



# Iranian EFL Learners' Writing Problems: Developing a Context-Sensitive Framework to Practice Writing



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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated Iranian EFL learners' writing difficulties and proposed a context-sensitive framework considering these difficulties for English language students to practice writing. To achieve the objectives of the study, based on the convenience sampling, 14 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Translation from Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon participated in this study. Each of them wrote a five-paragraph essay. Also, they took part in a semi-structured interview to assert their difficulties regarding writing. The researchers evaluated the essays according to [Jacob's five-component rubric \(1981\)](#) to identify the kind of writing problems. Also, the interviews were transcribed and the data were codified based on [Corbin and Strauss \(2014\)](#) systematic steps of open, axial, and selective coding. The findings revealed that Iranian EFL students had problems in mechanics of writing; grammar; organization including developing the components of the essay, coherence and cohesion; content; and vocabulary as the most to the least frequent problems respectively. Moreover, negative feelings such as anxiety and lack of motivation caused some writing problems. Accordingly, the researchers developed a three-phase context-sensitive framework for practicing writing. In this framework the activities of each phase of prewriting, while writing, and post writing are specified according to the identified writing problems of the students to help them overcome their problems.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is greatly considered as an “intricate” task and as the “most sophisticated skill to acquire” (Allen & Corder, 1974, p. 177). Particular psychological, cognitive and linguistic factors make writing a cognitively demanding discourse medium for most people in both native and second or foreign language (Byrne 1988). Writing, even in the first language, is a complex process to be as a means of communication and a tool of learning (Wolff, 2000), and it is one of sophisticated skills for ESL/EFL students to learn (Du, 2020, Jabali, 2018; Gholaminejad et al., 2013). Writing has always been an important skill; to express thoughts, feelings, and needs. If students are not able to express their thoughts in written language, they will be exposed to a great challenge (Marzban & Nouri, 2020). Indeed, both first and second/foreign language learners seek ways to improve their writing skill in order to meet their real-life and educational needs and demands (Sadiku, 2015). They may write for their personal activities such as diary or important notes, and in educational settings they may write reports, summaries, compositions, essays, and theses to meet the intended authorities' demands (Hyland, 2013). Due to neglect of writing skill in the educational settings and its complex nature, most EFL learners with a wide range of proficiency levels often find writing a very difficult task (Tillema, 2012). However, it is crucial for EFL learners to learn writing for the following reasons: First, writing helps learners learn more and even go beyond what they have learned (Raimes, 1991). Second, writing has a particularly effective role in developing learners' academic language proficiency by making them more willing to

examine lexical or syntactic patterns in their own written work (Weissberg, 2000). Third, writing helps learners master different subject matters by increasing their perceptions towards knowledge gaps and applying problem-specific knowledge into other areas (Reeves, 2002). This shows that writing is crucial in language learning; however, for effective writing which is a cognitive, social and intercultural activity, one has to organize and develop the ideas and information with a high degree of accuracy to prevent ambiguity; use complicated grammatical structures to focus and emphasize; and choose appropriate vocabulary and grammatical and sentence structures to create an appropriate style according to the subject matter and the specific readers (Hedge & Kavanagh, 1988). As writing tasks become more sophisticated, students require much wider range of skills to not only write legibly, logically, and in a professionally organized manner but also to invoke more complex rules of grammar and syntax. These requirements make writing the most sophisticated use of language (Manichander, Brindhamani, & Marisamy, 2015). As a result, adding writing skill into the EFL teaching curriculum in schools and universities has been recommended since writing can strengthen whatever students learn through other three skills by applying them in writing tasks to provide a good chance for them to work with language in a context (Raimes, 1991). Also, writing is the commonest assessment measure to evaluate the students' developments and identify their weaknesses and strengths and finally provide constructive feedback to students (Hyland, 2019); thus, their academic success may be put at risk by their weak writing ability (Tan, 2011).

However, different complaints have been frequently heard that most of the university students are not able to express themselves correctly, clearly, and comprehensibly in writing. This may be due to either the complicated nature of the writing skill ([Gautam, 2019](#); [Patience, 2020](#)) or particular cognitive, linguistic, and psychological factors ([Byrnes, 2002](#)). As a result, many researchers have focused on different writing problems learners encounter in various EFL contexts.

In Iran, also, despite at least 50- year history of English language teaching and a remarkable amount of curriculum time allocated to the development of EFL writing, it has been a common most often heard complaint that university students are not capable of expressing themselves in writing clearly, correctly and comprehensibly ([Salmani Nodoushan, 2018](#)). EFL students in our country encounter different problems in writing, and writing teachers are most often faced with students with a lot of writing problems. The reason may be partly related to the little use of English language in every day interactions and ineffective writing teaching methods ([Amirbakzadeh & Vakil Alroaia, 2020](#); [Iranmehr & Davari, 2018](#)). Another probable reason for EFL students' writing difficulties may be the great impact that testing has on what is being taught in educational settings. As a result, most student learn what is taught in writing courses through rote memorization in order to just pass the tests, instead of learning them in order to use them in real life situations and for real purposes ([Akbari, 2015](#)), so it is the responsibility of teachers to find some ways to activate the students' passive knowledge in a meaningful way in terms of the writing skill and help

students become more proficient by eliminating their writing difficulties ([Moqimipour & Shahrokhi, 2015](#)).

## 2. Literature Review

A large number of research studies have been conducted both to specify the causes of writing problems and to help EFL learners overcome these difficulties in their writing. Some studies have tried to investigate different types of learners' writing problems in different types of writing, such as sentences, paragraphs, essays, and abstracts; and classify the problems, so that they can be corrected.

In a study, [Dong \(1998\)](#) conducted a study on nonnative graduate students' to find out their writing difficulties and discovered that vocabulary choice was the main difficulty for almost all of the students to express their ideas and arguments. Besides, grammar, mechanics, sequencing and developing the propositions and appropriate use of different transitions between propositions and the related topic were difficult for students of English as a Second Language (ESL). In Saudi Arabia [Bani Younes and Salamh Albalawi \(2015\)](#) investigated the most prevalent writing problems encountered by 40 sophomore female students majoring in English language and translation at Tabuk University, Saudi Arabia. The results of their study revealed that the participants' writing problems consisted of: (a) grammatical problems like verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, and use of article; (b) punctuation problems; especially omission of comma and (c) spelling problems. In a similar study [Akbari \(2015\)](#) explored 20 EFL students' English writing problems at Nile Valley University. He asked the participants to write a 250 to 300 word composition to describe

their hometown. Based on the results of the study, the students had some problems in morphology and syntax, usage errors, and many problems in mechanics of writing such as punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

[Al Mubarak \(2017\)](#), also, studied the undergraduate students' writing problems at Al Imam Al Mahdi University-Sudan. He reported that the students had many grammatical inaccuracies which hindered their writing process. Punctuation, prepositions, unparalleled structure, weak expressions, inconsistency, and irregular verbs were found to be the most important ones to be taken into consideration.

In a very comprehensive study, [Salmani Nodoushan \(2018\)](#) attempted to classify common writing problems of lower- and upper-intermediate Iranian EFL learners. A rich corpus of 15785 EFL writing samples were collected during 20 years from both lower - and upper-intermediate EFL learners studying at different Iranian universities. It was found that EFL writing problems at the basic-level could be classified into three major categories: structural, discursive, and cognitive. According to [Salmani Nodoushan \(2018\)](#), structural errors are textual errors including errors related to the mechanics of writing and syntax. Discursive or meta-textual errors include those errors which are related to the errors at discourse level of the text. These errors deal with cohesion and coherence of the paragraphs in an essay. Cognitive errors are marked by a problem in the writers' processes of thought and logic. These errors are not linguistic in nature; rather, they are caused by learners' patterns and processes of thought but turn up into linguistic errors in writing.

In another study, [Toba, Noviana Noor, & Sanu \(2019\)](#) investigated Indonesian EFL students' writing problems in writing the essays of comparison and contrast. Three instruments, essay writing test, open-ended questionnaire and interview were used for data collection. Based on the findings the most frequent problems were mechanics, grammar, content, and vocabulary. Also, the students stated that lack of writing motivation, lack of writing practice, inadequate teaching hours in writing classes, writing anxiety, writing dislike, and negative writing perception caused many writing problems. Finally, [Derakhshan and Shirejini \(2020\)](#) investigated perceptions of Iranian EFL learners toward their most common writing problems employing semi-structured interview and questionnaire. Results showed that most of the participants believed in teaching grammar and punctuation in the context and integrated with the four skills. They also insisted on the teachers' appropriate punctuation when writing and their effort to teach its rules to the students explicitly.

Writing problems are context-specific; therefore, the results of studies in other contexts cannot be simply generalized to all contexts. Furthermore, none of the previous studies has proposed a model or framework based on the students' problems for teaching writing. As a result, this study is an attempt to investigate the problems framework for teaching and learning EFL writing. To this end, the following research questions are put forward in this study:

1. What are the Iranian EFL students' problems in writing?
2. Based on the grounded theory what does a framework for teaching writing considering the identified problems look like?

**3. METHOD**

**Participants**

The participants of this study were 14 fourth-semester sophomore undergraduate students majoring in English Language Translation at Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon branch, Tonekabon, Iran. They were selected based on the availability to the researcher, so an intact class was used. The participants had taken "Advanced Writing" course during their third semester and during the study they were being taught "Essay Writing" course. Their age range was between 20 and 35 years, and they were 6 males and 8 females. The participants' native language was Persian.

**Materials and Instruments**

The following materials and instruments were employed for data collection.

**Course book**

The course book was Practical writer with readings ([Bailey and Powel 2008](#)). The researchers also used a series of topics from 501 writing prompts to practice writing in the classroom

**Writing Samples**

The data of this study included 14 five-paragraph essays written after four sessions of teaching the basic rules of essay writing. Each of the essays consisted of approximately 200 to 300 words which were written within a 90-minute time period. The purpose of collecting the samples was to identify the most common difficulties which Iranian EFL students frequently encountered in their writing.

**Semi-structured interviews**

The researcher selected this type of interview due to the fact that based on the literature, it is

the best type for social sciences ([Bryman, 2008](#) & [Dörnyei, 2007](#)). Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher developed the interview guide/ protocol, some general questions regarding the learners' writing difficulties. The use of interview guide is advantageous as it helps the researchers concentrate on a variety of issues and on the specific desired objective of the study at the same time more conveniently ([McCracken, 1998](#)). To develop the interview questions, the researcher reviewed a large number of related publications, and finally decided to include five open-ended questions in the interview guide. Afterwards, the questions were piloted with five interviewees at Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon. One question which seemed vague to the interviewees was reworded. Moreover, one more question was added to the interview guide/ protocol.

**4. Data Collection Procedure**

The data of the present study were collected in three steps:

Step one: 14 fourth- semester undergraduate Iranian students majoring in English Language Translation wrote a five-paragraph essay after being taught the basic rules of essay writing. The students were free to choose one of six topics, each in a different rhetorical mode, selected from 501 writing prompts to practice writing in the classroom, and write a well organized five-paragraph essay in 90- minute period of time which is considered sufficient for writing an essay ([Caudery, 1990](#) & [White, 1994](#)). After finishing their essays, participants were given sufficient time to go through what they had written in order to check and revise their work. Finally, 14 five-paragraph essays were collected.

Step two: The prepared interview guide was piloted with 5 participants before the main study, which led to the rewording of one question and addition of one more question to the interview protocol.

Step three: The same 14 participants whose written essays were collected took part in the interview session one by one on the day after they had written the essay to express the problems and difficulties they encountered while writing an essay in general and the essay on the previous day in particular. Due to the fact that the interviewer and interviewees were familiar, the interviews were held in just one session for each of the participants. Some sub-steps were followed by the first researcher in the interview session:

- a) The interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study.
- b) They were allowed to use either Persian or English language to state their writing problems.
- c) The interviewees were notified that their voices would be recorded for further transcription and analysis, and the researcher asked their permission to turn on the recorder and start the interview.
- d) The researcher tried to listen more than to speak in order to gain rich data.
- e) The researcher tried to give feedback to the interviewees to motivate them to keep on expressing their problems.
- f) The researcher took notes to make some main points more tangible for further analysis.

There was no time limit for the interview sessions so that the participants could have enough time to think about the questions and state their writing problems and what they expect from a writing class. However, each

interview lasted about 15 minutes on the average.

## 5. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data of this study were analyzed in two stages.

Stage one: The students' five- paragraph essays were evaluated according to [Jacob's five-component rubric \(1981\)](#) to identify the type of writing problems; moreover, percentage of each writing component was computed. In order to obtain maximum reliability of analysis, inter-rater reliability technique was followed. Another experienced teacher who was an M.A. graduate of TEFL other than the researchers was asked to identify errors in the essays. She checked all the samples, and the results of data analysis indicated some 96.8 percent of agreement on the type and frequency of analyses. Then, the discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved.

Stage two: The interviews were transcribed. For the purpose of credibility ([Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010](#)) the transcripts of the interviews were given to the interviewees to review their comments and check the written responses in details. Then, the notes written by the researcher during each interview session were added to each related individual transcript. Afterwards, the researchers started coding the data in order to identify the common concepts and themes ([Jacobs ,Ary & Sorenson, 2010](#)). The coding process was done manually in three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first stage, the researchers coded each transcript separately. In each transcript all important words and phrases received a code or label which best identified the gist of that segment. In fact, the data were divided into several small segments with several assigned

codes and labels. The outcome of this coding stage was a number of codes (145) and the frequency of their occurrence.

In the axial coding stage, the researchers looked for the relationship among the open codes and labels in order to combine similar codes and subcategories to group them into smaller number of workable categories (28 categories). At the final stage of coding which is called selective coding, the categories were connected and refined into themes, and finally six themes were extracted.

## 6. RESULTS

<b>Writing Components Traits</b>	<b>Criteria/ problems percentage</b>
<b>Content</b>	subject knowledge, substance, development of the topic, relevance 15.8 %
<b>Organization</b>	coherence, fluency, clarity, logical sequencing 18.4 %
<b>Vocabulary</b>	richness, appropriate register, word form mastery 6.9 %
<b>Language use</b>	accuracy in usage of articles, verb tenses, word order, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, sentence constructions, pronouns 28.5 %
<b>Mechanics</b>	paragraphing, spelling, capitalization, punctuation 30.4 %
<b>Total</b>	100 %

[Table 1](#) shows that among the writing problems, 15.8 percent of problems were related to the content component of writing. Content deals with students' familiarity with the subject and their ability to develop the topic thoroughly by writing relevant sentences. 18.4 percent of the problems were related to the component of organization. Organization considers the students' ability to organize their ideas clearly, coherently, and in a logical sequence with proper cohesive ties. The larger amount of problems in organization component than in content component means that the students may

The results of this study are presented in two parts.

Part one: The written essays were evaluated based on Jacobs, et al. (1981) five component ESL composition profile. Table 1 shows the percentage of participants' problems in each component of writing.

**Table 1.**

### *Percentage of writing problems in written essays*

**Writing Components Traits** **Criteria/ problems percentage**

have some relevant ideas, but they find it more difficult to organize their ideas (Bacha, 2001). 6.9 percent of problems were vocabulary problems. Component of vocabulary refers to the use of rich, meaningful words and appropriate register. Problems of language use consisted of 28.5 percent of the whole problems in the written essays. Finally, 30.4 percent of problems were related to the mechanics of writing. Problems such as wrong punctuation, misspelling, faulty paragraphing, and inappropriate capitalizations were the mechanics problems in the written essays.



Table 1 indicates that the participants performed differently in different components of writing. The participants performed differently from the best to the least as follows:

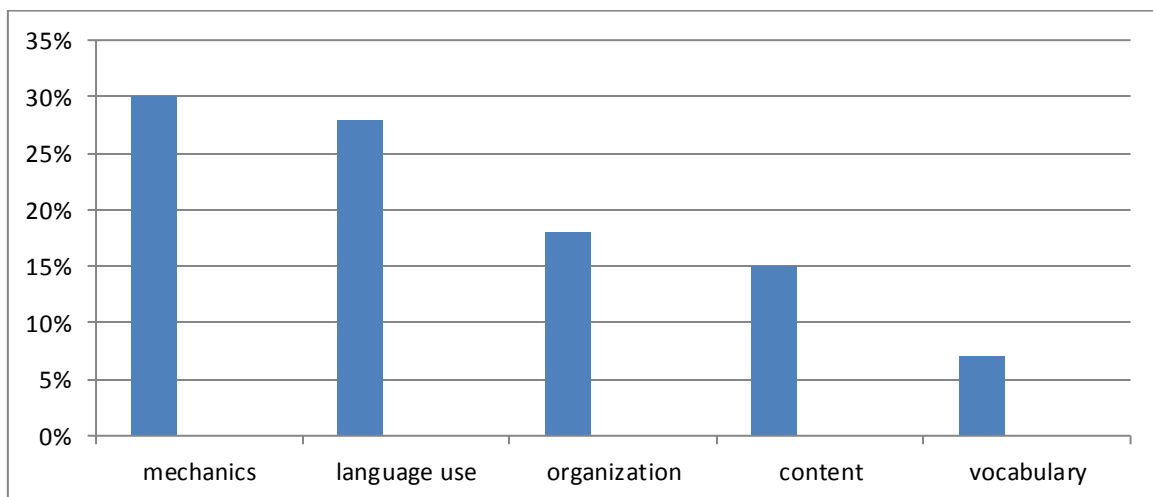
Vocabulary, Content, Organization, Language use, Mechanics

It seems that the participants' problems are the highest in the mechanics and the language use in

comparison with those in content and organization. Moreover, they had the least amount of problems in vocabulary. These findings have been summarized in figure 1, showing the students' writing problems in each writing component based on their percentage.

**Figure 1.**

*Writing problems based on the written essays*



**Part two:** Thematic analysis of the transcripts of face to face interviews indicated that the students had many problems regarding different aspects of writing while writing. Consistent with the results of the written essays, the most frequent stated problem was mechanics of writing. Most of the students remarked that they missed commas, forgot indentation, had spelling mistakes, or did not capitalize the first letters.

In line with the collected data from written essay, problems regarding grammar such as articles, conjunctions, verb tenses, subject verb agreement, omission, and prepositions were the second most widely expressed writing problems.

Another problem of writing reported by the students is the problem of organization of different parts of the essay such as developing the thesis statement, writing the introduction, body and conclusion paragraphs.

Achieving unity or focusing on one main point in each paragraph and arranging the ideas in an organized and coherent order was, also, mentioned as a big problem by the participants.

As stated by some of the participants, topic of the assigned essay is problematic for them. They stated topics were confusing, general, unfamiliar and not interesting for them.

Poor vocabulary, also, was another writing problem stated by the participants. Finally, some students referred to negative feelings they experienced during writing exam. It is well evidenced in the literature that negative feelings such as anxiety, boredom, and lack of motivation hinder learning and affect achievement negatively (Lee & Krashen, 2002). Some students stated they suffered from anxiety and fear of failing the course, while some others stated they didn't have any motivation to write.

All these findings have been summarized in [Table 2](#), showing writing problems based on participants' perspectives.

*Writing problems based on participants' perspectives*

**Table 2.**

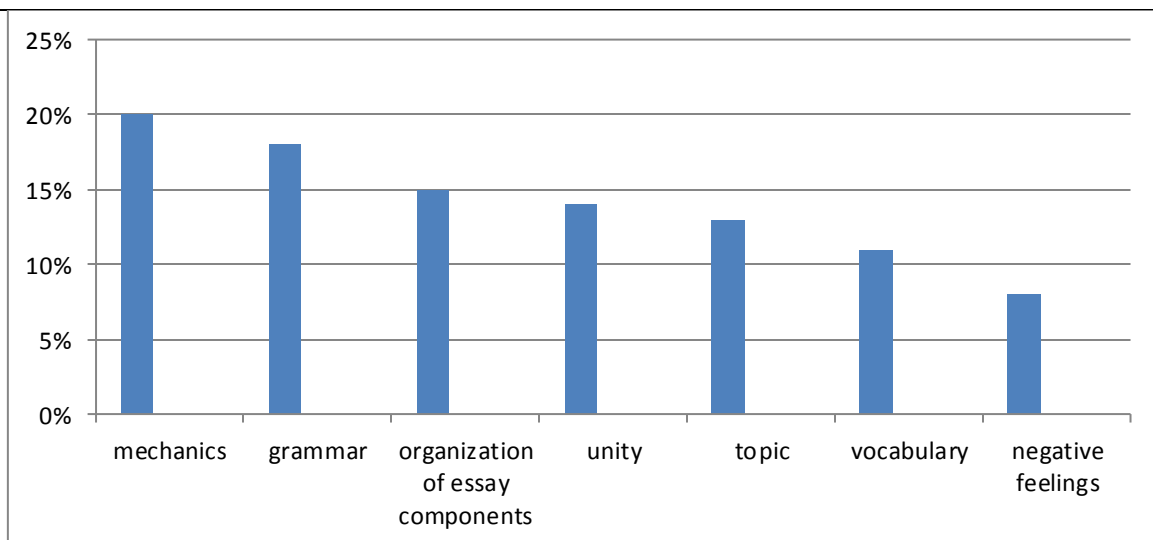
	Theme Samples	%	Categories
Problems of Mechanics	Punctuation	I do not know where I have to put a comma. I overused commas.	20%
	Capitalization	I forget to capitalize letters where it is necessary.	
	Spelling	English spelling is confusing for me.	
Problems of Grammar	Conjunctions	I always write short and simple sentences.	17.5%
	Tenses	Correct use of tenses has always been very difficult for me.	
	Subject-verb agreement	Most often I have subject-verb disagreement in my Sentences.	
	Articles	I have a lot of difficulty regarding the definite article "the".	
	Preposition	I usually overuse the preposition "to"	
	Omission	Because I think in Persian first, then I write in English, I most often omit the subject where it is necessary.	
Essay components	Writing the thesis statement	It was difficult for me to develop the thesis Statement.	15%
	Writing the introduction	As usual, the most difficult part was writing the introduction paragraph.	
	Developing the bodies	I had a serious problem in writing the body Paragraphs and supporting sentences.	
	Writing the conclusion	It is difficult for me to make an appropriate conclusion.	
Problems of unity	Cohesion, coherence & Sequencing	It was very difficult for me to arrange my ideas in an organized and coherent order. I didn't know how to sequence my ideas. I think I have some unrelated sentences in my essay.	14.5%
	Problems of Topic	Unfamiliar topic	I didn't have much information about the topic.
Confusing topic	I got confused due to misunderstanding the topics.		
General topic	I think most topics were very general.		
Uninteresting topic	Topics were not interesting for me, so writing the essay became very difficult.		

Problems of vocabulary	Limited vocabulary	I do not know many words. Poor vocabulary is my serious problem.	12%
	Mastery of words	I get confused with the synonyms, and I do not know which one is appropriate in that context.	
	Technical words	I like to use better and more technical words but I cannot.	
Negative feeling	Anxiety	When I want to write an essay, I become anxious.	7.5%
	Fear of failure	All the time, I had the fear of failure, so I couldn't concentrate.	
	Lack of motivation	It's not important for me to write a good essay.	

Based on the information provided in [Table 2](#), it is evident that the most frequent writing problems stated by the participants were problems of mechanics of writing. Grammatical problems were the second most prevalent problems among the EFL students. Developing the essay components was the next stated problem as hindering problem. Moreover, the students asserted they had a number of problems in achieving unity throughout the essay. The participants, also, stated vocabulary caused some writing problems. Finally, they talked about the negative feelings they experienced while writing an essay. [Figure 2](#) shows the percentage of these writing problems.

**Figure 2.**

*Problems stated by the students*



## 7. DISCUSSION

Analysis of the collected data, the written essays and semi-structured interviews, revealed

that Iranian EFL students had problems in mechanics of writing, grammar, organization including coherence and cohesion, content, and vocabulary from the most to the least. The results of the present study are in line with those of [Toba, et al. \(2019\)](#) in that mechanics of

writing and grammar are the most important writing problems, and vocabulary is the less frequent one. Moreover, the findings of this study confirm [Al Mubarak's \(2017\)](#) study in that students had difficulties in punctuation, spelling, and grammatical structures. The results of this study are, also, consistent with the results of [Bani Younes and Salanh Albalawi's \(2015\)](#) study. According to the results of their study, the students believed that grammatical, punctuation, and spelling problems were the three main sources of writing difficulty for them.

The findings of the present study support the presumptions suggested by [Nyasimi \(2014\)](#) who asserted that in addition to correct sentence structure, one of the greatest challenges for EFL students is to create a coherent text. The interviewees in this study also stated that linking ideas cohesively and coherently is one of the most serious writing problems they most often encounter. The results of the present study, however, contradict the findings of [Dong \(1998\)](#) who conducted a study on nonnative graduate students' writing and found out that vocabulary choice was the main difficulty for almost all of the students to express their ideas and arguments.

Different studies investigated various writing difficulties and suggested different methodologies and approaches to teach writing to EFL learners. However, writing pedagogy researchers and scholars have argued that there cannot be a single helpful writing methodology for all learners with different cognitive and linguistic abilities ([Kumaravadivelu, 2006](#); [Nunan, 1991](#)). Therefore, writing teachers should have plenty of pedagogical tricks which can be adapted to different learning styles of learners ([Xiao-yun Zhi-yang, & Peixing, 2007](#)).

According to [Kumaravadivelu \(2001\)](#), teachers must be able to construct their theory of practice by a focused context-specific approach which is congruent with local linguistic, cultural, and individual needs.

Accordingly, the findings of this study and the related literature prompted the researchers to propose a tentative three-phase context-sensitive framework for practicing the findings of this study. It is context-sensitive due to the fact that the activities in each phase are planned based on the identified problems of the students in that particular class. As [Kumaravadivelu \(2003\)](#) argues any language pedagogy must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu (p. 33). This framework includes three phases of prewriting, while-writing, and post writing with various procedures and activities in each phase based on the specified writing difficulties with the aim of helping students decrease their problems and difficulties.

### **Context-sensitive Framework for Practicing Essay Writing**

**Pre-writing Phase.** According to [Kelly \(2019\)](#), prewriting stage is the "generating ideas" part of essay writing process. Different procedures can be proposed here according to the students' identified problems such as:

- Talking about the topic: Here the students work on the topic. The pre writing stage is also considered as the "talking stage". Researchers believe that talking

plays a great role in literacy. According to [Wilkinson \(1965\)](#) talking about the topic surely improves the writing. Therefore, the students had better talk about the topic they are going to write about. In the present study about 14% of the students declared that they had problems with the topic. They stated that the topic was vague, very broad, or confusing. This activity may be helpful for them.

- Reading existing materials: Searching for existing materials and reading different essays written by other students are other tasks which are included in the prewriting phase of this framework. According to [Krashen \(1984\)](#), [Carson \(1993\)](#), and [Eisterhold \(1990\)](#) writing competence stems from constant reading. Moreover, Krashen's "reading input hypothesis" strongly suggests that comprehensive reading in the target language even for pleasure will definitely affect L2 writing proficiency ([Flahive& Baily, 1993](#)). This activity is very beneficial for those students who stated they did not know what to write or did not have any knowledge about the topic.

- Group brainstorming: Brainstorming and group discussion as strategies of collaborative learning have significant effects on writing competence by providing peer support, developing more ideas, broadening the perspectives on the topic, enriching the content, and speeding up the composing process ([Abdullah, Husin, & Shahkir, 2018](#); [Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017](#)). Brainstorming increases self confidence and stress-free atmosphere in the class ([Abdullah, Husin, & Shahkir, 2018](#); [Jalili & Shahrokhi, 2017](#)). This activity helps the students decide what to write and get rid of their negative feelings.
- Studying a brief pamphlet of those grammatical points which are problematic for the students: Studying a pamphlet of some problematic grammatical points prepared by the teachers is a remedial instruction as [Salmani Nodoushan \(2018\)](#) states that a book such as *Practical English Usage* ([Swan, 1980](#)) juxtaposing faulty usage forms or typical mistakes with their correct standard counterparts provides easy explanations and can help learners internalize correct usage. In the present study a list of

conjunctions and rules of punctuation is very advantageous.

**While writing phase.** In this phase, the whole essay is going to be written under the teacher's guidance and supervision ([Li, 2013](#)). The following stages help those students who have problems in developing the components of the essay such as writing the introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs; creating logical relationship among these components; and achieving the unity.

- **Outlining:** Here the students first outline the essays based on the ideas they came up while brainstorming. Outlining is based on Overload Hypothesis ([Kellogg, 1988](#)) and is a drafting strategy in which students prepare a list of topics and subtopics for what they decide to write about before starting to compose the essay. Overload hypothesis assumes that working memory has limited capacity and is overloaded during the process of composing; therefore, by outlining the free space in working memory increases, and more attention is devoted to turning ideas into text ([Kellogg, 1988](#), [Ongo, 2014](#)).
- **Organizing :** [Starkey \(2004\)](#) asserts that it is very important for the writers to organize their ideas into a format that is easy to follow., the writers have to focus on the unity of the paragraphs, consider suitable

discourse markers within and between the paragraphs, not include irrelevant sentences, and keep the consistency throughout the whole text ([Williams & Bizup, 2015](#)).

- **First draft:** The first draft indicates just the student writers have a clear direction, and the writing is still in progress and not necessarily perfect. In the first draft none of the major parts of the essay should be missed, and the ideas should be communicated in the best way. In the first draft the focus is on the content according to [Williams, \(2003\)](#), the first draft must more or less match the initial outline of the work.
- **Revising:** [Pottle \(2000: 42\)](#) remarks that in the revising stage, students “are concerned with rewriting awkward sentences, developing paragraphs in various ways, and adding needed information or deleting some parts”. Revising is important because here good writing is created and the writer reconsiders what he has written with the intention of refining, improving, and changing ideas and structures in his writing.
- **Editing:** According to [Donohue \(2009\)](#), in the editing stage, students must make their writing as correct as possible in terms of conventions of writing: spelling, grammar,

punctuation, and capitalization. He adds that there is a difference between the revising and editing stages in that during the revising stage “the piece might change dramatically; during editing, the student is polishing the writing and make it ready to share with others” (p. 13). In addition,

**Post writing phase:** In this phase the writers submit their edited version to experience a trial communication and receive the teacher's and other students' feedback (Li, 2013). This phase consists of the following stages:

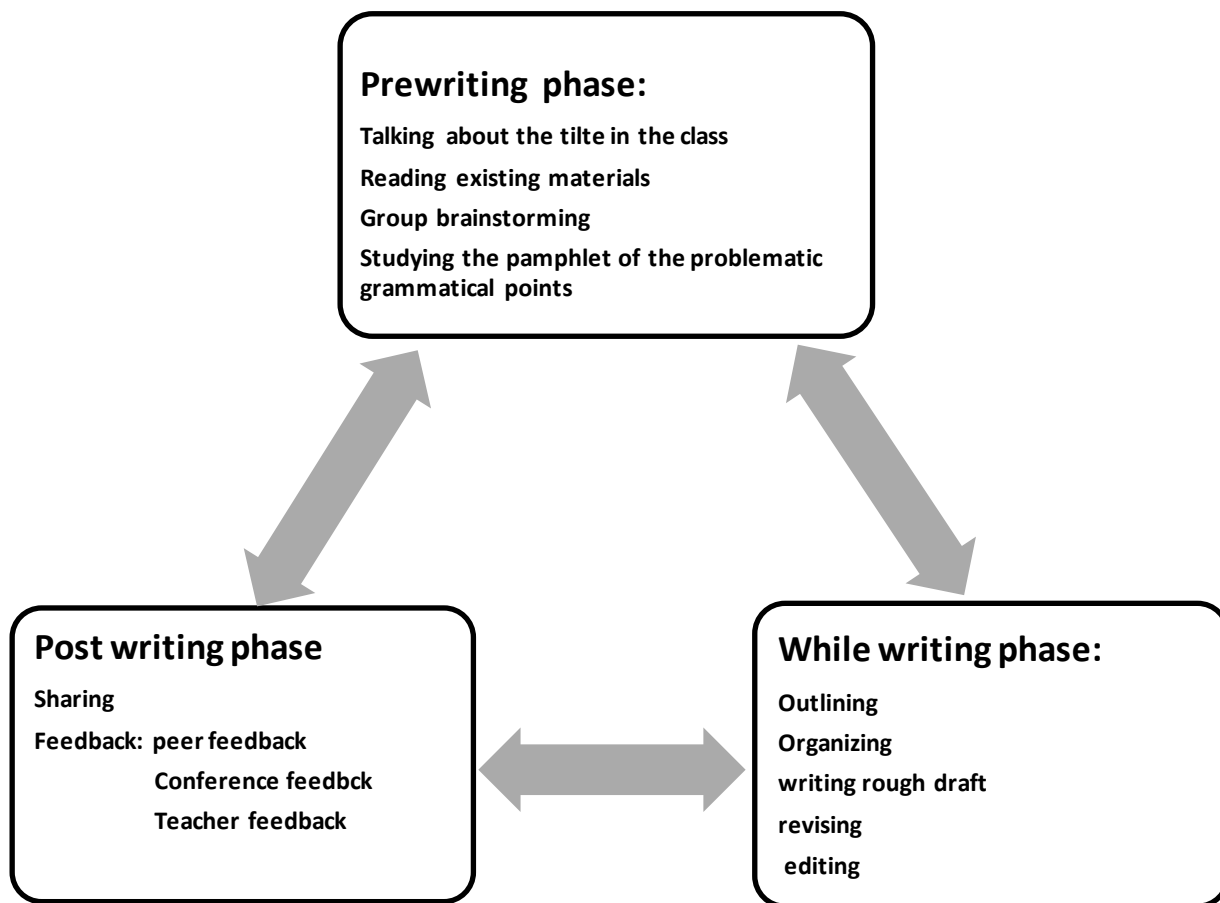
- **Sharing:** The last stage of the writing process is sharing or publishing. At this step, the students present and share what they have written with others. [Weber \(2002, in Tompkins et al. \(2015\)\)](#) sees that the sharing stage is powerful because it motivates learners to write and to improve their writing quality through receiving verbal or written corrective feedbacks from the other students or the teacher.
- **Feedback:** Feedback helps students to recognize the correct parts of their work and the parts which require correction ([Rowe & Wood, 2009](#)). Effective feedback must be provided because feedback stimulates critical thinking and development of

constructive ideas among students. Written or verbal feedback can be considered as a crucial source of comprehensible input ([Bitcher, Basturkmen& East, 2010](#)). [Keh \(1990\)](#) classified feedback into three main types of peer feedback, conference feedback, and teachers' feedback. In Peer feedback other students examine their peers' written work and give feedback. Peer feedback creates positive attitudes, enhances motivation and confidence, and fosters collaboration ([Mangelsdorf, 1992](#) and [Caulk, 1994](#); [Lee, 1997](#); [Hyland, 2019](#)). In conference feedback teachers discuss the problems with their students. By evaluating each other's writing, the students may learn new vocabulary, ideas and criteria of good writing to apply them in their future writing ([Jahin, 2007](#)). Teachers' feedback happens when they should first comment as readers, so it is suggested to respond to the compositions with phrases such as “good point” or “I agree”. Second, still keeping the role of a reader, they have to draw the students' attention to some certain points of confusion or to some strategies to revise their writings. Finally, holding the role of a grammarian, teachers must point out the grammatical mistakes and explain the reasons for the

inappropriateness of those mistakes. All kinds of feedbacks are very beneficial for those students who stated they had problems with the vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and ideas. All problems are

discussed and evaluated in this stage. The framework is summarized and illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.**  
**Three- phase context-sensitive framework**



## 8. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

According to [Nunan \(1991\)](#), writing is a challenging cognitive activity requiring the learners to control a number of different factors. These factors include academic background, personal interest, and linguistic, cognitive, and psychological problems ([Khan, 2011](#)). This challenge becomes more complicated in an EFL context as learners are not frequently exposed to the target language ([Marashi & Dadari, 2012](#)). An effective text of EFL writers has to be

cohesive, clearly structured, logical, properly organized, interesting, rich in vocabulary, and based on the conventions of mechanics ([Jacobs, 1981](#)). Accordingly, different studies have been investigating different sources of writing difficulties, learners' areas of problems in writing, and providing practical solutions to overcome the challenges.

To this aim, the present study attempted to identify 14 Iranian English Translation students' writing difficulties through written essays and semi-structured interviews. The results of the study revealed that mechanics of writing,



grammar, organization of essay components, unity, content, and vocabulary are writing difficulties. Moreover, negative feelings such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and fear of failure hindered the writing process. These problems can be resulted from different factors such as lack of proficiency in grammar and mechanics of writing, inability to use learned grammatical points in stating their ideas, limited vocabulary due to lack of studying, and fear of negative feedback. According to [Mohseni and Stariyan \(2013\)](#), the use of language must be considered more, and students must be given more writing exercises. They, also, believe teachers have to possess enough knowledge and skill to provide their students with appropriate corrective feedback particularly in correcting the students' writing errors. [Satarayan and Reynolds \(2014\)](#) state that if teachers have plenty of strategies in teaching writing, they can help students to overcome their writing problems. Based on these findings, the researchers proposed a three-phase context-sensitive framework for practicing writing. The framework consists of pre-writing, while-writing, and post-writing phases with different activities in each phase based on the students' problems and difficulties.

The results of the present study can yield insights concerning the main causes of writing difficulties from the students' point of view which could be beneficial for students, teachers, and material designers. The proposed framework also has the potential to suggest a practical solution to the difficulties encountered by EFL learners in writing production. In the light of the results of this study, some suggestions may be helpful for EFL teachers. If teachers investigate the difficulties that their students experience, they can fill the three phases of the framework

with most appropriate tasks and activities to resolve the writing problems and provide the students with remedial solutions.

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