

**NEAR EAST UNIVERSITY**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING**

**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' USE OF THE MECHANICS OF  
WRITING IN ENGLISH IN NORTHERN IRAQ**

**MASTER THESIS**  
**KAMERAN NOORI ABDULLAH**

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**Department of English Language Teaching**

**An Investigation of Students' Use of the Mechanics of Writing in English in  
Northern Iraq**

**Master Thesis**

**Kameran Noori Abdullah**

**Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kurt**

**Nicosia**

**June, 2015**

Approval of the Graduate School of Educational Sciences

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Prof. Dr. Orhan ifti  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kurt  
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis submitted by Kameran Noori Abdullah, titled 'An Investigation of Students' Use of The Mechanics of Writing in English in Northern Iraq', and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kurt  
Supervisor

**Examining Committee Members**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mustafa Kurt

---

Asst. Prof. Dr. Doina Popescu

---

Assist. Prof. Dr. Nurdan Atamtürk

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that all the information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all the materials and results that are not original to this study.

**Name, middle and last name: Kameran Noori Abdullah**

**Signature: .....**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my family, especially to my mother who has always supported me with  
endless love.

**ABSTRACT**  
**AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENTS' USE OF THE MECHANICS OF  
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**Kameran Noori Abdullah**

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This study set to investigate the type and frequency of the common errors in the written performance of Kurdish EFL students, considering the correct use of Mechanics of writing, and also to compare the errors made by students in the two groups of male and female of Kurdish EFL learners. In this regard, composition test was used as one of the instruments in this study and the errors made by the participants were analyzed. Moreover, the inter-rater reliability was estimated to ensure the reliability of the instrument and the obtained results. Moreover, to add to the reliability and the validity of the results, a checklist was designed, developed and used by the researcher as a framework for correcting and analyzing the errors made by students, which contained a list of the most identified elements of writing mechanics. Another aim of this study was to explore the minds and thoughts of Kurdish EFL teachers toward the effectiveness of the Sunrise (textbook) teacher training course considering introducing the new methods and ways of teaching writing skills and its affect on their own teaching practice, the strategies they mostly adopt or devise to use in teaching writing skills and more specifically mechanics of writing, the teachers' awareness about their students' major problems in their writings and the types of errors that their students' mostly commit considering the use of mechanics of writing. To investigate this aim, an interview was employed as another data collection instrument in this study. The results revealed that generally the major problems of Kurdish students and the most errors they made are on the elements of capitalization (61%), punctuation (88%), and paragraphing (87%). However, female students were found to generally have worked much better than the male students. Considering Kurdish teachers also it was found that generally most of them do not teach mechanics of writing in their classes and do not use any specific strategy in teaching writing skills and mechanics of writing, while they mostly focus on teaching grammar and think it suffices for their students' needs for writing, Moreover, it was found that they are mostly not satisfied with the teacher training course set for introducing them to Sunrise ( textbook) in terms of teaching writing skills and introducing new teaching strategies to them .All the results are mentioned in detail and discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The findings of this study have some implications for all teachers, learners, curriculum developers, teacher educators, policy makers and generally all those involved in the system of education.

**Key words:** Mechanics of Writing, Writing skills, Error, Error analysis, Kurd EFL students, Kurd EFL teachers.

## ÖZ

### KUZEY IRAKLI ÖĞRENCİLERİN İNGİLİZCE YAZMA MEKANIĞINI KULLANIMLARI ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Kameran Noori Abdullah

İngiliz Öğretmenliği Yüksek Lisans Programı

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Bu çalışmada, Kürtçe konuşan EFL öğrencilerinin yazarken yaptıkları yaygın hataların sıklığını ve türünü yazma mekaniğinin doğru kullanımını gözönünde bulundurarak ortaya koymak ve kız ve erkek öğrenciler olmak üzere iki gruptan oluşan İngilizce öğrenen Kürt öğrencilerin yaptıkları hataları mukayese etmek için yola çıkılmıştır. Bu amaçla ölçüm yöntemi olarak kompozisyon yazdırma kullanılmış ve öğrencilerin yaptıkları hatalar analiz edilmiştir. Bunun yanında karşılaştırmalı değerlendirme (inter-rater) güvenilirliği tahmin edilerek kullanılan yöntemin ve elde edilen sonuçların güvenilirliği sağlanmıştır. Bunun dışında, sonuçların güvenilirliğini ve geçerliliğini artırmak için öğrencilerin hatalarını düzeltme ve analiz etmede çerçeve olarak kullanılabilen, yazma mekaniğinin en iyi tanımlanmış unsurlarını içeren bir kontrol listesi tasarlanmış, geliştirilmiş ve kullanılmıştır. Araştırmanın bir başka amacı da yeni İngilizce yazma metodları ve yollarını öğreten Sunrise (ders kitabı) öğretmen yetiştirme kursunun etkililiği üzerine EFL öğretmenlerinin düşüncelerini ve yaklaşımlarını ve bunun kendi öğretim tecrübeleri üzerine etkisini, İngilizce yazma becerisini ve özellikle yazma mekaniğini öğretmek için kendi kullandıkları ve oluşturdukları stratejileri, öğrencilerin yazarken yaşadıkları önemli problemler hakkında öğretmenlerin farkındalıklarını ve öğrencilerin yazma mekaniği konusunda karşılaştıkları en önemli sorunları keşfetmektir. Bu amaca ulaşmak için karşılıklı konuşma bir başka veri toplama aracı olarak uygulanmıştır.

Elde edilen sonuçlar göstermiştir ki Kürtçe konuşan öğrencilerin genellikle karşılaştıkları en önemli problemler ve en çok hata yaptıkları yerler, büyük harf –küçük harf kullanma (capitalization) (%61), noktalama (%88) ve paragraflara ayırmadır (%87). Bununla beraber kız öğrencilerin erkek öğrencilere nazaran daha başarılı oldukları gözlemlenmiştir. Kürt öğretmenlerin de genellikle çoğunun yazma mekaniğini sınıflarında öğretmedikleri ve yazma becerisini ve yazma mekaniğini öğretmek için herhangi bir strateji kullanmadıkları, çoğunlukla gramer öğretmeye odaklandıkları ve bunun öğrencilerin yazma becerileri için yeterli olduğunu düşündükleri görülmüştür. Bundan başka kendilerine Sunrise (ders kitabı) ile verilen yazma becerileri ve öğretim stratejileriyle ilgili öğretmen yetiştirme kursundan çoğunlukla tatmin olmadıkları tespit edilmiştir. Ulaşılan bütün sonuçlar 4. ve 5. Kısımlarda detaylı olarak ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışmadan elde edilen bulgular bütün öğretmenlere, öğrencilere, müfredat geliştiricilere, öğretmen yetiştiricilere, eğitim politikası oluşturanlara ve eğitim sisteminde görevli herkese yol göstericidir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Yazma mekaniği, Yazma becerisi, Hata, Hata analizi, Kürt EFL öğrencileri, Kürt EFL öğretmenleri.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **Terms and Abbreviations Used in the Thesis**

**KRG** : Kurdistan Regional Government

**EFL** : English as a Foreign Language

**ESL** : English as a second language

**EC** : Error Correction

**FL** : Foreign Language

**L2** : Second Language

**MC** : Measure of Cohesion

**IRR** : Inter rater reliability

**EA** : Error Analysis

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Overview**

In today's modern world with its own complexities, where, through the window of technology, the hatch has been opened to the ocean of communication and information. Technology is available for all people around the universe to be used for different reasons, such as trade, making friends, sharing ideas, learning new things from one another, and so on. The importance of knowing English as an international language in general and mastering productive skills in particular is of high status of importance.

Writing as one of the key tools of communication is one of the skills which is essential for any educated person to be effectively learned, since any failure in using this skill, may lead to failure in future success of the person in his educational and occupational communicating affairs which are mostly written form-based.

In this regard, writing, which is highly considered a difficult and problematic productive skill by foreign language learners, finds its importance and its role in both life and education. People need to write for different purposes in different stages of their lives and based on the requirements in educational, business, family or friendship communicational contexts, for each of which learners are supposed to use correct frameworks for writing and correctly employed mechanics of writing and be aware of the grammatical points and rules to produce error-free and appropriate form of written texts.

Writing is indeed an art, and as creating a work of art requires full attention to the details and fine elements. In producing a good written work one must also be aware of all the detailed elements of writing. In other words, not only grammatical forms and



rules but also mechanics of writing such as spelling, punctuation and capitalization are important.

Writing is also considered a mediator and an important communicating tool to generate and transfer ideas. Considering this fact, adherence to the correct use of mechanics of writing is helpful and beneficial in facilitating communication and helps convey the message easily and clearly on the part of reader(s).

Many factors are involved in creating a perfect error-free piece of writing and the learners must be aware of and focus on in the process of their writing. Some of these factors are merely grammatical, related to a set of rules and conventions and knowing them is considered the basics of writing along with sufficient knowledge of vocabulary. However, in the advanced levels of learning writing skills, adherence to the mechanics of writing as the crucial elements of a body of writing are so important. Hence, these are expected from the learners to master.

Learners are not the only ones who are responsible for their learning and more specifically mastering writing skills. In fact, many other people and factors are involved in helping the learning to take place. The whole system of education in general, and teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, material developers, curriculum developers, institutional factors in particular, which are connected to each other like a chain, have roles in providing suitable situations and implementing effective methods and strategies to help students to write correctly and effectively. However, teachers play the most important role in providing learners with the efficient knowledge and practical use of the different dimensions of writing and emphasizing on the importance of paying attention to the mechanics of writing. In other words, due to the fact that teachers have direct contact with the students, they can be more effective in this sense by supporting the learners through scaffolding and guiding them through teaching writing skills and

the requirements of a good piece of writing, not only by focusing on grammatical forms but also by stressing on the correct use of mechanics of writing which facilitates transferring ideas and hence enhancing the value of the written text.

One cannot master writing skills by only learning the grammatical and syntactical structures and main points theoretically. Instead, learners are supposed to practically use these structures and points in actual production output.

One of the ways of helping foreign language learners with their written production is the correction of the learners' writing papers that generally teachers do. Accordingly, error correction (EC) by the teacher and explaining the errors to the learners and hence guiding them to use the elements correctly are very beneficial in helping the foreign language learners to progress their writing skills.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Working as a high school teacher, I noticed the general poor performance of my students in their writing tasks and I was wondering if the problem is with the strategies and techniques that I use in teaching writing skills and also if I am the only one who faces this problem in the context of Kurdistan Region (KRG) of Iraq, and if yes, what are the most frequent problems of Kurdish students in writing and more specifically considering mechanics of writing such as punctuations, spelling, capitalization and paragraphing; since any error regarding the mechanics of writing may negatively affect their writing and make understanding difficult, while a good writing work, can help convey the ideas and purpose of the writer in a proper way.

Considering the factor of sex, also the question is that how the two groups of Kurdish male and female EFL learners differ in terms of the errors they make

concerning the elements of the mechanics of writing based on the frequency of errors and types of errors they commit.

Knowing about the strategies that Kurdish teachers use in teaching writing mechanics, the extent of importance they give to the teaching of writing mechanics, and their awareness of their students' writing problems are also other problems discussed in this study, due to the major role of teachers as guides in correcting and helping with the difficulties their students face in the process of learning writing skills and their neglect in this respect can be the reason for possible weakness in the writing ability of their students, while the good strategies they use in teaching writing mechanics and the importance they give to it may guarantee the good performance of their students in their writing tasks to some extent.

Moreover, considering Sunrise, which is a new curriculum in Kurdistan region of Iraq in teaching English as a foreign language, the question that raises in mind is to what extent it was successful in the realm of writing skills and more specifically in emphasizing and teaching the mechanics of writing as an integral part of any piece of writing by exploring the thoughts and beliefs of teachers as those who play a major role in implementing this curriculum; and also investigating on the effectiveness of the teacher training courses set for the teachers.

### **Aim of the Study**

Consistent with the research questions, the aim of this study is centered on investigating, identifying and commenting on the most problematic element Kurdish EFL learners generally struggle with in writing: the mechanics of writing.

Finding the frequency of errors made by Kurdish students considering each of the elements of writing mechanics and also comparing the errors of the students in two groups of male and female to figure out the difference existing between these two groups is also a goal of this study.

Moreover, this study intends to explore the attitudes of the Kurdish EFL teachers regarding the importance they attach to the teaching of the mechanics of writing, the amount of the time they devote to teach these elements of writing skills, the strategies they adopt to use in their teaching and guiding their students considering mechanics of writing, and the effectiveness of Sunrise Curriculum in encouraging the students to focus on the learning of the mechanics of writing and the type of strategies they use.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions in this study are listed below:

1. What are the most frequent errors made by Kurdish EFL students in terms of the use of the mechanics of writing?
  - a. Do mistakes made by EFL students vary according to gender?
2. What are the Kurdish EFL teachers' perceptions of the students' errors made in the mechanics of writing?
3. What strategies do Kurdish EFL teachers adopt in teaching and guiding students, considering the correct use of mechanics of writing?

4. What do Kurdish EFL teachers think about the effectiveness of Sunrise Curriculum and its' teacher education course, regarding their focus on writing skills and the strategies they use to teach mechanics of writing?
5. To what extent do Kurdish EFL teachers attach importance to teaching the mechanics of writing?

### **Significance of the Study**

Analyzing the writings of Kurdish students and finding the most frequent errors they make and hence identifying their major problems in writing can be helpful in showing the extent of effectiveness of techniques, methods or strategies that Kurdish teachers use in order to teach writing skills. Failure in any of these strategies of teaching can lead to possible errors in students' performance. Henceforth knowing about the difficulties of the Kurdish students in writing and particularly in the correct use of mechanics of writing can pave the way for setting up new teaching strategies and modifying some related parts in designing the curriculum and training more effective teachers who can help students in writing error-free and using correct forms of writings.

Accordingly, due to the fact that it is highly assumed that the majority of teachers generally teach grammatical rules in their classes for it is related to all skills of language learning, it is important to know how much they focus on the structural points and more specifically the mechanics of writing, which this study deals with.

Moreover, since any new curriculum's efficiency needs to be tested to reveal its' weak points and strength points, this study also had an eye on the effectiveness of Sunrise on teaching strategies adopted by Kurdish teachers and generally their teaching

of writing and specifically teaching the mechanics of writing from the viewpoints of teachers who participated in Sunrise teacher training writing course.

All in all, considering all the above mentioned points, this study is significant even more for up to now; few studies have been conducted in the context of Kurdistan region of Iraq to focus on each of these issues separately, while a study which deals with all of these issues altogether in a single study has not been found in the literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mechanics of writing which is the focus of this study, has been defined differently and in various ways, and hence different scholars have categorized it differently, as it will be indicated later in this chapter, in the section about the definition of key terms.

Henceforth this study considered all of the categories or sub categories defined by the majority of the scholars, more specifically those categories which overlap in all definitions (e.g. capitalization, punctuation, spelling) and those other (e.g. numbers and numerals).

Since in some of the definitions and categories presented by some scholars (e.g. Smith, 2003), grammar is considered a subcategory of writing mechanics, this study considered some most tangible grammatical points which are directly or indirectly related or affect mechanics of writing in this study (e.g. word order, verb tense, determiners, gerunds and participles ).

However, some categories suggested by some scholars were not considered in this study and they were considered limitations of this study, such as hand writing, pronouns, and acronyms.

Finally, a framework was set for this study based on which, mechanics of writing were examined based on 11 related categories : capitalization, contractions, punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, gerunds and participles, numbers and numerals, verb tense, word order, determiners, and pronouns.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

***Mechanics of writing.*** Mechanics of writing as a "sub-skill of writing" (Norman et al., 2005) are generally referred to as conventions of writing that do not exist in the spoken language. They are generally described as "the technical aspects of writing", including elements, such as punctuation, capitalization and spelling. In other words, mechanics of writing are considered the established conventions for words to be used in one's documentation (Sun, 2003) However, giving the same definitions, different scholars consider slightly different classifications for this term.

In this regard, I can refer to some scholars who consider grammar (e.g. Smith, 2003), sentence structure skills (e.g. Danielson, 2000), formatting (e.g. Smith, 2003) also as parts of mechanics of writing. On the other hand, Sun (2003) enlisted the mechanics of writing as gerunds and participles, capitalization, numbers and numerals, pronouns, acronyms, units of measurement, technical abbreviations, contractions, and punctuations; while Leggett et al. (1985) considered only numbers, syllabication, manuscript form, and abbreviation. Mandell and Mandell (1989) considered many points as being covered by writing mechanics and called punctuation and capitalization as the most important writing mechanics.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study only focused on 11 elements which were capitalization, contractions, punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, gerunds and participles, numbers and numerals, verb tense, word order, determiners, and pronouns.

Although 100 participants in this study seem a logical number to make the results of this study generalizable to all Kurd learners in Iraq, due to their limited number of population in comparison to a dependent country, however it would be better that slightly more number of participants were used in this study to add to the generalizability of the research.

On the other hand, the location of the study was limited to collect data only in Erbil city.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Overview

Reviewing the literature one can find the lack of studies on the context of Kurdistan and more specifically Kurdistan region of Iraq, considering the factors investigated in this study on the nature and frequency of errors in the domain of writing mechanics, made by the learners in their writing performance and also exploring the Kurdish teachers' thoughts and their awareness toward their students' problems concerning writing skills. Up to now, no research has been found to study the effectiveness of Sunrise (textbook) and its' related teacher education course regarding writing skills on the teachers' teaching strategies and consequently on learners from the viewpoints, thoughts and beliefs of Kurdish teachers which were also included in this study.

Moreover, although studies on L2 learners' writing skills and their use of mechanics of writing are rare in the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. Relatively sufficient number of the studies have been conducted on these issues in the other similar EFL contexts, some of which, including their findings will be briefly mentioned in the following sections of this chapter. However, it must be noted that unlike this study, none of these mentioned studies compared the writing problems of the students, considering the factor of gender.

Below, starting with defining and describing the related main notions and concepts, I will introduce the related studies conducted in the similar EFL contexts.

## **Writing**

According to Fischer (2003) considering writing, there is no unique definition that can be applicable to all writing systems.

Liu and Braine (2005), defined writing as a complex and difficult skill, due to its need for paying attention to both accuracy and fluency, while spending much time and effort and using the ability to use language to express thoughts and ideas. Interestingly, Norrish (1983) considered writing a more difficult skill than speaking.

According to Mousapour Negari (2011) and Flower & Hayes (1981), due to the complexity in writing for it consists of many meta cognitive and cognitive processes and activities, ranging from brainstorming and planning to drafting and revising, the attention of the researchers recently have been attracted to the issue of cognition and cognitive processes in L2 writing. In this regard, it can be said that focusing on the errors made by students as the aim of this study, I can come up with results which can be useful in providing us with the information about the processes of the minds of L2 writers.

## **Features of a Writing System**

Fischer (2003) cited three features for a "complete writing system", which are as follow:

- (a) Has a communication goal and hence is used to communicate;
- (b) Uses marks that are conventionally related to spoken language or electronic programs in a way that communication takes place; and
- (c) Includes a set of artificial graphic signs on an electronic or durable surface.

## **Importance of Writing and Mastering Writing Skills**

Enormous developments in technology and creation of communicational tools based on Internet, and opening the global marketing has added to the importance of language and ability of communication, most important of which is writing skill (Pakir,1999). According to Flanegin and Rudd (2000) knowing the English language and being able to have the ability of communication using writing skill are important for all professions.

According to Fati (2013), in order to have a good writing ability , one must learn and practise writing skill and experience it well, since it is not an skill to be naturally acquired.

### **Different Types of Writing**

According to Fati (2013), writing systems are of two kinds, symbolic and functional. In this sense, symbolic refers to representing people and culture, while functional refers to representing language in a visual way.

Another distinction of writing, divides the views on writing in to "writing as product" and "writing as process".

### **Writing as a Process vs. Writing as a Product**

Raimes (1991) believed in viewing writers as the creators of their written texts, along with new insights toward class activities such as focusing on content before form, peer collaboration, invention and use of journals, where the reasons that led to developing the process writing approach.

According to Fati (2013), writing as a process was a view which was raised as a reaction toward the view of writing as a product, putting simplistic assumption of product approach under questioning. Focusing on authorial voice and self-discovery in pragmatic level, according to Harris and Hodges (1995), the process approach puts emphasis on the necessity of planning writing as a goal-oriented contextualized task.

### **Composition**

Composition, based on the definition of Suleimani (2004) is a kind of activity that one uses in order to develop a writing skill.

Moreover, Rutherford (2008) defined composition as the process of creating a piece of literature in a written form.

### **Descriptive Composition**

Descriptive composition, which can be in a simple form or a complex form (Al-Hamash, 2000), refers to that type of writing, in which one deals with describing scenes, people, events, places, or objects that can be real or imaginary (Alexander, 1965) through including arranged vivid details which impress the people, events, or things which are being described, in a way that the reader feels he/she is experiencing them (Forlini et al., 1982; Furnish, 1996).

## Different Steps of Writing

Keh (1990) classified the different steps of writing based on process approach as follow:

- (a) Generating the idea;
- (b) Writing down the idea in a discovering way of what one wants to say;
- (c) Revising the draft;
- (d) Receiving feedback from different readers;
- (e) Write the second draft; and finally
- (f) Edit the draft to make sure of its mechanical and grammatical accuracy.

Davison et al. (2004), on the other hand, devised a model in which he cited four stages for writing : Drafting (write down the ideas and information without considering organization or form) , re-drafting (shape the written ideas and frame them in an structure, considering the audience and form), rereading and revising ( help reader by paying attention to coherence and cohesion of the text , and removing the ambiguities), and the final stage he called as proofreading (check any possible errors both grammatically and structurally including the mechanics of writing).

Fati (2013) referred to the recursive process as being a writing process which covers four different steps of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. In this regard, according to her, prewriting as the first step of writing, refers to anything that one does before starting to write down his ideas, which includes thinking and generating ideas based on the related topic, identifying the audience for whom the writer is going to write, along with gathering some information to use in his writing, and outlining the whole idea before starting the drafting stage. Drafting, as the second stage, is when

writing in terms of putting the ideas in form sentences takes place, which is, however, not a perfect writing and it needs a later revision in the following stages.

Accordingly, in the stage of revising thinking deeply about the audience of the writing and the needs of the reader and thinks about if the sentences and the paragraphs which were written support the main idea and if they are related to the main topic or not. In other words, in this stage the writer checks his writing from the view point of cohesion and coherence.

Considering the stage of revision, it is noteworthy that Murray (1980) makes a distinction between two types of revision, namely external revision and internal revision, where internal revision refers to modifying structure, topic, and the information provided in the written draft in order to make sure it communicates the meaning successfully; while external refers to any modification considering the terms of writing mechanics, tone, language and style. Editing, on the other hand as the final stage of writing process, according to Fati (2013) refers to checking the written work considering writing mechanics, grammar, punctuation and spelling.

### **Factors of a Good Piece of Writing**

Hadley (1993) considered composing a requirement for writing which involves transforming the ideas in mind to the written form on the paper, or any other writing forms, and viewed the process of writing as a continuum ranging from formal and mechanical elements of writing to the more complex aspects of writing or composing itself.

According to Sadallah and Hammoodi (2009), avoiding making mistakes or errors considering spelling and grammar are not the only factors that guarantee a good piece of writing. Instead they believe that other factors, such as style is also important

which refers to selecting a good topic, using good and appropriate words, and arranging them in a correct order. In this regard, to start and plan a composition, according to Glatthorn and Rosen (1996), one must first choose a good topic and then following the three steps of listing the detailed information, identifying the main points, and finally organize the supporting information.

Taylor (1976) also asserts that what makes a good and perfect writing is not only based on writing a perfect paragraph or sentence which is both grammatically and structurally correct. Instead, he believes that the factor which can guarantee the strength of a written text is intertwining of all such paragraphs and sentences to have a cohesive text. Following that, Sadallah and Hammoodi (2009) point that in order to have a good piece of writing or a composition, one must consider three factors which are unity, order of importance, and coherence.

Reid (1990) and Preto-Bay (2004) emphasize the necessity for learners to be aware of the factors of good writing, namely the content, the reader and his expectations, contextual elements, and degree of formality. In this regard, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), it is important for L2 learners to decide what strategy of learning to use to improve their writing effectively and be aware of the reasons why they are doing that.

According to La Brant (1946), the factors that language educators mostly consider the standard of expectations of the learners' written works include the use of punctuation marks appropriately, use of pronouns in correct place, use of correct tense of verbs, use of correct grammatical structures, and write words in correct spelling. Similarly, based on the statements of some researchers (e.g. Graham et al, 2000; Graham et al, 2002, Berninger & Amtmann, 2003; Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009) students need to adhere to the correct use of all sub-skills of writing which correct use

of them adds to the quality of writing such as vocabulary, handwriting, paragraph writing, sentence construction and spelling. They believe that failing in correct use of them may lead to the occurrence of difficulties on the part of learners.

Al-Hamash (2000) believes that a good and accepted piece of writing must be written gradually. In this regard, he cites some essential points that one must consider in his writing, which in brief are as follow:

- (a) Collecting adequate extent of information related to the topic, which includes listing the thoughts and ideas; and
- (b) Trying to arrange and organize the ideas in a logical order, using sub-headings in the writing paper.

On the other hand, Sadallah and Hammoodi (2009) cite three main factors that L2 learners need to have in order to be able to express their thoughts in the written form, which include : the ability of organizing the information and ideas in a logical order, having the necessary information, and the ability of expressing it pleasantly, effectively, and clearly.

### **Mechanics of Writing**

Based on the definition of Allen (2003), mechanics of writing referred to a group of rules or conventions which help writing perfect sentences and paragraphs and consequently a perfect piece of writing through providing a guideline for both reader and writer, while correct use of them facilitates reading and understanding the piece of writing by the reader. On the other hand, according to Brusaw (1997), adherence to the use of mechanics of writing in details shows the writers' reflection on achieving a perfect written outcome.



## **Punctuation**

Punctuation marks are a set of symbols and signs that relate the words and sentences to each other to help clearing the meaning for the readers (Al-Hamash, 2000) and help relating the ideas or separating the ideas (Sadallah & Hammoodi, 2009), which based on the definitions of Forlini (1982) and Furnish (1996) are like the hints for the readers to know where to change tone of voice, where to stop or where to pause .

Markwardt (1942) defined punctuation as a system of conventions used in written language that signal those elements of speech, such as stop, stress, pitch, and pause that cannot be written down on paper conventionally.

The initial aim of punctuation as Gibaldi et al. (1988) pointed out is to guarantee the accuracy, and ease of reading of the specific written text, and according to Angelillo (2002), students must use it to shape meaning.

Emphasizing the importance of punctuation in writing for the connection made between clauses and phrases on one hand , and showing the sentence patterns, Rude (2006) asserted that while using correct forms of punctuation marks adds to the accuracy of written texts and assists reading, incorrect use of them , or not using them leads to confusion and noise. Similarly, Collinson et al. (1998) believed that, by learning and using the punctuation appropriately, learners can express their minds and ideas and hence communicate more clearly.

Hackeling (1991) also emphasized the importance of punctuation in facilitating the reading and conveying the meaning by the readers, in helping the writer to express his mind clearly, in specifying the place of intonation or pause, and also the structure of the sentences.

According to Naeem (2007), there are two types of punctuation, which are defined as follow:

- (a) End mark: are those punctuation marks which locate at the end of the sentences (e.g. question mark [?], and period/stop mark [.]); and
- (b) Internal marks: refer to those punctuation marks which are used in the middle of the sentence, or somewhere in between (e.g. comma [,], semicolon [;]).

Another distinction, proposes three types of punctuation marks, which adds another type to the previous classification, that is "marks within the word", such as hyphens [-] or apostrophes ['] (Naeem, 2007).

## **Spelling**

As it is defined by Naeem (2007), spelling is a prescriptive element of language and one of the elements of orthography that refers to the writing of the vocabulary as it must be with the conventionally necessary letters, in the expected order.

Considering spelling, Schulze (2006) proposed five stages of progress for mastering spelling, namely Pre-communicative Stage, Semi-phonetic Stage, Phonetic Stage, Transitional Stage, and Conventional Spelling Stage.

## **Advantages of Spelling**

Irvin (2010). named two main advantages for the use of standard spelling, which is as follow:

- (a) Leads to a fluent writing

(b) Reinforces phonics' instruction [through using standard and fixed spelling for each sound] (P.2)

### **Capitalization**

Capitalization as a category of punctuation refers to the use of capital letters for the initial letters of some specific words such as proper nouns, or based on the place of the word in the text context such as the initial letter of the beginning word of a sentence, assists guiding and leading the eyes through the written text (King, 2003).

However Leggett et al. (1985) asserted that compared to formal writers and writers in the past, informal and modern writer use less capitalization and less follow the capitalization rules in their writings.

Warriner (1982) mentioned three main functioning roles for capitalization, which are listed below:

(a) Beginning the initial letter of the titles and proper nouns with capital words and hence making distinct between them and the rest of the words of a sentence help the reader to quickly get the meaning;

(b) Capital letters can be used in some sentences in order to show respect (e.g. "The President is speaking on television.");

(c) Since in the written form unlike the spoken form, the reader doesn't have the falling and rising intonation of the speaker's voice; capitalization at the beginning of the sentence can function as a guiding role to tell the reader when the sentence ends and where begins. (p. 425-426)

## **Errors in Writing**

Norrish (1983) defined errors as systematic failure in correct use of the language or structure forms due to the lack of knowledge about specific language or writing elements and hence repeatedly using the wrong forms.

James (2003) viewed language errors as something unique and individual due to the unsuccessful use of the language elements, and considered error analysis as an attempt to find reasons, nature, and effects of unsuccessful use of language forms and structures.

Corder (1981) considered errors as the result of the learners' failure in their writing performance. However, Chiang (1981), considered students' errors as a "surface phenomenon" as a result of learners attempt to adapt their own language system to the L2 language system.

However, it is noteworthy that as Thomas (1963) asserted, these writing problems or errors do not limit only to EFL/ESL students, but they can be also found in the native speakers' writings too.

## **Types of Errors**

In a classification by Hilton et al. (2007), EFL learners' writing problems can be categorized into two groups of Organizational Problems (e.g. errors regarding the use of introduction and conclusion in the piece of writing) and Mechanical Problems (e.g. errors considering spelling, punctuation, capitalization).

Alinsunod (2014) believed that grammar is the major and most common error of L2 learners, considering writing skills.

Kim (2005) cited four major problems in writing of EFL learners: (a) too much stress on grammatical forms, (b) too much stress on the final writing product, (c) lack of genre –specific in the curriculum, and (d) lack of different feedbacks to the learners' writings.

Adas and Bakir (2013) also named other problems of the EFL learners in writing such as the fact that they mostly use present tense correctly and have problem with other tenses, they use ill-structured sentences that makes understanding of the written work difficult for the reader, and they use incorrect spelling most often.

Burt and Kiparsky ( 1972) made distinction between local and global mistakes, based on which local mistakes are consisted as mistakes made about adjectives, pronouns, determiners, verbs, prepositions, nouns and adverbs; while global mistakes are consisted of mistakes about inversion, relative clauses, conjunctions, sentence fragments, objects, run-on sentences, subjects, and other mistakes of these types.

### **Sources of Errors**

While some researchers (e.g. Graham,1983; Morris et al,1995) emphasized the importance of teaching mechanics of writing to L2 learners and those who stress the importance of using correct forms of writing mechanics and grammar on producing acceptable and high quality writing performance by the L2 learners, there are some (e.g. Graham and Perin, 2007 ) who believe that based on meta-analysis of the effective teaching practices considering writing skills, teaching grammar is the least effective instruction on the L2 learners' errors. In this regard, According to Moris et al. (1995) , one of the reasons that teachers mainly focus on teaching grammar maybe due to the fact that EFL textbooks devote their major parts to grammatical points and less

consideration to writing sections, and hence that can be considered a reason for leading problems and consequently students' making errors in their writings.

Adas and Bakir (2013) asserted that considering EFL students, they mostly understand language; however their problem is in their production skills that make them unable or difficult to communicate and express their ideas. In this regard they considered two main reasons for this problem in case of writing skill: Lack of students' creativity in writing, and Lack of enough knowledge about vocabulary.

Norrish (1983) listed the sources of students' writing errors, which contained reasons such as: interference, incomplete application of rules, material-induced errors, carelessness, the learner's first language, overgeneralization, and translation from the first language.

To feature L2 learners' system of language, Richards and Sampson (1974) cited seven factors : (a) universal hierarchy of difficulty, (b) age , (c) succession of approximate systems, (d) intralingual interference, (e) language transfer, (f) modality, and (g) sociolinguistic situation.

On the other hand, Schuman and Stenson (1974) identified three main causes for the errors made by L2 learners: (a) incomplete acquisition of the L2 grammar, (b) errors for the normal language performance problems [e.g. interlingual and intralingual problems], and (c) exigencies of teaching-learning situation.

Some of the errors made by L2 learners are the result of negative transfer or interlanguage. In this regard, Selinker (1972) considers the existence of a "latent psychological structure in the L2 learners' brains as the reason for the occurrence of this error, which gets activated when the learner tries to learn the second or the foreign language".

Wilkins (1972), however, believed in some universally difficult points in learning English structures for all L2 learners.

Richards and Sampson (1974) classified L2 learners' errors of L2 production in six categories of: (a) overgeneralization, (b) performance errors, (c) teacher-induced errors, (d) strategies of assimilation and communication, (e) markers of transitional competence, and (f) interference.

Adas and Bakir (2013) and Rabab'ah (2003) both believed in the limited number of L2 learners' vocabulary as the major reason for their difficulty to write down their ideas and express them. Adas and Bakir (2013) named lack of appropriate feedback from the teacher another reason for the EFL learners' poor writing performance.

Richards (1971) assumed four main types or reasons for interlanguage, which are namely : (a) false concepts hypothesized, (b) ignorance of rule restriction, (c) overgeneralization, (d)incomplete application of rules.

Brown (1980) classified four main sources of error: (a) intralingual transfer, (b) interlingual transfer, (c) communicational strategies, and (d)context of learning.

Politzer and Ramirez (1973) also speculated some factors such as regional differences, L1 inference and improper use of second or foreign language rules, as the probable sources of errors made by L2 learners.

### **Evaluation of the L2 Learners' Writings**

Errors on mechanics of writing as the most common problems that L2 learners face in their writings, and due to their roles in assisting the communication and giving meaning, are highly recommended by Naeem (2007) to be considered in grading the students, instead of merely focusing on content and the material.

While Yigzaw (2013) found explicit teaching of grammar necessary and giving feedback to grammar errors in learners' writing papers unwarranted, he declared that it's not the same considering writing mechanics, such as spelling and punctuation. He also concluded that giving a mark based on the grammar and mechanics goes beyond overt spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

However, as Al-Makhzoomi (2011) pointed out, due to the complex nature of the writing skill itself, the evaluation and analyzing of the writing performance of EFL students is difficult.

### **Different Methods of Grading L2 Writings**

Considering rating the free writings, Heaton (1982) cited two methods which raters use less frequently compared to analytic method, which are as follows:

(a) Error-count or mechanical accuracy method: Heaton (1982) considered this method as the least valid method of grading the writings and called it subjective due to its reliance on the given grade in counting the errors that EFL learners have committed, while not all decisions have agreed upon the relative importance of most kinds of errors. Hence, he does not recommend this method for he finds it as method which ignores the main purpose of writing and focuses only on negative points and hence too much focus on errors, makes learners afraid of writing for fear of making error.



(b) Impression method: It is based on multiple grading (i.e. two raters giving a same grade) based on the impression of the subject and the writing as a whole. According to Heaton (1982) compared to the other two methods (*i.e. mechanical accuracy method and analytic method*), this method is faster yet more tiring.

However, Al-Makhzoomi (2011) proposed three major types of rating methods, namely holistic grading method, analytic grading method and frequency count grading method, which were introduced by Kammeen (1989), Heaton (1988), and Wilkinson (1979), respectively.

### **The Best Method of Evaluating and Grading Writing**

As Carroll and Hall (1985) asserted, rating a piece of free writing or composition objectively is highly assumed to be difficult. However, considering all the methods of correcting and grading free writings or compositions, Gannon (1985) supports analytic method as the most reliable one for many elements of composition writing lend themselves to objective testing (e.g. punctuations, spelling).

Al-makhzoomi (2011) compared two methods of grading EFL learners' composition scripts by the teachers, namely analytic method and impressionistic method, and his study showed the pedagogical advantages of the analytic method to impressionistic one for it has a framework for grading which is based on the elements of good writing, and hence by grading students' compositions based on this framework, teachers can discover on what writing elements students need more attention and considering the strength in their writings, the teacher can make sure of the success of his teaching method considering a specific writing element which students performed

better. Henceforth according to him the analytic method or error analysis method in grading students were proved to work better.

Kaczmarek (1980) also conducted a study to compare subjective and objective methods of composition grading system and surprisingly found no difference between the both methods in grading matter and actually both methods were highly correlated with each other.

### **Factors that Must be Paid Attention to in Evaluating Writings**

According to many researchers and scholars (e.g. Harris, 1969; Sako, 1972; Farhady 1980; Mc Donough, 1985, and Wilkinson, 1979) in measuring and evaluating the learners' writing abilities many different factors must be considered, such as originality, unity, diction, cohesion, style, coherence, layout, relevance, logic, handwriting, content, accuracy, vocabulary, form, and mechanics (e.g. spelling and punctuation).

Wilkinson (1979) similarly believed that to evaluate EFL learners' writing ability, the raters or graders must pay attention to many different elements of writing, such as mechanics (e.g. spelling and punctuation), organization, layout, form, diction, originality, content, logic, vocabulary, handwriting, accuracy, unity, style, relevance, coherence, cohesion, elaboration, and grammar.

Considering the writing skill, Heaton (1988) emphasized the following elements to be paid attention to in analyzing, grading and teaching EFL/ESL learners:

(a) Mechanical skills, which consists of ability of using correct forms of punctuations and spelling;

- (b) Judgment skills, refers to the ability by which the writer writes appropriately based on the specific aims of writing or the specific audience;
- (c) Language use, which refers to the ability of writing correct forms of sentences and paragraphs;
- (d) Stylistic skills, referring to the ability of using language properly by manipulating sentences and paragraphs; and
- (e) Treatment of content, which is referred to creative thinking and the ability of expanding the ideas in the written form and identifying and removing irrelevant information.

Different scholars and researchers propose and advocate different ways to evaluate and measure students' writing skills. In this regard some (e.g. Dunlop, 1969) advocate objective writing test, while some others (e.g. Oler & Perkins, 1978; Oller, 1979; Heaton, 1988; Jacobs, et al.1981; Carol & Hall, 1985) support essay tasks and compositions (which was used as an evaluating instrument in this study). However there are some scholars (e.g. Ackerman & Smith, 1988; Godshalk, et al.1966; and Harris, 1969) who argue the effectiveness of the combination of the both, as being the perfect way.

Considering composition test which was used in this study, three main ways of evaluating and rating the students' papers have been developed, introduced and used, which are namely analytic marking, advocated by scholars, such as Heaton (1988), Harris (1969), and Madsen (1983); frequency count marking, supported by scholars such as Brown and Baily (1984), Wilkinson (1979), Jacobs et al. (1981), and Hendrickson (1984); and finally holistic marking advocated by scholars, such as Raimes

(1983), Cooper(1977), Carol and Hall (1985), Rivers and Temperley (1978), and Kammeen (1982).

Farhady and Farzanehnejad (1996) supported frequency count marking, and considered it as the most objective measure for analyzing , measuring and marking the compositions , which was also used in this study. They also devised a measure for evaluating the compositions or writings of the learners, named "Measure of Cohesion", which they found to be more valid and superior compared to other previously devised and proposed measures by other scholars and researchers (e.g. Hunt, 1965).According to Farhady and Farzanehnejad (1996) this measure can be computed as follow:

$$\text{Measure of Cohesion (MC)} = \frac{\text{Number of Cohesive Devices}}{\text{Number of Words}}$$

### **Role of Teachers' Strategies on EFL Learners' Writing Performance**

Adas and Bakir (2013) considered writing as a complex and intricate skill which requires not to be taught using traditional methods which don not help students much, but to be provided an opportunity for the students to learn and use the correct form of writing by making them interested in learning and using them through adopting suitable and new strategies based on the need of their learners. In this regard, Al-Makhzoomi (2011) accentuated on the role of teachers' in adopting proper strategies and methods selected based on their agenda and modify them if it is necessary based on their periodically analysis and review of their students' writing performance.

Cumming and Riazi (2000) also believed in the importance of thinking and views of experienced teachers who are involved with teaching writing skill about their

strategies of teaching and correcting their students paper, in that exploring their minds with provide us with useful information about their role in students' amount of learning and their sources of errors which may be due to the teachers' poor teaching and more importantly help to devise useful empirical model for teaching writing skill.

Shokropour and Fallahzadeh (2007) asserted that different strategies of teaching writing skills can work in EFL context only and only if the teacher chooses and uses them based on the students' needs, their educational and social contexts and the aims of teaching writing skills.

Following the statement of Gomaa (2010) about the abilities of teachers for teaching language and the duty of the teacher to provide a learning opportunity and conditions for the learners to spontaneously and inductively learn the language, Adas and Bakir (2013) emphasized this point about teachers' duty in teaching language skills that : " A good teacher teaches, a better teacher explains, and the best teacher inspires" (p.1).According to them, students mostly engage in writing tasks and less in writing out of the class context, so class writing activities that teachers provide for them help students to get experience in writing and, in this regard, teachers must use a specific pragmatic approach to encourage his/her learners and help them expand their writing by giving appropriate tasks to them which can facilitate their learning of writing skills.

### **Approaches to Instructing Learning Strategies for Writing Skills**

Fati (2013), pointed that since different languages have different systems, hence one is required to use a set of techniques or strategies in learning the L2 writing skills. In this regard, Strum and Rankin-Erickson (2002) considered parts of learners' difficulties in writing to be due to the difficulties they face in using different cognitive

strategies; while also believing that learning strategy training can be useful in helping students to explicitly divide their writing tasks to different sub processes and hence facilitate their writings.

According to Wenden (1991), teachers can support their students by teaching them learning strategies; for being aware of the learning strategies about writing skill, is beneficial in adding to the autonomy and independence of the students.

According to Ruddell & Boyle (1989) and Mousapour Negari (2011), concept mapping as a learning strategy which assists learners in organizing the ideas and the background information in their minds which are related to the topic, since as Zimmaro and Cawley (1998) defined, concept mapping refers to graphical and visual representation in outlining the idea and knowledge of a learner toward the topic about which he is going to write.

Moreover, Richard et al. (1992) cited three approaches for teaching learning strategies to students, which can be used by teachers to help L2 learners to improve their writing skills. These approaches include: direct or explicit teaching, combination strategy teaching and embedded strategy teaching. According to them and based on their definitions, direct or explicit teaching, refers to the situation when teachers give students some information about the aims and the importance of a particular strategy that they are going to teach, and then teaching the students how to use them and how to self-correct their own writing errors. On the other hand, Embedded strategy training, opposed to explicit or direct teaching, refers to the situation when teachers teach a particular strategy indirectly, embedding it in the content of other skills such as reading or speaking or subject areas such as math or science. Finally, by Combination strategy, they mean the combination of both explicit strategy teaching and embedded strategy teaching, while embedded one is followed by direct strategy teaching.

### **Proposed Solutions for EFL Students' Writing Problems**

Kim (2005) proposed a set of guidelines to solve the problems that exist in writing classes and students' writing problems, which are namely conducting formative assessment, extending the curriculum balancing form and function, providing meaningful response, and scaffolding language and learning.

According to Nguyen and Hudson (2010), related issues and topics to writing skills and its' teaching methods which help teachers to learn how to teach writing skills in their classes must be incorporated in pre-service teachers' course-books, some of which are as follow: how to motivate students to learn writing and how to deal with mixed levels of students at secondary schools, writing topics, and writing genres.

Uchniat (2005), on the other hand, suggested that to overcome these problems EFL teachers of writing skills should have a set of goals or aims to accomplish with students a long with using appropriate strategies and methods or an eclectic method.

According to Crossley et al. (2014), being aware of those textual factors that learners face in their writing practice must be considered while rating or grading the writings, and these can help us in identifying errors and consequently help in designing and developing effective teaching strategies and techniques based on teacher cognition.

Shokropour and Fallahzadeh (2007) emphasized the importance of linking between knowledge, discourse, and community by teachers to indicate a new viewpoint in the context of EFL writing, while some of the researchers (e.g. Boyle, 2003; Dowling, 2003; Singh 2003; Dziuban, 2004; Graham, C.,2006; Adas and Bakir,2013) advocated blended learning as an approach that can be used to solve the problems of EFL learners considering their writing skill.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

The focus of this study is on investigating the extent of Kurdish male and female students' use of correct forms of writing mechanics and the related grammatical points, to find the most frequent errors they make and to explore the Kurdish teachers' attitudes toward their students' written errors in mechanics of writing and the strategies they use in teaching writing mechanics. The research design employed for this study was qualitative. Two research instruments were employed for data collection purposes, namely a composition exam and an interview. Based on descriptive and frequency analysis the results were interpreted and elaborated upon. This chapter will organize around a review of the participants, instruments, design, and data analysis.

#### **Participants**

Data collection in this study was restricted to the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. The study involved students and teachers.

Considering student participants, who were the main focus of this study, 50 female and 50 male Kurdish high school students, studying in the 11th grade of 20 Kurdish high schools, ranged in age from 17 to 18 years old were selected randomly from the pool of all the students with the same characteristics.

Considering teacher participants, 20 English language teachers, teaching in these schools, participated in the study.



## **Instruments**

Two types of instruments were employed in this study to collect the required data for the analysis: students' written compositions and teachers' interview.

**Students' written composition.** The researcher chose students from 20 Kurdish high schools in Erbil city, then asked them to write about their holidays (the composition subject: My holiday) in less than 500 words, during the 40 minutes time given to them, which was relatively a sufficient time. All papers were collected by the researcher when the time was over. After collecting the papers, he randomly selected 5 composition papers from each school. This way he came up with the total 100 composition papers to analyze.

Students' pieces of writings are the most useful and beneficial data one can collect to analyze the students' problems in writing regarding both grammar and mechanics of writing. Hence, students' compositions as indeed the most enriched source of data are the best research instrument one can use for the data collection purpose, since it is the mere written production of the students which reveals the most difficulties of the students in transferring their thoughts and ideas in to the written form, that is where the errors arise and show themselves. They provide us with the information about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the teachers' strategies and methods in teaching writing mechanics and related grammatical points.

**Checklist.** Due to the various range of definitions and classifications attributed to the writing mechanics (some of which mentioned in chapter two of this thesis), in order to set a framework for this study and to validate and add to the reliability of the results obtained by the correction of the students' composition papers, in which using inter-rater reliability also, high reliability was obtained ( $r > 0.85$ ), and help the process of data analysis which was easier and more standardised, a checklist (See appendix I) was designed and developed by the researcher which examines the correct use of the

following factors : capitalization, contractions, punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, gerunds and participles, numbers and numerals, verb tense, word order, determiners, and pronouns.

The reason for adding some grammatical points in to the checklist and considering them in the data analysis and consequent results was the fact that in some definitions and classifications of writing mechanics some have also considered grammar as a part of writing mechanics a long with numbers and numerals, and also gerunds and participles ( e.g . Olsen, 1999, Crossley,2014). Hence the researcher decided to add only those grammatical points that are somehow more related to the mechanics of writing and not focusing on the detailed grammatical points, instead generally examining their use as I focus on the main and most important factors of writing mechanics, such as spelling, punctuations, paragraphing, capitalization and etc.

**Interview.** Interviews, some of which were sound-recorded by the permission of the teachers participated in interview session (most of them were not sound-recorded due to the participants' state of discomfort, and therefore since they did not give permission for that), were conducted in a semi-structured form to elicit teachers' opinions and explore their thoughts toward their students' writing errors, teaching mechanics of writing, Sunrise (the new English language curriculum employed in educational system of Iraqi Kurdistan), the strategies they use in teaching writing mechanics and other related issues through their answers to the main and fixed questions of the interview which were selected before, and other related probing questions asked by the researcher at the time of interview to clarify the main points stated by the participants and remove any possible ambiguity in their statements.

## **Procedures**

**Administrating the composition exam session.** Being present at each writing performance exam session, the researcher generally informed the students about the purpose of taking this exam. They were asked to write down a composition about my holiday in the exam papers. The exam papers were prepared for them by the researcher and handed in to the students at the beginning of the session. They were asked not to write their names on the top of their papers.

Students were asked to write about their holidays (the composition subject: My holiday) in less than 500 words, during the 40 minutes time given to them, which was relatively a sufficient time.

Finally, all papers were collected by the researcher from schools(20 schools) when the time was over. After collecting the papers, he randomly selected 5 composition papers from each school. This way he came up with the total 100 composition papers to analyze.

**Conducting interviews.** The teachers were interviewed individually before conducting the composition exam session. Since the interview was in a semi-structured form, first the teachers were asked to reply the same set of questions which were prepared beforehand. After they replied the questions, in case of any ambiguity, or in any case which the researcher felt necessary to help better eliciting the teachers' thoughts and attitude, some other probing and clarification questions were asked. The main questions that were asked to all teachers are listed below:

1. Do you teach mechanics of writing? If yes, what elements of the mechanics of writing do you exactly teach?
2. What kind of writing problems do you usually notice in the writings of your students?

3. What strategies do you use in teaching the mechanics of writing and helping your students to overcome these problems?
4. To what extent do you think teaching the mechanics of writing is important?
5. Do you think Sunrise had any effect on your teaching methodology and your focus on the writing skill?

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze the interview results, using open coding strategy (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), first the questions were written on a piece of paper and the participants' answers were transcribed exactly as they were stated by the participants (e.g. with all possible grammatical errors) and listed under each question. Then the data were categorized and the different dimensions of the data were examined and interpreted accordingly.

In order to facilitate analyzing the students' written performance in using the mechanics of writing, a checklist as it was described in detail previously (see instruments) was used in correcting the papers by the three raters, reliability of which was estimated before. Frequency analysis was employed on the checklist results and the detailed frequencies were tabulated for the easier interpretation.

Using content and descriptive analysis, the whole data were interpreted qualitatively by the researcher, details of which are stated in the following chapter. It must be noted that the results of the student participants' written productions were analyzed first as the whole students, and then they were analyzed in the separate groups of male and female students based on the factor of sex as can be seen in the frequency Tables inserted in chapter 4.

### **Reliability and Validity**

After all the papers were rated by the three raters, using inter-rater reliability, the reliability of this research instrument was estimated and the high reliability of 0.85 was obtained.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting the composition writing test and the interview session, all the participants were briefly informed about the goals and the nature of the study in a way that at the same time does not affect the results and to prevent the probable side effects it would have on the reliability of the current data. All participants were assured of the privacy and confidentiality of the information they provide in that the whole data will be used only for this study and the researcher is the only one who will have access to them.

Before starting the writing exam, the students were asked not to write down their names, but write their sex only. In other words, they were assured that their papers would be corrected and analyzed anonymously.

In case of the interview, before starting the interview, the permission was obtained from each of the participants for sound recording that majority of the teachers showed their reluctance toward, for they mentioned they would not feel comfortable while being interviewed.

It must be asserted that before all the data collection process took place in the schools of Erbil, based on the law in Erbil, the permission was taken from the ministry of education and the province administration for education (Erbil surroundings).

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS and DISCUSSIONS

#### **Overview**

The purpose behind this qualitative study is to explore the extent of Kurdish students' use of writing mechanics and grammar in their English writing. To specify the frequency of their mistakes and the errors they make in mechanics of writing, this study also investigated teachers' self- reflections on their teaching of writing skill and their awareness of their students' writing problems. Their thoughts about the roots and sources of these mistakes and the strategies they use to solve these problems and guide their students considering mechanics of writing were also investigated.

This Study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequent errors made by Kurdish EFL students\_in terms of the use of mechanics of writing?
  - a. Do mistakes made by EFL students vary according to gender?
2. What are the Kurdish EFL teachers' perceptions of the students' errors made in mechanics of writing?
3. What strategies do Kurdish EFL teachers adopt/use in teaching and guiding students, considering the correct use of mechanics of writing?
4. What do Kurdish EFL teachers think about the effectiveness of Sunrise Curriculum and its teacher education course, regarding their focus on writing skill and the strategies they use to teach mechanics of writing?
5. To what extent do Kurdish EFL teachers give importance to teaching the mechanics of writing?

Basically this research involved teachers and students, so its results can be more effective, useful and comprehensive. Accordingly, to collect data two instruments as elaborated up on in the third chapter of this thesis and which, included the students' composition papers on a given subject and the interview with teachers were used.

Below, the data gathered by each of these two instruments are analyzed and elaborated once as a whole and once separately based on the participants' gender. At the end of each section, based on the results of both sets of data, I come up with the related general findings of this study.

### **The Most Frequent Errors Made by Kurdish EFL Students in Mechanics of Writing.**

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics for the analysis of the whole participants' performance in their use of writing mechanics.*

<b>The correct use of</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Other</b>
...			
<b>Capitalization</b>	100	61%	10%
<b>Contractions</b>	100	29%	24%
<b>Punctuations</b>	100	88%	8%
<b>Spelling</b>	100	20%	13%
<b>Paragraphing</b>	100	87%	5%
<b>Gerunds and participles</b>	100	9%	82%
<b>Numbers and numerals</b>	100	12%	57%
<b>Verb tense</b>	100	42%	25%
<b>Word order</b>	100	26%	4%
<b>Determiners</b>	100	40%	9%
<b>Pronouns</b>	100	20%	8%

To answer the first research questions related to the most frequent errors that Kurdish students make in their writings, I must refer to the frequency Table 1, based on which, I can observe that the most frequent errors committed by male students were respectively in the cases of paragraphing, punctuation, capitalization and verb tense. Generally, considering the Table 1 I counted these four elements of punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization, and verb tense respectively as the most frequent errors made by Kurdish learners in general.

Table 1 Shows that majority of the participants all in poor proficiency in using the correct forms of verb tense (42%), paragraphing (87%), punctuations (88%), and capitalizations(61%).

Regarding the variables of gerunds and participles (82%) and numbers and numerals (57%), generally the majority of participants either avoided using them in their writings or they only used them correctly in few cases and not in the rest of the cases they appeared in their compositions and therefore it cannot be judged if they have mastered these writing mechanics or not.

As one of the most significant findings of this study, it is noteworthy that except for few cases among the whole participants of this study, almost none of the participants used any of the punctuation marks such as comma(,), colon(:), question mark(?), semicolon(;), and so on. Only in some few cases the participants used period (.) mark.

The other important point is that sentences in the writings of the majority of the participants were incomplete, unfinished and in many cases meaningless. While many studies of error analysis on students' writing skill were merely devoted to grammatical issue, such as Darus and Subramaniam (2009) who in their study on Malay students of EFL, identified and analyzed the writing errors of the learners and classified them in to 6 categories of preposition, verb tense, singular/plural form, word choice, word order



and subject-verb agreement based on their most frequent errors; and Wyatt, (1973) classified writing errors in to different categories of : contractions, spelling, abbreviations and informalities, repetition and circumlocution, punctuation, noun groups , sentence structure, verb groups, intensifiers , pronouns, adjectives, prepositions, carelessness, confusion or misuse of words and idioms; this study considered mechanics of writing as the major focus and few grammatical points which seemed to some extent related to the mechanics of writing and the most noticeable grammatical elements used by Kurd learners , such as verb tense , determiners, pronouns and gerunds and participles. In other words, in this study the students' written productions were analyzed and classified in 11 categories of capitalization, contractions, punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, gerunds and participles, numbers and numerals, verb tense, word order, determiners, and pronouns.

Darus and Subramaniam (2009) found that majority of the errors made by participants in their written productions were grammatical; and most of the sentences made by students were incomprehensible and meaningless; which are consistent with the finding of this study, except for that grammatical errors that were one of the most types of errors found in our study and other main errors are also involved. Their study also showed the weakness of the EFL learners in using sentence structure rules and their relatively limited knowledge of vocabulary which is opposite of the findings in our study, in which participants generally had good and enough knowledge of vocabulary and also used correct spelling of the vocabulary.

However note must be mentioned that the most frequent errors found in our study were errors made on punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing and verb tense, while in another study conducted by Ghadessy (1976) on Iranian learners as sample of EFL learners, the major types of error committed by the participant were found to be

Morphology, Modal verbs, Tenses, Articles, Word order, Syntax, Construction, Preposition, and Lexis based on their frequency.

About punctuation, most of the teachers (12 participants out of 20) think that although punctuations facilitate reading the written texts, the other elements, such as grammatical points, play more important roles, hence they focus more on them.

Kharma (1981) dealt with the errors considering the use of definite and indefinite articles as the most error EFL learners commit. He concluded that "the" is the most problematic error in the written performance of EFL learners in terms of using articles, which is consistent with the finding of this study in the category of determiners, where almost all of the participants' problems were with the correct use of "the", which shows the need of the students to learn the different usages of "the" and where they should use it.

#### **Errors made by Kurdish EFL female students in mechanics of writing.**

Table 2 indicates that the most poor performance in using the correct forms of punctuations (92% capitalizations (62%), and paragraphing(78%).

Most of the female participants either avoided using the three variables of gerunds and participles (90%), numbers and numerals (48%), and verb tense (38%) or they only used them correctly in one or two cases and not in the rest of the cases they appeared in their papers and so judging about their extent of mastery in the use of the writing mechanics was not possible. However the Table illustrates that most of those who used the writing element of numbers and numerals and gerunds and participles, and verb tense, used them correctly.

**Table 2.**

*Descriptive statistics for the analysis of the female participants' performance in their use of writing mechanics*

<b>The correct use of.....</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Capitalization</b>	50	62%	10%
<b>Contractions</b>	50	22%	30%
<b>Punctuations</b>	50	92%	6%
<b>Spelling</b>	50	10%	12%
<b>Paragraphing</b>	50	78%	8%
<b>Gerunds and participles</b>	50	2%	90%
<b>Numbers and numerals</b>	50	20%	48%
<b>Verb tense</b>	50	26%	38%
<b>Word order</b>	50	26%	6%
<b>Determiners</b>	50	32%	12%
<b>Pronouns</b>	50	10%	10%

Rostami Abusaeedi and Boroomand (2015) in their study conducted in the context of Iran, found that female learners commit more errors in their written productions, while it is opposite of the findings of the present study in which considering most of the elements of writing mechanics analyzed in the compositions of Kurd students, female students showed relatively higher performance than male learners. However, Rostami Abusaeedi and Boroomand (2015) concluded that both

male and female students had similar types of errors in their writings, which is consistent with the findings of this study in that both male and female students more or less showed the same set of errors, however the frequency of their errors differed in each of the elements of writing mechanics which were elaborated upon in chapter 4 with the help of frequency Tables.

**Errors made by Kurdish EFL male students in mechanics of writing.** Male students made their most number of errors in the cases of paragraphing, punctuation, capitalization and verb tense.

The results showed that unlike male students, for female learners verb tense was not counted as one of the major errors made, but as a reason for making errors considering this element, generally based on the distribution of frequencies in the Tables I can assume that most probably for both male and female students it is counted as a problem in noticing how and when to use any of the verb tenses in the sentences, due to several mistakes that majority of female students did in their writings and the frequency of errors made by male students. However, interestingly it was observed that both male and female students showed same set of errors in their writings, although the frequency of their errors differed. Generally, considering the Table 1. I counted these four elements of punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization, and verb tense respectively as the most frequent errors made by Kurdish learners in general. Considering the rest of the elements which are counted as the minor errors made by students you can refer to the chapter 4 for more detailed information.

Surprisingly majority of the Kurdish students didn't use any punctuation in their papers, except for using period (.) in few papers; which show the lack of students' knowledge about the importance of using punctuation, types of punctuation, and the places they are expected to be used.

Similarly in case of paragraphing, it was found that majority of the participants were not aware of it as most of them didn't use paragraphing, and so used a long irrelevant paragraph to create a piece of writing which had no coherence and cohesion in many cases.

Likewise, Majority of the students showed lack of knowledge considering the places where they are supposed to capitalize the words and where they shouldn't. Few of the students however only capitalized the proper nouns, and some of them only capitalized the first letter of the first word in each sentence, that is the indicator of their partial knowledge of capitalization, or that maybe they just made capitalization in those cases by chance, without knowing the rules of capitalizations.

In case of determiners, many errors were found due to the wrong use of the article "the", which shows those participants' unfamiliarity with the usages of "the" to use them in appropriate places in the sentences.

As Table 3 shows, the lack of sufficient knowledge and attention toward the correct use of capitalization(60%) , punctuations(84%) , paragraphing(96%) , and verb tense (58%) were apparent, as many errors were observed in their papers that indicates that they were not fully learnt them or directed toward considering them in their writings.

Regarding the cases of gerunds and participles (74%) and numbers and numerals (66%), the majority of male participants either avoided using them in their compositions or they only used them correctly only in one or two cases and not in the rest of the cases they appeared in their papers and so it cannot be judged if they have mastered these writing mechanics or not. However the Table illustrates that most of those who used the writing element of numbers and numerals, used them correctly, while a few of the participants used gerunds and participles correctly in their writings.

**Table 3.**

*Descriptive statistics for the analysis of the male participants' performance in their use of writing mechanics*

<b>The correct use of..</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Capitalization</b>	50	60%	10%
<b>Contractions</b>	50	36%	18%
<b>Punctuations</b>	50	84%	10%
<b>Spelling</b>	50	30%	14%
<b>Paragraphing</b>	50	96%	2%
<b>Gerunds and Participles</b>	50	16%	74%
<b>Numbers and Numerals</b>	50	4%	66%
<b>Verb tense</b>	50	58%	12%
<b>Word order</b>	50	26%	2%
<b>Determiners</b>	50	48%	6%
<b>Pronouns</b>	50	30%	6%

### **Teachers' Perception about Teaching the Mechanics of Writing**

The semi-structured interview results revealed that majority of Kurdish teachers only focus on grammatical points in correction of their students' papers and few of them teach the mechanics of writing and writing skill in their classes or paying attention to them. Surprisingly, majority of teachers referred to teaching mechanics of writing such

as punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing, waste of the time and not as important as grammatical points. Those few of them who claimed to teach those elements in their classes, were found to only explicitly refer to those elements in their classes merely and asked their students to pay attention to them. Based on the results of the interview, this study supports the findings of Khansir and Ahrami (2014) who in their study on EFL students' writing errors in the paragraph level, found that majority of EFL teachers focus on teaching grammatical points, instead of teaching the skill of writing; and our study also partially supports their finding that if they do, they mostly prefer using product approach (i.e. teaching mechanics of writing such as syntactical and grammatical structures) and neglect using process approach (i.e. writing as a process to transfer ideas and so creating meaning) in their teaching practice.

Unlike Fang and Xue-mei (2007) who in their study found that teachers often take negative attitudes toward errors, in this study we found from the interview results that Kurdish teachers have relatively positive attitude toward students' errors and consider them as a sign that learning is taking place.

Surprisingly majority of the Kurdish students didn't use any punctuation in their papers, except for using period (.) in few papers; which shows the lack of students' knowledge about the importance of using punctuation, types of punctuation, and the places they are expected to be used.

Regarding the second research questions about teachers' beliefs and points of views toward their awareness of their students' major errors in their writings, they mostly merely referred to their students' errors considering grammatical points, and they rarely mentioned any of the points regarding mechanics of writing such as punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization, and so on, which showed to be part of the major errors found to be made by learners in this study.

This study provide support for the findings of Khansir (2013) who in his study compared errors done by ESL and EFL learners, and showed majority of errors done by EFL learners were in the domain of punctuations, while the minimum number of committed errors in their written productions were in the domain of spelling. Muhammed and Ameen (2014) showed grammar rules as the major problem of the Kurd students in their English writings, while this study examined few grammatical elements related to writing mechanics and not all of them, it would be a strong claim in this study to call grammar rules as the major problem, instead I call errors made on verb tenses as one of the main problems of Kurdish students in their writings. Muhammed and Ameen (2014) also found "punctuation" and "spelling" errors as the other frequent errors made by Kurdish students, while except the fact that in this study I also found punctuation errors as one of the major errors, relatively few "spelling" errors were found.

Khansir (2008) focused on analyzing syntactical errors in the writing performance of EFL learners to classify “errors” made by them at the sentence level. He found most of the errors to be in the realm of correct use of auxiliary verbs, passive and tenses, where except for students' errors in tenses, relatively no error were observed in the writings of students, while this grammatical element in addition to the passive were not counted in the analysis of this study, since they are not related to the mechanics of writing and specially about passive sentences, the students in this level were not taught this grammatical point yet.

As Celce-Murcia et al. (1966), Pei (1966), and Burns (2004) stated, It seems that the root of these errors is also in the fact that, usually non-native speakers, focus only on the correct use of one or two components of writing, such as grammar, punctuation or other elements of writing mechanics, and neglect the rest of the elements, that's why the



errors raise; and as Khansir (2013) points out, foreign language learners are not aware of rules of English writing.

Nuryanfar (2014), focusing on the correct use of prepositions, found interference of Kurdish (L1 of learners) as the main reason of students' errors, which were not observed in much cases in this study. Similarly, Muhammed and Ameen (2014) considered the EFL learners' errors in their written productions due to the learners' translation of ideas from their mother tongue, without being aware of the syntactic rules of the target language. Sulaiman and Muhammad (2013), in their study showed the students' problem in both recognizing and producing passive sentences. They believed that the errors made by students root in three factors of interlanguage, context of learning, and interlanguage. Likewise Hamada (2008), Brown (2007) and MacKeating (1981) summarized the main sources of errors made by EFL learners in three categories of interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, and other sources like errors encouraged by teaching, and the students' carelessness. Khansir (2013) also referred to interference of the mother tongue of the students along with the students' lack of knowledge or incomplete knowledge of English writing and complexity of the English language as the main causes of errors in Kurdish students. While except for other reasons that Khansir (2013) provided, and unlike the reasons provided by Muhammed and Ameen (2014), Sulaiman and Muhammad (2013), Hamada (2008), Brown (2007) and MacKeating (1981), this study doesn't consider interference of the mother tongue as the main reason for Kurd students' errors in their writings. In contrast, Boroomand and Rostami Abusaeedi (2013) found few errors to be due to transfer from mother tongue, which is in line with the findings of this study, in which based on the qualitative analysis conducted, in general, relatively few errors were observed to be sign of negative transfer, which all happened in the domain of grammar and hence not main elements of mechanics of writing.

Majority of the studies in the field of error analysis and writing skills, as they were presented in-depth in the second chapter of the current thesis, were highly devoted to the correct use of grammar, punctuation and spelling, putting the other elements of mechanics of writing in the margin. Many also investigated the sources of errors made by EFL learners (e.g. Al-Shormani, 2012; Ramezani, 2013; Abusaeedi Rostami and Boroomand, 2015) and interpreted the reasons of committing those errors on the side of Kurdish and other EFL learners in different contexts, such as Iran, Thailand, Arabic speaking countries and so on. Moreover, some studies focused on the importance of error correction (e.g. Truscott and Hsu, 2008; Truscott, 2007; Ferris, 2004; Chandler, 2003, Ferris and Roberts, 2001) and corrective feedbacks (e.g. Ferris and Barrie, 2001; Chandler, 2013) on improving students' writing skills and teachers' and learners' beliefs and points of view on the importance and effects of error correction and feedback on the learners' writing performance (e.g. Loewen et al, 2009; Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen, 2009; Schulz, 1996). However, it must be noted that a few studies were conducted on Kurdish students' writing skills in general and their correct use of mechanics of writing in particular, which were the main focus of the present study (e.g. Ahmed, 2008; Sulaiman and Muhammad, 2013; Muhammed and Ameen, 2014).

The semi-structured interview results revealed that majority of the teachers that involve in teaching the mechanics of writing and the related grammatical points, instruct them explicitly, and try to explain them to their students, asking them to focus on them in their writings. Teachers who participated in this study, did not mention any specific strategy in their teaching of writing skills, but they stated that they are interested in learning new strategies and methods in teaching writing skills and specifically the mechanics of writing. They still teach in their traditional way when there is no observation on their teachings.

### **Strategies Used by Kurdish EFL Teachers in Teaching Mechanics of Writing.**

The semi-structured interview results revealed that majority of Kurdish teachers expressed that there is no specific strategy to use in teaching mechanics of writing except just brief explanations and giving them writing tasks in the book or asking them to write compositions. Majority of them considered their learners' errors in terms of writing mechanics, just as a learning process, and that they don't focus on them, instead they focus on grammatical points. The finding show that there is no any particular strategy or educational technique to guide learners to the correct use of writing mechanics.

Based on the results of the interview, this study supports the findings of Khansir and Ahrami (2014) who in their study on EFL students' writing errors in the paragraph level , found that majority of EFL teachers focus on teaching grammatical points, instead of teaching the skill of writing; and our study also partially supports their finding that if they do, they mostly prefer using product approach (i.e. teaching mechanics of writing such as syntactical and grammatical structures) and neglect using process approach (i.e. writing as a process to transfer ideas and so creating meaning) in their teaching practice.

Unlike Fang and Xue-mei (2007) who in their study found that teachers often take negative attitudes toward errors, in this study I found from the interview results that Kurdish teachers have relatively positive attitude toward students' errors and consider them as a sign that learning is taking place.

Similar to the findings of this study , in that grammatical errors were one of the major problems of Kurd students' writing specially about the cases of verb tenses and determiners, while spelling was one of the minor errors committed by the participants, are the findings of Tananart (2000) , who examined the frequency of errors committed

by EFL learners , and found "grammatical errors" in terms of structure as the most frequent errors in the students' written productions, while the minor type of errors found were errors in the correct use of spelling, word choice, transition signals , and verb forms .

Responses to the four main questions of interview and some related exploring questions revealed that only some of the teachers (8 participants out of 20) highly involve in teaching and constantly guiding their students to pay attention to the correct use of the main mechanics of writing , such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation and contractions; however the majority of teachers only focused on teaching and stressing on the correct use of grammatical elements related to the mechanics of writing, such as verb tense, word order, gerunds and participles, etc.

Majority of the teachers (18 participants out of 20), considered writing as a difficult skill to be instructed by the teacher and learned by the students. All of the teachers complained about the weakness of their students in their writing tasks. However they confessed that they do not usually devote their teaching time to writing mechanics due to several reasons of which the most frequent as they stated are the limitations in their class time that they cannot focus on all the teaching skills and that they mostly prefer to concentrate on teaching speaking and reading for they believe them as more important for the needs of their own students and they traditionally think that if students master these two skills they can automatically improve their writing skills, especially in the cases of capitalization, paragraphing, and spelling. They teach grammatical issues and they consider it suffices for students to making correct sentences, although they show several grammatical problems, and they show severe weakness in making meaningful and complete sentences, the majority of teachers (16 participants out of 20) consider it as just a part of a learning process and they believe students will make progress in that in future.

All in all, although the Kurdish teachers in this study do not use any specific strategies in teaching mechanics of writing and have poor teaching practice, they support Sunrise and show their interest in learning new methods and strategies in teaching mechanics of writing in a way that it be helpful, while at the same time wish the teaching hours be extended. They are aware of the writing problems of their students and although they still believe speaking and reading are more important skills, they seek to find a way to improve their students' writing performance.

### **Teachers' Perceptions about the Effectiveness of Sunrise Curriculum and its Teacher Education**

Regarding Sunrise, all teachers supported this new educational curriculum being conducted in Kurdistan but complained the teacher education classes - set for the teachers to prepare them for adapting to the new curriculum- for not introducing new strategies of teaching writing skills as well as mechanics of writing as its component, in those classes. They complained that they just emphasized them to teach those elements in their classes while teachers had no idea how to manage them in their class due to the limitation of the class time.

These findings, show this probability that apparently same reasons are involved in the errors committed by both male and female Kurdish students which seem to be the weakness of the system of education on the part of teachers. Neglect of teachers in teaching the points or transferring the points to the learners, not using any specific strategy or educational technique to direct students to the correct use of writing mechanics and improving their writing skills in an effective way, and hence lack of knowledge or partial learning on the part of the students regarding the specific elements of writing mechanics have led to the occurrence of these errors and writing problems in

terms of using mechanics of writing and related grammatical points.

Ahmed (2008) found that Kurdish students have severe problem in producing speech acts which seem natural English which supports the finding of this study in that students were not able to produce meaningful sentences and use correct speech acts. However the main reason Ahmed (2008) found for producing these meaningless speech acts were found to be due to their translations of speech acts from their own mother tongue. Lack of pragmatic competence and lack of linguistic knowledge of the FL and its culture were named as the other factors involved in Kurdish students' difficulty in producing correct and meaningful speech acts. However as it was mentioned earlier this study consider students' lack of enough grammatical and structural knowledge as the main reasons of students' errors and making meaningless sentences.

Regarding the sources of error, as Darus and Subramaniam (2009) pointed out, the most important finding of EA (error analysis) is the major role of misunderstanding the rules of the target language by the learners in their error makings, which is also considered as a potential source of error in this study.

Having this ideology in mind, in line with the interpretation of the results in this study , Boroomand and Rostami Abusaeedi (2013) and Rostami Abusaeedi and Boroomand (2015) concluded in their papers that the sources of errors made by EFL learners mostly rooted in imperfect mastery of the target language (i.e. English) and partial learning. The same reasons were also provided by Kim (2001), Ghafar Samar and Seyyed Rezaie (2006), Nayernia (2011), Sabzalipour (2012), Kafipour and Khojasteh (2012), Al-Shormani (2012), Barzegar (2013), and Ramezani as they considered lack of knowledge, partial learning and incomplete mastery of the target language (English) as the main roots for the students' writing errors. Teachers mentioned that the main focus of teacher education class in teacher education courses was on introducing new ways of

teaching other skills of reading, listening, and speaking, although on the surface Sunrise stresses on all four skills.

About Sunrise (the new curriculum of English language), teachers have positive opinion but they complain that it requires much effort on the side of teacher when there is a limited class time and focusing on the whole four skills equally is so hard and sometimes not possible. All of them complained for the poor performance of teaching education course that was set for introducing teachers to Sunrise in teaching writing mechanics and the related strategies and new teaching methods. That is why they have no idea how to direct students' attention to use them correctly in their writings. They also complained that in teaching writing skills, like in teaching speaking, the focus of Sunrise is mostly on grammar structure.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusion

This study was an attempt to find out the main problems that Kurdish EFL learners commonly face in using mechanics of writing correctly along with having an eye on some related grammatical points considered in this study. The study also explored the Kurdish teachers' beliefs and thinking in the different related domains which were explained in details in previous sections.

The study revealed the severe difficulty of Kurdish students in implementing the correct forms of mechanics of writing and more specifically in the correct use of punctuation, paragraphing, capitalization, and verb tense as students showed the most frequent errors in those elements of writing mechanics. However generally female students showed better performance in their writings, compared to male students.

These findings, along with the sources of errors which were interpreted from the results that is, the partial knowledge or more possibly lack of efficient knowledge toward these rules of writing mechanics are the indicators of serious need of Kurd students to learn and practice those elements of writing mechanics while also work on grammatical points in order to improve their writing skills.

On the part of teachers who mostly don't follow any specific strategy or method in teaching and guiding their students to pay attention to and correctly use the mechanics of writing , and majority of them even don't teach these elements in their classes , they are expected to focus on the major difficulties of Kurd students' writing problems which are identified and analyzed in this study, and by adopting an effective



strategy, help their students to overcome their writing problems, while teacher educators in teacher education programs are on the other hand, expected to support and help teachers in finding suitable teaching strategies.

To sum up, it is hoped that the findings of this study be useful and enriching. It is hoped that using the findings of this study and the other similar studies which were conducted in the context of Kurdistan, in future I will witness the positive modifications in Sunrise and hence great improvements in the educational system of this region by the cooperation of all teachers, learners, teacher educators and policy makers.

### **Implications**

As Schechter (1974) stated, error analysis directs our attention toward the difficulties the learners have. In other words, as he pointed out, the learners' errors in production are the indicator of their difficulties in the target language (here i.e. English); moreover, the frequency analysis of the specific errors informs us about their relative difficulty. Knowing about the learners' difficulties in writing provides insights in to the great roles of those involved in the system of education who are responsible for the poor performance of the students in their writings, while on the other hand they are the only ones who, considering all these findings, can help in changing the situation by employing effective programs and setting up strategies to help students to improve their writing abilities and paying attention to the correct use of the mechanics of writing.

All in all the findings of this study have implications for all those involved in the system of education, more specifically all teachers, teacher educators or trainers and mentors, teacher education centers, policy makers and curriculum developers, and even learners who indirectly benefit from the findings of this study.

**Implications for teachers.** Teachers indeed have important roles in teaching and guiding their students to enhance their skills in the target language. Hence the most important ones in charge with the Kurdish students' severe difficulty in writing appropriately and error-free in case of using correct forms of writing mechanics and related grammar, are teachers in the first place. As the results revealed, majority of the teachers confessed their neglect in teaching writing mechanics in their classes and considered that as a waste of time due to the limited class time which is not acceptable; and also that students' errors showed the strong possibility that their errors were due to their lack of knowledge toward those specific elements of writing mechanics. Students' not being aware of these elements shows the poor function of Kurdish teachers in teaching writing skills to their students.

However frequency of the errors made by students, helps Kurd teachers to be aware of the difficulties of their students in writing, focus more on the error-raising points and try to help students to overcome those problems in order to enhance their writing abilities.

The results of this study also help Kurd teachers to find the ineffectiveness of the methods they use in teaching writing skill, and the need to adopt effective strategies and methods for educating their students to obtain better results. They need to consider teaching mechanics of writing in their classes and encourage their students to use them correctly in their writings. Kurdish teachers are responsible to use effective strategies in teaching writing mechanics, so that their students would learn to use them correctly in their writing tasks. In other words, as Fang and Xue-mei (2007) state out, "teachers should employ different and flexible error treatment strategies in accordance with the teaching objectives, students' linguistic competence, their affective factors and the effectiveness of the error correction." p.10

**Implications for teacher educators, mentors and teacher education programs.** If Kurdish teachers are responsible for the poor performance of their students in the correct use of mechanics of writing, teacher educators, mentors and teacher education programs (Supervisors) are responsible for training ineffective teachers. As majority of the teachers complained the weak performance of teacher training course- set for them for introducing Sunrise -in that they didn't introduce them new strategies and methods for using to teach writing skills and specifically mechanics of writing, it is expected that teacher educators and teacher education programs consider the importance of teaching mechanics of writing in training teachers and guide them in using effective strategies and techniques in their classes to obtain better results from the written performance of Kurd students' writings in future.

#### **Suggestions for Further Research**

As stated by Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013), different number of frequent errors can be found in different written tasks, for genre is an effective factor on the type of writing errors since each type of written tasks, requires specific structural feature that may be used or not be used in the other written tasks, which must be considered in teaching writing skill. Hence it is suggested that separated set of studies be conducted on the analysis of the errors made by students in different writing genres.

It is suggested that portfolios and English diaries of students be used as instruments in future studies in order to check the process of students' progress making during time and hence achieving more comprehensive and intensive information about the Kurdish students' weaknesses in correct use of both grammatical and structural rules.

Moreover, it is suggested that the effectiveness of the new curriculum of Sunrise in the educational system of Kurdistan be investigated upon all four skills of writing,

reading, speaking and listening, and also the learners' thoughts and beliefs about this new system be investigated as well as exploring the minds of Kurdish teachers.

Conducting comparative analysis such as the one conducted by Bagherzadeh Kasmani and Rahmani (2012) who compared errors made by Kurdish and Iranian EFL learners, is suggested to compare Kurd students' errors in the use of mechanics of writing and grammar and learners of other countries of the region, since the results will be important and helpful to understand the status of the English language education of Kurdistan in the region. It is also suggested that such kind of studies be conducted and an in-depth analysis takes place between Kurd learners who are studying in the three parts of Kurdistan of Iran, Kurdistan of Turkey and Kurdistan of Iraq to compare the level of English language teaching in terms of writing skills and errors made by students in all these three parts of the great Kurdistan.

It is also suggested that each of the elements of mechanics of writing studied in this research, be analyzed and studied in a separate set of research, to give more in-depth information about the weaknesses and strength of Kurd students in using each of these elements in their writings, since this study dealt with all those elements generally and not in details in the frequency Table, which if counted, would provide us helpful information.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

**The checklist developed by the author of this thesis to analyze the frequency of the students' correctness or errors in using the mechanics of writing**

The correct use of ...	Tallies	
	No	Other
<b>Capitalization</b>		
<b>Contractions</b>		
<b>Punctuations</b>		
<b>Spelling</b>		
<b>Paragraphing</b>		
<b>Gerunds and participles</b>		
<b>Numbers and numerals</b>		
<b>Verb tense</b>		
<b>Word order</b>		
<b>Determiners</b>		
<b>Pronouns</b>		

## APPENDIX B

### Random sample of the participants' (teachers') responses to the interview questions

#### \*\*\* Do you teach mechanics of writing? If yes, what elements of the mechanics of writing do you exactly teach?

1. Not much , but I try to explain some rules to my students sometimes before I give them a writing task, such as about the verbs, good handwriting, good sentence making, and ..

2. Well, yes, umm , sometimes if I have time I tell some points in the class, ummm , I tell them what should they do to write a good composition , umm, choose good words, use the verbs correctly and, umm word order is very important.

3. Of course yes. I teach them how to use correct grammatical forms in their writings, pay attention to the verb tenses, word order, related sentences , and ..

4. No, just sometimes I mention them very briefly because I don't have enough time for that.

5. No, I don't teach them. It's not something I need to teach; students can write well by reading a lot and can speak English correctly, so they can write well too. I sometimes, however, remind them to use correct grammatical word order and pay attention to the gerunds and participle when it is necessary, use period at the end of each sentences and capitalization I also taught to my students some sessions ago, and yes maybe I must say yes sometimes.



6. Mechanics of writing?!! What is that?!! (After explanation) Oh no, I think students can learn them from the reading tasks, they see the use of punctuations and inductively learn it. The same is for other and I also teach grammar in class; it has good effect too on improving their writings.

7. No, I don't teach, they do their writing tasks and I correct their papers and they will notice their problems by my correction, no need to teach them in class again. I correct their punctuation errors, verb tense, word order, determiners and other things.

**\*\*\* What kind of writing problems do you usually notice in the writings of your students?**

1. They mostly use incorrect verb tense, they confuse it, sometimes change the place of the parts of speech, they don't use punctuations mostly, *(what about capitalization, determiners, gerunds and participles, contractions? Any problem in them?)* In capitalization, a lot, sometimes about determiners yes, they have no problem about contractions most of them, but they don't use gerunds and participle in the way you mean for I haven't teach them that yet.

2. (He laughs) a lot of problems, which one do I say? Most of them are punctuation and wrong verb tense.

3. Punctuation, paragraphing and verb tenses, sometimes word order.

4. Well, my students have different writing problems, some have problems in correct verb tense, some in capitalization and .. but what is common among most of them is punctuation error.

5. They mostly have problem in punctuation, capitalization and grammatical errors especially on verb tense and determiners.

6. Paragraphing, punctuation, verb tense and sometimes word order.

7. Mostly punctuations and grammatical errors.

8. Well, they have different errors but punctuation errors are more

9. All different problems I find in my students' writings, but mostly about paragraphing, punctuations, verb tense, and grammatical errors.

10. My students' don't use punctuations, they can only use period. They also have problems in capitalization and they mostly use wrong verb tenses.

**\*\*\* What strategies do you use in teaching the mechanics of writing and helping your students to overcome these problems?**

1. I don't use any specific strategy, I just explain them.

2. I don't teach it. I said that before. I correct their mistakes in their papers and they will find out their mistakes and try not to correct themselves.

3. Well, I don't know. Well I just teach them ordinary. I don't use any strategy.

4. I give them writing tasks as much as possible and each time I correct them, so they shouldn't repeat their mistakes next time. Errors are not always bad, they can learn from their mistakes.

5. I sometimes explain some errors that they made in the class and ask them not to repeat them again, hoping they write better next time.

6. I give them more readings to study to see the correct forms of writing to use them as their models. Step by step they will make progress. They are learning that's why they have errors in their writings and so as teacher I guide them .

7. As I said I don't teach writing mechanics, so I don't use any specific strategy, I think students will gradually learn from their mistakes.

8. Students can learn from their errors and that's natural. I think by correcting their papers and explaining them and encouraging them to read more authentic texts, they will improve.

9. I give them more writing tasks. More they write, more they learn. Their writing errors show that learning takes place. Each time they think on their mistakes and try not to repeat in their next writings.

10. Sometimes when I feel it necessary, I explained their mistakes in the class and ask them not to repeat them again. Not any special strategy.

**\*\*\* To what extent do you think teaching the mechanics of writing is important?**

1. It is important, but not the most important.

2. It is important to some extent for it is the most difficult skill for the students.

3. It is important after the other three skills of speaking, listening, and reading.

4. It is important depended on the needs of the students. Especially for those who are studying academic courses in English.

5. Of course it is important, but if students learn reading and speaking, they can learn writing easier.

6. Well, I think it's kind of important as one of the four skills.

7. To me it is good for the students to write correctly and precisely for their need in the future, whether for their university or job.

8. It is important, but I think speaking is more important for the most of the communication in the modern world is by speaking and in case of writing I think knowing speaking is much helpful.

9. It is important for students need it, especially for their university.

10. I think it's very difficult and yet important skill for the learners.

**\*\*\* Do you think Sunrise had any effect on your teaching methodology and your focus on the writing skill?**

1. Not much on the case of writing. They didn't introduce us how to teach writing, I mean mechanics of writing. I would like they do in future, for the other three skills were so successful.

2. Yes of course it had. I think it's really good, especially on the speaking, reading and listening; I used the methods and strategies they taught us based on the curriculum, but about writing they didn't guide us with any special methods.

3. Not in the case of writing mechanics, but on the other skills, it works so well.

4. It could have and it still can, but if we have more time and they teach us new methods and strategy in the case of mechanics of writing, well I think it can has a good effect on me. For about other three skills it was perfect.

5. Yes I believe Sunrise, was a kind of revolutionary act in the English education of Kurdistan, it says it emphasized on all the four skills but I wish the teachers were trained well how to teach writing mechanics, but we were not taught well and so we keep going our traditional way of teaching writing, especially when no observation on our teaching.

6. I'm a fan of that, but it's not perfect. I think it can become better. It was effective in my teaching reading, speaking and listening, but not on my teaching writing, for I'm not sure how to manage teaching that or in what methods.

7. Not very much, I still use my own teaching methods, especially when I don't have any observer in my class. But I like sunrise, I think it's effective in general.

8. Yes, to some extent, especially on teaching reading and speaking I think it was really effective. I think it can become better. It's just still new, and I think as a teacher, that we need to be trained with the new methodology and way of teaching writing especially which is kind of ignored.

9. It had a good effect on my teaching reading, writing and listening but I like to learn more about teaching writing, unfortunately I have problem with my time management in the class and I feel other three skills are more important, however I like to use new strategies and teaching methods in teaching writing, just need to learn about them.

10. I can't say it was not effective, but I think I still need time to adapt myself with it. However I think it was not much effective in changing the educational situations in teaching writings in new ways. I believe we teachers need to become updated with the new methods and time management also be taught to us, for I myself have problem with that, so sacrifice teaching writing for that.

## APPENDIX C

## Approval Letter from the Administrative of Education ( KRG)

<b>إقليم كردستان - العراق</b> <b>مجلس الوزراء</b> <b>وزارة التربية</b> المديرية العامة لتربية اربيل مديرية التخطيط التربوي شعبة التخطيط	 <b>Kurdistan Regional Government</b> Council of Ministers Ministry of Education	<b>هەریەکێ کوردستان - هێراق</b> <b>ئەنجومەنی وەزیران</b> <b>وەزارەتی پەرورە</b> بەڕێوەبەرایەتی گشتی پ.ههولێر بەڕێوەبەرایەتی پلانی پەرورە هۆبە یان دانان
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ژماره ١  
رێكهموت ١٧٩٠٤

٢٠١٤ / ١٧ / ٩

رێكهموت ١  
٢٢٧٤ / كوردی

No: /  
Date: / 2014



بۆ / بەرێوەبەرایەتی پەرورە / ئاوەندی ههولێر / دەورووبەری ههولێر / دهمتی ههولێر / خهبات / شه قلاوه / سۆران / دواندز / چۆمان / میڕگەسور / مەخمور / کۆیه / ب / ئاسانکاری

داواکارین ئاسانکاری بکەن بۆ بەرێز ( کامران نوری عبدالله ) قوتابی خویندنی بالا ماستەر له زانکۆی ( قیرس ) بۆ ئەنجامدانی توێژینهوهی ماستەر نامهکەمی له قوتابخانهکانی نامادەیی . به مەرجیک کار نەکاتە سەر پرۆسەیی خویندنی له قوتابخانهکاندا .

لهگەڵ رێژدا.....

  
**فیصل حسن طه**  
**ی. بەرێوەبەری گشتی تەکنیکی**

ئێهك بۆ -  
پلان دانان / لهگەڵ سەرمتايبهگان.