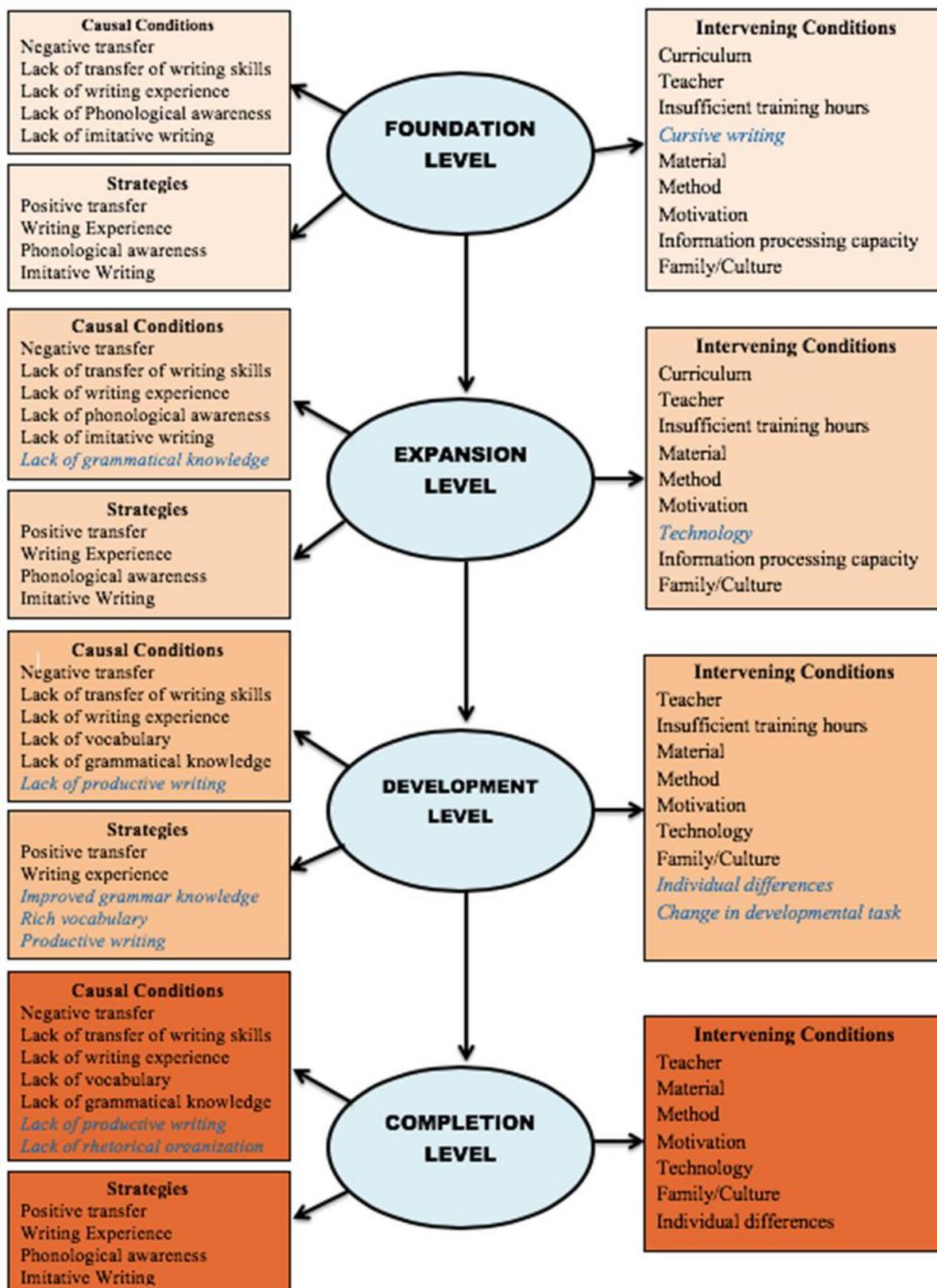


Figure 5. The FEDCom Model of EFL Writing

Discussion and Conclusions

This qualitative study aims to determine the challenges the students face in EFL writing primarily from the perspective of teachers at all levels from primary school to university; secondarily from the perspective of a group of university students retrospectively. It intends to provide insight for the parties who want to put forth solutions to these challenges. The findings of the study reveal causal and intervening conditions for the problems encountered in EFL writing at each stage and strategies to overcome them. The study yields a four-stage FEDCom model, which indicates EFL writing is *based* in primary school, *expanded* in secondary school, *developed* and *completed* in high school and university respectively.

The results of this research have similarities and differences with the studies in the literature on the challenges of learning EFL writing. Studies in the relevant literature have discovered similar challenges in learning EFL writing in different contexts such as the application of inappropriate methods and materials in Ukrainian (Tarnopolsky, 2000) and Iranian (Zoghi & Fakhimie Shokri, 2019) contexts, students' lack of transfer of writing skills due to their insufficient writing experience in L1 in Kuwait context (Al-Zankawi, 2018), negative transfer, phonological unawareness, grammatical problems, limited vocabulary, lexical bundle and crosslinguistic influence (Güngör & Uysal, 2020), and problems in rhetorical organization in Taiwanese university (Chen, 2002) and Indonesian contexts (Hidayati, 2018), punctuation and spelling problems in Saudi Arabian university (Younes & Albalawi, 2005); cohesion and coherence in Palestinian context (Hammad, 2016) and other various contexts (Polio, 2017); the effect of educational policy in Iranian (Zenouzagh, 2018) and Chinese (Zhao & Huang, 2020) contexts; and insufficient time allocation for writing, curriculum, and imposition of western writing pedagogy (Leki, 2001). Moreover, the findings are parallel with the conclusion that writing process is a complicated recursive process rather than a simple linear one (Zamel, 1983). Finally, having found that the culture and negative transfer from the mother tongue impact EFL writing (Güngör & Uysal, 2020), the study affirmed the studies of Kaplan (1966), Ostler (1987), Derakhshan and Karimian (2020), and Yang (2019).

There are other studies that found some other causes behind learning EFL writing, which are different from the ones the current study revealed. These include insufficient writing teacher training, writing teachers' lack of writing experience (Leki, 2001), EFL learners' inability to form their own voice in writing (Alagozlu, 2007; Ramanathan & Kaplan, 1996). On the other hand, the study found out some other factors different from those in the existing studies behind the problems in learning EFL writing. These factors cover lack of imitative writing and cursive writing (mostly in elementary level), family, and technology.

Although there have been many studies focusing on the problems of learning EFL writing (Ahmed, 2010; Al-Zankawi, 2018; Derakhshan & Karimian, 2020; Ezza, 2010; Hammad, 2016; Kaplan, 1966; Leki, 2017; Ostler, 1987; Tarnopolsky, 2000; Younes & Albalawi, 2005; Zenouzagh, 2018), this study differs from those ones in some respects. Firstly, the study is an original one in that it presents the causes behind EFL writing problems, the strategies needed to overcome these problems and the intervening factors in EFL writing by making classification. Second, while the majority of the existing studies focus on tertiary level EFL writing, this study tries to capture the phenomenon in a holistic manner by gathering a large amount of data at all levels from primary school to university. Last but not least, this study addresses learning of EFL writing within a developmental perspective.

The findings of this study extend some of the existing declarations in EFL writing literature (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Perl, 1980). For example, Zamel (1983) implies that EFL writing has a developmental nature in micro-level (planning, collecting data, drafting, revising, rewriting, and editing). Each dimension of the model grounded on this study has developmental nature in its own right as well. For example, in writing at primary school level, students go through some developmental sub-stages such as phonological awareness, learning vocabulary and basic grammar, and imitative writing. In addition, each stage in the model can be considered as a prerequisite development period for the next stage. At this point, this study is different from other studies by contributing to EFL writing as it brings developmental perspective to the field.

The results of this study revealed important findings. First of all, this study shows that EFL writing is a whole set of sub-skills that progress in a developmental process. At this point, it verifies the information in the literature (Brockman & Taylor, 2016; Rinehart & Thomas, 1993). The foundation of EFL writing is laid on in the primary school (Foundation), and this skill is expanded in the secondary school years (Expansion). Then, high school years are noted as the years of development of this skill (Development). Finally, university years are regarded as a process in which the developing structure is completed (Completion). These are considered as a model for how a healthy writing development should take place. However, both the causes stemming from the education system and the individual causes prevent the successful completion of this process. For this reason,

learners remain at a certain stage of FEDCom or fall into a lower-level developmental stage. In other words, problems that cannot be solved continue developmentally.

This study revealed that learning EFL writing has a developmental nature. Findings at this point can also be handled from the perspective of developmental psychology. According to developmental psychology, individuals in certain age groups exhibit certain developmental characteristics. In this sense, it is stated that both language and cognitive development progress through various developmental periods (Sanrock, 2006). The current findings show that the fact of developmental periods and developmental tasks is also valid in learning to write. According to the results of this study, causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions have the same names but they are qualitatively different. Besides, there are some other causal and intervening conditions and strategies that are specific to each level of education. These similarities and differences prove that EFL writing has a developmental nature. *The strategies* in this study have shown that there are developmental writing tasks that must be accomplished by students in certain time periods in EFL writing, just as it is in developmental psychology (Havighurst, 1972), which can be evaluated as the critical tasks of learning EFL writing. On the other hand, *the causal conditions* have shown the problems that will arise if these developmental writing tasks cannot be overcome successfully. The factors that were found to intervene in students' learning of EFL writing, just as there are such factors in the developmental psychology as "scaffolding", "culture", and "language" which were expressed by sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1980); and some others as "social transfer", "readiness", "experience" and "maturation" that Piaget (1964) described as the factors affecting cognitive development. These factors were taken as "intervening conditions" in this study.

According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, assimilation and adaptation are two major influences on the process of cognitive development (Flavell, 1963; Piaget, 1964). It may be stated that the *causal conditions* in the FEDCom model of EFL writing in this study in fact correspond to *assimilation* in Piaget's (1964) cognitive development theory. *Strategies* on the other hand can be evaluated as the *adapted factors*. According to Piaget's (1964) theory of cognitive development, individuals or institutions around the individuals accelerate cognitive development of individuals as a means of social transmission. At this point, some of the intervening conditions in this study can be seen as means of social transmission. In addition to all these, in every developmental period, the important role that experience plays in EFL writing is emphasized. Piaget (1964) advocated that development progresses more healthily and rapidly, with increasing experience.

The causal conditions, strategies and intervening conditions may demonstrate different characteristics based on the level although the majority of them are found across all levels. For example, while negative transfer in primary school was generally seen in letter level, it causes syntactic and semantic problems in later levels. In addition, some elements of the strategies and both conditions differed based on the level. For example, elements concerning productive writing, grammar, and vocabulary showed up in later levels. Two most striking examples for such differences can be seen in the examples of "change in developmental task" in intervening conditions of the *development* stage, and of "lack of rhetorical organization" in causal conditions of the *completion* stage. In adolescence individuals form their identity and develop their autonomy (Erikson, 1956; Majchrzak, 2018; Steinberg, 2005); and these changes in developmental tasks are reflected on their writings. In university, on the other hand, students are supposed to write advanced writing, which requires more knowledge of rhetorical organization. These examples and similar others also support the model in that EFL writing have different requirement and is affected by different situations in each developmental stage.

Leki (2001) questions the reason why EFL writing is taught, and she gives such reasons as a) professional purposes (e.g. teaching English) b) using it as a tool for professional development and c) using it for self-exploration regarding teaching EFL writing. However, there can certainly be some others who want to be or will be in a position that will not require the ability to write in an L2 (for example, an ordinary worker at a factory). In this case, it is meaningless to try to teach those students EFL writing. A similar situation applies to EFL writing teaching in Turkey. The questions that Turkish students cannot answer about why they should learn EFL writing may lie behind particularly the factors such as "family/culture" and "individual differences" which are among the intervening conditions of this study. In fact, since professional development or career development progresses parallel to the individual's self-development -it is the reflection of self-development, it can be argued that the answer to this question is that "the task of professional development in Turkey cannot be overcome successfully". Successful fulfillment of individual professional development duties during each developmental period leads to healthy individual career choices and a healthy professional development (Super, 1990). However, profession choice in Turkey generally depends on the placement scores in the university entrance exam. Thus, individuals cannot understand why it is necessary to write in English because they do not know whether they will use it. The reason why they do not know is that they are not directed to the professions earlier according to their interests and abilities.

There is classification of teaching L2 writing pedagogies such as controlled and guided writing, free writing, product writing, process writing and genre-based writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 4-9; Grabe, 2001). The findings of the current study suggest that all these approaches should continue to be used in teaching EFL writing in the Turkish context. While controlled and guided writing should continue in the beginning levels (i.e. foundation and expansion), the other approaches should be applied based on the pedagogical objectives in later levels (i.e. development and completion). Actually, if we act from the Turkish case, the model that emerged in the work provides policy makers and theoreticians with ideas on teaching EFL writing. At this point, while EFL writing should be mandatory during foundation and expansion periods; it should be optional during development and completion periods in an EFL context similar to Turkey. Those who want to use English in their life and those who consider English as a part of their professional identity need to go through all stages of the model. The reason why it should be obligatory in foundation and expansion stages is that individuals have not yet shifted to a professional field because they cannot distinguish their interests and skills.

Consequently, this research study has presented a holistic and comprehensive perspective on the problems of EFL writing and solutions to these problems in the Turkish context. Necessary regulations, which informed by the findings of the current study, on teaching EFL writing can be done at each education level based on this model. Carrying out similar studies in different communities can help cross-cultural comparisons in the field of EFL writing. The model discussed in this study can also be quantitatively tested through developing an instrument based on these findings as well as on the existing studies. The dimensions discussed in the FEDCom model can be re-evaluated according to the results of quantitative studies. According to such findings, EFL writing development programs can be prepared.

Limitations

The study has three main limitations. Firstly, the findings that emerged from the data could have been subjected to measure quantitatively. Secondly, the implications of the problems on students' writing could have been presented, which could strengthen the existing findings. Finally, instead of interviewing with only university students, some other students from the other levels could have been interviewed.

Recommendations

The suggestions for future research can be put forth considering the limitations of the current study. Accordingly, the studies ahead can quantitatively test the findings that emerged out through the qualitative analysis that was done in this study. Moreover, tangible examples from the writings of the students from each level can be provided in a study that will focus on the current issue. In addition, longitudinal studies which focus on the progression of students' writing from at least secondary school to the end of the high school can be planned and carried out. Such studies can reveal more about the developmental nature of writing in a foreign language. Finally, future studies can focus on not only the problems but also possible solutions to these problems.

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APPENDIX: Examples from the Data Obtained from Teachers / Instructors

A- Examples from primary school data

Already provided in the main article.

B- Examples from secondary school data

They improve it (their writing) at the end of 5th grade. The spelling mistakes reduce. We want them to make sentences with the words they have learned so that the vocabulary will be permanent. They learn more about writing when they move towards 7th and 8th grades. (T_7)

Example expressions on causal conditions:

Negative transfer:

The biggest problem of course is that words are pronounced and written differently in these two languages. Maybe, it becomes difficult for the kids to learn both how to write and how to pronounce. The kids get satisfied with the pronunciation only, they can write through that way. (T_10)

Lack of transfer of writing skills:

I can say the number of students who use their mother tongue as it should be in real sense considering their ages is about 30 percent. Mostly there are sentence errors. They do not make proper sentences, they do not make long sentences. (T_11)

Lack of writing experience:

If they do it again at home, that is, if they practice more, the result will be better in writing in English (T_10)

The main problem is; the children are not studying regularly, that's most obvious. They are not studying to improve their vocabulary. (T13)

Lack of phonological awareness:

We are facing problems, of course, because the pronunciation is different from the spelling. We spend most of the lesson to check them out. (T_11)

Lack of imitative writing:

We have students who cannot even write to the board. (T_11)

Lack of grammatical knowledge:

They do not know how to organize words because their grammar knowledge is insufficient (T_17)

Example expressions on strategies:

Positive transfer:

They can write composition at home, as they write (composition) in Turkish. (T_12)

Writing Experience:

In order that the students improve their writing skills, they have to engage in a variety of writing exercises. For instance, they can write what they do during a day in their diaries. (T_13)

Phonological awareness:

I, personally, have them listen to simple English songs so that they get accustomed to English sounds. I also get them exercise by pronouncing and by getting my students pronounce short words on the board. (T_14)

Imitative writing:

We have problems with fifth and sixth graders. Our students at seventh and eighth grades are able to write well what's on the board. (T_17)

Example expressions on intervening conditions:

Curriculum:

This is due to the curriculum. I think the curriculum is very dense. If the kids encounter fewer topics at school, if they encounter fewer words, they may learn more robustly (T_13)

Teacher:

The attitude of the teacher and the willingness of him to have students write are important. I am, for example, having them write quite a bit, I do it especially to get them accustomed to writing. I both have them write and give them homework so that they get used to writing a little faster. (T_11)

Insufficient Training Hours:

That is to say, the number of courses is low. We had 24 hours of English lessons per week while we were preparing for university. The number of lessons is low, so we cannot allot time for writing, speaking etc. with children. (T_11)

Material:

We do not have any listening CD with our textbooks. If it was so, and if it was possible to practice listening with native speakers' voices, it would be more efficient. Thus, children's phonological awareness would increase. (T12)

Method:

They already read and understand the book and translate it into Turkish. I like GTM. We learned with GTM. I am also trying to support the good ones (students) in this way. (T19)

Motivation:

Elementary school students are already eager to learn something. If the teacher teaches them in an amusing way, they already progress in 2, 3, 4 (grades). But now when they move on to 6th grade, the child is starting to prepare for the TEOG exam. They are preparing for the test rather than learning English. Their worry is to get high marks in the test. This is a nuisance. They think that they will learn English in college in the future. They do not think it's easier to learn it now. (T_13)

Technology:

They like playing with computer or phone. They are not struggling with writing. There is too much distraction. (T_18)

Information processing capacity:

We have students who can write complete sentences. They usually come out of their shell at 7th and 8th grades. It's not the in the 5th or 6th grade, in later times. (T_11)

Family/Culture:

It might be effective if the family, the teacher, and the student come together and talk. It is necessary that the student give a promise about it. But the parents are often uninterested. (T_18)

C- Examples from high school data

They are beginning to write simpler. But later on, in conjunction with the subject, the writings are further developed when the examples are given in front of them. They move their writings further ahead the level they achieved before high school. (T_23)

Example expressions on causal conditions:

Negative transfer:

They want to carry the Turkish expression in their head to English literally. For example, they use a word in a way that does not fit the context. For example, s/he says 'he has a big head' to mean that 's/he is hobnailed' as s/he translates *koca kafalı*[†] literally by separating the words of the idiom. S/he cannot use it properly. (T_27)

Lack of transfer of writing skills:

The absence of composition lesson in Turkish also affects their writing in English. They do not know what to write and how to write it. "We do not even do (write) it in Turkish, you want it from us in English," they say. (T_26)

Lack of writing experience:

They write easily when they know what to write about. But when it comes to some more academic subjects, it becomes harder to write because their level of knowledge is not enough. Reading is a solution for this, but "Is the existing one a reading generation?". It is a question mark. Students cannot write without knowledge. He turns and turns and says the same thing. (T_26)

Lack of Vocabulary:

Writing is really a skill. In other words, you have to have vocabulary knowledge, and grammatical knowledge to produce something. They get in trouble at this point. The vocabulary of the students is not sufficiently developed. (T_30)

Lack of Grammatical Knowledge:

They do many grammatical errors. Although we repeat teaching them, and give them feedback when they do wrong, they still lack some grammar points. (T_21)

Lack of Productive writing:

Speaking and writing are productive skills. You have to produce something, and those who are not so imaginative cannot achieve it. That's a complication. (T_24)

Example expressions on strategies:

Positive Transfer:

First of all, grammar should be given to a certain extent. After that you should move on to the use of English; speaking, reading... How does this happen? Reading is important here. For example, I say to my students: While we study in the class, we study passages. When you get home, take this piece and read it aloud to yourself. So you pronounce because you read aloud. Do you hear what you read? Then you are listening. Now take paper and pen, and summarize as well as you can. So you have done exercises on 3 skills and on how to pronounce. (T_25)

[†] Koca: big; kafa: head

Writing Experience:

Students need to read a lot. Reading a lot is crucial. In fact, it is necessary that we do not separate reading in English and reading in mother tongue. Both are necessary. If they read in both, then they can write well. They should be patient and they should allocate time for it. (T_28)

Grammatical Knowledge:

The stronger the grammar knowledge, the more accurate their writing is. (T_21)

Rich Vocabulary:

As students' vocabulary increases, their writing gets richer. (T_22)

Productive Writing:

By giving an example, you can say, "Here is how it is written, you can do it like this". You might want something like their rewriting something by changing a few words. It is first because of creating the feeling "I can write". (T_26)

Example expressions on intervening conditions:*Teacher:*

It is not enough that you learn methodology in college. You start little by little in teaching, you see the reaction of students, and you develop something different. You reinforce what they admire, and you avoid what they do not like. (T_27)

Insufficient Training Hours:

It is required that you give an example of what they are going to write so that they can write something like that. They will write after that. You will evaluate what they write and give feedback. But how many hours of a 4-hour lesson in a week does it take? 4-hour English course in a week is insufficient. (T_22)

Material:

Of course, English is not taught like the native language. We are lack of many things; the books are not engaging. We have a problem with the material. Now we have a smart board, but we do not have the internet access. It's pretty good compared to the old one, but there are no funny activities for kids. There is no CD for the listening pieces. We have to reach them from EBA (Educational Information Network), but we cannot reach there at all. (T_25)

Method:

In general, the more stimulation you put in group work, the more the children become happy. Like in a contest, we need to activate the senses. Visuals, for example. If you want them to write on a white page without looking at and seeing anything, this is hard. You need something to activate their senses. (T_23)

Motivation:

When they move on to 11th-12th grades, the students are starting to prepare for the university entrance exam. They are preparing for they do not want to study English. This is a big problem (T_23)

Technology:

The students have become lazy now. Mobile phones, shortening everything, disappearance of letter... Life has become more practical now. They always want everything short. For example, I have just spoken to one of my friend. "Do not write to the board," the students said to him, that is, they do not want to write. There is a serious problem yes, because they do messaging in short cuts. In the past, we wrote letters, the letters vanished. Writing is disappearing slowly. This is a negative side of technology. Of course, teaching English is also influenced by this situation. The kids cannot write, they cannot interpret, and so they cannot express themselves. (T_25)

Family/Culture:

All families and the authorities think that way: Our children should always proceed in the academia; they all should be university graduates. They should study in science colleges, Anatolian teacher training high schools etc. Students have different abilities, all different. The things they can do is clear. Of course we will open the way, but we will not keep them in the direction we want. We will suggest the students to move towards the most appropriate direction. To occupational high school, to craft high school... Those who have such a talent can at least learn an art instead of being dragged to other places. Not everyone will be a doctor or a lawyer. (T_24)

They do not think it's easier now. It's a bit related to the family of course. Parents' view is the child's view. It's all nested. If the parents support and consolidate, our job gets easier. (T_29)

Individual differences:

Some people like to work individually. Some of them enjoy group work. There are individual level differences too. Some students may be able to write better than others. (T_22)

Change in Developmental Task:

Another factor is they are in adolescence. They cannot express them in a well-coordinated manner. They cannot express them in a planned way. When they write something, they do it very complex and complicated. However, they get happier if we help them plan and guide them. But they also complain about it: "You are limiting us." First, you will not block their autonomy. You will leave them free. It (the thing they write) should be more flexible. You cannot expect students to be autonomous in teacher-dominated class. (T_26)

D- Examples from university data

A little more emphasis should be put on writing in pre-university education. It gets a little difficult (late) to acquire writing skill at college. They should acquire it in the previous stages. (T_32)

Examples expressions on causal conditions

Negative transfer:

They want to translate what they think in Turkish into English directly. As can be seen in the example; 'there are green eyes of my sister' (trying to say 'my sister has green eyes'. Secondly, they want to write very complex sentences in English. However, they do not think that 'my English is different from Turkish'. One is my mother tongue and the other is a foreign language. They need to write simpler things in a foreign language first. They cannot make this simplification. (T_34)

Lack of Transfer:

There is a transfer event from mother tongue to the foreign language. When there are major differences, this causes big problems. Even though there is some similarity, it does not provide a complete positive transfer. Something is always missing. (T_32)

Lack of Experience:

Perhaps they have a lot of writing-related shortcomings in the training they had received until they started the university. (T_37)

Lack of vocabulary:

Having a rich vocabulary means being always one step ahead of others. (T_38)

They write translation of a Turkish word in English regardless of its context just by looking up in the dictionary. For example, when a student wanted to write 'this bridge connects two sides', he wrote 'this bridge connects two collars' since the Turkish word 'yaka' is a homonymous word meaning both 'side' and 'collar'. (T_34)

Lack of Grammatical Knowledge:

We get difficulty in structures; grammar, syntax, word order because the syntaxes of the two languages are very different. (T_39)

Lack of Rhetorical Organization:

Generally they cannot organize sentences, ideas, etc. in a proper and smooth fashion. We observe that they see writing as a task. They do not want to seek ways for improving their abilities on writing organization. (T_31)

Lack of Productive Writing:

But students do not produce. It's just grammar loading. When they arrive at university, we do not observe that they can produce something. They say "I know present simple" but they have difficulty in making sentences. (T_36)

Examples expressions on strategies

Writing Experience:

Students will listen/watch BBC radio/TV, even if they do not understand it. First, they will follow foreign radio-TV channels. The second, they will use an English-English dictionary. They will see through the samples and use them. They will also use the collocations dictionary. They will learn such basic collocations as "get a high mark-low mark; take an exam-have an exam .." etc. However, they will use paper-based dictionaries not electronic ones. I, having more than 30 years of experience, believe that paper-based dictionaries are more helpful and efficient. (T_39)

Positive Transfer:

I'm trying to raise their metalinguistic awareness. 'See why we are learning it, because of it'. I raise their awareness. The structure of each language is different. You cannot translate a sentence that you set in your mind in mother tongue to foreign language. I say that you have to express it in its simplest form in the target language according to the rules. (T_34)

Improved Grammatical Knowledge:

It's my observation that when a student learns the syntax and other grammar-related issues well, they also improve in writing. They start making sentences that are well-ordered. (T_38)

Rich Vocabulary:

Suppose we started on sentence basis. When you explain what a sentence, a paragraph a topic sentence, a supporting sentence, a concluding sentence etc. they start writing something. We observe the gradual development. (T_33)

Writing Experience:

My students have been writing regularly since the term began. As their writing practices increase, their writing also improves. (T_34)

Productive Writing:

First, you need to write essays together with students. Secondly, you need to have them write in class. Otherwise, it is not all right when you want them to write at home. And they need to write on different types and issues. They have to experience it to produce something original on their own later. (T_39)

Examples expressions on intervening conditions

Teacher:

The facilitating factor can be the relationship between us. I keep saying them the mistakes not as mistakes, but as things that are fairly normal in learning English by way of relieving them. I am tolerant towards them. I give the feedback more positively and I tell the reasons for their mistakes. I tell them that their mistakes are normal, and they will overcome them by studying and writing more. (T_37)

Material:

Not having the appropriate material when you need is a nuisance! We have some materials of course, however, they are not those that we need. (T_32)

Method:

When we first established the prep school, METU had a writing book. And we started with guided writing there. For example, it is written there; I, 25, London, student etc. The student wrote by combining these prompts. Free writing followed this. First guided and instructed writing then free writing. Step by step because it is always recommended in seminars and conferences. Personalization is very important. For example, like and dislike. I am asking immediately; ‘what do you like / dislike?’. They learn more easily. They will learn chunks first. I am opposed to starting with free writing. (T_39)

Motivation:

First of all, students are afraid of writing. There is a fear that they are not proficient. Most students think so. Even though these students took courses starting from primary school they feel like this at first. (T_37)

Technology:

There is a situation like this: Whatsapp correspondence and Messenger correspondence really kills language skills. For example, if you see my correspondence with an American friend- who has a master’s degree- you think that she is probably a Turkish girl, and I am an American. My language is smoother. Abbreviations, acronyms etc. These things affect writing skill negatively. (T_39)

Family/Culture:

I think the background is a bit of education families give their children. The child is successful if he is educated in literacy, science, and so on in family. It starts from the family rather than the previous levels (until university). (T_39)

Individual differences:

Some people cannot express their feelings; they cannot put them on paper. Some of them cannot do it when they are asked to write their opinions on something specific. (T_35)

There are also differences within the same class. Even some cannot write paragraphs in Turkish. But on the other side, there are also ones who can express themselves well through writing in English. (T_40)