


**The Use of the Whole Language Approach to Sharpen  
EFL Learners' Writing Skill at Al-Imam  
Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University**

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**Abstract**

This paper supports the implementation of the whole language approach in EFL classrooms as a theoretically rich and practically feasible procedure. It aims at investigating the effect of using the whole language approach on developing the writing ability of first-year English majors at Al-Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University. The sample of the study consisted of 50 male students, randomly selected from five groups and assigned to either an experimental or control group. A writing ability pretest was administered to both groups at the beginning of the study to ensure that they were equivalent and homogenous. The same test was given as a writing ability posttest at the end of the experiment. The results revealed significant differences between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental one.

**Key Words:** whole language approach, integrated-skill approach, integration of language skills, writing ability, language proficiency.


## ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة اثر استخدام الطريقة الكلية (تكامل المهارات الأربعة) في تنمية مهارة الكتابة بين طلاب السنة الأولى لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية. تكونت عينة الدراسة من خمسين طالب مسجلين في شعبتين تم اختيارهما عشوائيا من بين شعب الكتابة الخمس المتوفرة في قسم اللغة الانجليزية. وبالطريقة ذاتها تم تحديدهما كمجموعتين تجريبية وضابطة. خضعت المجموعتان عند بدء الدراسة لامتحان قبلي للقدرة الكتابية للتأكد من كونهما متساويتان ومتجانستان. وقد أعطي نفس الامتحان للمجموعتين عند انتهاء التجربة. أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المجموعتين التجريبية والضابطة لصالح المجموعة الأولى.

## Introduction

Writing pedagogy has consistently been a major concern in EFL education. Although writing in academic and English for specific purpose contexts is widely discussed, the practice of teaching writing in wider contexts of EFL education tends to pose a two-sided challenge. On the one hand, theoretical approaches seem to be too decontextualised and forbidding to find their way into the teaching of writing. On the other hand, the mainstream practice of EFL writing pedagogy appears to be based on loose theoretical foundations and largely confined within traditional skill-based views of language teaching (Zamel 1987).

Traditionally, writing was viewed as a one-dimensional activity in which linguistic accuracy was all important and context and self-expression were not priorities. It was a way to reinforce grammatical patterns and lexical items. Writing pedagogy was a habit-formation exercise and the writer was supposed to merely manipulate the previously learned structures into longer stretches of language. This produced a collection of words and sentence patterns not necessarily representing meaningful written language (Silva 1990). A basic characteristic of this approach was a focus on a strongly worded, well-structured and neatly styled product. At the most sophisticated level, product-oriented views of writing were concerned with style and arrangement, or fitting sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into texts (Connor 1987). This focus on minimal mechanical writing skills was based on positivist assumptions about language that viewed language as fragmentable elements that could be linearly presented (Zamel 1987). Product oriented approaches were also influenced by behaviourist psychology and structural linguistics. The lack of real purpose and audience resulted in artificial writing practices, with learners unable to engage in writing



as persons with intellectual or emotional interests in what they wrote (Raimes 1985).

This paper is a call for the introduction of the whole language approach into EFL education as an integrated and holistic writing practice for teaching EFL learners the skill of writing. It explores the whole language approach as a procedure based on sound theoretical foundations that can be very flexibly adopted, adapted and practiced in almost all educational contexts. Involving EFL learners in functional communicative experiences via the whole language approach motivates them to learn and use English in their daily lives (Holmes 2001).

By employing the whole language approach, EFL teachers and learners can move towards an authentic and integrated writing practice that simultaneously incorporates formal aspects of language, communicative and discursive purposes, and higher order personal and social concerns (Zamel 1987). Moreover, Hamayan, (1989); Dahl and Frepon (1992); and Goodman (1989) pointed out that students who use the whole language approach in learning the skill of writing are usually able to improve their writing skills more significantly than other learners do because they have an access to feedback about their errors in grammar, style and spelling. Thus, when the whole language approach is utilized properly, it will surely expose English language learners to authentic language and encourage them to interact naturally in the language as a whole, and as a result, to write a reasonable and appropriate piece of writing.


A major characteristic of the whole language approach that learning is often fostered through social interaction. Strickland (1999) has demonstrated that social contact and experiences "enlarge learners' opportunity for language development and increase their motivation for learning. Group discussion makes

it possible for students to respond freely in their own and may draw even a timid child into the circle of participation" (p.190). The processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are interrelated and interdependent. It is impossible to separate out one language process from the teaching task. (Freeman, 1988). When students engage in the complex processes of reading, writing, discussing, and thinking, they simultaneously develop language and literacy, and learn about language through these processes (Waver, 1990).

The whole language process is learner-centered, "empowering students to direct their own learning" (Stahl, 1999, p.18). Goodman (1986) indicates that in whole language classrooms, language development is empowering. The learners "control" the language learning process, make the decisions about when to use it, and determine their goals. Freeman (1988) suggests that the learners' needs and interests be considered first. Materials should be centered on topics that are familiar to the learners and build upon their background knowledge and interests.

Murray (1985) states that when students interact with each other through whole language instruction, they develop their critical thinking skills, explore their ideas, strengthen and develop greater imaginative powers, and gain self confidence through original writing. At the same time, teachers benefit from such an approach by gaining knowledge of students, by helping students become better learners, by stimulating collaborative learning experiences, by motivating students to learn more, and by creating a more stimulating, exciting environment for learning.

The researcher has noticed that English instructors usually complain that the majority of EFL learners in the college of languages and translation face great difficulty in their writing abilities and they are unable to produce well- organized and coherent writing texts which are free from various types of errors. These



texts are usually incomprehensible and incorrect to their instructors. In fact, to them writing is a great problem and they exhibited low writing performance. A very important reason that causes such a problem is the fact that English writing courses lack both effective strategies and free interaction among the teacher and students. Thus, students do not have enough chances to practice writing strategies and techniques.

Consequently, investigating the effect of the whole language approach may lead to fruitful conclusions and pedagogical implications for EFL instructors and students. Goodman (1989) refers to the whole language approach as creating learning experiences that are not simply confined to writing but can be easily and coherently integrated with other language skills and even oral language learning experiences in the wider context of EFL education. In addition it provides a learning practice that can be meaningfully related to the lives of EFL learners beyond the classroom. Agnew (1995) refers to the whole language movements as a grass-root movement among teachers to build better, more effective, and more satisfying experiences for their pupils and themselves. Bixer (1980) asserts that integrating the language skills means providing natural learning situations in which listening, speaking, reading and writing can be developed together for real purposes and real audiences.

#### Benefits of Using the Whole Language Approach in EFL Learning


A number of researchers have noted several benefits of using the whole language approach in language classrooms. Agnew (1995) presents three benefits of the whole language approach. He states that the whole language instruction can promote real and natural communication inside the classroom. Through the whole language approach, students are able to cooperate with each other easily and comfortably. This provides authentic context for

communication. Besides, the whole language approach also facilitates cooperative learning which is essential in second language (L2) writing. Furthermore, the whole language approach stimulates students' interest in communicating as they feel they have an authentic audience who will respond to their writing. In short, the whole language approach promotes opportunities for communication, cooperation, collaboration and information.

Engelhart (2000) mentions that the use of the whole language approach in EFL classrooms may provide EFL learners with a practical opportunity to experience the mechanical and formal challenges of writing in a foreign language classroom. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for EFL learners to involve themselves in a more process-oriented writing practice that creates chances for interaction and autonomy in a social context. Ideally, the whole language approach may integrate all these aspects of product, process and post-process approaches into a unified whole. Teachers who become involved in the whole language approach may also find that similarly multifaceted teaching opportunities are available to them.

Barras (1995) indicates that the use of the whole language approach into EFL writing pedagogy may provide teachers and learners with a practical, flexible and theoretically rich opportunity for engagement in writing as an integrated and holistic practice. It creates possibilities for EFL literacy practices through which learners can engage with the linguistic and communicative challenges of writing in a foreign language, while they experience written language as a socially relevant and personally meaningful activity. While many mainstream EFL writing activities are based on the fragmentation of skills and components of language, the whole language approach can defragment EFL writing practices into a meaningfully unified and integrated whole.





Having reviewed related literature about the use of the whole language approach for teaching and learning the skill of writing, the researcher notes that there is a dearth of investigation studies and lack of research oriented articles. Few studies are also based on applied work; others are theoretically oriented and glorify the use of the whole language approach for teaching EFL skills such as writing. This study, however, is based on an experimental work to test the effect of using the whole language approach on the development of students' performance in writing. Furthermore, it is the first study about the use of the whole language in Saudi Arabia for teaching the skill of writing to EFL learners.

Smadi (1986: 35) noted that "the students' inability to write a comprehensive, acceptable English passage is due to the method used in EFL teaching in general and composition in particular." This remark is supported by the researcher's observation that Al-Imam University EFL learners face serious problems and difficulties in writing due to utilized inappropriate and ineffective teaching methods. It is the researcher's belief, that if students are taught through communicative activities, such as the whole language approach, in writing classes their writing abilities will improve, and they will be better English writers.

The study aims at exploring the effect of using the whole language approach on the development of EFL learners' performance in writing. The study would pose the following main question: What is the effect of the method of teaching on the achievement of students in the writing tasks? The major null hypothesis of the study would be that there would be no statistical significant difference in the EFL learners' writing performance between the experimental exposed to the whole language approach and the control group taught according to the traditional method in favor of the experimental group.


## Review of Literature

This section is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the theoretical studies on the whole language approach and the second part deals with the research studies conducted in this area.

### A. Theoretical Studies

Whole language advocates, such as Bixler (1980), Zhang & Jin, 1989, Goodman (1986), Weaver (1990), Edelsky, Altwerger & Flores (1991), Baylard (1993), Davies, 1998, Schwarzer (2001), and Brooks-Harper and Shelton (2003), state that language (oral and written) functions to serve authentic purposes by facilitating meaningful communication. No language process should be separated from the whole teaching task. Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) explain that each time someone reads, writes, speaks, or listens, this language encounter feeds into a common data pool. In subsequent encounters with language, the person can draw on this pool. Peregoy and Boyle (2001) suggest that reading and writing as well as speaking and listening should be integral parts of all language classroom activities because all these processes interact with one another. In addition, they stressed that the whole language approach improves the skill of writing and facilitates meaningful communication and interaction between teachers and learners. Shang (2000) and Oxford (2001), for instance, asserted that the basic tenet of the whole language approach is that language should be taught and learned as a whole. Any attempt to break it into parts (i.e. vocabulary lists, phonics patterns, grammar exercises) destroys the spirit of language. This means that the four language modes- listening, speaking, reading and writing support each other and must not be artificially-separated.

To conclude, the systems of language should not be separated in language learning, neither should listening, speaking, reading and writing. In whole



language classrooms, language skills should support one another and should be integrated for instructional purposes. When this happens, students will get engaged in meaningful listening, speaking and writing skills. This will surely result in steady improvement in students' writing abilities.

### **B. Experimental Studies**


The effect of the whole language approach on students' writing composition has not been studied extensively on the international and local levels, mainly for EFL students. The following research studies differ widely from the current study, due to a variety of factors such as the design of studies, the sample of the study, and the length of time during which students were exposed to the whole language approach. All the research studies have been conducted on different samples such as middle and upper school students, whereas the current study has been conducted on college EFL students. Besides, few experimental studies on the use of the whole language approach have addressed the issue of teaching writing skills in EFL environments. Accordingly, the present study investigated the effect of the whole language approach on students' writing skill, aiming to find out if using the whole language approach would improve the students' quality of writing, when training is provided and when the participants were exposed to the whole language approach over a period of time.

Edelsky (1986) examined the effect of the whole language instruction on the writing development of Spanish-speaking children. The children were first, second, and third graders. Her research indicated that there was a significant positive effect upon the writing development of Spanish-speaking children in a whole language classroom, when compared to the skill-based group. She showed that Spanish-speaking children do not need skill-based programs. Her data revealed no language deficiencies in language minority children. For example,

when considering the language genre "label quest" there were no instances of children substituting "thing" or "cosa" for a noun that was required. She discovered that many features of writing had been acquired by the children through means other than direct instruction. Furthermore, she found, despite phonics instruction, the children still used a variety of techniques for inventing spelling when encountering an unfamiliar word. The results of her study revealed that Whole Language instruction would (1) integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing; (2) teach skills as part of a whole; and (3) allow students to work together cooperatively. Such instruction benefited bilingual students in their language acquisition and writing.

Dornbos (1991) investigated the effect of whole language instruction during kindergarten on students' achievement in reading comprehension, as measured by a standardized norm- referenced test at the end of the second grade. The researcher examined the Stanford Achievement Test reading comprehension scores of second- grade pupils who began their kindergarten experience in either a whole- language or a non-whole language classroom. All students received two years of instruction. Analysis of the data at the end of the second grade indicated that there was no significant difference between the average mean scores of the experimental group (whole-language), and the control (non-whole- language).

Baylard- Eidson (1993) examined the impact of Meramec Valley R-III whole language program on students' achievement in written language. An exploratory and descriptive program evaluation study was undertaken using qualitative research methods to answer questions concerning the effectiveness of Meramec valley R-III whole language program. Results indicated that whole language showed students that reading and writing are interrelated and that the basic skills are dependent on one another to produce communication. Moreover,



students' scores on the holistic writing assessments went up as long as they were in the whole language classrooms.

Wadle (1994) tried to find out if using whole language reading instruction could better the scores received by fourth grade students on Missouri Mastery Achievement Test. The study was conducted using a literature-based reading approach with anecdotal records kept to inform the teacher of mastery of test objectives. Teacher-made tests were also administered at the teacher's discretion. Results showed that whole language did not significantly affected the reading and language arts scores on the MMAT, but did show some practical significance.

Agnew (1995) examined the effectiveness of a program for improving students' writing skills by using whole language. Targeted population was a fifth grade class of 30 students in a stable middle class, suburban community located in Rockford. Writing deficiencies were documented through data gathered from norm- referenced tests, quality and quantity of assignments completed, reviews of students' portfolios, and a student survey. The quantity, quality and variety of writing increased as evidenced by improved test scores on standardized tests and teacher observation of writing samples. The amount of writing that students produced increased as measured by counting the number of completed pieces in students' collection of their written ability.


Engelhart (2000) assessed the effects of a pilot program using the basal reader approach to teach reading compared to the whole language approach. The sample of the study consisted of ninety-five first grade pupils during the 1996/1997 school year. Seventy six pupils were taught reading using the whole language approach and nineteen were taught reading using the basal reader approach. A T-test was performed to determine if there were significant

differences between the pilot-based reader group and the control whole language group. Achievement scores of students who were in the basal reader group and the whole language group did not show any significant differences.

Ya-Chen (2003) investigated the effects on four American-born Chinese children when the researcher, as an instructor, employed whole language instruction with predictable materials in teaching Chinese as a second language. The teaching tenets and strategies were based on the principles of the whole language. Three types of data were collected: (1) classroom observation, (2) interviews with the children and (3) content analysis of children's written work during the study work. Results showed that predictable materials and a whole language approach could be effective in teaching bilingual children to read, write, speak and listen in their second language, Chinese.

Abdelhamid (2006) explored the effectiveness of the whole language based program to develop the composition writing of the first experimental secondary students during the school year 2006/2007. The study was conducted at Salah Salem Experimental Secondary School located in Giza, Egypt. The sample of the study consisted of seventy experimental secondary students, is randomly assigned to an experimental group which studied composition writing via the whole language based program and a control group which studied the same skill in the traditional method. Two types of data were collected (1) Skills Checklist, and (2) Pre-post composition writing test during the study work. The results of the study revealed that the experimental group achieved better results in their composition writing skills due to the use of the suggested program based on the whole language approach than the control group did.

Dwyer and Karen (2007) investigated the effect of integrated teaching of vocabulary and main ideas and supporting details on struggling middle school



students' ability to write summaries of expository texts. The research was conducted in the literacy support classes in fifth and sixth grade in a suburban middle school in the Northeastern United States. The teacher/researcher conducted an intervention in the integration of reading and writing strategies to struggling middle school readers and writers. Data were collected for five writing tasks, three of which were collaborative. The first and last were written independently. The teacher/researcher examined the students' writing samples through both quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition to the pre- and post-study writing by the participants, data from the Gates-MacGinitie vocabulary and comprehension tests were collected before and after the study. Findings indicated that struggling middle school readers and writers benefited from a comprehensive approach to building their literacy skills. Ninety percent of the fifth and 83% of the sixth grade participants improved either their reading or writing achievement or both.


Kupall and Peck (2010) investigated the comparative effects of whole language-based instruction upon the writing development of eight Spanish-speaking kindergarten and eight English-speaking kindergarten children. Writing development was divided into three subsets of assessment: self-concept of students as writers, compositional literacy, and grapho-phonemic literacy. The study provided descriptive information to answer the following questions: (1) Will the use of whole language-based instruction have the same effects upon the writing development of Spanish-speaking kindergarten children as it will for English-speaking kindergarten children? (2) If the writing development of the Spanish group does differ from the writing development of the English group, to what extent does it differ? and (3) In what areas of the writing development are the differences evident? Findings indicated that the writing skills of Spanish-

speaking children in a whole language-based program developed as well as the writing skills of the English-speaking children.

Moghadam and Adel (2011) examined the effect of the whole language approach on developing mainly the two primary skills of reading and writing in varying degrees and combinations. Based on a language proficiency test, out of 150 senior Iranian EFL learners from Azad University of Torbat Heydariye, 90 were chosen and defined as intermediate learners. Two expository reading and writing tests were taken and the results were compared with four reading and four writing scores which were defined as their general reading and writing scores. The results were analyzed using the SPSS software and some correlation and ANOVA analyses were run. The correlation coefficients along with the scatter plot matrix showed strong, weak and in some cases partial correlations among the scales. The results of the post hoc tests of the repeated measures of ANOVA and the pairwise comparison of the measures also showed that the Iranian EFL learners performed almost equally well on the skills of reading and writing, but with expository writing and expository reading texts the performance was quite different. The concept of language proficiency was reconsidered in respect to the integrative approach's principles and some pedagogical implications in the field of language teaching were suggested.

As indicated from the previous literature, the researcher found out that few studies have been conducted on the usage of the whole language approach as a tool to teach writing in EFL classrooms. Nevertheless, there are few experimental studies that focus on the whole language approach as such possibility or technique is quite new to language instructors and researchers. This is especially so in Saudi Arabia as there seems to be no experimental studies at all (to the best knowledge of the researcher) on the usage of the whole language





approach as a tool conducted among EFL students in writing classrooms. Therefore, this study aimed at filling this gap.

### Methodology

#### The Subjects

The sample of the study consisted of 50 students enrolled in two sections. The two sections were randomly selected out of five English writing sections available in the English department at Al-Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012. The two sections were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The experimental group consisted of 25 male students, while the control group consisted of 25 male students.

#### Research design

This study utilized a pretest-posttest control group experimental design. The experimental and control groups took a pre-test during the third week of October 2011 to measure their writing abilities before conducting the experiment. Instructions began from the first week of November 2011 to the end of January 2012. A post-test was administered at the end of January 2012.

#### Instruments of the study

The following instruments were used:

##### I. A writing performance test

A writing test was developed by the researcher to measure the students' writing abilities before and after conducting the experiment (see appendix I). This test required students to write about fifteen lines on the qualities of good parents. To ensure the validity of this test, a jury of three EFL professors was consulted. All members of the jury agreed that the topic was suitable for the first level of EFL students to measure their writing proficiency. To ensure its

reliability, the writing achievement test was administered to a sample of twenty-five EFL students (level 1) out of the sample of the study during the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012 and was repeated ten days later on the same sample to assess its stability over time. Pearson correlation coefficient was found to be 0.87 which indicated that the test scores were stable over time.

## II. A scale for marking EFL students' writing


The researcher adopted El-Koumy's (1991) scale for marking EFL students' writing as well as its instructions (see Appendix II). This scale is divided into five major components: content, organization, word-choice, grammar and mechanics. It was proved to be valid and reliable.

## III. The Instructional Material

Reason to Write: Strategies for Success in Academic Writing by Miller & Cohen (2001) which is taught for the first level of EFL students was used. The researcher overviewed the prescribed book and its supplementary materials. Then, he developed a list of eight open ended writing topics (see Appendix III). These topics were used with both the experimental group and the control group, and each group learned them in a different way. The experimental group was taught these topics by using the whole language process. On the other hand, the control group was taught them by employing the traditional procedures (i.e. guided by the Teacher's book). To ensure the validity of these topics, a jury of three EFL professors was consulted. This jury suggested that two of the topics should be reworded to be understandable for the students. Their suggestions were taken into consideration and the topics were changed accordingly.

## Procedure

To investigate the effect of using the whole language approach on developing first year EFL students' writing skill, the researcher gave an



introductory lesson about the use of the whole language approach for learning the skill of writing to the experimental group. He explained the main characteristics of the whole language approach to the experimental group as follows: (1) It is a learner-centered activity empowering students to direct their own learning by integrating the four language skills for teaching writing skills in a meaningful context. It is based on students' strengths, background knowledge, and experience focusing on content rather than form. (3) It is mainly fostered on social interaction and cooperative learning. (4) It encourages students to discuss, share ideas, and work together to solve problems in a cooperative manner. (5) Group discussion, peer tutoring, and group writing activities are common components of the whole language instruction (Waver,1999). Then, the researcher divided the experimental group into with four students in each group. The researcher provided the groups with a list of topics and asked each group to choose a topic to write on. The students in each group were encouraged to brainstorm and generate ideas for the pro and con sides of the topic. After that, the researcher asked each group to record together the information that they brainstormed on charts. Students of the experimental group practiced writing after listening to what the instructor says about the topic. Then they started speaking, reading, and interacting with each other to what is raised in a discussion about the assigned topic. By listening to what the instructor says , and interacting with each other on the topic, they enhanced their background knowledge and gave them a clear picture about what they were supposed to write. Then, the researcher encourages experimental students to discuss, share ideas, and work together in an organic way to write about that topic. During classroom sessions, they were also allowed to move around the classroom to assist their classmates. Besides, members of the experimental group used the

whole language approach for many applications in writing like doing exercises, checking and correcting errors and getting feedback, editing texts, and making linguistic interaction through group discussion, peer tutoring, and group work.

Members of the control group studied the components of the paragraph in a traditional manner, and received training on how to write different kinds of paragraphs like narrative, and descriptive paragraphs. They were also provided with a checklist to edit peers' writing. They were also asked to analyze paragraphs into their components, and find and correct errors. Moreover, they were trained on how to use capitalization and punctuation marks correctly. Members of the control group also used different strategies in writing such as freewriting, and brainstorming.

#### Findings of the Study

A pretest was used in order to ensure the equivalence of the two groups in their writing proficiency at the beginning of the experiment. The results of the pretest concerning the mean scores of the two groups are shown in Table 1.

GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	25	6.08	1.63	-0.64	48	0.53
Control	25	5.98	1.69			

Table (1) shows that the mean score of the experimental group was 6.08 with a standard deviation of 1.63, and the mean score of the control group was 5.98 with a standard deviation of 1.69. It also shows that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was not statistically

significant at ( $t = 0.64$ ,  $p = 0.53$ ). Therefore, it could be assumed that there was no statistically significant difference with reference to writing ability between the groups.

After conducting the experiment, a posttest was administered to the two groups of the study on the students' writing proficiency. The results of the analysis of the post-test scores are shown in table (2) below.

Table 2 The t-Value of the Difference in the Mean Scores Between the Experimental group and the Control Group on the Post-Test						
GROUP	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	25	8.64	1.16	4.36	48	.000
Control	25	6.96	1.54			
* Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$						


Table (2) shows that the mean score of the experimental group was 8.64 with a standard deviation of 1.16, while the control group's mean score was 6.96 with a standard deviation of 1.54. It shows that the difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group was statistically significant ( $t= 4.36$ ,  $p= 0.00$ ). Table 2 also shows that the treatment had a significant effect on EFL students' writing performance between the experimental group and the control group and in favor of the experimental one. This means that the students in the experimental group, who were instructed according to the whole language procedure, achieved better results than those in the control group who were instructed according to the normal traditional

methods of teaching writing skills. This notion is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about the significance of social interaction and cooperative learning. He supports the dynamic social process of learning where the teacher in social dialogue with students can focus on the integrated skills and abilities of language learning. It also supports the premise that the whole language method is far more important than the normal traditional teaching techniques employed in the teacher's book. Therefore, with using the null hypothesis, the study's hypothesis ought to be rejected and the alternative one should be accepted.

To sum up, it is clear from the findings of the study that the whole language procedure was very effective in improving the students' writing performance. That performance will definitely help them use the English language more properly and effectively, especially in an age where the main goal of learning English is to equip learners for better communication in all walks of life; because of more interdependence among countries, an increase in international travel and the chance to meet people from other countries rises.

#### Discussion of the Findings

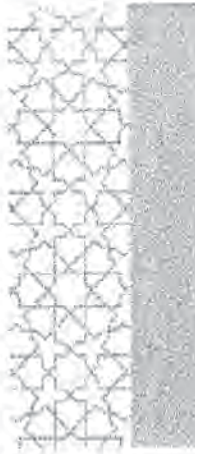
The findings of the study showed that there were statistically significant difference between the achievement of the experimental group and that of the control group on the writing achievement test due to the whole language method. This result is in line with the findings of Edelsky (1986); Baylard-Eidson (1993); Agnew (1995); Ya-Chen (2003); Abdelhamid (2006); Dwyer and Karen (2007); Kupall and Peck (2010) ; and Moghadam and Adel (2011). This finding is also in harmony with the several views raised by different writers such as Hamayan (1989); Baylard-Eidson (1993); Shang (2000), and Oxford (2001). However, this result is incongruent with the findings of some other studies such as Dornbos (1991); Wadle (1994); and Engelhart (2000) and whose results



indicated no significant differences in favor of the students of the experimental group.

The disagreement between the last three studies and the current study might have resulted from their different purposes due to a variety of factors such as the design of studies, their duration of data collection, the length of time during which students were exposed to the whole language approach, as well as improving students' reading skill was the purpose of those studies which means that the reading skill was utilized and activated before commencing writing.

The high scores of the experimental group could be attributed to many reasons. First, the excitement of using the whole language approach combined with intimate and genuine communication might have built students' motivation to write in English as a foreign language, which could in turn make EFL writing a motivating activity. In support of this interpretation, Strickland (1999) has demonstrated that the whole language approach enhances EFL learners' opportunity for language development and increases their motivation for learning. Second, the interaction between the teacher and students might have improved students' critical thinking skills which are necessary for writing because writing is putting thoughts on paper. Moreover, this interaction might have motivated students to broaden their linguistic competence to meet its requirements. In support of this interpretation, Murray (1985) states that when students interact with each other through the whole language instruction, they develop their critical thinking skills, explore their ideas, strengthen and develop greater imaginative powers, and gain self confidence through original writing. Third, Agnew (1995) states that utilizing the whole language approach in teaching writing might contribute a lot to arousing students' interests, activating their background knowledge and providing them with basic ideas and vocabulary



items to compose their essays or compositions. Fourth, Listening to what the instructor says about the topic, talking and interacting to what is raised in a discussion about the same topic, then reading a preview might enhance students' background and might present a clear picture about what students were supposed to write (Waver,1999). Thus, activating the prewriting phase by utilizing the whole language approach has probably improved and enhanced the quality of the students' writing. Agnew (1995: 17) states: "Prewriting is what students do to get ready to write. This stage of writing requires talking, reading, thinking and trying ideas on paper." Harman and Edelsky (1985) indicate that the whole language approach is more able to engender true readers and writers than the traditional approaches. Fifth, Freeman (1988) mentions that the whole language approach might have helped the teacher address specific needs, current knowledge and learning style of each student in the experimental group. Moreover, this whole language instruction might have helped the teacher diagnose the writing difficulties of each student and suggest remedies for overcoming these difficulties. Sixth, the teacher's tolerance of mistakes might have built students' self-confidence and self-esteem, which could in turn encourage them to express their own points of view. In support of this interpretation, Agnew's (1995) observation during his study revealed that the whole language instruction encouraged EFL students to write without fear of making mistakes and to pay more attention to idea development. Finally, the whole language approach might have developed the relationship between the teacher and the students which could in turn make writing an enjoyable activity. In support of this interpretation, Agnew (1995) found that whole language instruction improved the rapport between the instructor and the students.





## Conclusion

The findings of the study showed that the whole language approach has an effect on the process of teaching and learning the skill of writing. EFL learners have a facility that provides a chance for self-learning, which helps them to be more independent on teachers. They are also able to discover and correct their errors because the whole language approach enhances language learning through cooperation. By using the whole language approach, it has become possible to practice the sub-skills of writing in convenient contexts. The researcher believes that the steps implemented while teaching writing according to the whole language approach made it easier for students to write and improve both of their writing quality and quantity. The researcher who got involved in teaching the experimental group for the whole semester according to the whole language approach stressed this point saying that his students worked seriously and reacted positively to the concessive activities lead by the researcher, and they felt happy and proud to have clear progress in their writing ability by the end of the semester. Finally, it can be concluded that EFL learners' performance in writing improves a lot through using the whole language approach compared with the traditional procedures, techniques, activities, and methods used by EFL teachers. Thus, the improved performance of the experimental group is logically justified and accepted.

## Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, the researcher recommends that EFL writing skills should be taught through the whole language approach. The integration of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) promotes growth in students' language abilities in general and writing ability in particular and that EFL instructors should emphasize the content rather than the

form of writing and adapt whole language instruction to meet learners' individual needs and interest in writing. Moreover, higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia should encourage EFL instructors to adapt the whole language approach in their writing classes.

#### Suggestions for Future Research


Depending on the results of this study, future researchers are recommended to:

1. Carry out further research concerning the effect of the whole language approach on other language skills.
2. Conduct further studies concerning the effect of the whole language approach in teaching writing, but with more subjects of different levels of different schools and colleges in different districts in Saudi Arabia.

#### Pedagogical Implications

In light of the study's findings, EFL instructors are recommended to do the following:

1. Accept the new role in which the teacher is no more a complete controller of the class, but rather an organizer who offers help when needed. Teachers should encourage students engage actively in the learning task, not merely to go through the process of completing assignments. As Waver (1990) points out, " the teacher should best facilitate learning by providing learning opportunities in which students choose to engage and invest themselves" (p. 10).
2. Instructors are advised to enable their students to listen, to speak, to read then to write as a logical order for presenting language skills.
3. Instructors are advised to intensively use cooperative learning while teaching the writing skill. They should create learning climates in which students can take risks without fear of failure.




4. Instructors are advised to teach language as a whole and not as fragmented components which runs counter to the holistic spirit.

5. Try to be creative and innovative in the use of various EFL teaching techniques. EFL instructors should try to be up-to-date in their knowledge of EFL teaching techniques and activities in dealing with writing activities.

6. Instructors should believe in the usefulness of the whole language approach in the syllabus, because such an approach builds students' personalities and confidence, which in turn help them to be better writers of the language outside the class. Learners in whole language classrooms develop greater independence in the four skills in general and in the writing skill in particular.

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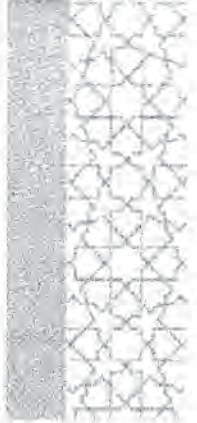
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## Appendix I

Write a composition of about fifteen lines on amusement parks. Have you ever been to an amusement park? Why are they so popular? Why do you think people like amusement parks so much? Do you like them? With whom do you usually go to an amusement park? Have you ever been to an amusement park in another country? How do you feel when you go to an amusement park?

## Appendix II

El-Koumy's Scale for Marking EFL Students' Writing

### 1. Content (3 marks)

- 3 marks for adequate information (From 15 to 13 lines)
- 2 marks for fairly adequate information (From 12 to 9 lines)
- 1 mark for little information (From 8 to 5 lines)
- 1/2 mark for very little information (From 4 to 1 lines)
- Zero for no/irrelevant information

### 2. Organization (1 mark)

- 1 mark for well-arranged and coherent sentences/paragraphs.
- 1/2 mark for well-ordered but not completely coherent sentences/paragraphs
- Zero for disorganized and incoherent sentences/paragraphs

### 3. Grammatical structures (2 marks)

- 2 marks for grammatical accuracy in the entire composition
- 1/4 (one-fourth) mark is deducted for each grammatical mistake
- Zero for many grammatical mistakes (8 or more)

### 4. Word choice (1 mark)

- 1 mark for fully-acceptable choice of lexical items (vocabulary and idioms) in the entire composition.
- 1/8 (one-eighth) mark is deducted for each unacceptable choice of lexical items
- Zero for many mistakes in choosing the appropriate words (8 or more)

### 5. Mechanics (3 marks)

#### (a) Spelling (1 mark)

- 1 mark for a composition free from spelling mistakes (eliminating structural mistakes)





- 1/8 (one-eighth) mark is deducted for each mistake in spelling
- Zero for many mistakes in spelling (8 or more)

(b) Punctuation (1 mark)

- 1 mark for a composition free from mistakes in punctuation
- 1/8 (one-eighth) mark is deducted for each mistake in punctuation
- Zero for many mistakes in punctuation (8 or more)

(c) Capitalization (1 mark)

- 1 mark for a composition free from capitalization mistakes
- 1/8 (one-eighth) mark is deducted for each mistake in capitalization
- Zero for many mistakes in capitalization (8 or more)

Instructions for Using the Scale

1. If the content is irrelevant, no marks should be given to the other components.
2. Repeated errors in lexical items, spelling and capitalization should be ignored.

3. Criteria of marking grammatical structures, word choice and mechanics are based on the length of composition expected from students. If a student produces a shorter composition than the length required (13-15 lines), the criteria of marking these components should be changed as shown in the following table:

Length of composition	Criteria for marking grammatical structures	Criteria for marking word choice, spelling, punctuation and capitalization
From 9 to 12 lines	1/2 mark is deducted for each mistake. Zero is given for four mistakes or more.	1/4 mark is deducted for each mistake. Zero is given for four mistakes or more.
From 5 to 8 lines	1 mark is deducted for each mistake. Zero is given for two mistakes or more.	1/2 mark is deducted for each mistake. Zero is given for two mistakes or more.
From 1 to 4 lines	2 marks are deducted for one mistake. Zero is given for one mistake or more.	1 mark is deducted for one mistake. Zero is given for one mistake or more.

\* \* \*