

## WRITING DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN RURAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN

Khushnood Akhtar

Email:khushnoodakhter4gmail.com

### Abstract

*The English language has an important role in Pakistan as a valuable means of communication in local and international circles. It is used as a medium of instruction in many Pakistani institutions; not only in schools but also in colleges and universities. Students in Pakistan face numerous difficulties in learning English as a second language. The purpose of this study is to sort out writing difficulties that students face when they write English. The study was conducted in a rural area in Baigpur District Gujranwala in Pakistan. Data were collected from two secondary boys' public schools. Students were selected at the matriculation level. The quantitative method was adopted for this study. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire; non-random sampling was adopted to collect quantitative data. The target population of the current study was all English language students in public schools in Baigpore. 30 students were selected randomly as the sample for conducting this study. It was found that students at matriculation faced several problems in writing English as a second language. Some causes become an obstacle in their English writing composition. This study would be helpful for both students and teachers to improve their writing skills and be acquainted with problems that become an impediment to writing English as a second language.*

**Keywords:** *English as a second language, writing difficulties, rural areas, matriculation level, Pakistan*

### Introduction

The introduction is the first and most important part of any research project. The main purpose of the introduction is to describe the problem that will be addressed. This chapter focuses based on the study. It looked at the general background of study, signification, topics, delimitation, objective of the study and, research questions.

The study has great importance in identifying the writing difficulties in English as a second language. Writing is measured man's best academic achievement based on skills. The English language has become the language that is used widely all over the world. In this regard (Burnfit and Christopher 2000p.131) stated English was a dialect 400 years that was little known beyond the southern countries of England but now it has got status as a major world language and there is no obstruction in cast and colour to continue the spread of its use. It is the national language of many countries and is also learned as a second language. The increasing demand for the English language has made it compulsory to learn a second or foreign language. The English language has a role as a second language in Pakistan. As we know that learning the English language has become very important because it is an international language and also an academic and official language in Pakistan. Pakistan education commission has made English an important subject in all types of syllabuses. The knowledge of English has become very important as described by, (Shahid 2000, P: 9) what will the future of English in Pakistan but it will have remained its usefulness as a library language. For acquiring and using any language successfully and proficiently it is important to master four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. All skills have equal importance in learning a language but writing has become more significant in academic discipline to examine students' performance in their accessible field of study. ( Javid and Umer, 2014) cited, This is the most important means through which students can show their academic progress to their instructors. Students' ability in other skills depends on their writing. It is very important in learning and teaching a second language. Writing is an

essential learning tool because it helps students to get ideas better (Voon Foo, 2007, p. 4). There is no doubt it is a tool for the creation of ideas and a mixture of linguistics systems that is interactively used for communicative objectives. Writing is a way through which ideas are transmitted from addresser to addressee through text so, the exchange of information becomes a means to encourage the development of writing skills. Writing is considered a challenging language skill. It has also been a challenging task for English foreign language teachers because students who are observed in their writing samples do not take much interest in their academic writing. There is a depth of understanding in writing in learning a second language. That is why it is a mingling of other language skills like listening, speaking and reading. In this way, students scarcely feel motivated in writing. Motivation is very important for developing any skill. Students may have some writing problems in some aspects of writing like the use of punctuation, capitalization, language use (grammar) and initiating aspects of writing. Lack of motivation is a factor that becomes a cause of students' poor performance in written work. Writing is a productive skill in which students should be proficient to handle their academic tasks. (PakTaoNG, 2003) stated, the idea about writing comes first to mind is that is an essential part of coursework. According to, (Aronoff and Rees-Miller 2007) Writing is not a natural skill there are some exterior instructions are required for the development of it (Danial and Bright 1996) described, "Writing is a scheme of some enduring marks used to be an utterance in such a manner that it can explain the meaning exactly without the interference of the utterer". (Hughes 1996) stated, "Writing is not reliant on space and time like speaking. In act of writing writer has to depend on prescribed features to express meaning."

## Statement of problem

Writing is a very important academic skill. Thus, the present study is attempted to analyze the kinds of difficulties that the students face at the matriculation level when they write in English. Alsamadani (2010) stated that "writing in a second language is even more difficult because it is a complex and challenging process". English language is being used as an official language and is considered a second language in Pakistan therefore, learning English has also become important for Pakistani students.

## Significance of study

It is hoped that the results of the study would be assisted teachers to adapt their teaching style according to the writing errors of students. The results would be benefited both EFL learners and syllabus designers. In addition, the study will also recommend some instruction about writing difficulties that would be helpful for English second language learners to rise above several difficulties they may face in their academic writing.

## Research questions

The following questions are answered in the current study:

1. What are the writing difficulties students face in English composition writing in public schools at the matriculation level?
2. What are the causes of these difficulties in writing English?

## Objectives of research

The study has the following objectives:

- To identify writing difficulties faced by students at the matriculation level in selected public schools of Baigpure.
- To examine the causes and reasons for these difficulties in writing English as a second language
- To suggest some strategies and techniques overcome these problems.

## Hypothesis

Students of English as a second language are facing difficulties in writing English as a second language at the matriculation level in public schools in the rural area of Baigpore District Gujranwala in Pakistan.

## **Limitation**

Several limitations were realized during the current study. However, the present study provides a narrow insight into the writing difficulties investigated as it was hard to cover all aspects of the topic in-depth in a research paper. Only two public schools were selected with the 30 students as a sample. Gaining access to the research participants was another research limitation. Furthermore, the instrument that was used for data collection is a questionnaire. There are certain disadvantages of this method because respondents may not be very cooperative and fill the questionnaire without due consideration. The quantitative approach is used in this study.

## **Literature Review**

Writing is considered a very complex phenomenon via its rhetoric and linguistics capabilities. Effective writing conveys a message in such a way as it affects the audience as the writer intends. English second language learners face many difficulties in writing English so that there are several studies have been conducted to identify the learners' English composition writing problems. Abdul Haq (1982) conducted a study on Arab students to analyze the problems that they face in their English writing. He argued that Arab students have problems with syntax and spelling rules. He concluded students have writing difficulties due to the lack of proper knowledge of syntax and L1 interference. There is another study conducted by Ridha (2012, p.44) on Iraqi college students. She investigated errors in English essay writing. She found grammatical, lexical, semantic and word order types of errors. She pointed out that these errors were due to L1 interference and the most serious and frequent errors were found in grammar and mechanics. Taj Muhammad and Zohab Hazarika (2014) argue, of the less efficiency of teachers in feedback system students just focus on memorization of answers just to pass the examination. They do not use proper approaches to develop learning when writing an answer. Farooq et al (2012) assert students face writing problems due to teachers' wrong selection of approaches. The sample of their research was four colleges in Lahore two were boys' colleges with 24 students and two were girls' colleges with 121 students. They collected data through questionnaires. They found that students were facing problems in spelling, grammar and vocabulary. The reason for these problems was teachers' less knowledge about applied linguistics and the selection of traditional English teaching methods like the Grammar translation method (GTM). Writing has always been a very systematic process so the students who have less knowledge about the use of grammatical rules make some mistakes while writing. English is learned as a second language in many countries like Pakistan so to identify the problems that students face in English many other studies have also been done. Haider, G (2014) investigated organizational problems in English foreign language writing at the intermediate level. The data were collected from hundreds of students through questionnaires and interviews. The researcher interviewed ten students and five teachers to sort out the problems in writing the essay. It was explored students were not motivated to develop their skills but were forced to memorize. Some parental and environmental factors were the problems in writing a second language and some other factor like; wrong selection of pedagogical approaches was also included. English itself has some irregularities which create many problems like spelling in English. To spell words is a skill that identifies the word in the written mode. The students who have a poor command of spelling memorize them. Students also face problems with the use of punctuation marks in writing. Punctuation marks are very important to convey a message properly. Students most of the time commit mistakes in using full stop, colons, semicolons

and commas due to these mistakes it is difficult to understand the text. (Davidson,2005). Leisak (1989) argues that grammar is not easy to learn for L2 learners. Students face several problems in many areas of grammar like the use of correct sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, subordinate and coordinate conjunctions. Grammar proficiency helps students to run-on sentences and make a different types of sentences.

Cook (2001)says L1 interference is cause learners to face difficulties in writing. Learning L2 is different from learning L1 when a person already knows a language and its use. It is easy to learn the second language when both first and second languages have common elements; if there is a different system in both languages students have more difficulties in the learning process.

The above-mentioned studies reveal many researchers have researched to analyze which type of problems students face in writing English as a second language. The present study contributes to the research in the field in terms of offering valuable insight into the most difficult aspects of writing faced by Pakistani students at the matriculation level and causes that are a barrier to their writing tasks. Most of the studies have been conducted at colleges and university levels there is a lack of research that addresses the secondary school setting. A focus on secondary school is essential as students are exposed to English second language writing and they develop writing skills at this stage. Thus, it is significant to find out difficulties in English composition writing so the teacher can further expertise in providing a guide to learners well in becoming better writers.

## **Research Methodology**

Research Methodology is the process used to collect and analyze data needed to answer the research questions guiding a study. This chapter explains the methodology of the study to present English writing difficulties and causes a second language that students face at the matriculation level in the rural area of Baigpur district Gujranwala.

## **Research Design**

To examine writing difficulties and their causes quantitative approach was used. The research design was descriptive to answer closed-ended questions.

## **Setting**

The current study was conducted in a rural area of Baigpure district Gujranwala. Public secondary boys' schools were selected for the study. The respondents of this study were matriculation level students.

## **Population**

The target population of this research study was English language students in public schools in Baigpur district Gujranwala.

## **Sample**

For this study, 30 students were carefully selected from public secondary schools due to some reasons to identify problems in writing English as a second language. They were all boys who participated in this study. These students were selected from two public secondary schools and they were provided with the same topics on which they had to write under different circumstances and with different backgrounds.

## **Research Tools**

In this study tools were a survey, questionnaire, and written corpus (in the form of closed-ended questions).

## **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were collected by the researcher personally, for this purpose researcher visited two public schools in Baigpure. Participants were provided with introductory information

about the study and the nature of the questionnaire. After assigning the tasks participants were provided with the same time, different environments to accomplish their tasks. 30 questionnaires that were consisted of closed-ended questions were collected from the 30 participants. All participants filled out questionnaires without the help of others in their school. Data were collected through a random sampling technique.

## Data analysis procedure

After getting responses from the students, the data were ordered according to the nature of the study. Data were analyzed in the table and also in graphs through frequency and percentage of measuring items. It was analyzed by using statistical techniques. After analyzing data in tables and graphs, there was an explanation about the whole data that was analyzed.

## Data analysis / Findings

The results were interpreted by using the frequency and percentage of the respondents on the statements. Data proved students at the matriculation level faced several difficulties in writing English as a second language. The collected data were processed statistically. The table listed below shows the frequency and percentage of students' responses.

Table:1:Following is an overall analysis of the frequency and percentage of students' responses to the questionnaire's items

Difficulties and measuring items	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
I am often confused about the use of capitalization in sentences.	2	6.6	7	23.3	2	6.6	6	20	13	43.3
I face difficulties in writing due to my lack of vocabulary.	1	3.3	2	6.6	3	10	11	36.6	13	43.3
I feel difficulties with sentence structure.	2	6.6	6	20	5	16.6	2	6.6	15	50
My written texts do not give proper sense because I am not good at marking punctuation in sentences.	0	0	3	10	5	16.6	8	26.6	14	46.6
I was confused about using the exact rules of grammar.	2	6.6	8	26.6	6	20	3	10	11	36.6
I face difficulties due to the classroom environment.	2	6.6	13	43.3	3	10	8	26.6	4	13.3



I face difficulty while using direct and indirect narrations in my writing.	2	6.6	4	13.3	0	0	4	13.3	20	66.6
I face difficulties due to the unsuitable method of teaching English writing.	1	3.3	9	30	2	6.6	5	16.6	13	43.3
I have poor performance due to my weak spelling.	0	0	4	13.3	3	10	9	30	14	46.6
I face difficulties due to the lack of teachers' help.	2	6.6	3	10	3	10	8	26.6	14	46.6
L1 interference becomes cause when I write English.	0	0	9	30	4	13.3	5	16.6	12	40
Writing is not easy for me because I have less knowledge of vocabulary.	1	3.3	7	23.3	1	3.3	4	13.3	17	56.6

### Explanation

The above table shows students in public schools at the matriculation level were facing a myriad of difficulties when they write in English as a second language. The results proved, most students had difficulties in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, tenses, vocabulary, lack of teachers' help, wrong selection of teaching methods, classroom environment and spelling.

Following is the individual analysis of students' responses to the items of the questionnaire.

**Figure.1**

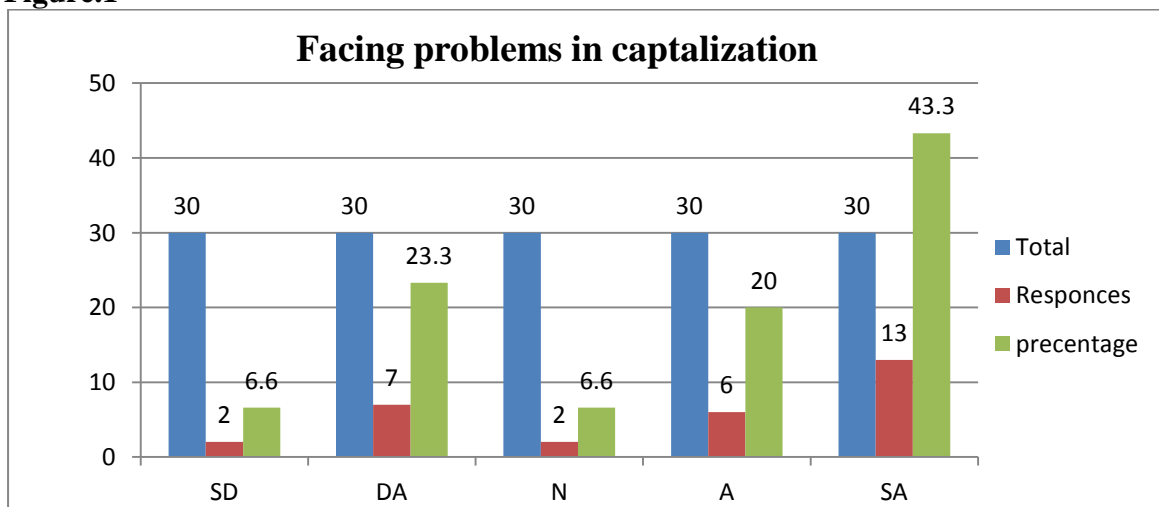


Figure .1 reveals, 43.3% of students strongly agreed with item number one and 20% agreed they faced difficulties using capitalization but on the other hand 23.3% of students did not agree 6.6% were neutral and strongly disagree. This shows the majority of students had

problems with the correct use of capitalization in sentences while writing English as a second language.

**Figure.2**

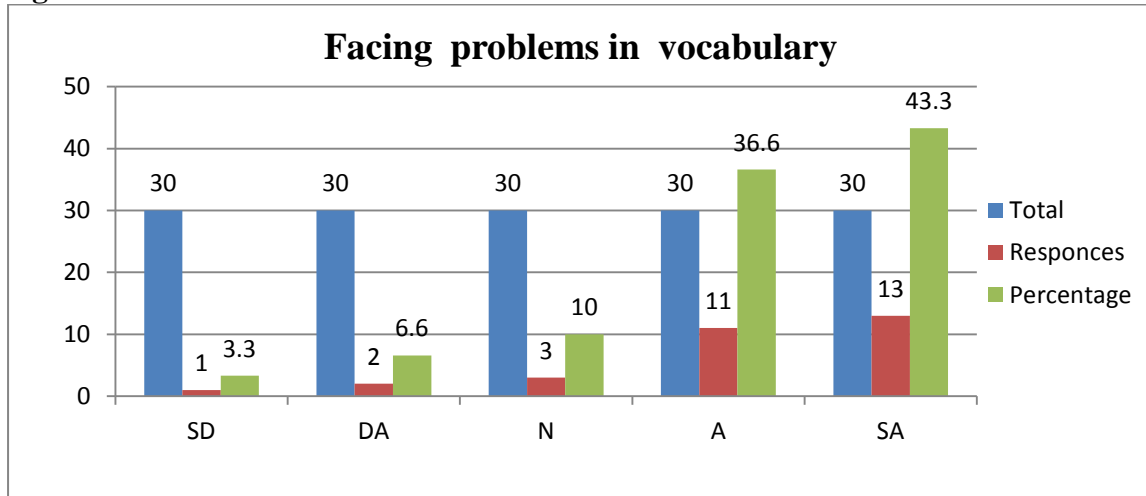


Figure.2 shows that 43.3% of students strongly agreed and 36.6% agreed they had problems due to the vocabulary restrictions. There were 6.6% of students who disagreed 10% were neutral and 3.3% strongly disagreed faced no difficulties in vocabulary. This analysis shows mostly students had problems with vocabulary in English writing.

**Figure.3**

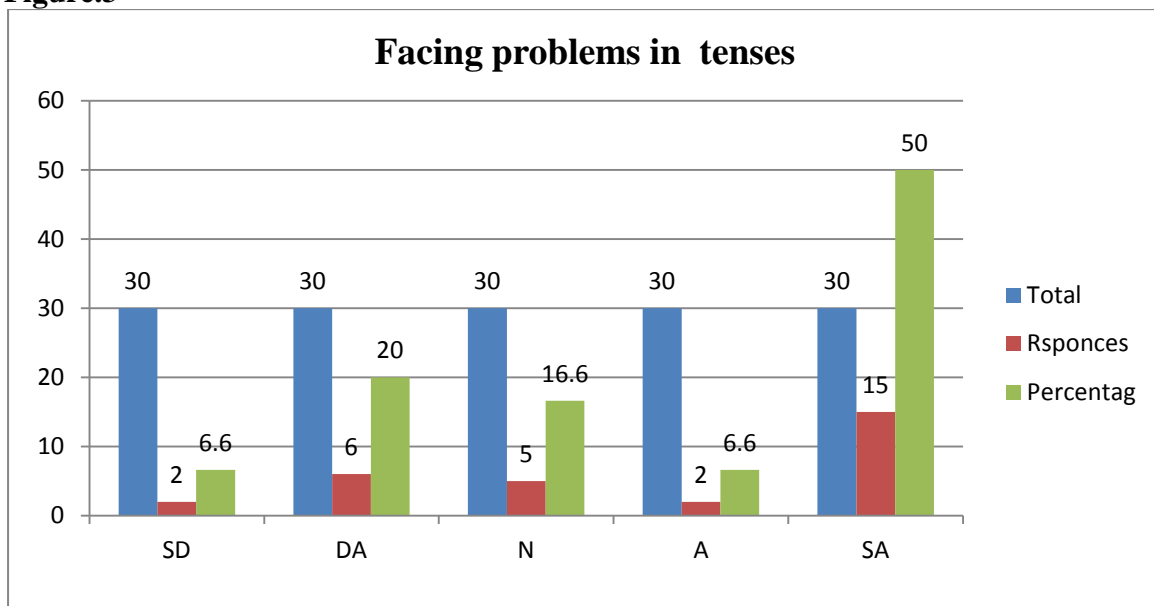


Figure.3 shows 50% of respondents strongly agreed and 6.6% agreed that they had problems in forming a sentence structure. 16.6% of students were neutral which means sometimes they feel difficulties in the formation of a sentence when they write in English as a second language, 20% students disagreed and 6.6 per cent agreed with the statement. This figure shows that most students had problems in sentence formation while writing English.

**Figure.4**

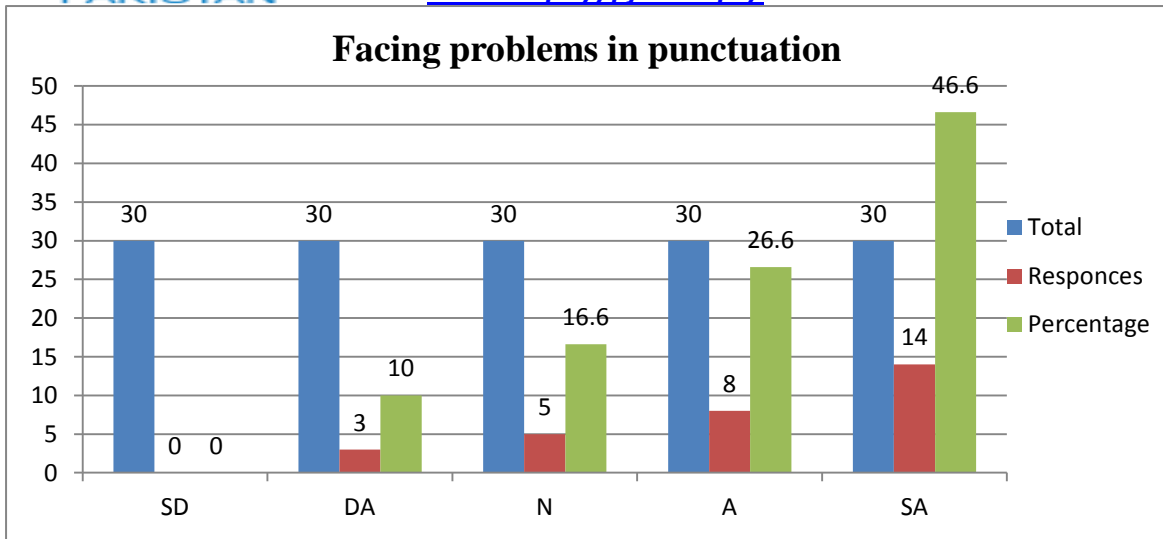


Figure .4 analyses in case of punctuation 26.6% participants agreed and 46.6% strongly agreed on the other hand 10% students disagreed, 16.6% were neutral as the figure shows that there was no one strongly disagreed about they had problems in punctuation in English writing. If two related meaning scales like (strongly agree + agree) are merged 73.2% of students faced difficulties in punctuation.

**Figure.5**

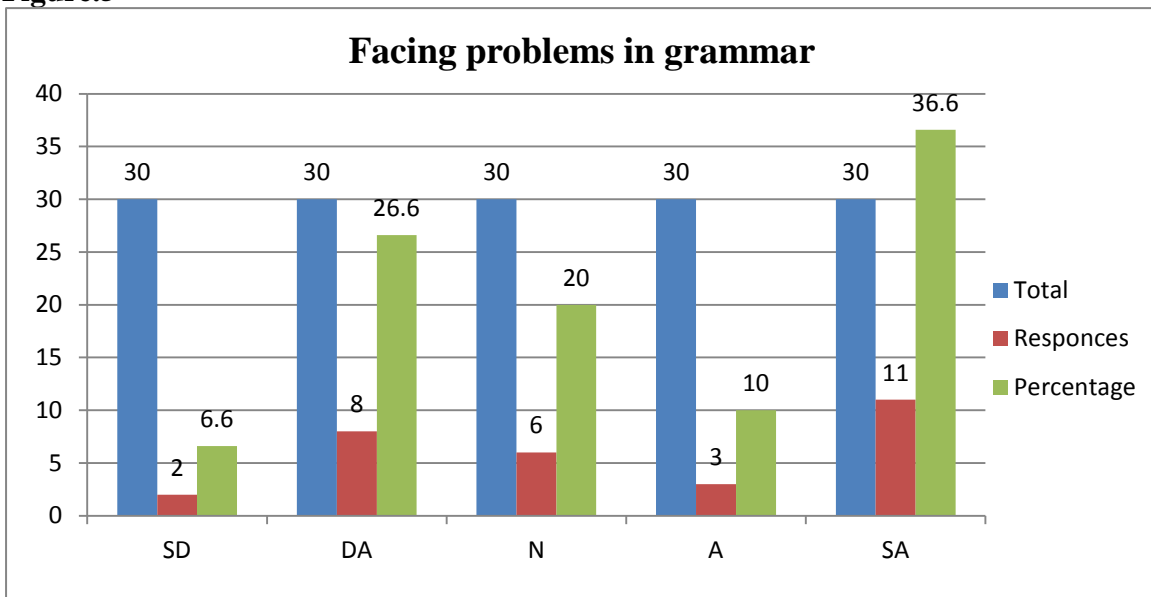
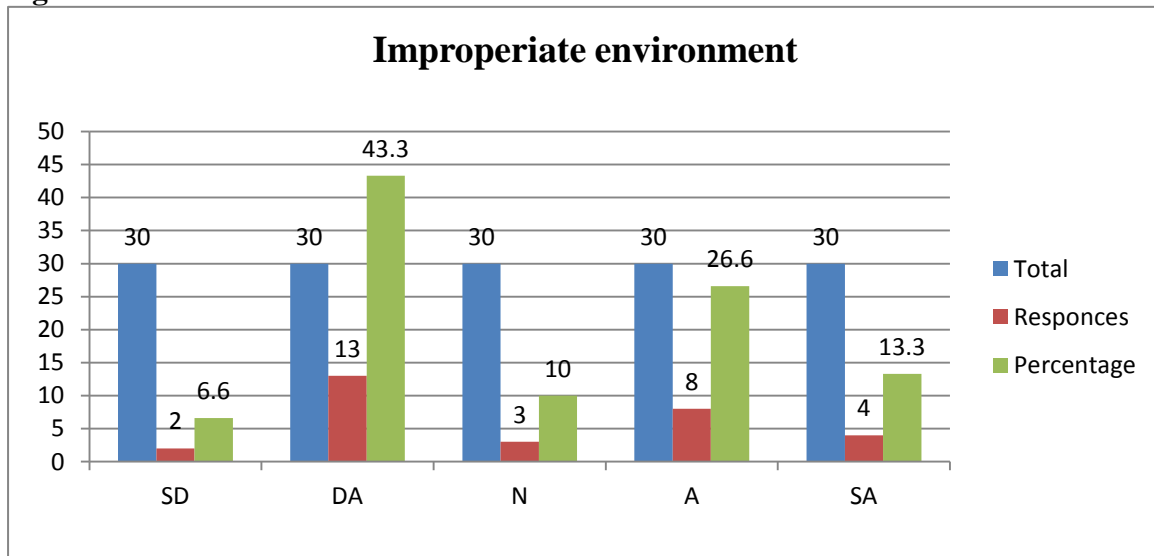


Figure.5 reveals 36.6% of students strongly agreed 10% agreed that they had no demand knowledge about the grammatical rules. 20%students were neutral; this shows sometimes they faced difficulties in the use of grammatical rules. 26.6% disagreed and 6.6% strongly disagreed. They had no problems with the use of grammatical rules in English writing.



**Figure.6**



This figure shows students also faced problems in their writing because their classroom environment was not fulfilling their needs. In the above figure 13.3% of respondents strongly agreed 26.6% agreed, they had problems due to an inappropriate environment. 10% of students were neutral. 43.3% of students disagreed and 6.6% strongly disagreed. If we merged two close related scales like (strongly agree + agree) so the total percentage of these two scales is  $(13.3+26.6)=39.9\%$ . This reveals fewer numbers of students had difficulties in writing due to the classroom environment.

**Figure.7**

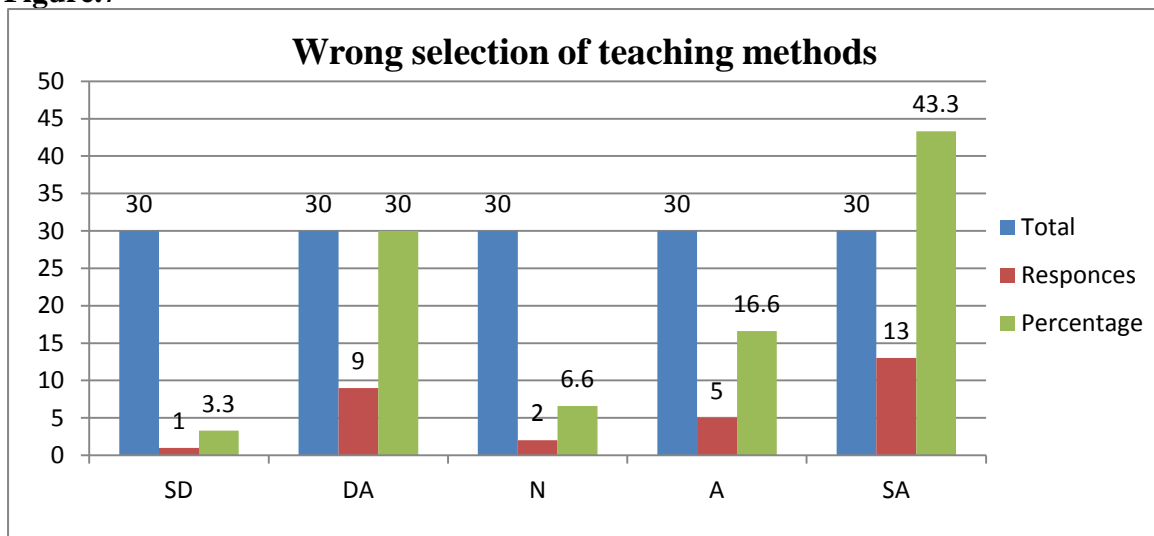
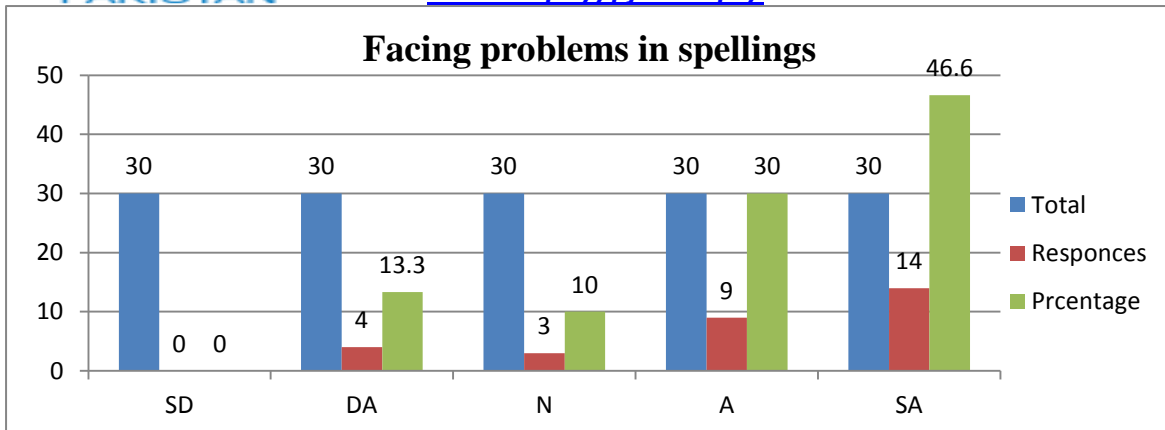


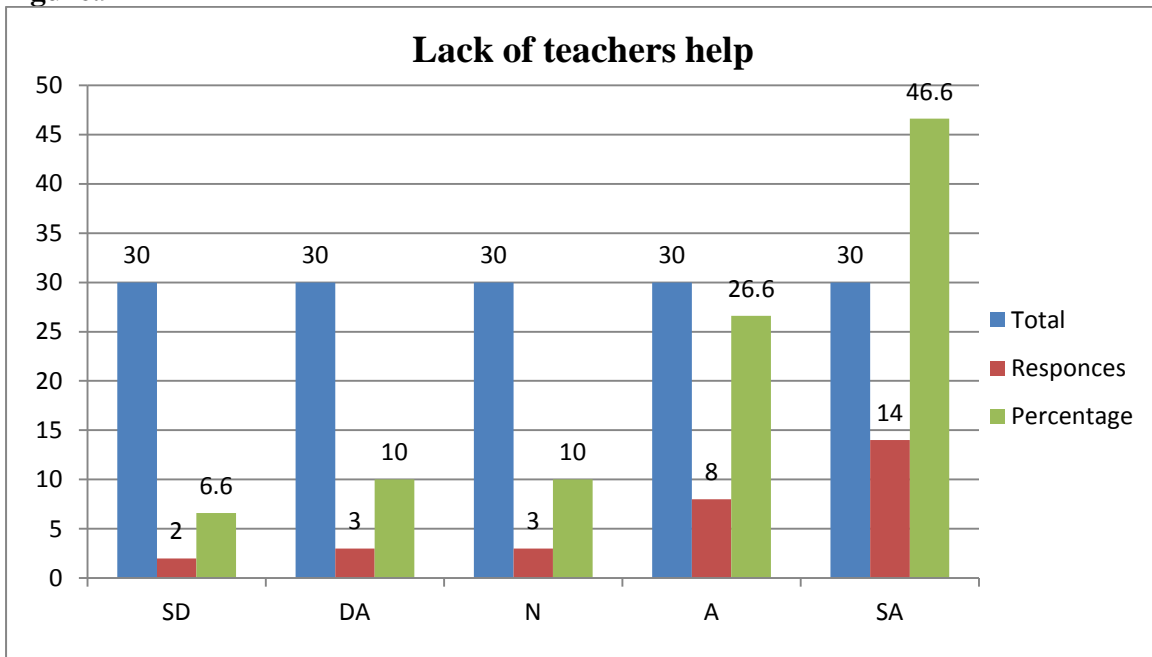
Figure.7 analysis in the case of teachers' unsuitable methods in teaching English reveals 43.3% of students strongly agreed and 16.6% agreed that they faced difficulties due to the teachers' wrong selection of teaching method. 30% of respondents disagreed and 3.3% strongly agreed with this problem. This figure shows generally students had difficulties because the method of teaching was not according to their needs.

**Figure.8**



The students gave different responses to problems in spelling. 46.6% of respondents strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 10% were neutral, 13.3% disagreed and no one strongly agreed about spelling difficulties. A large number of students (46.6%) agreed that they had problems with spelling. If the two scales (strongly agree and agree) which are very close in meaning are combined, the total percentage would be  $46.6 + 30 = 76.6$ . It proves a frequent number of students who said they have problems with spelling.

**Figure.9**



This figure shows 46.6% strongly agreed and 26.6% agreed who had difficulties because of the lack of teachers' help. 6.6% of students strongly disagreed 10% disagreed and 10% of students were neutral in the case of teachers' lack of help. This figure reveals a great number of students faced problems in writing due to a lack of teachers' help and proper guidance.

Figure.10

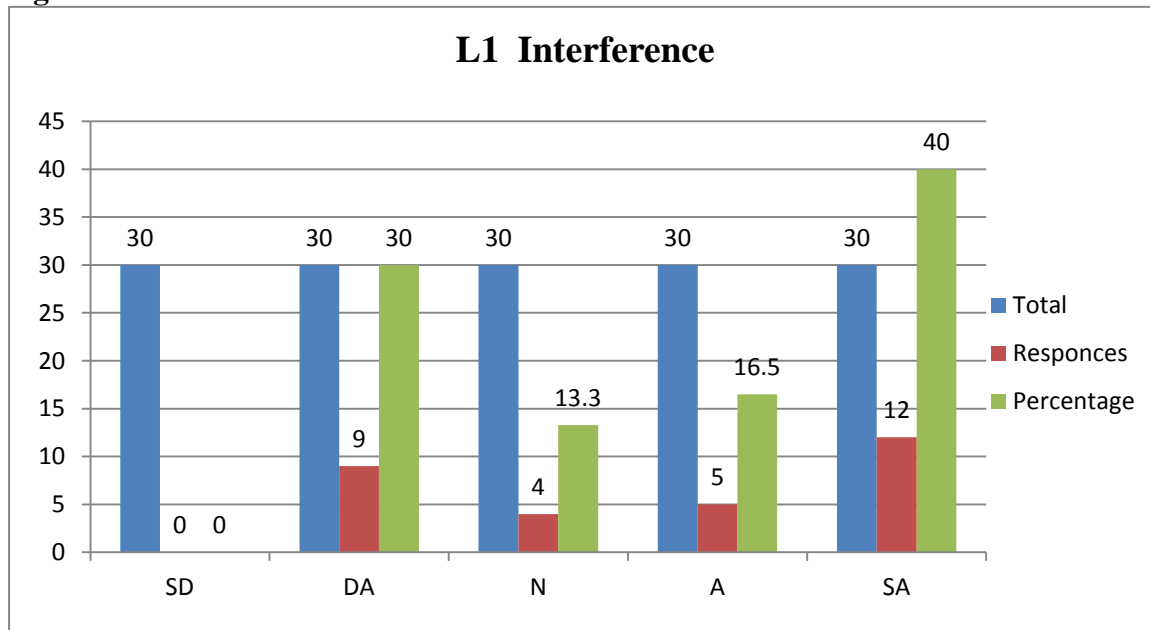


Figure .10 reveals students had problems in writing English as a second language due to the L1 interference. 40% of students strongly agreed and 16.6% just agreed with this problem.13.3% were neutral,30% disagreed but no student did strongly disagree. The results of the current study proved students had a plethora of difficulties when they write in English.

## Conclusion

Writing is considered a very important academic skill one of the main language skills. Writing in a second language is more difficult because it is a complex and challenging process. This research paper aimed to investigate the writing difficulties that students face at the matriculation level when they write English as a second language in selected public schools in rural area of Baigpur. The problems specifically, related to vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, grammar, classroom environment, lack of teachers' help, unsuitable teaching method, capitalization and L1 interference. The research investigated great numbers of students who were facing difficulties in English writing. They had problems with vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization while writing. Researcher revealed there were some reasons for their weakness in writing: Firstly, teachers' wrong selection of teaching approaches. Secondly, the inappropriate environment in Pakistan's public schools. Thirdly, they faced problems due to the L1 interference because in public schools in rural areas most students speak Punjabi in their classrooms as their first language and learn English as a second language both English and Punjabi languages have different patterns and grammatical rules. Students were not guided properly. They do not pay much attention to students' academic performance. They just do their jobs without passion. It is said that teachers are nation builders. But the teachers in public schools are not like role models for the students. It can be concluded mostly students were not able to form a proper sentence in English composition writing and also faced grammatical difficulties due to improper knowledge about the exact use of grammatical rules. Finally, it can be said students in public schools in rural areas faced a lot of problems in their writing process. These problems had a bad impact on their academic performance. The teaching methods and the environment in public schools in rural areas are the main causes of students' misconceptions about writing English.

## Techniques and strategies to overcome learners writing difficulties

The following techniques and strategies are proposed based on findings to overcome learners' writing difficulties that they face in English composition writing.

- Teachers should use techniques according to the need of students, if one technique does not work then should apply the other one. Teachers should use an eclectic approach when teaching the English language. The students should be taught language with suitable illustrations. This will help the students produce correct sentences.
- Teachers should explain the rules of capitalization and practices it in the classroom.
- Teachers should be focused on practices in writing in the classroom rather on delivering passive lectures.
- The learning environment should be considered a very important tool in teaching writing skills.
- Teachers should do their job with sincerity and passion because the role of teachers has great importance to improve the students' academic performance.
- Teachers should adapt their teaching styles according to the writing errors of students.

## References

- Alsamadani, H. (2010). The relationship between Saudi EFL students' writing competence L1 writing proficiency, and self-regulation. *European Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Abdul Haq, F. (1982). *An analysis of syntactic errors* in the composition of Jordanian Secondary Students. (Unpublished master's thesis). Jordan, Yarmouk University.
- Aronoff, M., & Miller, R. J. (2007). *The handbook of linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Christopher, J. B. (2002). *Teaching English as a foreign language*. Philadelphia: John
- Cook, V. (2001). *Second language learning and language teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). London: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, G. (2007). *How to punctuate*. London: Penguin.
- Daniels, P.T. & Bright .W. (1996). *The Worlds' Writing system*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Farooq, M. S. Hassan, M. U. Wahid, S. (2012). Opinion of Second Language Learners about Writing Difficulties in the English Language. *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, 27(1), 185-194
- Haider, G. (2014). An Exploratory Study of Organizational Problems Faced by Pakistani Student Writers with Learning Difficulties (LD) in EFL Writing. *International Journals of English and Education*, 3(1), 127-145.
- Hughes, R. (1996). *English in speech and writing*. New York: Routledge.
- Javid, C. Z. & Umer, M. (2014). Saudi EFL learners' writing problems: A move towards a solution.
- Leisak, J. (1989). *Problems in written expression: Assessment and remediation*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mohammad, T. & Hazarika. Z.(2014). Difficulties of Learning EFL in KSA, *International Journal of English Linguistics*; Vol. 6, No. 3; 2016
- Pak-TaoNg, P. (2003). *Effective Writing: A Guide for Social Science Students*, the Chinese: University of Hong Kong.
- Ridha, N. S. (2012). The effect of EFL learners' mother tongue on their writings in English: An error analysis study. *Journal of the College of Arts*, 60, 22-45. Retrieved from. <http://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=58267>
- Shahid, S. M. (2006). *The teaching of English*. Lahore: Z.A. Printers.
- Voon Foo, C. T. (2007). *The Effects of the Process-Genre Approach to Writing Instruction on The Expository Essays of ESL Students in a Malaysian Secondary School*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University Sains Malaysia. Penang, Malaysia.