

# **Exploring English Writing Problems of English Major Student-teachers at Kuwait University**

**Dr. Wafaa Salem Al-Yaseen**

Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction  
College of Education - Kuwait University  
drwafaasalem@yahoo.co.uk

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### Abstract

The study aimed to explore the writing problems which English major student-teachers from the College of Education at Kuwait University face. Sixty participants in their first and second year of study were involved. Gender, year of study and educational districts were tested for significant differences. Employing a quantitative data collection method, a 3-point Likert-scale questionnaire covering 26 items in three domains (punctuation, spelling, and language usage) was administered. The findings show that English student-teachers still have problems in their writing after studying English for 12 years before joining University. In punctuation, students confuse between a colon and a semicolon. They forget to use commas between words in a list. In spelling, they get confused between the spelling of /p/ and /b/. Students also get confused between words of similar spelling but different in meaning. As for their language use, they need constant guidance during composition writing, and they depend on translating words from Arabic to English to write their sentences. The study recommended introducing advanced writing courses based on students' needs and focus on areas of weakness in students' writing, introducing group/pair writing sessions, encouraging peer correction, encouraging frequent use of dictionaries, and developing reading habits among English language student-teachers.

**Keywords:** English Language Major, Kuwait University, Student-teachers, Writing Problems.

## استكشاف مشكلات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية للطلبة المعلمين تخصص لغة انجليزية في جامعة الكويت

د. وفاء سالم الياسين

قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس  
كلية التربية - جامعة الكويت

### الملخص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى استكشاف مشاكل الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلبة المعلمين تخصص لغة انجليزية في كلية التربية بجامعة الكويت. شارك ستون طالباً وطالبة في سنتيهم الأولى والثانية من الدراسة الجامعية. تم اختبار نوع الجنس وسنوات الدراسة والمناطق التعليمية كمتغيرات قد تكون ذات دلالة احصائية. استخدمت الدراسة استبياناً مكوناً من ٢٦ بنداً على مقياس ليكرت الثلاثي ويشمل ثلاثة مجالات (علامات الترتيم، والاملاء، واستخدام اللغة). أظهرت النتائج أنه على الرغم من دراسة الطلبة باللغة الإنجليزية لاثني عشر عاماً في مراحل التعليم العام قبل الالتحاق بالجامعة، إلا أنهم لا يزالون يعانون من مشاكل في الكتابة في مجالات أداة الدراسة الثلاثة. ففي علامات الترتيم لا يعرف الطلبة الفرق بين الفاصلة المنقوطة والنقطتان. كما أنهم لا يتذكرون استخدام الفاصلة بعد الكلمات في قائمة. وفي الإملاء، يجد الطلبة صعوبة في التفريق بين الباء والباء المشددة، كما إنهم يخلطون بين المفردات ذات الإملاء المتشابه. وفي استخدام اللغة، فإن الطلبة بحاجة مستمرة للمتابعة عند الكتابة، كما أنهم يعتمدون على الترجمة من العربية للإنجليزية عند الكتابة. أوصت الدراسة بتقديم مقررات ذات مستويات متقدمة في مهارة الكتابة بناءً على احتياجات الطلبة، تقديم حلقات نقاشية جماعية أو زوجية لمناقشة مشكلات الكتابة، تشجيع تصحيح الأقران، استخدام القواميس، وتشجيع الطلبة المعلمين تخصص لغة انجليزية على القراءة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلبة المعلمون، تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة الكويت، مشكلات الكتابة.

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### Introduction

Writing is one of the four language skills which requires a good mastery of it to enable language students to communicate their ideas and express their thoughts effectively. However, writing is an intricate and complex task, because it does not exist in a vacuum (Hazel, 2005; Mourtaga, 2004). It has been said that teachers cannot really teach a language, they can only create conditions in which it will develop spontaneously in its own way in the minds of learners. As explained by Deane et. al (2008) the writing process involves both linguistic and writing skills to produce a wide range of texts. Wall (1981) explains that writing has many complex characteristics ranging “from mechanical control to creativity, with good grammar, knowledge of subject matter, awareness of stylistic convention and various mysterious factors in between” (53). Nunan (1989) elaborates:

“Writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation. Beyond the sentence, the writer must be able to structure and integrate information into cohesive and coherent paragraph and text.” (36).

According to Ghabool, Mariadass, and Kashef (2012: 132) “individuals with writing problems may have difficulties in one or more aspects of the writing skill such as proper use of grammar, conventions, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and some of the basic and initiating aspects of writing”. Thus, it becomes a tedious piece of work for both teachers and students in the language classroom. Studies investigated the beliefs of

language students regarding their writing skills revealed that most of them believe that writing is one of the most difficult skills to master (Javid & Umer, 2014; Kurk and Atay, 2007; Abdel Latif, 2007).

Writing is a difficult skill especially for nonnative speakers of English. Abu-Rass (2001) explains that language learners are expected to create written products which will express their mastery of all writing mechanisms in a language other than their mother tongue, which makes it hard on them. Non-native speakers of English face many challenges when they learn the writing skill and how to present their ideas in writing. This is applicable as well to Arab students. They can understand the language, but many of them encounter the difficulty of communicating their ideas effectively. Thus, when confronting major writing problems, those students become prone to writing errors and problems (Adas and Bakir, 2013; Huwari and Noor Hashima, 2011; Rabab'ah, 2005). Some of the reasons for such writing problems as revealed by Salem (2007) are a result of the limited number of vocabulary, idioms, and the limited knowledge of a foreign / second language rhetorical strategy. Putra (2009) asserts that students' vocabulary knowledge is significant in the writing process, however, the need for grammatical knowledge is also unquestionable.

In general, Arab students as learners of the English language face such writing problems as they rarely write English in a creative way. Adas and Bakir (2013: 254) affirm that "students do not write very often and most of what they write is classroom-bound. The most important factor in writing exercises is that students need to be personally involved to make the learning experience of great value". It is not surprising that Arab learners of English have problems in organizing their ideas. Thus, Kellogg and Raulerson (2007) suggest that deliberate practice of writing should be an essential principle that guides the instruction and trains the students. Al-Khasawneh (2010) advises students to be surrounded in a language learning environment to enhance their learning of language vocabulary, expression, and structure. Ansari (2012) declares that more than 50% of Arab learners do not know how to write in English.

Research investigated the writing problems of English language learners has referred to certain causes to be responsible for such problems.

Ezza (2010) believes that students shoulder the responsibility because they practice writing in a mechanical way. This means learners copy and memorize what their teachers provide them with of pieces of writing and writing compositions. Al-Otham (2013: 4) explains that such “poor writing skills that were developed among the students in their formative years will be the starting point for all the difficulties which students will encounter in their academic writing in higher institutions”. According to Al-Khasawneh (2010) and Al-Khasawneh and Huwari (2013) the main causes of students’ writing problems are due to the following: teachers’ poor preparation and lack of interest in teaching writing, the applied teaching methods, students’ use of Arabic during the writing classes, and students’ grammatical and knowledge weakness. In addition, as noted by Randall (1988) teachers’ poor teaching of the English phonology and the lack of proper productions of its sounds lead to poor spelling. Although teachers shoulder the responsibility of their students’ writing problems, they should not be blamed as it is difficult for them to provide the necessary assistance to a heterogeneous class full of different writing abilities. Rabab’ah (2005) adds that the limited vocabulary and the lack of adequate choice of words are other causes of poor writing.

Another crucial cause of writing difficulties among learners of English is first language (L1) interference. Koda (2011: 467) defines L1 transfer as “an automatic activation of well-established mapping skills in the first language triggered by second language (L2) input”. According to Friedlander (1990) first language transfer inhibits second language acquisition due to the transfer of structure and vocabulary from L1 to L2. Bhela (1999) finds out interference of L1 on L2. In addition, foreign and second language learners of English produced L2 responses due to the interchange of L1 structures with L2 structures. Likewise, Kosterina (2007) shows that the structures of learners’ L1 affects their L2 writing quality.

It has been reported that English language learners, in general, and Arab learners, in particular, encounter problems in all the language skills, however; the writing skill is the most problematic among the four language skills. Several studies revealed that Arab learners face maximum problems

in their writing (Al-Khuweileh, & Al-Shoumali, 2000; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Al-Samdani, 2010; Grami, 2010; Ezza, 2010). Based on the focus of the present study, the following are the main types of writing problems: punctuation, spelling, and language use (grammar). As for punctuation problems, Byrne (1988: 16) explains that this is due to the fact that “punctuation has never been standard to the extent as spelling, and this makes it problematic”. Similarly, Carroll and Wilson (1995: 191) state “students' writing encounter punctuation problems as there are no universal rules of punctuation”. This is a result of the first language (L1) interference (Betham 2011). Almarwany (2008: 10) conducted a study on high school students which revealed that “the students committed various mistakes in grammar, organization, and, most importantly, in capitalization and punctuation”. Almarwany (2008) concluded that students’ first language, which is Arabic, was the main cause for such writing problems. Similarly, Elkilic, Han, and Aydin (2009) indicated that errors in punctuation were the most frequent among other writing problems of Turkish students. Such errors in punctuation were a result of inadequate mastery of second language (L2) rules as well as Turkish language interference. Due to inferior language proficiency, students apply L1 rules without realizing that L1 and L2 have different systems of punctuation. Moreover, Elkilic, Han, and Aydin (2009: 279) confirm that “the writing skill courses do not always cover punctuation and capitalization topics in detail even they raise students’ awareness in linguistic skills as grammar and other organizational problems in composition”.

Punctuation marks give meaning to words as pauses and change in tone of speech do. Punctuation marks may change the meaning of words if they are incorrectly used, and they may reveal mystery when they are correctly used. No wonder that punctuation is considered more important than spelling when it comes to writing. Therefore, Al Fadda (2012) affirms that students should be familiar with punctuation marks beyond commas and full stops including semicolon, colon, dash, hyphen, and capitalization, and know how to apply them, as they are essential for successful academic writing.

Spelling is another encountered writing problem which students face. According to Al-Faki (2015) students have problems with word spelling due to the influence of other languages, variant pronunciations, and other historical reasons. The English language spelling system is inconsistent and complex which makes it hard on many students to master it. Al-Jarf (2010) asserts that English language courses neglected the importance of spelling in the Arab world. Fender (2008) shows that Arab learners have a lower level in spelling and they have difficulties in spelling patterns, word spelling, and multi-syllabic words. Bahloul (2007) relates such a major problem with spelling to the irregularity of the English writing system which affects learners' abilities to develop their spelling proficiency. Moats (2005: 1) shows the importance of spelling for writing and says that "some writers restrict their writing to the only words that they know". The lack of one-to-one correspondence between the written word and its pronunciation explains such irregularity (Henderson, 1981).

Finally, comes language use which is another encountered problem. Language use refers to learners' proper use of grammatical rules, correct forms of verbs, subject-verb agreement, proper sentence structure, suitable words, complete sentences and avoid exact translation from the mother tongue to the target language (Tyner, 1987; Kharma, 1987; Zamel, 1985). Therefore, students could not express themselves clearly, unless they have a clear idea of what they will write about, and follow the rules of writing. Muslim (2014: 107) affirms that grammar and spelling are essential for communicating correct and clear meaning. "A misused grammar or spelling may often cause problems and terrible losses". Hedge (1988) summarizes learners' problems with language use as being unable fulfil the following in their writings:

getting the grammar right, having a range of vocabulary, punctuating meaningfully, using the conventions of layout correctly, spelling accuracy, using a range of sentence structures, linking ideas and information across sentences to develop a topic, and developing and organizing the content clearly and convincingly (8).

Al-Faki (2015) conducted a study on 20 English language learners from the College of Education, Nile Valley University, North Sudan



to investigate their writing problems. They were instructed to write a composition of about 250 -300 words on composition titled: “A description of my own home town/village”. The students’ compositions were reviewed twice by 10 English language instructors. The aim was to identify the errors and mistakes made by the students. The findings reveal that those university students have various language writing problems at the levels of morphology and syntax, usage errors, and mechanical mistakes, that is, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

Hammad (2014) examined the writing problems of 60 EFL Palestinian university students. Students had to respond to a questionnaire and write essays. The study revealed several problems with students’ writings. These problems included lack of grammatical knowledge, lack of vocabulary knowledge, word-for word translation, lack of academic style, lack of content, and lack of proofreading.

Al-Khairy (2013) explored the demotivating factors of 75 undergraduate English students towards learning English at Al-Taif University in Saudi Arabia. He concluded that the students’ major problems comprise grammatical errors, the inappropriate choice of vocabulary, irregular verbs, and incorrect punctuation and spelling. Al-Khairy asserts that most of these errors were encountered because of the mother tongue influence.

Nazim and Ahmed (2012) examined the opinions of 15 English teachers regarding students’ writing problems at Najran University KSA. They found that the students always struggle with their writing and face problems especially in conventions, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and some of the basics of language use (grammar).

Ahmed (2010) investigated the writing problems of 50 Egyptian students at Hilwan Faculty of Education. He concluded that students face a considerable challenge with regards to topic prior knowledge, coherence, cohesion, style, range of vocabulary, punctuation. and grammatical structures (such as tenses, articles, singular and plural, verbs, and prepositions).

It is clear from the cited studies and literature that students who are non-native speakers of English face problems with their writings in English with reference to punctuation, spelling, and language use. L1 as well

plays a role as a cause of these problems which has a growing influence due to the poor teaching of English phonology from the English language teachers who are non-native speakers of English. This makes it significant to shed light on Kuwaiti student-teachers' writing problems as a mean of exploring them and draw English teachers' attention to them.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although the evidence of writing problems faced by English language learners is indicated above, and considered crucial in the learning process of English, most of the information is derived and learned from western research studies and other Arabic contexts (Mourtaga, 2004; Hazel, 2005; Kellogg and Raulerson, 2007; Ansari, 2012; Zakaria and Mugaddam, 2013). Most empirical studies indicate that writing continues to pose a challenge for EFL/ESL learners (Ortega, 2009; Nanwani, 2009; Kim, 2005). According to Ghabool, Mariadass, and Kashef (2012: 132) "writing has always been a difficult task for individuals especially for English language teaching practitioners". As described by Al-Samadani (2010: 53) "the difficulty of teaching/learning of this skill is due to the fact that it involves a comprehensive knowledge of grammar, suitable vocabulary, writing mechanics (e.g., punctuation & capitalization), organizational skills, style, imagination etc."

However, little is known about English major student-teachers' writing problems in Kuwait University. After studying English for 12 years starting from grade 1 at the age of 6 up to grade 12, it is important to find out the writing problems which student-teachers encounter when writing in English as they will become future language teachers. Thus, examining their English writing problems is of critical importance, and therefore; is the primary aim of this study.

### **The Objectives of the Study:**

The present study aims at exploring the writing problems of English major student-teachers from the College of Education at Kuwait University. A special focus will be on their ability to use proper punctuation marks, correct spelling, and correct language use. In addition, the study attempts to

suggest proper recommendations for this issue hoping to improve students' writing as they will be the future language teachers of new generations.

### **Questions of the Study:**

To fulfil the purpose of the present study, the following questions are posed:

- 1) What are the writing problems which English major student-teachers encounter in relation to punctuation, spelling, and language use?
- 2) Are there significant differences among English major student-teachers' writing problems with reference to their demographic variables: gender, year of study, and educational districts?

### **Significance of the Study**

The writing skill is an important means of communicating ideas, and this makes English language student-teachers under a great demand of writing proficiency to fulfill different writing tasks including homework assignments and class work activities. This study will be useful to find out the writing problems in punctuation, spelling, and language use which student-teachers encounter. This will help in assessing them to overcome these problems through offering remedies for their writing problems in future courses. The study also draws the attention of English language teachers in Kuwait public schools to such problems in their students' writing to overcome them in the advanced stages of their study in higher education institutions.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

**The present study was limited to the following:**

It is limited to the English language major student-teachers at the College of Education in Kuwait University in the academic year 2016/2017. The study is restricted to exploring the problems which English language major student-teachers encounter with one language skill which is writing and in particular in punctuation, spelling, and language use. The study results will be restricted to the writing skill and applicable only to English language major student-teachers.

### Definitions of the Study:

- As the present study discusses the causes of writing problems, it is necessary to define writing and writing mechanics.
- Writing: According Weigle (2002: 159) writing is "a mirror to the thoughts of the person who is writing. It also helps in the contribution of new ideas that help in establishing information".
- Writing mechanics: Danielson (2000: 8) defines them as "standard writing conventions such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure skills".

### Methodology

#### Participants

The participants in this study are 60 English major student-teachers who have been studying at the College of Education at Kuwait University for two years. It is crucial to state that the teaching profession does not attract Kuwaiti male students to join it. Thus, the number of Kuwaiti male students who join the College of Education is very low, especially for the English major. Therefore, for this study, the female participants are 50 and represent (83.3%) of the sample, while male participants are 10 and represent (16.7%). As for the year of study, students who are in their first year represent (53.3%) of the participants, while students in their second year of study represent (46.7%). The participants represent the six educational districts in the State of Kuwait. Students from Al Asima district represent (20.0%). From Hawalli district, students represent (15.6%). As for Farwaniya district, the students represent (16.0%). Al-Ahmadi district has the lowest percentage which is (14.2%). Mubarak Al-Kabeer district represents (16.4%) of the students. Finally comes Al-Jahra district with (17.8 %) of the students.

### Instrument

Many related literature and research studies have been consulted to construct the study questionnaire (Javid & Umer, 2014; Ghabool, Mariadass & Kashef, 2012) to elicit the responses of male and female English major student-teachers at Kuwait University. The questionnaire

is divided into three sections: punctuation, spelling, and language use. In total they cover 26 items. The questionnaire represents a 3-point Likert scale (always, sometimes, and never).

### Questionnaire Validity & Reliability

#### Validity

Five faculty members of the College of Education reviewed the questionnaire. Feedback was considered to clarify the final wordings of the questionnaire items. Also, a pilot study with 35 student-teachers resulted in the final refinement of the questionnaire items.

#### Reliability

Coefficient Alpha Cronbach was calculated to obtain a measure of consistency and reliability of the instrument for all items in its three domains. The reliability of coefficient alpha equals " 0.763" which is high and acceptable. The reliability values of the questionnaire domains are presented in (Table 1).

**Table (1)**  
**Represents the Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire**

Variables Name	Variables Labels	Means	S.D.	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
TOT_1	Punctuation	1.91	0.397	0.699	9
TOT_2	Spelling	1.99	0.399	0.687	7
TOT_3	Language Use	2.01	0.221	0.612	10
TOT_ALL	All items Calculated	1.92	0.209	0.763	26

### Data Analysis

Version 21 of the SPSS program is used. Both t-test and One Way ANOVA are applied when appropriate to analyze data in relation to the research questions. The descriptive analysis, namely frequencies, percentages are calculated for the purposes of data analysis. Tables are used to present and discuss the data. The findings according to the means of the domains will be interpreted according to the following scale:

1) Less than 2.50 indicates low level of frequency.

- 2) Equal to 2.50 and less than 3.50 indicates moderate level of frequency.  
 3) More than 3.50 indicates high level of frequency.

### Results Pertaining to Question Number One

Question 1. “What are the writing problems which English major student-teachers encounter in relation to punctuation, spelling, and language use?”

To answer this question the three questionnaire domains “punctuation, spelling, and language use” were investigated as believed to be the main writing difficulties which English major student-teachers encounter. The results revealed by this study are presented as follows in Tables (2-4).

**Table (2)**  
**Student-teachers’ Feedback on their Use of Punctuation**

<b>First Domain: Punctuation</b>	<b>Always %</b>	<b>Sometimes %</b>	<b>Never %</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. D.</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1) I use a full stop at the end of each sentence.	44.0	52.0	4.0	1.83	0.424	5
2) I know when to use a question mark.	48.0	50.7	1.3	1.72	0.497	8
3) I know when to use an exclamation mark.	12.9	63.1	24.0	1.81	0.521	6
4) I confuse between the use of a full stop and a comma.	6.7	76.0	17.3	1.93	0.480	3
5) I know when to use a comma properly.	19.1	53.8	27.1	1.92	0.561	4
6) I confuse between a colon and a semicolon.	41.3	51.6	7.1	2.18	0.573	1
7) I forget to use commas between words in a list.	30.2	61.3	8.4	1.96	0.387	2
8) I forget to use apostrophes in singular possessives.	15.6	67.6	16.9	1.80	0.518	7
9) I rarely use quotation marks in dialogues.	15.6	53.3	31.1	1.66	0.554	9

Table (2) represents student-teachers’ responses to the first domain items (punctuation) which they encounter problems with. Looking at the total mean of this domain as presented in Table (1), it shows a low mean level as the it scored (1.91) and the standard deviation was (0.397). Students’ responses indicate problems in their applications of punctuation

rules. First comes item (6) with a mean of (2.18) and a standard deviation of (0.573). Among the participants (51.6%) of the students agree that they “confuse between a colon and a semicolon” as sometimes. Second comes item (7) that “I forget to use commas between words in a list” with a mean of (1.80) and a standard deviation of (0.518). It shows that (61.3%) of the students admit that they only sometimes achieve that. Third comes item (4) with a mean of (1.93) and a standard deviation of (0.480). As (76.0%) of the student-teachers state that they “confuse between the use of a full stop and a comma” as sometimes only. Fourth comes item (5) with a mean of (1.92) and a standard deviation of (0.561), as (53.8 %) of the students confirm that they “know when to use a comma properly” as sometimes only. Fifth comes item (1) with a mean of (1.83) and a standard deviation of (0.424), as student-teachers “use a full stop at the end of each sentence” with (52.0%) of agreement that this is achieved sometimes and not always. Sixth comes item (3) with a mean of (1.81) and a standard deviation of (0.521). Among the participants (63.1%) of the students believe that they “know when to use an exclamation mark” as sometimes only. Seventh comes item (8) with a mean of (1.80) and a standard deviation of (0.518), as (67.6%) of students sometimes “forget to use apostrophes in singular possessives”. Eighth is item (2) with a mean of (1.72) and a standard deviation of (0.497), as a total percentage of (50.9%) of students confirm that this is sometimes achieved as they “know when to use a question mark”. Finally comes item (9) in the ninth position with a mean of (1.66) and a standard deviation of (0.554), as (53.3%) of the student- teachers confirm that they “rarely use quotation marks in dialogues”.

Based on student-teachers’ responses, they encounter problems when using punctuation marks. This indicates that students apply punctuation marks in a mechanical way which does not allow them to fully understand the rules of their use. Sometimes students forget to put a full stop at the ends of a sentence, or to put a comma when listing items. This in return will influence their writings, the meaning they want to convey, and the proper division in the parts of a sentence.

**Table (3)**  
**Student-teachers' Feedback on their Spelling**

<b>Second Domain: Students' Spelling</b>	<b>Always %</b>	<b>Sometimes %</b>	<b>Never %</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. D.</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1) I spell one syllable words correctly.	30.2	63.3	6.4	1.60	0.568	6
2) I get confused between words of similar spelling.	25.3	69.3	5.3	1.53	0.526	7
3) I get confused between words of similar spelling but with a different meaning.	38.2	57.8	4.0	2.11	0.598	2
4) I get confused between the spelling of /p/ and /b/.	52.9	44.0	3.1	2.12	0.479	1
5) I misspell difficult words in my writings.	69.3	24.9	5.8	2.08	0.677	3
6) I write words according to their pronunciation.	61.3	30.2	8.4	1.66	0.607	5
7) I confuse between words starting with /p/ and /b/.	51.6	41.3	7.1	1.82	0.894	4

Table (3) represents student-teachers' responses to the second domain's items which they encounter some problems with words' spelling. Looking at the total means of this domain as presented in Table (1), it shows a low mean level as the it scored (1.99) and the standard deviation was (0.399). Student-teachers' responses indicate problems in their writing with reference to spelling in which the correct spelling occurs only sometimes and not always.

First comes item (4) " I get confused between the spelling of /p/ and /b/", as the most encountered problem, with a mean of (2,12) and a standard deviation of (0.479). Among the participants, (52.9%) confirm that they always encounter such a problem. Second comes item (3) " I get confused between words of similar spelling but with a different meaning", with a mean of (2.11) and a standard deviation of (0. 598) as (57.8%) of the participants mention making such a mistake sometimes. Third comes item (5) " I misspell difficult words in my writings", with a mean of (2.08) and a standard deviation of (0.677) as (69.3) of the participants always encounter this problem. Fourth is item (7) " I confuse between words starting with /p/ and /b/" with a mean of (1,82) and a standard deviation of (0.894). It shows



that (51.6%) of the participants always suffer from this problem. In the fifth place comes item (6) "I write words according to their pronunciation" with a mean of (1.66) and a standard deviation of (0.607). Among the participants (61.3%) indicate that they always write words according to how they hear. Sixth comes item (1) "I spell one syllable words correctly" with a mean of (1.60) and a standard deviation of (0.568), as (63.3) of the participants agree that they sometimes face this problem. Finally comes item (2) "I get confused between words of similar spelling", as the mean is (1.53) and the standard deviation is (0.526). A total of (69.3%) of the participants sometimes face this spelling problem.

In general, EFL/ESL students encounter spelling problems in their writings. This is very problematic as student-teachers are confused when writing words with similar pronunciation but with a different spelling. They mistakenly alter the spelling and that changes the meaning. Student-teachers should be aware of remedies for these problems to be able to avoid them. Although students are at a transitional stage before joining the teaching profession which requires a mastery of correct spelling for better writings, it is never too late to achieve better results.

**Table (4)**  
**Student-teachers' Feedback on their Language Use**

<b>Third Domain: Students' Language Use</b>	<b>Always %</b>	<b>Sometimes %</b>	<b>Never %</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. D.</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1) I lack a proper use of appropriate language.	9.3	84.0	6.7	2.01	0.571	6
2) I use synonyms/antonyms of words properly.	9.3	69.8	20.9	1.93	0.400	9
3) I translate words from Arabic to English.	13.8	55.1	31.1	2.17	0.649	2
4) I have a problem using SVO= Sub+ V=Object/ Sub + Predicate/ SVA= Sub+ V+ Adverb patterns correctly	11.6	79.6	8.9	1.97	0.452	7
5) I use correct form(s) of verbs/words.	12.9	80.9	6.2	1.95	0.433	8
6) I need help with my written language.	44.0	52.9	3.1	2.16	0.470	3

Table (4)

Third Domain: Students' Language Use	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean	St. D.	Rank
7) I have a problem using accurate grammatical structure.	8.0	77.8	14.2	2.06	0.468	5
8) I have a problem using subordinate clauses properly.	4.4	75.6	20.0	1.59	0.553	10
9) I write incomplete/fragment sentences.	19.1	79.1	1.8	2.12	0.539	4
10) I need constant guidance during composition writing.	20.0	68.0	12.0	2.19	0.667	1

Table (4) represents students' responses to the items on the encountered problems with language use. Looking at the total mean of this domain as presented in Table (1), it shows a low mean level as the it scored (2.01) and the standard deviation was (0.221). Student-teachers' responses indicate problems in their applications of language use rules. To begin with, (68.0%) of the participants state that they "need constant guidance during composition writing" with a mean of (2.19) and a standard deviation of (0.667) as presented in item (10). Second comes item (3) "I translate words from Arabic to English" with a mean of (2.17) and a standard deviation of (0.649). Among the participants (55.1%) agree that they sometimes have such a problem. Third comes item (6) "I need help with my written language" with a mean of (2.16) and a standard deviation of (0.470). According to the responses of the student-teachers (52.9%) state that they sometimes face such a problem. Fourth is item (9) "I write incomplete/fragment sentences" with a mean of (2.12) and a standard deviation of (0.539). As indicated in the responses of the participants (79.1%) state that they sometimes encounter such a problem. Fifth is item (7) "I have a problem using accurate grammatical structure" with a mean of (2.06) and a standard deviation of (0.468). Among the participants (77.8%) state that they face such a difficulty when writing. Sixth comes item (1) "I lack a proper use of appropriate language" with a mean of (2.01) and a standard deviation of (0.571). According to the responses (84.0%) state that this is a problem for them. Seventh is item (4) "I have a problem using

SVO= Sub+ V=Object/ Sub + Predicate/ SVA= Sub+ V+ Adverb patterns correctly" with a mean of (1.97) and a standard deviation of (0.452). Among the participants (79.6%) indicate that this is a common problem with their writing. Eight is item (5) " I have a problem using correct form(s) of verbs/words" with a mean of (1.95) and a standard deviation of (0.433). A total of (80.9%) of the participants indicate that they have a problem with conjugations and parts of speech. Ninth comes item (2) " I use synonyms/antonyms of words properly" with a mean of (1.93) and a standard deviation of (0.400). Student-teachers confirm that this is not a problematic item as (69.8%) of them do not have a problem with it. Tenth is item (8) " I have a problem using subordinate clauses properly" with a mean of (1.59) and a standard deviation of (0.553). According to the responses of the participants (75.6%) of them state that sometimes encounter such a language use problem.

Keeping these results in mind, students require an intensive practice of grammar especially that students sometimes rely on Arabic translation as a solution to overcome their shortage in vocabulary, and this gives an awkward meaning. Grammar and vocabulary are important language components to assure good writings. Practice is a key component to overcome all the shortcomings in the writing skill of those students especially they will become future teachers of English and will have a negative influence on their learners.

### **Results Pertaining to Question Number Two**

Question 2. "Are there significant differences among English major student-teachers' writing problems with reference to their demographic variables: gender, year of study, and educational districts?". The answers to the second question are presented in Tables (5-7).

**Table (5)**  
**t-test results of TOT \_1 to TOT \_3 By Gender**

Variable Names	Male			Female			T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.			
TOT_1 Punctuations	10	1.887	0.248	50	1.907	0.303	-.533	58	0.594
TOT_2 Spelling	10	1.897	0.198	50	1.935	0.200	-1.417	58	0.158
TOT_3 Language Use	10	1.956	0.221	50	2.034	0.195	-2.785	58	0.006*

Table (5) shows that there are significant differences in domain 3 (Students' Language Use) only with reference to (Gender). The mean value (2. 034) for female students is more than the mean value (1.956) of the male students. This means that the level of female students' application of language use rules students is higher than that of male students in this domain. This indicates that female students have a better command of the English language. However, there are no significant differences in the responses of the participants with reference to (Gender) in both domains 1 and 2 (punctuation and spelling).

**Table (6)**  
**T-test results of TOT \_1 to TOT \_3 by Year of Study**

Variable Names	Year 1			Year 2			T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.			
TOT_1 Punctuations	32	1.768	0.245	28	1.901	0.205	-1.401	58	0.483
TOT_2 Spelling	32	1.978	0.196	28	1.924	0.198	-1.417	58	0.204
TOT_3 Language Use	32	1.968	0.213	28	2.021	0.199	-2.785	58	0.209

Based on the results presented in Table (6), it shows that there are no significant differences between the total of answers according to the 'year

of study' with reference to the study domains as the level of significance is  $p > 0.05$ .

**Table (7)**  
**F-Test (ANOVA) of TOT\_1 to TOT\_3 Results by Educational Districts**

Variable Name	Source	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-Ration	Sig.
TOT_1 Punctuation	Between Groups	2	1.258	0.252	3.729	0.003*
	Within Groups	58	14.774	0.067		
TOT_2 Spelling	Between Groups	2	0.482	0.096	2.227	0.053
	Within Groups	58	9.470	0.043		
TOT_3 Language Use	Between Groups	2	.591	0.118	3.101	0.010*
	Within Groups	58	8.348	0.038		

Table (7) shows that there are no significant differences in domain 2 (spelling). However, there are significant differences in domain 1 (Punctuation) and domain 3 (Language Use) with reference to the (Educational Districts). To find as which pairs of groups differ significantly, the multiple comparison tests using the Scheffe Procedures were applied. Scheffe (.05) shows that the significant difference exists between (Asima & Ahmadi) in domain 1 and (Hawalli and Farwaniya) in domain 3. The results are in favor of Asima and Hawalli in those domains. This could be explained by the notion that students graduating from Asima and Hawalli have a better command of English and know how to apply punctuation marks and language use rules more than the students in Ahmadi and Farwaniya.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Taking into consideration that English is taught to Kuwaiti students for 12 years beginning with grade one and finishing in grade 12 in Kuwait public schools prior to university level, it is expected that they have a good command of the English language use with a high level of fluency and accuracy. Yet, students still encounter problems in the writing skill. Therefore, the present study is conducted to explore English major student-teachers' problems in their writing. The focus is on three types

of writing problems: punctuation, spelling, and language use. From the analysis, it shows that students are aware of their writing problems. As for punctuation, no doubt that punctuation is crucial to express ideas more clearly, to specify the structure of a sentence and to state the ways of intonation and stress on a sentence. The study reveals that participants who will be future English language teachers still face problems when applying punctuation marks which are essential for academic writing. They confirm that they sometimes and not always use punctuation marks correctly. Thus, by learning how to apply properly the punctuation marks, students will be able to communicate and express their ideas, and arguments better (Betham 2011; Carroll and Wilson 1995). Punctuation marks may change the meaning of words if they are incorrectly used, and they may reveal mystery when they are correctly used (Byrne 1988). The findings are in line with those of (Al-Faki 2015; Hammad 2014) as many writing courses do not focus on teaching punctuation (Elkilic, Han, and Aydin, 2009).

As for spelling, it is crucial to remember that English and Arabic as languages differ in their systems (phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax) Al-Faki (2015). Spelling problems are common among Arab learners as Arabic is different from English in its sound system (phonology) such as: the number and quality of vowels and diphthongs, consonant clusters in word initial, medial and final positions. English spelling and pronunciation are more complex than Arabic as words are written as pronounced. Thus, students have difficulties in spelling patterns, words, and multi-syllabic words (Al-Faki, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2010; Ahmed, 2010; Fender, 2008). Also, there are letters in the English language which do not exist in Arabic like /p/ and /v/ and students misspell them as /b/ and /f/. Although /v/ and /f/ are less problematic than /p/ and /b/, yet misspelling of these consonants will alter the meaning completely. With the absence of special courses to teach spelling and pronunciation rules, students are likely to learn to pronounce the word in the wrong way when teachers do not provide the correct pronunciation, especially that English teachers in all stages of public schooling are Arabs (Randall, 1988). The Findings are like other studies (Al-Khairiy, 2013; Nazim and Ahmed, 2012).

Language use forms another problem to students. First language (L1) plays a role in the wrong application of grammatical rules (Al-Khairi, 2013). Arabic language grammatical system is completely different from that of English which is reflected in the sentence structure, subject-verb agreement etc., as well as the choice of words and the presentation of ideas (Kosterina, 2007). This all affects the coherence of writing. Incompetent learners will rely on Arabic to overcome any problems in their grammar and vocabulary choice. Some of them depend on literal translation from Arabic to English which sounds awkward in writing (Hammad, 2014; Tyner, 1987; Kharma, 1987; Zamel, 1983). Unable to apply English grammatical rules will result in wrong communication of meaning (Muslim, 2014; Moats, 2005).

According to the second research question, results reveal that female students have a better command of the language rules more than male students. Educational districts point out that graduates of Asima and Hawalli have more understanding of the punctuation marks and their proper applications, as well as the application of grammatical rules. It becomes important to investigate the supervisory process executed by the English Supervisory Units in all educational districts to ensure an equal level of proper teaching of English. In addition, it is important to consider the impact of gender to provide learners with suitable learning techniques and activities, as well as suitable learning materials to ensure their learning.

Keeping in mind such writing problems after all these years of study at school prior to University level, it becomes important to pay more attention to the teaching of English language skills in general and the writing skill to avoid L1 interference and other apparent causes of writing problems. It is crucial to improve the English language skills and the writing of the student-teachers during the years of study at the College of Education before joining the teaching profession to avoid any future problems which student-teachers may cause through their poor teaching of English to their future students. Otherwise, the English learners in public schools will end up with a poor command of English. The study recommends the following to improve the writing skill of English major student-teachers:

1) Introducing more advanced writing courses according to the students' needs to teach writing rules and conventions.

2) Introducing group/pair work writing sessions to stimulate discussions.

3) Encouraging peer correction prior to teacher correction to enhance students' understanding of writing conventions and grammar rules.

4) Encouraging dictionary use for better spelling.

5) Introducing free writing workshops for topics of students' own interest.

6) Providing enough time for writing to practice extra proof reading and self-correction.

7) Encouraging reading to build up students' writing style, develop their grammar, improve spelling, and enrich their vocabulary.

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