

## Investigation into Strategies of Creativity in EFL Writing in Jordan

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the utilization of strategies in EFL writing creativity. It also aims to investigate the barriers that face EFL students in the promotion of their creativity in EFL writing. The present study made use of a qualitative approach to obtain data from the one hundred branches of Discovery Schools (DSs) located in Amman, Jordan for the Academic year 2012/2013. This study lasts for six months, categorized into three phases namely pre-pilot, pilot and the actual/main study, with each phase lasting for two months. Utilizing convenience sampling, the present study chose ten EFL teachers, who teach first secondary students and eight students who did not do well on TTCT. Two instruments were employed to collect data namely, semi-structured interviews and observations. To check the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative data, the researcher utilized two strategies namely; Triangulation and member check. The results showed that participating teachers' responses to the interviews revealed five primary themes with sub-themes. These themes are getting students' started in writing, encouraging students to keep on writing, focusing on instruction, valuing students' writings and encouraging students to be creative. The observations results showed some discrepancies in the actual use of these themes adopted by teachers in the classroom. The results of students during interviews showed that all eight students provided their opinions concerning the constraining factors that they encounter while promoting their EFL writing creativity. Their responses were categorized into five themes namely inadequate vocabulary, lack of unity and coherence, lack of encouragement, lack of positive feedback and lack of motivation.

**Keywords:** Writing Strategies, Creativity in EFL writing, Writing Barriers, Jordanian Secondary School Students.

### INTRODUCTION

English is an international language that is spoken in many countries as a first, second or foreign language (Crystal, 2003). It has established itself in recent decades as the common language of international communication. English language has become the language of knowledge since most of the human innovations in research, science, medicine, literature, and all other fields are written and documented in English (Crystal, 2003). In the context of education, English language skills have an essential role in helping learners develop their thinking and creativity skills using several language processes such as, relating, commenting, connecting, predicting, recalling, comprehending, applying, associating, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating and solving problems (Ibnian, 2011). Among these skills, writing skill is considered a thinking tool for language, creativity development and, extension for learning in all disciplines (Bjork and Raisanen, 1997).

Majority of researchers and educators have come to realize the importance of creativity in English writing as promoted by Tse & Shum, 2000. They stated that creativity is one of the language skills and among the elements of language teaching, writing and creativity are the ones closely interlinked. Furthermore, researchers and educators have concentrated on the development of creativity in education (Cheung, 2005). For example, students' creativity and innovation enhancement is considered as one of the top goals in all societies (Baucus et al., 2008). Specifically, enhancement could affect the thinking and problem solving skills of students while creativity that promotes students' adaptability and thinking abilities is imperative owing to the ever-changing environment and to the students' need of adaptation in various real life situations. In the current times, creativity is an imperative and effective skill required by society to face the constant challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market (Lambropoulos, Kampylis, & Bakharia, 2009).

For this reason, the Jordanian Ministry of Education (JMoE) has been paying attention to creativity in its general sense in education, and creativity in EFL with particular stress on writing skills. Moreover, based on the official Jordanian Ministry of Education Syllabus of English language, the students' needs should be met in a judicious way and these needs include the ability to communicate orally, to read analytically and to write coherently in English (Al-Gomoul, 2011). This evidently emphasizes the importance of writing in English language in Jordanian schools (ibid, 2011). The relevance and value of English writing are clarified both in academic and vocational fields in Jordan (MoE, 2002). However, despite the efforts expended by the JMoE in developing creativity in EFL writing, Ibnain's (2010) study revealed that Jordanian secondary school students still have problems in English creative writing. Moreover, Rababah, Halim, Jdaitawi & Bani Melhem (2012)

carried out a study to identify the level of creativity dimensions (fluency, flexibility, and originality) in EFL writing among secondary school students in Irbid and Amman, Jordan. The study revealed that the majority of the students still lacked all three dimensions with 65% of the total number of students in the moderate level, 19% in the low level and only 16% in the high level of writing creativity. Table 1 shows the results of creativity level of students in EFL writing.

Table 1: *Result of Study for Creativity Level of students in EFL Writing*

Scale	Score	F	%
High level of creativity	above 57	16	16%
Moderate level of creativity	28-56	65	65%
Low level of creativity	below 27	19	19%

In this regard, Al-Jarf (2007) stated that creativity in writing is not difficult to achieve in EFL classroom, as the teachers just need to encourage the students to write and communicate rather than to perfect their grammar and spelling. However, in the context of Jordan, the government represented by the JMoE, has placed fostering students' creativity at the top of their priorities list. JMoE always attempts to align the country with the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries' ongoing Educational developments, which is evident from their launching of educational reform initiatives (JEI, 2010). As mentioned, JEI or Jordan Education Initiative is an initiative in 2003 in an attempt to foster and enhance students' creativity and English language skills (JEI, 2010; JEI, 2009). Ibnian (2010) further added that JMoE has made great efforts to develop EFL writing skills in general, and creativity in writing, in particular. For example, the National Agenda of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2006) has recommended creating a curriculum based on developing thinking skills, creativity and problem solving in order to improve the outcome of the educational process in Jordan.

For the enhancement of the educational processes, the National Agenda of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2006) suggested the development of a curriculum based on developing the students' English language skills including, writing, creativity and problem solving. Even though the Jordanian educationalists have made great efforts to develop various skills (Toubat, 2003), it is difficult to deny that Jordanian EFL students suffer from weaknesses in writing skills (Al-Haq & Al-Sobh, 2010; Ibnian, 2010; Rababah et al, 2012). The researchers attributed these writing skills weaknesses to the strategies and techniques that are adopted and the barriers that students face (Al-Gomoul, 2011; Al- Jarf, 2007; Al-Omari, 2004; Al-Quran, 2002; Al-Sharah, 1988; Alsouqi, 2001; Batayneh, 1986; Rabab'ah, 2003).

Thus, this justifies the present study's investigation of creativity in EFL writing through the utilization of interviews and observations, the present study attempts to explore the most effective suitable strategies and techniques to enhance the students' creativity in EFL writing. Furthermore, this study aims to investigate the barriers that face EFL students in the promotion of their creativity in EFL writing through the utilization of interviews. The present study investigates creativity in EFL writing in Jordan, which calls for the answers to the following research questions:

1. What strategies and techniques are utilized in the classrooms to improve the students' creativity in EFL writing?
2. What are the constraint factors that EFL students face while promoting their creativity in EFL writing?

As for the contributions of the present study, the study may contribute to the lack in literature concerning EFL writing creativity in the context of Jordan. In other words, the present study will heed the call for more studies made by academic researchers in Jordan such as Ibnian (2010) and Rababah et al. (2012) who requested for additional studies addressing creativity in EFL writing among secondary school students. More importantly, the present study is unique from the previous ones as it focuses on teaching strategies and techniques that are utilized in improving creativity in EFL writing, and the barriers that face EFL students in the promotion of their creativity in EFL writing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### CREATIVITY IN EFL WRITING

It is important for schools to facilitate student's development of creativity as learning entails thinking (Beyer, 2001). Many of school going individuals fail to use comprehensive factors to find solutions to problems and most secondary school students and college students fail to use their higher order thinking skills – skills they require for their successful achievement in post-secondary education or in their profession in later life. Finally, enhanced thinking does not just incidentally arise as a result of learning. In this context, Wagner (2008) contended that creativity is crucial for students as it is an imperative and effective skill. Creativity's importance was also stressed by Smith (1994) who stated that "*creativity is among the things that differentiates human*

*beings from animals*" (p.67). Moreover, researchers as well as educators defined creativity in writing. To begin with, Shorofat (2007) defined creativity in writing as the manner through which individuals reflect their feelings, opinions, reactions and notions to the reader in a distinct literary manner.

### HAYES AND FLOWER MODEL OF WRITING CREATIVITY

Flower and Hayes (1980) proposed that the environment where the writing is conducted along with the writer's experience form the context in which writing is conducted in. The writing process entails planning, translating, and reviewing with planning comprising of idea generation, organization and goals setting. Translating comprises of language production that is consistent with the generation of ideas from the memory of the writer. In the whole framework, creativity is considered as the ability of the person to produce ideas during the process of planning. A person characterized as lacking in creativity will merely manage limited ideas which in turn, confine the planning process and lead to incomplete or limited writing process. Hayes and Flower's Model of creativity and writing is presented in the following figure (Figure 1);

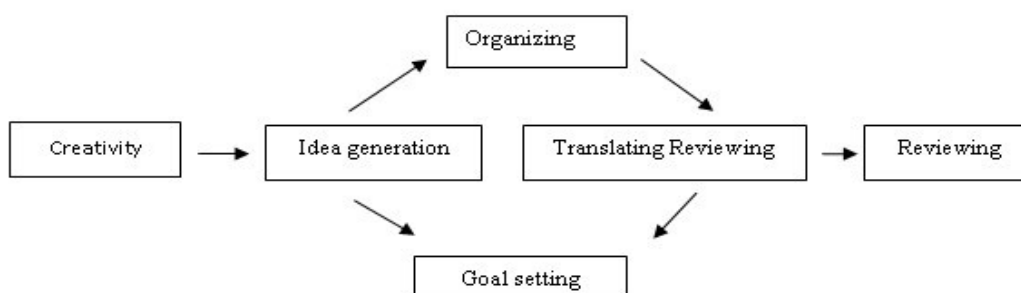


Figure 1: *The Relationship between Creativity and Writing under Hayes and Flower Model*

Furthermore, Flower, Ackerman, Kantz, McCormick and Peck (1990) emphasized the significance of strategic knowledge as this assists in generating appropriate writing goals, in being aware of the writing task goals and in developing strategic knowledge for the transformation of knowledge rather than only retelling obtained knowledge. Effective writers are known to be creative in terms of problem finding and solving activities. Strategic knowledge according to Flower and Hayes, leads the way for writing instruction and helps students to consider their goals and their methods of writing process achievement (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996).

### STUDIES IN JORDAN

In the context of Jordan, Ibnian (2010) also conducted a study in an attempt to examine the impact of using the story-mapping method on developing 10<sup>th</sup> graders short story skills in EFL creative writing. Based on the results, story mapping method positively impacted the development of Jordanian tenth graders' short story writing skills in light of content and organization, writing mechanics, language use and skills from creative abilities (i.e. fluency, flexibility, novelty and elaboration).

Additionally, Shorofat (2007) examined the effect of utilizing brainstorming and synectics in the development of female ninth graders' creative writing skills and their attitudes towards writing. The study sample comprised of 132 students studying in Zarqa Governorate Schools, categorized into one control group and two experimental groups – the former used brainstorming while the latter used synectics. He employed a pre-test on the three groups, and then instructed the students in a period of five weeks after employing posttest to examine the strategies' effectiveness. The results revealed that brainstorming and synectics usage were effective in developing the creative writing skills of the students with regards to content, style organization and writing mechanics.

Moreover, the effectiveness of a program based on the process method and learning style in developing EFL writing skills displayed by Jordanian secondary students were investigated by Banat (2007). The study sample comprised of 90 male first secondary class, of scientific stream studying in the academic year 2006-2007 in Jarash public schools, in Jordan. The students were placed in three intact randomly chosen classes - two classes as experimental groups and one as a control group. The students in the first experimental group were instructed through a program based on process approach to writing and learning style preference while the student in the second experimental group were instructed through a program based on the process method to writing. The control group was instructed through the traditional method of teaching writing (the product approach). The three groups were requested to complete a pre-post-test prior to and following the treatment. The study findings revealed that the three groups achieved significant progress in writing skills on the posttest in comparison to the pretest. The two experimental groups also outperformed the latter group on their posttest in overall writing performance with the first experimental group outperforming the second one on the post test.

This indicates that the program is effective in enhancing EFL secondary stage students in terms of their skills in writing.

Moreover, El-Abed (1991) (cited in Ibnian, 2010) studied the impact of chosen pre-writing activities comprising of class discussion and pair discussion and the impact of no pre-writing activity upon the students' composition (quality and quantity). The sample was made up of sixty first year students studying in Hakama Vocational Training Center, Jordan. The students were chosen randomly and placed in either one of the three groups; class discussion, pair discussion, and no pre-writing activity (control group). The students in every group had to complete a set of four compositions one for every week in the four week duration. The first one is the pretest followed by three treatments of 20 minutes long. Following every treatment, the students had to write a composition. The last composition was the posttest. The compositions evaluation was based on quantity (number of words) and quality (general impression through holistic scoring). The writing time for the composition was set at ten minutes. The study results revealed no significant differences in the quantity of writing between the selected prewriting activities, class discussion and pair discussion and the control group, no significant differences were revealed in writing quality between the selected prewriting activities and the control group and finally, no significant differences were revealed among the selected prewriting activities for writing quantity or quality.

Despite the many studies addressing English language skills, most of them focused on the achievement of learners (for instance, Al-Masri, 2011; and Chen et al., 2004), reading comprehension (Chen, 2006; Lin and Chen, 2007; and Siddiqi, 2007), listening comprehension (Jones, 2003; and Kim, 2003), pronunciation (Mustafa, 2001; and Lee, 2008), grammar (Chen, 2006), and speaking (Liang, 2008). This indicates the lack of studies dedicated to the EFL writing creativity (Ibnian, 2010; Rababah, et al., 2012; and Shorofat, 2007).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study made use of a qualitative approach to obtain data from the one hundred branches of Discovery Schools (DSs) located in Amman, Jordan for the Academic year 2012/2013 in order to determine the answer to the research question. The qualitative approach is useful to help the researcher to explore social or human problems and then build a complex picture, analyze words, report detailed information and conduct the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012; Denscombe, 2010). DSs are characterized by a long history of past development projects and initiatives serving as platforms to attract and carry out research and development in educational studies. Moreover, DSs have e-content for English language which is currently being used in computer labs and in classrooms (JEI, 2010; JEI, 2009). This study lasts for six months, categorized into three phases namely pre-pilot, pilot and the actual/main study, with each phase lasting for two months. In the context of the present study, for the present study, the researcher chose 10% of 103 EFL teachers who teach first secondary students utilizing convenience sampling. Creswell (2012) claimed that convenience sampling makes it easy for the researcher to select participants as they are available and willing.

## **INSTRUMENTS**

This study employed two data collection instruments namely, interviews and observations: the semi-structured interview was employed because according several researchers who claim the advantages of semi-structured interviews and its superiority over other kinds (Bogdan and Biklen 1998; Drake, 1989; Patton (1987; Yin, 1994). Second, the present research made use of the observation as it is a more appropriate means of collecting information in a classroom setting in order to find the answer to the research question. Data collection through observation is attributed to many advantages. One of those advantages is the chance to record information while it is actually happening in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012).

## **TRUSTWORTHINESS AND CREDIBILITY**

To check the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative data, the researcher utilized two strategies namely; Triangulation and member check. First, triangulation is referred to as a strategy that improves the validity of the research or findings which ensures that bias and possible rival explanations are eliminated (Denscombe, 2010; Creswell, 2012). Second, member check is an invaluable method in establishing credibility of findings (Creswell, 2012).

## **RESULTS**

### **TEACHERS' INTERVIEW RESULTS**

In an attempt to examine the strategies and techniques adopted by teachers for instruction and to determine the answer to the first research question which reads, 'What strategies and techniques are utilized in the classrooms to improve the students' creativity in EFL writing?', the researcher conducted series of interviews with ten EFL teachers. Every teacher was requested to respond to five questions revolving around the techniques and strategies they adopt in the classroom. The interview data was then qualitatively analyzed and tape recorded responses

were transcribed word for word and translated from Arabic into English. Every care was taken to guarantee that the translation kept the authentic meanings, terminology, concepts and context. The transcripts were read many times for relevant responses that may answer the questions or that may contribute to an emerging theme. The responses of the interviewees were translated into English with each coded in the following way; teacher X – for instance (TA) refers to ‘Teacher A’. This coding was also used in both interview and observation data. The proceeding paragraphs describe the analysis of the qualitative data with the informants’ names made anonymous through the use of the above coding.

The participating teachers to the interviews revealed five primary themes with sub-themes. These themes are getting students’ started in writing, encouraging students to keep on writing, focusing on instruction, valuing students’ writings and encouraging students. Refer to Table 2 for these themes.

*Table 2. Summary of Themes and sub-themes emerging from interview data*

<b>Themes &amp; Sub-themes</b>	<b>N=10</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>• Getting them started</b>		
Brainstorming	8	80%
Scaffolding	8	80%
Focusing on Content	9	90%
<b>• Keeping them going</b>		
Collaborative learning	10	100%
Integration of ICT	10	100%
<b>• Focusing on instruction</b>		
Feedback	9	90%
Teaching skills in context	7	70%
<b>• Valuing their writings</b>	8	80%
<b>• Encouraging them</b>	9	90%

*N= number of participating teachers*

*% utilizing subthemes in percentage*

The first theme highlighted from the participants’ interviews is getting the students to start writing. Teachers were of the opinion that students initial attempt at writing is among the important steps that every teacher should work on. This topic is further sub-divided into three sub-themes namely brainstorming, scaffolding and Focusing on Content. Eight participating teachers provided their account of using brainstorming and scaffolding strategies in their attempt to promote students’ EFL writing creativity and nine participating teachers expressed their opinion and their use of focusing on content strategy to do the same. The next theme that could be obtained from the teachers’ responses is keeping the students going which means getting students to keep on writing. According to the teachers, this is the next step to help students improve their EFL writing creativity. The responses are sub-divided into two sub-themes namely collaborative learning and ICT integration. The participating teachers stated and explained their use of collaborative learning and ICT integration strategies to promote creativity of students’ writing in the context of EFL.

This theme is followed by the focus on instruction strategy as highlighted from the responses of the teachers. Participants to the interview stressed on focusing on instruction as one of the significant steps that every teacher should employ. The responses of this theme are categorized into two sub-themes namely feedback and teaching in context. Nine teachers confirmed their use of feedback strategy to promote the students’ EFL writing creativity. With regards to the second sub-theme, seven participating teachers expressed that they teach language skills in context to encourage and bring about students’ creativity in EFL writing. The fourth theme concerns valuing students’ writings; in other words, respecting and valuing students’ written works and accomplishments. The participants are convinced that when they value students’ writings, this encourages students to improve in their EFL writing abilities and therefore, this strategy should be used by teachers. Eight teachers believed of the essentiality of this strategy.

The final theme that is highlighted from the interviewees’ responses is the importance of encouraging students to write to become more creative. According to the participants, encouraging students is considered one of the important strategies that should be employed by teachers. Based on the interview data analysis, nine teachers claimed that they are convinced that the use of such a strategy is crucial. The teachers encourage students in various ways; these include writing positive comments, providing verbal comments and rewards. In sum, the interview results showed positive comments from teachers with only few negative comments in relation to not making use of the focused strategies to improve students’ EFL writing creativity.

## **OBSERVATION RESULTS**

The teachers were observed for three months to determine their classroom techniques and strategies. The observation data were then qualitatively analyzed. The researcher jotted down field notes in the class

observations in the form of activity and time log, supported by audio recordings of the teacher's teaching which both covered the teachers' overall classroom practice including their implementation of teaching strategies and methods.

The researcher observed the use of the first theme – Getting them started. Based on the classroom observations of teachers in their classrooms, teachers employed three strategies to assist students in initiating their writing activities and in enhancing their writing abilities like brainstorming scaffolding and focusing on content. First, the observations revealed that seven out of eight teachers who reported to use brainstorming strategy did employ the strategy in their writing classes. Second, the observations revealed that only four teachers used the strategy of scaffolding. In particular, in TFs class, he made use of group activity to introduce descriptive writing to the students. Third, based on the observations, all the teachers employed focusing on content to handle their students' hesitance to write by letting them focusing on content rather than on their errors.

The researcher observed the use of the theme – Keep them going. The next step in improving students' writing abilities is to keep them writing. Once the students started writing, it was observed that teachers employed two strategies to keep them engaged in writing. These two strategies are collaborative learning and ICT integration and they were employed to help students keep writing and to improve their abilities in writing.

Collaborative learning, the first sub-theme, emerged from the responses of the teachers in their attempts to promoting creativity in students' EFL writing. Observations showed that all the teachers combined collaborative teaching activities such as working in groups (WG), working in pairs (WP) and whole-class teaching (WC). The top strategy employed by teachers is working groups while whole class teaching and working in pairs followed after. The second sub-theme, ICT integration, also emerged from the teacher's responses. The researcher observed the EFL teachers integrated various media and technologies in their instructions. Based on the observations, all the teachers made use of a combined element of media and technologies in their writing sessions as a strategy to assist students to hone their writing abilities. These technologies include e-mail, word processors, and e-content of English language.

The researcher observed teachers using the third theme- Focusing on instruction. The observation results analysis showed that teachers used two strategies under this theme namely feedback and teaching skills in context. Based on the observations, eight teachers employed feedback in an effort to increase students' EFL writing creativity. Some of the teachers employed peer feedback. Based on observations, seven teachers employed teaching skills in context – the second sub-theme. These teachers did not concentrate on teaching grammar rules or mechanics but they concentrated on writing context. They are convinced that grammar and mechanics should only be taught when necessary.

The researcher observed the fourth theme – Valuing students' writings. Despite majority of the participating teachers contending and believing that they value their students writing in their interview sessions, the results from the observation showed that only three teachers actually employed this strategy in their teaching technique. Teachers valued their students in various ways; for instance, one of TD's students wrote a perfect essay, the teacher printed student's writing, made it into a gift certificate to present to the student. TG also values his students by printing perfect work and posting it on the bulletin board in the classroom and school.

Finally, the researcher observed the fifth theme – Encouraging students. To extend the understanding of the teachers' strategies in their classes and to confirm them, the verbal interaction of the teachers was recorded through an audio recording instrument. The findings reveal that praises including good, very good, clever, well-done, and beautiful are some of the praises that teachers used. However, only six teachers actually employed encouraging the students through praises in their classroom tasks. Analysis of verbal interactions in the classrooms indicates that some teachers criticize and provide negative criticisms to students.

## **TRIANGULATION**

The interview results showed that five themes emerged with sub-themes. On the other hand, the observations of the teachers' actual practice of the themes revealed unexpected results. The following table presents the discrepancies found between the response in the teachers' interviews and their actual classroom practices.

Table 3. Triangulation of interviews and observations

Themes & sub-themes	interviews results N=10	%	observations results N=10	%
<b>• Getting them started</b>				
Brainstorming	8	80%	7	70%
Scaffolding	8	40%	4	40%
Focusing on content	9	90%	10	100%
<b>• Keeping them going</b>				
Collaborative learning	10	100%	10	100%
Integration of ICT	10	100%	10	100%
<b>• Focusing on instruction</b>				
Feedback	9	90%	8	80%
Teaching skills in context	7	70%	7	70%
<b>• Valuing their writings</b>	8	78%	3	30%
<b>• Encouraging them</b>	9	90%	6	60%

N= number of the participating teachers.

% = percentage of the participation in each theme and subtheme.

The above table lists the discrepancies between the interview results and the observations ones. First, eight teachers interviewed reported the use of brainstorming but only seven were actually observed their use. Second, eight teachers interviewed reported the use of scaffolding but only four teachers actually employed it. Finally, nine teachers interviewed reported to use Focusing on Content strategy and on a positive note, all of them were found through observations to do just that.

The above table shows the teachers description of strategies they employ to keep the students writing and to assist in the enhancement of their writing abilities. The teachers claimed to use two strategies that they employ to engage students in writing and these are collaborative learning and ICT integration. All the teachers were confirmed to use both strategies on the basis of the observation results.

With regards to the third theme, focusing on instruction, the table shows that the observation results matched the claims made by teachers in their interview sessions. The teachers believed and employed this strategy in their actual instruction in class. Specifically, the teachers focused on teaching students the skills in context as opposed to on the grammar, mechanics and punctuation. Teachers also focused on topics related to the student's everyday level and those catered to their level.

As for valuing students' writing, based on the table, the observation results showed a discrepancy between the responses of the teachers in the interviews and their actual employment of the strategy. Three out of eight interviewed teachers employed valuing students writing strategy in their classes. In addition, only six out of nine interviewed teachers used encouraging words to encourage students to keep on writing. Hence, the observation results showed the level to which the teachers integrated the themes to their instruction method. As evidenced, observation results also showed some discrepancies between interviews opinions and actual practice.

## RESULTS OF STUDENTS' INTERVIEWS

The researcher also collected data through interviews with the students to examine the obstacles that the weak students encountered while promoting their EFL writing creativity and to determine the answer to second research question, "What are the constraining factors that EFL students face while promoting their creativity in EFL writing?". According to Rababah et al (2013), The findings of the creativity level of the students revealed that 66% of the total respondents fall in the moderate creativity level, 16% fall into the low level while the remaining 18% fall into the high level of EFL writing creativity. (See Table 4)

Table 4: TTCT results of students' creativity level in EFL writing.

Scale	Score	F	%
High level of Creativity in EFL writing	above 25	9	18%
Moderator level of Creativity		13-24	33
Low level of Creativity	below 12	8	16%

Based on the creativity results, only eight students fall into the low level of creativity and they are the ones who were interviewed to determine the second research question and determine the constraining factors

encountered by the students in their quest to promote their EFL writing creativity. The eight students were interviewed with every student asked to answer four questions revolving around one aspect of the barriers that they encounter while promoting their EFL writing creativity. The interview data was then qualitatively analyzed with recorded responses transcribed word for word and translated from Arabic to English language. The researcher took great care in ensuring that the translation was as close to the original meanings, terminologies, concepts and context. The transcripts were then reviewed many times to obtain relevant data to answer research questions and to detect any emerging themes. The feedback provided by the students was translated into English. The researcher established validity and credibility of the findings with the help of the member check. The research conducted member check by asking informants to recheck the information they provided in the interviews. Each of their quotes was recorded as; Student X, student SA which stands for Student A for their anonymity.

All eight students provided their opinions concerning the constraining factors that they encounter while promoting their EFL writing creativity. Their responses were categorized into five themes namely inadequate vocabulary, lack of unity and coherence, lack of encouragement, lack of positive feedback and lack of motivation.

*Table 5 Constraint barriers faced by students*

<b>Constraint faced by students</b>	<b>N=8</b>	<b>%</b>
• Inadequate vocabulary	5	62.5%
• lack of unity and coherence	3	37.5%
• Lack of encouragement	7	87.5%
• Lack of positive feedback	5	62.5%
• Lack of motivation	6	75%

N= number of participating students

% = percentage for each constraint factors faced by students

The above table shows students' responses; first, among eight of the students who scored low on creativity (TTCT), five stated that they possess low vocabulary. Second, three students stated that they lack unity and coherence. Third, seven students were noted to face lack of encouragement as a barrier to their writing abilities. Four, five students were reported not to receive any positive feedback. Finally, six students face the barrier of lack of motivation.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

From the results of drawn from the interviews with teachers and students and observations, the following conclusion can be drawn in light of the research questions;

**Question Two: "What strategies and techniques are utilized in the classrooms to improve the students' creativity in EFL writing?"**

Data collected to answer the above question shows that teachers have positive feedback about employing the best strategies in facilitating students' creativity in EFL writing, which can be divided into themes; getting them started, keeping them going, focusing on instruction, valuing their writings and encouraging them to be creative, each with its own sub-themes. More importantly, observation results supported the actual practice of the sub-themes. A detailed overview of the results in terms of themes and their sub-themes is discussed below;

### **The First Theme: Getting the Students Started**

The first theme I noted from the responses provided by the teachers during the interviews is getting the students started. The teachers opined that one of the critical steps that every teacher should consider is how to get the students started in writing. Three sub-themes stood out from the theme - brainstorming, scaffolding and focusing on content. The teachers are convinced that using the three sub-themes could encourage the students to begin writing.

First, based on my observations and interviews conducted with the teachers, they believe that using brainstorming could improve students' EFL writing creativity. They opt for using brainstorming particularly in group discussions. In literature, authors (Ibnian, 2011; Rao, 2007; and Shorafat, 2007) established the impact of brainstorming in developing creative writing skills of students. The interviewed teachers explained the role of brainstorming in their classrooms and it seems that brainstorming is a widely used pre-writing activity that helps students to gather their thoughts concerning what they are going to write about. For example, in my observations, I noted TJ helping students to brainstorm topics by asking them questions and driving the process. When some students worried about what to write, TJ encouraged them through questions to get them started. Brainstorming also appeared to be the most widely used pre-writing activity by teachers in an attempt to assist students in organizing their thoughts as I evidenced in my observations.

Second, although educators and researchers recommend it in writing classes (Cho and Jonassen, 2002; Fisher and Frey, 2003), through my interviews and observations I noticed some discrepancies. While eight



teachers interviewed claimed that they use scaffolding in their classroom, I only observed four of them actually practicing the strategy in their instruction. Those who did employ it to support the initial efforts of the students to immerse themselves in new and unfamiliar writing genres.

In particular, TF employed scaffolding to explain descriptive writing. He explained how to make use of reading descriptive sentences to his students. He distributed handouts to the students that contained spatial words and plain sentences and told them to construct descriptive sentences and paragraphs. He took the example of two sentences from the handout to clarify the task to the students. The students were then asked to turn the plain sentences into descriptive ones and to share their answers to their peers. All the sentences were discussed. The students continued to do their work individually on more sentences, which were eventually submitted to the teacher. TF corrected the sentences with comments and suggestions and handed them over to the students. The students were then asked to move a step further and write a descriptive paragraph and submit it to the teacher for comments and feedback. This was followed by a task that involved the writing of a longer piece of descriptive writing.

Third, prior literature also highlighted the importance of teachers employing the strategy of focusing on context as opposed to students' errors (e.g. Atwell, 1998; August, 1979; Graham and Perrin, 2007; Hsu, 2005). Nine of the teachers I interviewed claimed using this strategy to promote students' creativity in EFL writing. Most of them are convinced that encouraging their students to concentrate on writing content to enable the enhancement of their writing quality and abilities. They stated that this strategy is significant to students as this would encourage them to begin writing on the subject. From my observation, all the teachers effectively break down the resistance of their students' writing abilities by concentrating on writing content as opposed to the errors they make or the mechanics of grammar or punctuation. The students were encouraged to note their ideas on paper when content is emphasized.

In sum, the teachers used both sub-themes namely brainstorming and focusing on content in their day to day writing classes. The data I managed to gather from the teachers during the interviews was aligned to their actual practice I observed in the classrooms. Contrastingly, their practice of scaffolding differed from their claims as only a few teachers only used the strategy in class. This practice deviates from past research that advocated the role of scaffolding strategy in improving the writing creativity of students. Keeping with the strategy of focusing on content instead of grammar and errors, teachers manage to encourage students. Moreover, grammar and mechanics should only be taught to students when they need to brush up on them. This necessity can be validated through the analysis of the writing compositions and providing them feedback on what to improve on through short lessons (Graham and Perrin, 2007).

### **Second Theme: Keep them Going**

After succeeding in getting students to start their writing activity, they should be encouraged to keep going. I noted two sub-themes stand out from this primary theme and they are collaborative learning and ICT integration. First, proponents of collaborative learning stated that the active ideas exchanged within small groups heightens and promotes the members' critical thinking. In my interviews with the teachers, they expressed how they employ collaborative learning strategy to promote students' creativity in EFL writing. I also observed that all the teachers who divulged using this strategy did so through a set of collaborating teaching activities in their instruction as observed. This result is consistent with prior literature's take on collaborative learning that has been widely focused on and advocated (Guerrero et al., 2003; Hages, 2008).

Second, the teachers also told me that they integrate ICT in their instruction to students in order to promote their EFL writing creativity.

They opined that ICT is invaluable in these classes as it affects the writing abilities of the students positively and improves their EFL writing creativity, tackles their individual differences, assists in tearing down the barriers that students face in learning, and saves students' time and effort. It also provides students with instantaneous feedback about their performance. It was evident from both the interviews and the observation that teachers integrate several media and technologies in their classroom instruction. I also observed that all the teachers use a combined set of media and technologies to enable their writing ability. They use technologies including e-mail, word processors, e-content of English language, with the most commonly used as the word processor followed by e-mail and e-content.

JMoE's intention to furnish DSs and non-DSs with ICT is evident. More specifically, DSs are equipped with ICT infrastructure, hardware and software, technical support and training in comparison to its non-DSs counterparts (JEI, 2010). In addition to this, JMoE conducted ICT training packages for both teachers and Jordanian citizens in an effort to develop human resource and training. Prior literature has also stated that ICT tools could enhance EFL students' writing creativity (Al-Haq and Al-Sobh, 2010; Al-Jarf, 2004, 2007; Majid et al., 2003; Tsou et al., 2002; Wooley, 2007; and Yang, 2004). ICT tools are employed in developing both L1 and L2 students' writing skills.

### **The Third Theme: Focusing on Instruction**

Results under this theme carry two sub-themes – feedback and teaching skills in context. The teachers stated that using a combined version of the two sub-themes under focusing on instruction assists in teaching writing.

First, teachers use feedback to instruct their students with some using peer feedback while others using e-feedback. Moreover, they are convinced that the strategy has the ability to enhance the EFL writing creativity of the students. In this regard, Kaufman et al. (2005) recommended the employment of peer feedback among writers and the use of collaborative feedback in general in classrooms. Similarly, Jiang (2011) demonstrated feedback as a critical activity that allows writing teachers to help students acquire feedback on their papers and practice their many skills relevant for the development of their writing abilities.

This result is also consistent with studies that emphasized the effect of supportive learning environment and feedback in terms of creative writing (Essex, 1996; Jiang, 2011; Kaufman et al., 2005). However, while the responses of the interviewed teachers were varied, most of them responded positively. They claimed of using e-feedback, peer feedback and immediate feedback. They believe that feedback is an effective and invaluable strategy that also benefits them – as through this, they know the level of the students and they are able to provide them this information at the right time.

Second, during my interview sessions, seven teachers spoke about their take on teaching language skills in context as a strategy to promote students' EFL writing creativity. I also observed their strategies in class and matched it to their claims. I noted that the teachers actually employed the strategy by focusing on the students' skills in writing context about topic related to the students' lives and knowledge level as opposed to focusing on teaching grammar, mechanics and punctuation. This is consistent with the statements provided by researchers – they stated that that it is most effective when instruction is conducted in the context of the writer's compositions (Atwell, 1998; August, 1979; Graham and Perrin, 2007; Hillocks, 1984; and Street, 2005).

### **The Fourth Theme: Valuing their Writings**

According to my findings, the teachers emphasized on respecting and valuing the written work of their students as they believe that such a strategy is a crucial step to be adopted in classrooms. Nevertheless, there was a discrepancy between the teachers' claims from their actual practice that I observed in classrooms. Specifically, I observed that only three out of eight teachers, who claimed to employ such a strategy, actually practiced it. Majority of the teachers refrained from employing such a strategy and stressing it in class which goes against the importance shown by prior studies in literature (Al-Jarf, 2004, 2007; Armstrong, 1989).

### **The Fifth Theme: Encouraging students to be creative**

The fifth theme that was highlighted from the teachers' responses to the interview questions is encouraging students to be creative. The data analysis of interviews showed that nine teachers stressed on using this strategy as they are convinced of its importance. The teachers primarily encourage students in many ways such as writing comments, providing verbal comments and praising. According to the teachers, encouragement is important to the students and once the teachers encourage the students, the latter will definitely show improvement in the next task.

Moreover, Al-Jarf (2007) reported that writing creativity does not require a special talent nor does it need a high level of EFL proficiency. Teachers just need to encourage the students to write and communicate instead of focusing on perfecting their grammar and spelling. Positive feedback is needed as students should perceive autonomy in being able to express themselves in order to feel proud of what they are capable of achieving. Al-Jarf (2007) added that students should be encouraged to interact through a class blog, where each student is given the opportunity to write about a good subject to explore on a daily or weekly basis.

In the context of the present study, the interviewed teachers claimed that they encourage their students to write creatively through praises. Their claims were later matched with their actual practice in the classroom noted through observation. Based on my findings, the teachers use praises such as good, very good, clever, well done and beautiful.

However, only six teachers actually encouraged their students through praises. Two even criticized and provided negative criticisms aloud. The positive aspect of the result is consistent with prior studies' recommendation (e.g. Armstrong, 1989; and Al-Jarf, 2007).

### **Question Three: "What are the constraining factors that EFL students face while promoting their creativity in EFL writing?"**

As previously elaborated, eight students fell into the category of low level of creativity and they were interviewed to determine the constraining factors they encounter while promoting their EFL writing creativity. Five themes were highlighted from their responses; they are inadequate vocabulary, lack of unity and coherence, lack of encouragement, lack of positive feedback and lack of motivation.

First, five out of eight participating students attributed the constraints to their lack of vocabulary. They claimed that this theme prevents them from promoting their EFL writing creativity. Vocabulary skill is considered as one of the main elements of writing skills. Specifically, according to Al-Khasawneh (2010) revealed that students face issues in terms of vocabulary register, grammar and referencing. Most of the students

believe that vocabulary usage is associated with their writing abilities. Similarly, Rababah (2003) stressed that students lack of necessary vocabulary in authentic communicative situations like writing and speaking bar their creativity. Therefore, using a strategy that promotes students' use of vocabulary in situations may positively affect their writing quality.

Second, three of the students interviewed stated that they are incapable of sticking to the essay topic. This issue of lack of cohesion and coherence in writing is a problem faced by both students of EFL and ESL. It has been considered as a challenge to both teachers and researchers alike. This is because majority of teachers concentrate on teaching the uses of connectives like conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs while ignoring other major elements that assists in text cohesiveness and content lexical ties. These elements require using repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, antonym, and superordinate.

In particular, Scarcella (2002) claimsthat L2 learners require the knowledge that conjunctions join clauses to make sentences – cohesive devices can combine sentences into larger information units and conditionals are effective in scientific hypotheses analysis. It is important that learners have a good command of modal verbs that allow them to express levels of certainty, necessity and possibility. It is clear that the students face unity and coherence issues which are significant in writing and their lack of awareness of rules hinders their abilities to write.

Third, encouraging students' to write improves their writing creativity as advocated by both educators and researchers. I found that seven students stressed on lack of encouragement as a hindrance to their writing abilities. Teachers in EFL classrooms should encourage their students to write and communicate instead of perfecting their grammar and spelling. Similarly, Al Jarf (2007) stresseson the importance of encouraging students to interact in a class blog, where every student can write on the blog on a daily or weekly basis. Interviewed students felt frustrated as majority of the teachers always focus on good students while those with lower abilities are ignored.

Fourth, five students reported that lack of positive feedback hinder their promotion of EFL writing creativity. They stress on requiring positive feedback in their writing tasks. This is supported by Al-Jarf (2007) who contendsthat positive feedback is required to be provided to students as they need to feel that they are autonomous in their self-expression and that they are able to achieve something. I found students stressing the significance of positive feedback from their teachers. Hence, it is imperative for teachers to provide feedback to their students in ways that will also encourage them.

The final barrier reported by the interviewed students is the lack of motivation. The students claimed that lack of motivation prevents their promotion of EFL writing creativity. Specifically, six students stated that they need their teachers' encouragement to complete their writing tasks. Majority of the interviewed students reported that their teachers do not encourage them to keep them motivated in completing their writing tasks.

According to previous literature, L2 is faced with social and cognitive challenges that relate to second language acquisition. Learners may continue to make mistakes in their writing for several reasons; negative attitudes towards the target language, lack of progress in L2, an extensive social and psychological distance between them and the target culture, and lack of integrative and instrumental learning motivation (Myles, 2002). Hence, lack of motivation on the part of the students may lead to a level in which learners completely lose interest in learning the target language (Ellis, 1994).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, future studies are encouraged to look into the reasons behind why some teachers opt not to use creative writing strategies in their instruction as this could provide program directors with the initiative to resolve the issue and support teachers in improving their creative writing instruction and to engage their students in helpful activities. Second, research should also be addressed to the teaching of creative writing and its effective strategies and methods. Additional research should be conducted and results should be interpreted and spread in the field for effective professional development. Teachers need information to support their classroom practice while EFL students require effective writing instruction that deviates from the traditional way of teaching. Third, as the significance of emotional support (valuing and encouraging students' works) provided by the teachers to their students appears to be evident in student's successes, further study is recommended to look into the effects of teachers' support and encouragement. This may shed a light on how to enhance classroom dynamics between students and teachers that could add to nurturing creative writers. Finally, only few studies have addressed creativity in EFL writing in DSs. Hence, the present study is just the initial stage but it is hoped that it can raise awareness for English writing instruction in DSs as well as other schools. I believe that creative writing instruction and adoption in the context of Jordan will lead to the enhancement of result on this invaluable issue.

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