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Using Active Learning Strategies to Develop Writing Skills for Students in Iraqi Universities

ABSTRACT

Writing in a foreign language is a major challenge that may affect the writing proficiency of university students studying English as a foreign language. However, writing in English as a foreign language is still considered a difficult talent throughout academic life, although it plays an important role in schools and universities today. Active learning techniques are increasingly being adopted in higher education to enhance student engagement and improve learning outcomes. This research examined active learning strategies and how they affect Iraqi university students' growth as writers. To achieve the research objectives, the descriptive approach was adopted by reviewing previous studies closest to the field and research topic. literature review clearly defines active learning and offers a synopsis of important strategies, such as group projects, problem-based learning, conversations, games, and simulations. The constructivist and social learning tenets are highlighted in the theoretical framework. In contrast to conventional passive lecture formats, active learning enhances academic accomplishment, writing abilities, and conceptual understanding, according to empirical research published in the literature. The progressive integration of active learning, alignment with particular learning objectives, encouragement of student participation, and integration of continuous assessment are the main points of advice for actual implementation.

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استخدام استراتيجيات التعلم النشط في تنمية مهارات الكتابة لدى طلبة الجامعات العراقية

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الخلاصة:

الكتابة بلغة أجنبية هي تحدي كبير قد يؤثر على كفاءة الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. ومع ذلك، لا تزال الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تعتبر موهبة صعبة طوال الحياة الأكاديمية، على الرغم من أنها تلعب دورًا مهمًا في المدارس والجامعات اليوم. يتم تبني

استراتيجيات التعلم النشط بشكل متزايد في التعليم العالي لتعزيز مشاركة الطلاب وتحسين نتائج التعلم. بحث هذا البحث في تقنيات التعلم النشط وكيف تؤثر على نمو طلاب الجامعات العراقيين ككتاب. لتحقيق أهداف البحث؛ تم الاعتماد على المنهج الوصفي بمراجعة الدراسات السابقة الأقرب للمجال والموضوع البحثي. تحدد مراجعة الأدبيات الشاملة التعلم النشط بوضوح وتقدم ملخصاً للاستراتيجيات المهمة، مثل المشاريع الجماعية، والتعلم القائم على حل المشكلات، والمحادثات، والألعاب، والمحاكاة. يتم تسليط الضوء على مبادئ التعلم البنائي والاجتماعي في الإطار النظري. على النقيض من صيغ المحاضرة السلبية التقليدية، يعزز التعلم النشط الإنجاز الأكاديمي، وقدرات الكتابة، والفهم المفاهيمي، وفقاً للبحث التجريبي المنشور في الأدبيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجيات التعلم، التعلم النشط، مهارات الكتابة، جامعات

1. Introduction

The concepts of learning in higher education form the core of the andragogy approach. Students in higher education are independent and self-motivated. They need to be transformed from passive listeners to active learners. Engaging active learners is one of the most important aspects of the teaching and learning process. By using the right tools or techniques, this will increase its effectiveness and yield (Nabeel, 2024, p.66). Numerous studies have shown that active learning techniques are often more successful and focused on the needs of the learner than traditional teaching methods. Among the many positive educational outcomes that active learning promotes are increased student learning rates and information retention. In addition to motivating students to learn, active learning can improve their ability to think creatively (Gosavi & Arora, 2022, p.2; Ajaj, 2022, p.47).

Active learning has become an increasingly popular instructional approach in higher education settings over the past decade. The term “active learning” refers to any teaching strategy that engages students in the learning process through activities and authentic thinking rather than having them passively receive information (McConnell et al., 2017, p.606). These learner-centered strategies aim to engage students in knowledge construction and reflection during class time. Examples of common active learning strategies include collaborative group work, problem- or case-based learning, simulations, games, discussions, and other methods that require students to apply concepts rather than simply listen to lectures. Active learning has grown in popularity over the past ten years in higher education settings. In higher education contexts, research has shown

that active learning strategies confer a number of cognitive and non-cognitive benefits, including increased academic achievement, with average test scores increasing by 6% under active learning approaches across all STEM disciplines (Freeman, 2020, p. 6479), increased likelihood of passing courses taught using active learning rather than lecture-based instruction, and improved critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork skills, motivation, and engagement (Loes and Pascarella, 2015, p.3). Key components of an active learning approach are student activity and engagement in higher-level tasks, such as analysis, evaluation, and creativity. In higher education, active learning has gained widespread support as an evidence-based teaching strategy due to these benefits (Eddy and Hogan, 2014, p. 457). The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how active learning techniques can help students in Iraqi universities develop their writing skills.

Higher education is an ideal setting for analyzing the effects of active learning on students and teachers, despite its importance at all levels of education. Active Learning Strategy define any teaching strategy in which students work together in small groups to achieve a common goal is referred to as cooperative learning. Positive interdependence, personal responsibility, group processing, and social skills are all essential to collaborative tasks. Techniques include brainstorming and sharing, team-based projects, collaborative problem solving, and group debates, among other group configurations, roles, and activities. Social constructivism, the foundation of cooperative learning, holds that peer interaction facilitates deep understanding and the construction of shared knowledge (Laal & Laal, 2012, p.492).

Learners can engage in simulations that mimic real-world situations, settings, or procedures. After the simulation, a briefer links the experience to the learning objectives. To develop risk-free skills, simulations are widely used in business, aviation, medicine, and other fields (Lateef, 2010, p.349). Learning theories in cognitive science and experiential learning theory are examples of theoretical foundations. In debates, students take sides on a topic, seek out facts to support them, and then defend their positions while refuting those of others. Debates foster the ability to speak persuasively, analyze topics, think critically, and debate. Dialectical constructivism, which emphasizes that truth is revealed through discussion and confrontation of opposing viewpoints, is the source of debates (Roy & Shank, 2020, p. 458).

Games teach academic subjects in an entertaining way by including game components such as tasks, puzzles, challenges, or competitions (Plass et al.,

2015, p. 263). Players gain independence and the ability to solve problems on their own. Listening sessions link learning objectives to games. Cognitive, constructivist, and motivational theories are among the theoretical foundations (Plass et al., 2015, p. 265). The importance of active learning in higher education According to a large body of studies, active learning enhances the learning outcomes, abilities, and motivation of undergraduate students compared to lecture-only courses. STEM courses with active learning increased average test scores by 6% and reduced failure rates by more than 12%, according to a leading meta-analysis by Freeman (2020).

Active learning particularly benefits underrepresented or disadvantaged students in STEM fields, reducing achievement gaps (Eddy and Hogan, 2014, p. 459). Active learning improves academic performance and engagement across disciplines, not just in STEM. Active learning improves critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and lifelong learning skills—all essential for professional and personal success—as well as subject matter knowledge. Additionally, compared to lecture halls, students in active learning classes show higher levels of motivation, enjoyment, curiosity, and confidence. The importance of active learning for meaningful, multidimensional learning in higher education is demonstrated by these cognitive and noncognitive benefits (Dzaiy & Abdullah, 2024, p. 330).

Writing skills are among the most important academic skills that students must possess to achieve academic and professional success. With the development of teaching methods, it has become necessary to use innovative teaching strategies such as active learning, which focuses on the student's interaction with the educational content and active participation in the learning process. In this research, we will explore how to use active learning strategies to improve the writing skills of Iraqi university students, and identify the challenges and opportunities that may contribute to improving this aspect of education.

1.1 Research problem and questions

Students cannot actively participate in the learning process or communicate with each other under the traditional teaching method, where the teacher plays a dominant role (Ahmad, 2024, p. 10; Ajaj, 2020, p.3). Instead, they passively absorb information from the teacher and internalize it through memorization (Soltanzadeh et al., 2013, p.129). Traditional education assumes that all students need the same information at the same time, but this assumption is flawed given the diversity of students' needs and abilities. Traditional methods have proven insufficient in providing learning opportunities for children. According to

educational studies, students' active participation in the learning process has a positive effect on their achievement (Mustafa et al., 2012, p.46).

According to Delong (2008, p.11), research has shown that active learning is more successful than traditional methods such as lectures in increasing performance, and that some teaching strategies are better than others in helping students retain material covered in the course. Additionally, active learning engages students in the classroom through a variety of methods, allowing them to participate in the learning process beyond simply listening to the teacher. According to Malik (2011, p.215), the use of active learning is critical to improving the quality of learning, and many students express a preference for using active learning in the classroom over traditional lectures.

According to Naderi and Ashraf (2013, p.95), active learning has a long history of being effective in enhancing learning and is supported by a large body of literature. As educators, researchers realized that previous teaching approaches required students to simply listen and transmit knowledge, which was not enough to promote a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The content presented must be analyzed, summarized, evaluated, and discussed by students. Active learning is a student-centered approach in which students take ownership of the learning process, make decisions, maintain focus and connection, and are physically and cognitively engaged. Because active learning is supported by numerous studies, researchers suggest that it can have a positive impact on students' academic performance. According to Soltanzadeh et al. (2013, p.128), active learning includes a wide range of strategies, including "short stories, brainstorming, quick surveys, think-pair-think, formative tests, debate, role-playing, and cooperative learning," among many others.

Although there is much research supporting the cognitive and noncognitive benefits of active learning, questions remain about how best to use it. The most effective methods for specific learning goals and situations require further study. Pedagogical decisions can be guided by comparing the effectiveness of different methods. Furthermore, little research has explicitly compared online or face-to-face settings with integrated active learning environments. Examining active learning across delivery formats is essential as hybrid courses become increasingly prevalent. Research on faculty development to embrace active learning is also lacking. By filling gaps in teacher knowledge, evidence-based implementation training programs may increase use. Supporting students' adaptation to new forms of active learning also requires more effort. By addressing these shortcomings, active learning techniques can be maximized

and their benefits extended to other educational contexts (Dzaiy & Abdullah, 2024, p. 333).

The research problem is represented by the weakness of writing skills among some Iraqi university students, especially in academic writing in Arabic or English. Also, traditional methods of education do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop writing skills through continuous practical application and interaction with the content. There is a need to study the effect of active learning strategies in enhancing writing skills among students in Iraqi universities. Therefore, the research problem lies in the following questions:

1. What are the active learning strategies that can be used to improve the writing skills of Iraqi university students?
2. What are the advantages of active learning strategies in the writing skills of EFL teachers at Iraqi university students?
3. What are the challenges facing Iraqi university professors in applying active learning strategies in teaching writing?

1.2 Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the benefits and challenges of using active learning strategies in developing writing skills among Iraqi university student. This main objective is subdivided into the following sub-objectives:

1. To identify active learning strategies that can effectively contribute to the development of academic writing skills.
2. To identify the advantages of active learning strategies in the writing skills of EFL teachers at Iraqi university students
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities in applying active learning strategies in Iraqi universities.

1.3 Research importance

The importance of this study stems from the importance of writing skills among university students, which represents an important research area. Studies that have addressed the use of active learning strategies in developing writing skills among Iraqi university students are rare. Therefore, it is expected that conducting such research on this topic will have highly positive repercussions and importance that can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The scientific importance of this study lies in the scarcity of studies that specifically dealt with the using active learning strategies to develop

writing skills among Iraqi university students, which makes this study a new scientific attempt to identify the nature of the relationship between the two variables, and develop appropriate scientific recommendations.

- 2) The research helps improve students' academic writing skills, which contributes to developing their ability to express their ideas in a more organized and clear manner.
- 3) The research provides innovative teaching strategies and tools that can be used in teaching to develop writing skills.
- 4) The research contributes to providing recommendations on how to implement active learning more effectively in the university curricula of educational institutions.
- 5) This research will help improve the university education environment and contribute to the development of academic education outcomes in line with the needs of the labor market.
- 6) Those interested in this study can benefit from its findings and recommendations in conducting deeper studies as well as developing the performance of their educational institutions based on the results of the study.
- 7) The present research will contribute to enriching the literature on the use of learning strategies to enhance university students' EFL writing skills.
- 8) This study would represent a good reference for the future studies as long as it would provide the subsequent researchers and interested scholars in the field of English language teaching methods and curricula with valued literature, recommendations and suggestions that are important for their proposed studies.

2. Research methodology

Research methodology is considered as a systematic approach, which mainly focused on finding answers for all research inquiries and to produce effective results of a specific study.

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of this research, the descriptive method adopted for this research study. To cover the descriptive part and the design of the theoretical framework, several relevant documents, scientific researches, magazines, articles, books and references related to Arabic and foreign studies were reviewed.

3. Literature review

3.1 Active Learning (AL)

Learning strategies are specific actions that students use to improve their learning. By improving language proficiency and enhancing confidence and motivation during the learning process, the active use of language learning methodologies enables students to take charge of their own learning. Instruction in strategies helps students become more independent, self-sufficient, and take charge of their own learning. The more tactics a student uses, the more self-efficacy, motivation, and confidence he or she will feel. To increase students' levels of self-learning, teachers are encouraged to select effective teaching methods and learning strategies for them and teach them how to understand these tactics (Shi, 2017, p.27). According to Si Bouziane (2020, p.25), A strategy expresses a set of actions and steps taken to achieve specific goals. Students can monitor their learning with the help of cognitive knowledge, often known as mental processes. Planning, choosing a preferred method of learning, and evaluating progress are all steps in this process that can help students in their learning journey. Additionally, planning, observing, and evaluating are steps in the learning process. Mental processes are involved in the second tactic, known as the cognitive approach. This action deals with the selection of relevant data or sources. Students' interactions with other speakers are the subject of the last social strategy. Its goal is to enhance learners' cultural awareness (Kalati, 2016, p.5; Montaña-Gonzalez, 2017, p.482).

Active learning refers to the constructivist perspective of learning. The learner actively constructs information and integrates it with what he already knows and has experienced. A number of studies are cited on active learning, its methods, models, and techniques, as well as the process of putting successful learning into practice. History and political science experiments comparing active learning to traditional learning were reported by Patrick McCarthy and Anderson (2000). Active learning enhances students' creativity, which ultimately determines their future employability and personal growth, according to Daellenbach et al. (2018, p.174). It helps them acquire abilities that will gradually influence their personal growth and future employability, focuses on the problems of active learning and how to solve them (Muhammad, 2016, p.15). The subject matter of the course, preparation before class, large class size, instructor hesitation, lack of supplies or equipment, and student resistance are the main obstacles to active learning, according to their observations. They also provided some answers to these problems. As a case study, (Gosavi et al., 2019, p.32) describes a fully flipped classroom exercise. The use of tactics to

reduce student resistance to active learning in their undergraduate engineering courses is examined in (Tharayil et al. 2018, p.6). For this, they collected interview data from 17 American engineering professors. They concluded that while there are many effective ways to put these techniques into practice, careful course preparation is also essential.

Instructors need to be aware of the difficulties in implementing an active learning strategy. Adopting statistics in course workbooks slowly based on their experiences. They advise that activities be consistent with other course assessments and that the purpose and objectives of the activity be made clear. According to (O'Brocta, & Swigart, 2013, p.5), students often react positively to active learning techniques. There are very few studies on statistical analysis of the effect of applying active learning techniques on students' skill development, academic performance, and satisfaction, despite the fact that most of the problems of active learning have been adequately addressed by the published literature now. Teachers may sometimes be reluctant to change their teaching methods (Gosavi & Arora, 2022, p.3-4).

2.2 Characteristics of Active Learning

Active learning has several features, including:

1. Instead of just listening, students engage in active classroom activities (Naderi and Ashraf, 2013, p.102).
2. Active learning helps students retain material, meet their different learning needs and styles, and enhance their responsibility.
3. Priority is given to improving learning abilities over simply transferring knowledge (Malik, 2011, p.216).
4. Students analyze, summarize, and evaluate contents as part of higher-level thinking exercises.

2.3 The principles of Active Learning

Active learning offers several elements that enhance and improve the learning process. These elements relate to:

1. Active engagement immediately, such as developing a sense of teamwork
2. Acquisition of knowledge and abilities in a dynamic classroom through questions, problem solving, collaborative learning, conversations, and more.
3. Learning should be continuous, which means that planning for the future should be done

4. Transferring the burden of teaching from the teacher to the students (Wilk, 2003, p.208).
5. The learner must actively generate meaning
6. Acquiring skills rather than knowledge.
7. According to Weimer (2012), students prefer to study with others than learn alone.
8. Meaningful learning is facilitated by talking and providing explanations, whether students are talking to their teacher, others, or themselves.
9. Learning resources can be used in other areas.

3.2 The Impact of Active Learning on Teaching Effectiveness

Higher education has seen a shift in recent decades from traditional lecture-based teaching strategies to more active, student-centered strategies. Active learning is a broad category of teaching strategies that involve students in the learning process through discussions, activities, problem solving, and reflection. Students must interact with course content, apply ideas, and practice critical thinking in order to engage in active learning rather than passive listening (Freeman, 2020, p. 6481). Compared to more traditional lecture formats, a growing body of research shows that the use of active learning methodologies improves student engagement, comprehension, critical thinking abilities, and overall course outcomes (Ahmed, 2023, p.270). One of the main advantages of active learning is that students are more motivated and engaged when they are engaged in active learning. It is easy for students to become passive consumers of information during traditional lectures. On the other hand, active learning forces students to take ownership of their own learning, work with classmates, express their ideas, and participate in class activities. This results in increased interest in the topics and course content.

Students demonstrated higher engagement and attention during active learning activities such as think-pair-share discussions, problem-solving tasks, and clicker questions than during faculty-centered lectures; according to observational studies of college STEM courses. Furthermore, compared to standard lecture courses, students who took courses that included some or many active learning components reported increased levels of enthusiasm and engagement (Lumpkin et al., 2015, p. 123).

As a result, active learning not only captures students' attention during class, but also motivates them outside of class. Better Academic Performance and Better Understanding by Students Active learning has also been shown to

increase learning outcomes, such as skills, grades, and conceptual understanding, in addition to increasing student engagement. 225 research papers comparing the effects of active learning versus lectures in STEM college courses were included in a groundbreaking meta-analysis by Freeman (2020, p. 6477). They found that students were 1.5 times more likely to fail in lecture-based courses and that average exam scores increased by about 6% in the active learning portions. When compared to lectures, the research found that active learning significantly improved test performance. These findings support several individual investigations.

According to research, active learning enhances outcomes by having students absorb knowledge more deeply. Students are asked to critically evaluate concepts, apply and explain ideas, and summarize information through active learning activities such as conversations, projects, and reflective writing. Thus, active learning enhances understanding, knowledge transfer, and long-term retention compared to passive listening (Freeman, 2020, p. 6478).

3.3 Writing Skill

Writing is a means of communication that uses signs and symbols to express words, making it fundamental language ability. In addition, it is a complex process that requires proficiency in almost every area of language, including discourse, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The ability to write is arguably the most important for academic and professional goals, even though the other four English language abilities are also essential for language acquisition. It is a crucial communication tool that allows a writer to convey his or her thoughts, feelings, opinions, and arguments (Maba, 2023, p.1998). Writing, according to Toba et al. (2019, p.62), is both a mental and physical act. The act of physically committing words or ideas to a medium is called writing. Writing, on the other hand, is the mental process of coming up with ideas, figuring out how to put them on paper, and organizing them into coherent phrases and paragraphs that different readers can later understand. English language education researchers view writing as both a process and a talent. Like driving, playing a musical instrument, cooking, or any other ability, writing is based on the idea that it is a skill. So, if someone is keen on learning, they can learn it. However, writing as a process makes it difficult to write a research paper, essay, book review or paragraph.

3.4 Teaching Writing Skills in Higher Education

Writing is a process of structuring ideas that can sharpen intelligence. To write well, students need to understand and consider a variety of factors. Harmer (2004, p.23) argued that learning to write has many benefits. First and foremost, unlike speaking, there are no time constraints on writing. Writing allows students to develop and revise their writing patterns over a longer period of time, suggesting that writing is different from speaking. Secondly, students may write while thinking about the concept, which will help them stay motivated. This is the writing process that is influenced by what is being learned in class. The language that will be written will be informed by the brain.

Writing instruction in higher education places a strong emphasis on the step's students take to practice writing; this is known as "process-based instruction" by teachers. Linguists believe that this type of training prevents students from expressing their ideas in order to create a text. Writing exercises that lead to a complete text type are not considered finished in this model. Higher education teachers replicate product-based instruction to support this instruction. "When writing skills were explicitly taught in higher education, the focus was on writing the text as a final product," according to Coffin et al. (2003, p.11).

The use of process-based and product-based learning in writing instruction has become increasingly popular. Harmer (2004) asserts that students must go through several steps in the writing process before they can produce their final written work. Students are given specific topics to write about in class. After that, the process is planned in stages. Planning, drafting, editing, and publishing are the four steps that teachers recognized and used the most. Similarly, Syarof et al. (2018, p.352) used the stages of the writing process – pre-writing, drafting, sharing and interaction, rewriting and editing, and publishing. This was confirmed by Rusinovci (2015, p.701) who said that the publishing stage is the final stage for students to fully present their writing text as a result of undergoing a long process of learning.

The learning objectives of process-based training are different from those of product-based learning. Teachers believe that students may enhance their writing abilities through product-based training. Students are asked to read a book or article in class before writing about their thoughts on it. Haerazi et al. (2020, p.236), who referred to product-based learning as text-based learning, mentioned the same thing. The GBI model is another name for text-based

learning, which Richards (2006) echoes as one of the communicative frameworks.

3.5 Related Studies about using active learning strategies to develop writing skills

Several studies have addressed different ways to enhance writing skills in universities using active learning. The aim of Hakim et al. (2022) was to critically evaluate the methods and guidelines used in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training at Imam Punggol Padang University to teach Quranic reading and writing. The study involved four teachers from the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, as well as Islamic education students in the second or third semester in 2016-2017 who were involved in teaching Quranic reading and writing. Interviews, observations, and study documentation were the study tools. According to the results of the study, teaching Quranic reading and writing skills begins with mapping each student's abilities; however, continuous learning does not implement this mapping. However, students' Quranic reading and writing skills can be enhanced through extracurricular and extracurricular activities in which they participate. Castillo-Cuesta et al. (2021, p.147) sought to examine how digital stories influence the writing abilities of pre-service English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. 101 students from a private institution in Ecuador enrolled in four distance learning courses in English major participated - one experimental group of fifty-two and one control group of forty-nine. Pre-test, post-test, pre-test questionnaire and pre-test were among the instruments. The preliminary results showed that the students' writing abilities improved significantly, especially in the areas related to vocabulary and grammar.

Haerazi et al. (2020) examined the extent to which a genre-based instructional model was successful in teaching writing skills as perceived by students' creativity. A quasi-experimental research approach was used in this investigation. The courses that constituted the samples were the course taught using the genre-based instructional model (GBI) and the other course taught using the process-based instructional model (PBI). The writing and creativity tests were the instruments of the study. The results of the study showed that the GBI model outperformed the PBI model. As a result, students who were more creative produced better writing than those who were not.

El-Sweedy (2019) used Salmon's e-activities model for online learning to build creative writing abilities in English as a foreign language, as summarized in short stories and writing situations. Ninety-six fourth-year pre-service teachers who joined the English Department at the Faculty of Education, Benha University participated in the study. The pre- and post-test of creative writing in English as a foreign language with a scoring scale and a writing disposition scale were the two primary tools used. The results showed the effectiveness of the e-activities model in enhancing creative writing abilities and dispositions in EFL students, as well as the possibility of using writing dispositions as predictors of creative writing abilities in EFL students. McMullen (2009) investigated how Saudi students studying English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia use language learning strategies. The study investigated whether academic specialization and gender had any effect on this use. A self-report questionnaire developed by Rebecca Oxford was used to collect data from three sample Saudi institutions during the 2007-2008 academic year. A total of 165 students participated in the study, 94 of whom were female and 71 were male. According to the results, computer science students used slightly more language learning strategies than management information systems students, and female students used slightly more language learning strategies than male students.

Several studies have investigated how the use of learning techniques affects the development of EFL writing skills. Some of them are discussed below: English learning techniques of pre-service teachers at a Ghanaian college of education were examined in this study conducted by Kpeglo and Mortey (2021). 48 pre-service teachers in their first and second year of a public college of education in the Volta Region of Ghana that offers a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program participated. According to the study, students most frequently used compensatory and cognitive techniques. Students used memory and perception strategies sparingly. The aim of Junianti et al. (2020) was to determine the writing teaching techniques used by university EFL students. The participants in the study were EFL students, primarily aged 18–22, who were enrolled as active students in Indonesian higher education. Semi-structured questionnaires and interviews were used as study tools to collect information on the three categories of strategies - cognitive, perceptual, and social strategies. The average use of each technique was 79% for cognitive strategies, 74% for perceptual strategies, and 81% for social strategies, according to the results.

At the Intensive Language Learning Center at the University of Mostaganem; Bouzian (2020) looked at how the use of language learning techniques affected the development of EFL students' writing skills. The study participants were

students at elementary, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels who attended the Intensive Language Learning Center at the University of Mostaganem. Their ages ranged from 18 to 38 years, and they were male and female. To assess learners' use of strategies, the researcher used the Oxford Strategic Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990). The results showed that elementary and intermediate learners valued mnemonic techniques less. Since affective techniques were listed first, advanced learners reported using them more, followed by compensatory strategies.

Baltaoğlu and Guven (2019) aimed to examine the relationship between the learning styles and techniques of Anadolu University teacher candidates and their self-efficacy perceptions in terms of a number of characteristics. 4100 teacher candidates from Anadolu University Faculty of Education participated in the study. The "Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale", "Kolb Learning Styles Scale III" and "Learning Strategies Scale" were the three assessment tools used to collect data. According to the study, there is little correlation between teacher candidates' self-efficacy judgments and learning styles and learning practices.

Upon enrollment in teacher education programs, Dejene (2020) investigated the preferred teaching styles and learning styles of pre-service teachers. A descriptive survey approach was used. 293 pre-service secondary school teachers participating in Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) programs at two universities were selected to participate in the study. Data were collected using the Teaching Styles Inventory and the revised two-factor study questionnaire. The study found that the behavioral attitude of pre-service teachers who joined the teacher education program was at odds with the reforms in teacher education.

3.6 Challenges and Limitations

While the data support the benefits of active learning, the adoption of these techniques also brings significant problems and limitations that must be recognized and addressed by Iraqi universities. Many academics who are accustomed to traditional lectures often lack the necessary training and experience in active learning techniques. It takes specific methods and planning to create engaging activities, lead productive conversations, and monitor student learning at all times (Michael, 2007). Without a solid foundation, instructors can use active learning in superficial or ineffectively inconsistent ways. Some faculty members find it difficult to fully accept the conceptual shift from a

teacher-centered to a student-centered model, relying instead on long-term transition patterns (Sonal et al., 2001).

To gain the skills and confidence needed to implement high-quality active learning, ongoing professional development that focuses on designing activities, leading small groups, and creating a participatory atmosphere is crucial (Ebert-May et al., 2011). Adoption of innovative teaching strategies is also made possible by adequate administrative support in the form of training materials, communities of practice, and course delivery time (Henderson & Dancy, 2007).

Iraqi university students who have grown up in passive learning environments may object to active learning strategies because they feel strange or uncomfortable using them. Some students complain that they have to think for themselves rather than listen to lectures that present pre-prepared material (Seidel & Tanner, 2013).

Opposition may also arise from expectations that the instructor should direct learning, discomfort with peer interactions, and a preference for anonymity (Finelli et al., 2018). To help students understand the value of active work, instructors should be clear about expectations regarding student commitments (Seidel & Tanner, 2013). Students may be more receptive to the method if the evidence-based benefits of active learning are clearly explained, assessment criteria are provided, frustrations are acknowledged, and growing pains are highlighted as a natural component of learning (Finelli et al., 2018). The transition is further facilitated by starting with less demanding tasks and gradually increasing students' proficiency (Nilson, 2010). Students will be able to reap the benefits of active learning with patience and assistance.

4. Conclusion

The research literature extensively documents the significant shortcomings of traditional passive learning approaches that dominate university education. Lecture-centered classrooms often foster student disengagement, superficial learning, and poor development of higher-order thinking skills among undergraduates. However, the past few decades have seen an emerging recognition that active learning approaches, which engage students in the process of constructing and applying knowledge, offer a promising solution. As discussed in this paper, active learning encompasses a variety of techniques rooted in cognitive and social science insights into how students learn best.

University education in Iraq has witnessed challenges in improving students' writing skills, which are among the basic skills that students need to express their ideas and organize their information. However, it has been shown that traditional methods of education may not be sufficient to motivate students to develop these skills. Therefore, the research seeks to explore the effectiveness of active learning strategies in improving the writing skills of Iraqi university students. The research concluded that active learning is an educational methodology that encourages students to actively participate in the educational process, which increases their interaction with the course material and contributes to enhancing their deep understanding of the content. These strategies rely on students' interaction with the course material through interactive activities such as group discussions, working in groups, and performing practical activities. As for writing skills, active learning helps students develop critical thinking and organized expression.

ALS has been shown to be an excellent strategy for improving students' skills and developing writing skills in English as a foreign language (i.e. in teaching methods of English as a foreign language course). Interactive discussions, collaborative projects, inquiry-based exploration, reflective writing, and practical problem solving are strategies that force learners to invest greater cognitive resources and take ownership of their learning. Previous studies have demonstrated that active learning, in contrast to passive listening, consistently enhances outcomes such as student engagement, academic achievement, conceptual understanding of core course principles, higher-order thinking, and teamwork abilities. Students deserve a rich post-secondary educational experience that ignites their intelligence, unlocks their potential, and empowers them to use knowledge to improve society. This future depends on innovation in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. Active learning is a sign in the right direction.

Based on the findings of previous studies; the research reflects that active learning strategies are an effective way to improve the writing skills of university students in Iraq. By actively engaging students in the educational process and providing opportunities for continuous interaction and review, students' ability to write academically and organized can be improved, which contributes to enhancing their overall academic achievement.

5. Recommendation

Research provides clear evidence of the benefits of active learning, but effectively scaling these practices across the institution requires intentional strategies by higher education leaders. In light of modern educational trends, it can be said that active learning strategies offer great potential in developing university students' writing skills, especially in the cultural and educational contexts of Iraq. The following are some recommendations on this topic:

- 1) The research recommends that teachers adopt ALS in their classrooms in order to increase students' learning and writing skills development because the use of such strategies may be reflected in their tests, exams, and assignments.
- 2) College and university stakeholders should develop a strategic vision and policies that make active learning a top educational priority. Strategic plans should also highlight the alignment of active learning with institutional missions that focus on student success and set specific goals
- 3) Training workshops should be organized for teachers on active learning strategies and how to apply them in teaching writing.
- 4) Curricula should be modified to include active learning strategies that support the improvement of writing skills.
- 5) Activities such as brainstorming, group work, and peer assessment can be encouraged to develop students' writing skills.
- 6) Training programmes are needed to empower both teachers and learners; such programmes should include teachers to enable them to develop their abilities and methods of teaching English in general and writing skills in particular.

6. Future studies

The researcher suggests conducting the following future studies:

- 1) Experimental studies on the use of active learning strategies (ALS) at different educational levels and academic subjects.
- 2) Applying active learning strategies (such as three-minute review, case study, peer teaching, and problem solving) in teaching multiple academic subjects.
- 3) Conducting a similar study to assess students' attitudes toward active learning methods.
- 4) Conducting further studies on the impact of active learning strategies on developing other skills such as reading.

- 5) Studying interactive online writing strategies within the framework of active learning
- 6) Studying the impact of active learning on enhancing students' critical thinking in writing

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