Assessing and Evaluating Academic Pre-writing Strategies of Third Year English Language Students in the Sudanese Secondary Schools: Omdurman Locality Secondary Schools as a Representative

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this study is to assess and evaluate the academic pre-writing strategies used by third secondary school students in the Sudanese secondary schools. The study sets out to find ways that help students raise their awareness of academic pre- writing techniques and how to use them effectively to improve their writing skills. The target group of this study is third year Sudanese secondary students represented by Omdurman Locality secondary schools for the school year 2013/2014. To achieve the aims of this study and find answers to the questions of study, the researcher used the descriptive, analytical method to analyse data collected from respondents. The data for this study was collected by using three instruments. These instruments were questionnaires for students and teachers and a writing test for students. After analysis of data, the results revealed that Sudanese third year secondary students rarely used effective pre-writing techniques with very little awareness of the strategies. The study also revealed no significant relationship between awareness of the academic pre-writing techniques and students' writing outcomes. The writer of the study recommended that Sudanese third year secondary students should be made aware of the academic writing techniques to be used *before* the writing process.

Keywords: academic writing ٬pre-writing strategies٬ brainstorming٬writing achievement.

المستخلص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة لتقييم استراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلاب وطالبات الصف الثالث بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية. و تسعى هذه الدراسة لإيجاد طرق من شأنها ان تساعد الطلاب على رفع إدراكهم بإستراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة الأكاديمية و إستخدامها بصورة فاعلة تؤدي لتحسين مهارة الكتابة . يتمثل مجتمع الدراسة من طلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث الثانوي بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية ممثلة بمدارس محلية أم درمان للعام الدراسي 20132014. و لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة و للإجابة على أسئلتها استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي.و بعد جمع المعلومات و معالجتها إحصائيا و تحليلها توصلت الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج أهمها:استخدام طلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث الثانوي بالمدارس السودانية لإستراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة الأكاديمية بصورة نادرة مع قلة إلمامهم بهذه الإستراتيجيات. كما أظهرت الدراسة عدم وجود علاقة بارزة بين الإدراك لإستراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة الأكاديمية و نتائجها. واستناداً على النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة ، قدّم الباحث مجموعة من التوصيات أهمها :تعريف طلاب الصف الثالث الثانوي بالمدارس السودانية وتدريبهم على طرق مختلفة من استراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة الأكاديمية

الكلمات المفتاحية : *إستراتيجيات ما قبل الكتابة ،العصف الذهني .*

INTRODUCTION :

Writing is an essential language skill that is vital to academic success. Many researchers agree that writing is a complex process with a number of operations going on simultaneously. The process of writing, according to Hedge (2005), is often described as a process consisting of three major activities or groups of activates that take place at different stages of writing (p.52). One of the most important stages of writing is the pre-writing stage. Pre-writing is the first stage of the writing process and the point at which we discover and explore our initial ideas about a subject. It is considered by many authorities and researchers as the most important stage of writing (Ede, L.2001, Dawson, M.2005, Hedge, P.2005, Wing, and R. 2009). One of the key factors which affect writing is writing strategies. A number of previous studies found that expert writers use more effective planning strategies than inexperienced student writers. Furthermore, findings of a number of previous studies suggest that teaching strategies for managing text production is an effective way of improving students' poor writing skills, e.g. De la Paz, 1999; Garcia & de Caso, 2004; Graham, Harris & Mason, 2006; Lei, 2008 (cited in AL Asmari, 2013). Therefore, students are to be made familiar and aware of academic pre-writing processes which will enable them to build a solid foundation for becoming confident and independent writers in English.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom observation and English teachers' reports, in addition to third year secondary students' low achievement in English academic writing show that students face writing difficulties either because of lack of awareness of writing strategies or inappropriate use of them. The researcher, being a teacher of English for nearly thirty years, observed that most Sudanese third year secondary students approach the writing process without gathering and planning information through pre-writing activities. Thus, many students miss the first important step to begin from. In addition, adopting traditional approaches that mainly focused on the product of writing resulted in restricting students in what they can write, and encouraging them to use and memorize the same forms of writing regardless of relation to content. White, 1988; Jordan, 1997; and Escholz, 1980 (cited in Algamoul, 2011) argue that adopting the product approach encourages students not to produce texts but to focus on model, form and duplication. This study focuses on what goes on before students write. In other words, the study focuses on the academic pre-writing processes that will enable students to make clear decisions about the direction of their writing by means of brainstorming and planning. More importantly, the study attempts to find better ways to train and encourage students to use effective pre-writing writing processes to ensure good writing achievement.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To review the literature for assessing and evaluating academic pre- writing processes
2. To assess and evaluate third secondary school students' academic pre-writing strategies
3. To encourage and train students to practice academic pre-writing strategies
4. To assess the relationship between awareness of pre-writing skills and students' writing outcomes as perceived by students and teachers

Questions of the Study

The study tried to answer the following five questions:

1. What academic pre-writing processes do third year secondary students in Sudan currently use?
2. To what extent do third year secondary students in Sudan use effective pre-writing techniques?
3. Is there any relationship between students' awareness of the main academic pre-writing processes and the writing outcomes?
4. Are there any differences between male and female students in awareness of academic writing processes and writing outcomes?
5. To what extent are teachers of English in Sudan aware of the most common academic pre-writing processes?

Significance of the Study

The choice of this topic emanates from the importance of the academic pre-writing strategies and the role they can play in the writing process. Moreover, classroom observation shows that secondary school students in general and third year students in the Sudanese secondary schools in particular, normally approach the writing process without enough practice of pre-writing activities which on its own resulted in students' poor writing achievement. Furthermore, it has been reported that most writing problems students face at a university level seem to be associated with certain deficits in the preparation process at the secondary level with regard to both curriculum and instruction. Thus, this study constitutes a challenging and significant attempt to assess and evaluate the academic pre-writing processes of third year secondary students, on the one hand, and on the other hand enhance good pre-writing processes to remedy poor writing. More importantly, the study sets out to assess the relationship between students'/teachers' awareness of pre-writing processes and writing outcomes. The expected outcomes of the study will be of great value not only to third year secondary students, but also to course designers and English teachers in Sudan.

Limits and Scope of Study

This is a descriptive, analytical study which is confined to assessing and evaluating academic pre-writing processes as part of the writing skill of third year secondary students in Sudan for the school year 2013/2014 (Omdurman Locality students as representatives). This study is conducted during the period from July 2013 to August 2015.

2. Literature Review

Pre-writing is the first stage of the writing process and the point at which we discover and explore our initial ideas about a subject. It is considered by many authorities and researchers as the most important stage of writing (Ede, L.2001, Dawson, M.2005, Hedge, P.2005, Wing, R. 2009). Graham and Perin (2007) believe that pre-writing," engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition" (p.18). Hedge and Wing point out that during this stage , writers establish the purpose of writing and the audience for whom it will be written as well as their argument and an outline for the piece of writing. It is at this stage writers begin to get ideas (Butler 2007, Oshima&Houge2007). Prewriting can help writers with their writing process by starting them off on the right foot both intellectually and psychologically. Prewriting strategies help writers generate ideas and figure out a topic's structure; doing both of these things before writing a draft can help writers save significant time and energy (http://uwp.duke.edu/writing). The strategies and processes used in the pre-writing stage not only help the writer formulate a topic and solidify ideas, they also serve as a kind of rehearsal for the rest of the writing process. As the writer uses the vocabulary associated

with a particular topic, he or she becomes well-versed in the subject and is able to express ideas with more confidence, organization and clarity.(writing.ku.edu /prewriting-strategies). There are different ways to generate and collect ideas. Leki(1998), Rumisek (2003), Hedge(2005) and many other researchers consider stating a purpose of writing, considering an audience for writing, freewriting, brainstorming, mapping, graphic organizers, outling, looping, cubing, and small group discussions as the most common types of prewriting techniques that writers use to generate and organize ideas about a topic.

Before beginning to write, the skilled writer decides what his or her purpose of writing is, and what he or she wants his/her piece of writing to accomplish. Stating a purpose of writing influences the choice of style, the choice of organization and the choice of language. Not only so, but having a purpose of writing beforehand keeps the writer's mind focused on the topic. In fact the student must have learned to set his or her own purpose, but if he or she cannot do this satisfactorily, the teacher's guidance should help provide him a purpose (Ahuja, G. & Ahuja, P. 1995). Considering an audience for writing is another important technique which goes together with stating a purpose of writing. Hedge maintained that the two skills together influence the choice of writing style, the choice of organization and language (Hedge, 2005). She argued that "Helping student writers to become aware of their readers and develop a sense of audience is an important task for the teacher, especially with secondary school learners (p.22)." Hedge justified this point as secondary school learners might not have developed a strong sense of audience in their first-language writing. So, in order to raise students' awareness of considering an audience, teachers of English should motivate students to develop a sense of audience and provide incentives for clear writing by creating real audiences wherever it is possible. In addition, the researcher would like to remind teachers to point out to students that different styles suit different purposes and audiences. Freewriting is a technique which has the main purpose of generating ideas (Hedge 2005). It tries to overcome the problem of writer's block. When writers write freely, they write whatever comes into their heads without stopping. At this stage, writers do not consider or worry about accuracy (Oshima & Houge, 2007, Rumisek & Zemach 2007, Hedge,2005). Hedge claims that"its main feature is writing as quickly as possible without stopping. Its other main feature, as a product of the speed, is that the writer concentrates on content rather on form."(2005.66). Freewriting helps students practice fluency (Zemach & Rumisek 2007). The advantage of freewriting as stated by Hedge (2005) is that,"it helps students to discover the things they can write about within a general theme. It also obliges students to redraft, thereby highlighting the importance of redrafting in the process of composing."(p.67). Leki (1995) distinguishes between two types of freewriting,"One type allows you to empty your mind temporarily of everyday concerns so that you can concentrate on the task at hand. The other type helps you to explore your ideas on a subject." (p.21) Brainstorming is another main type of pre-writing strategy. Zemach & Rumisek (2007) define brainstorming as, "a way of gathering ideas about a topic" (p.6).The Kansas University Writing Centre adds that," Brainstorming, also called listing, is a process of generating a lot of information within a short time by building on the association of previous terms you have mentioned." (Found

in:writing.ku.edu/prewriting-strategies). When writers brainstorm a topic, they write down every idea that comes to their minds. They do not worry about whether the ideas are good or silly, useful or not. Much like freewriting, brainstorming involves capturing all of the thoughts and ideas and writing them on a paper. Lisa (2001) comments that brainstorming looks more like a list while freewriting may look like a paragraph. According to Hedge (2005), brainstorming is especially useful in creative writing, where an unstructured flow of thoughts is a good way to get ideas together. It can also be effective as the first stage in more formal types of writing. Hedge (2005) adds that brainstorming as a topic in group discussion," produces lots of ideas from which students have to select the most effective and appropriate"(p.13). She concludes that:Group composition has the added advantage of enabling students to learn from each other's strengths. It is an activity where weaker writers can learn from stronger ones. It also enables the teacher to move from group to group monitoring the work and helping with the process of composition (p.14).

Mapping is also called clustering. Mind mapping or idea mapping is a strategy that allows the writer to explore the relationship between ideas. In clustering, writers write the subject of their composition in the middle of paper. Then, they write down all the things they associate with it. Writers continue the process by finding associations for each of the things they have written down. Finally, writers group items into clusters or categories (Leki 1995, Zemach & Rumisek 2007). Once the strategy has been established with students, they can be encouraged to use it in subsequent writing activities. The advantage of mapping , as stated by Hedge (2005) is that," all the aspects of a topic can be seen in relation and in proportion to each other, and possible links between paragraphs or sections of an essay become easily apparent." Sharrock (2008) defines a graphic organizer as,"a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task" (p.3). Graphic organizers are also sometimes referred to as knowledge maps, concept maps, story maps, cognitive organizers or concept diagrams. According to Novak (1991), graphic organizers are used to represent children's conceptual understanding. Kroll and Paziotopoulos (2004) describe a graphic organizer as a concrete Skyscraper Model, to help students become creative and analytical thinkers. Vinetta Bell argues that graphic organizers can be used during the pre-writing stage or at any other time during the writing process. They enable the writer to organize material logically and to see relationships between and among ideas (Retrieved from: www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/writing-process/5809).According to Miller (2011), graphic organizers are a good tool to help guide students when they write.They scaffold students' thoughts into writing a proficient piece. Although there are hundreds of different graphic organizers that have been created for educational use, a select few are proven to increase writing skills and guide writers to create proficient pieces of writing. When journalists or reporters write newspaper articles, they usually try to write the first sentence so that it will answer the following questions**:** who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how**.** These questions are also useful for writers when they are describing an event. According to Leki (1995), asking questions like these may help writers to clarify exactly what subject they are going to discuss in their composition. She adds, "This technique,

like listing, is also good for finding details about your subject and for restating your writing if for some reason you get blocked (Leki, 1995.25). The journalists' questions are a powerful way to develop a great deal of information about a topic very quickly. Learning to ask the appropriate questions about a topic takes practice, however. While writing an assignment, writers may wish to go back and ask the journalists' questions again to clarify important points (Retrieved from: writing.ku.edu/prewriting-strategies). Hedge suggests that students can work in pairs and make notes to answer the questions. The advantage of this activity as stated by Hedge is that, "it provides content for students and is thus complementary to activities where they have to generate ideas for themselves. It reflects real-life tasks where writers have to gather information from various sources and create their own text (2005.76). Cubing involves looking at an idea from six different points of view. According to Hedge (2005), cubing is an invention process which can be visualised as bringing together six sides of a cube which holds the subject inside. According to Leki (1995), looping is a prewriting technique which is similar to freewriting, but it is more focused. She states that,"Looping can help you focus your thoughts on a subject, find the core or center of your thoughts, and pinpoint a main idea on which to elaborate" (1995.28). To use this technique, Leki mentions three steps of looping that writers can follow. To begin with, write down the subject you want to consider and write continuously for five minutes. As with freewriting, writers should not worry about grammar or punctuation. At the end of five minutes, read what you wrote. Then write down one sentence to summarise the essence of what is written. Next, begin a second loop by focusing on your summary sentence and writing continuously for another five minutes.

After writing for five minutes, look for the main idea and summarise it in one sentence. Write that sentence down. Writers should follow the same procedure for their third loop. By the end of five minutes of writing, writers read the third text and summarise it in one sentence .Leki claims that, for most writers, the last sentence usually captures the gist of what they have to say on their topic (Leki, 1995). When journalists or reporters write newspaper articles, they usually try to write the first sentence so that it will answer the following questions**:** who, what, when, where, why, and sometimes how. These questions are also useful for writers when they are describing an event. According to Leki (1995), asking questions like these may help writers to clarify exactly what subject they are going to discuss in their composition. She adds, "This technique, like listing, is also good for finding details about your subject and for restating your writing if for some reason you get blocked (Leki, 1995.25). The journalists' questions are a powerful way to develop a great deal of information about a topic very quickly. Learning to ask the appropriate questions about a topic takes practice, however. While writing an assignment, writers may wish to go back and ask the journalists' questions again to clarify important points (Retrieved from: writing.ku.edu/prewriting-strategies). Although there are numerous prewriting techniques, there is no best technique or strategy to use. Zemach and Rumisek (2007) comment that some writers prefer using lists as they do not have to write complete sentences. Other writers prefer mapping because they can easily see the relationship between ideas. A third group of writers would like to use freewriting as they can write quickly and ideas come easily. According to Graham and Perin (2007), teachers of writing need to develop a mixture and appropriate blend

of techniques and approaches to writing in order to create proficient writers. They state that, "No single approach to writing instruction will meet the needs of all the students (2007.11).

Thus, from this review of related literature, we can see that the field of academic pre-writing processes and strategies is a wide field that has many explorations that need to be mastered. In addition, stages and strategies need to be given more intensive practice and training for a better achievement of academic writing.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants

Five hundred thirty two third year secondary students (263 males and 269 females) from Omdurman Locality secondary schools participated in the present study. Fifty teachers of English who teach third year secondary took part in the study as well.

The reason for this level of selection is that third year secondary students are approaching a new stage of education; so they need to improve their academic writing techniques, in particular pre-writing strategies to write different tasks such as assignments, essays and reports which are different from the tasks they have done at secondary schools. Teachers of English have been chosen to take part in this study based on the fact that they play an important role in promoting, training and developing students' academic pre-writing strategies.

3.2 Instruments

The data of this study were collected through questionnaires and a writing test. A questionnaire and a writing test were designed for students, while teachers were asked to respond to a special questionnaire.

3.3 Questionnaires

3.3.1 The Students' Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire investigates the participants' perception and evaluation of the academic pre-writing skills they adopt before they write a composition. It consists of twenty questions. The first eight questions were aimed to find out what activities and strategies students often use before writing.

3.3.2 Teachers' Questionnaire

The main objective of this questionnaire is to explore teachers' awareness of the most common English academic pre-writing techniques and activities that they can train their students to practice in the first stages of the writing process.

3.3.3 The Students' Writing Test

Students were asked to write one composition on a certain topic related to the Internet. Before writing the composition, students were asked to complete a plan to find out the way students use to gather and plan their compositions. The test was designed to assess students' ability to use academic pre-writing techniques to plan their writing

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Awareness and Use of Academic Pre-Writing Techniques

The following table shows students' awareness and use of the most common pre-writing techniques of academic writing.

Table 1: Students' Awareness and Use of the Most Common Academic Writing Techniques

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Pre-Writing Technique	Frequency	Percentage
Brainstorming	63	11.8%
Freewriting	138	25.9%
Stating a purpose for writing	132	24.8%
Considering an audience	105	19.8%
Style (word choice)	133	25.0%
Collaborative Writing	32	4.3 %
Planning	62	11.8%

Analysis of students' questionnaire reveals that most of third year secondary students in the Sudanese secondary schools were not aware of the most common academic pre-writing techniques. Many previous studies (e.g. Cumming, 1989; Hayes & Flower, 1986; Stratman & Carey, 1987) have found that expert writers use more effective planning and revising strategies than inexperienced student writers (cited in Al Asmari, 2013). Thus, the results of this study coincide with the results of a study conducted by Zakaria and Mugaddam (2013) to investigate the written performance of the Sudanese EFL students at tertiary level which revealed that 78.4% of students lack the ability to plan their writing. In the present study, the researcher attributes students' insufficient awareness of the most common academic pre-writing strategies to the absence of directed instruction on writing techniques by teachers during English writing classes, more specifically before the writing process.

4.2 The Relationship between the Students' Pre-Writing Techniques and Writing Outcomes

The table below shows the relationship between awareness of third year secondary students in the Sudanese secondary schools of the pre- writing techniques and the writing outcomes.

Table 2: The Relationship between Awareness of the Pre-writing Techniques and the Writing Outcomes.

Writing Feature	Awareness of Pre-writing Techniques (Students' Questionnaire)	Writing Outcomes (Students' Writing Test)
	Percentage	Percentage
Planning	11.8 %	2.8 %

The issue of the relationship between students' awareness of the academic pre-writing techniques and students' writing outcomes is one of the most important questions the current study attempted to answer. By analysing students' questionnaire which represent students' awareness of the academic pre-writing processes, and analysing the results of the students' writing test which represent students' writing outcomes, the study has revealed no significant relationship between awareness of academic writing processes and writing outcomes. As the results revealed notable decline in planning, it is worth to comment on this important technique. Many previous studies (e.g. Hayes & Flower, 1986; Stratman, 1987; Cumming, 1989; &Sasaki, 2000) have found that expert writers use more effective planning than inexperienced student writers. Lapp (1990) indicated that skilled writers spend

time planning the task while unskilled writers spend little time planning the task of writing. In fact, planning is an essential first step in writing. Writing without planning, is like trying to find one's way around a new town without a map. As shown by the answers of students' questionnaire, only11.8% of students are aware of the importance of making a plan for writing a composition after gathering ideas. The researcher attributes this serious lack of awareness of planning strategies to the absence of directed instruction on writing techniques by the teachers in the writing course, more specifically during the planning process. This researcher's own opinion is further confirmed by participant students who frankly reported that they were not exposed to any overt instruction on how to plan for writing. Planning helps students to organize their ideas, focus on the

subject, order the issues, and state the purpose of writing and the targeted audience (Abdulla, A.2007). Finally, the researcher would like to advise students to make a plan for their writing, particularly when writing in an exam because if students ran out of time and did not finish writing, scorers might give marks for the ideas in the plan.

4.3 Gender Differences

Question four of the present study was aimed to explore differences between male and female students in awareness of academic pre-writing techniques and writing outcomes.

4.3.1 Gender Differences in Awareness of Academic Pre-Writing Techniques

The table below presents the differences between male and female students in terms of awareness of academic pre-writing techniques

Table 3: Male and Female Students' Awareness of Academic Pre-Writing Techniques

Writing Technique	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1. Pre-writing: Brainstorming	34	12.9%	29	10.8%
2. Pre-writing: Freewriting	62	23.6%	76	28.3%
3 Pre-writing: Stating a purpose	60	11.2%	72	13.6%
4. Pre-writing: Considering an audience	51	9.6%	54	10.2%
5. Pre-writing: Word Choice	31	11.5%	38	13.5%
6. Pre-writing: Collaborative Writing	15	5.7%	8	3.0%
7. Planning	22	4.2%	40	7.6%

As shown in table 3 above, and by using Mann-Whitney's Test (Table 4 below), it was found that there are no significant differences between male and female students' awareness of academic pre-writing processes. The researcher attributes this result to the fact that third year secondary students in Sudan share the most

general characteristics such as age, educational background, academic capability, social class and socioeconomic status. Moreover, teachers who teach these students whether they are male or female, share the same work circumstances. They almost suffer from poor work facilities and lack of training which resulted in unsatisfactory

performance which on its part caused students' little awareness of most academic pre-writing techniques.

Table 4: Mann-Whitney's Test of Differences between Male and Female Students' Awareness of Academic Writing Techniques

Technique	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Z	Sig.
Brainstorming	Male	263	266.32	-032	.974
	Female	269	266.68		
Freewriting	Male	263	251.22	-2.397	.017*
	Female	269	281.44		
Purpose	Male	263	251.04	-2.485	.013
	Female	269	281.62		
Audience	Male	263	265.53	-.148	.882
	Female	269	267.44		
Word Choice	Male	263	269.42	-.462	.664
	Female	269	263.65		
Collaborative Writing	Male	263	254.99	-1.839	.066
	Female	269	277.75		
Planning	Male	263	265.27	-.198	.843
	Female	269	267.71		

*Significant at 0.05

**Significant at 0.01

4.3.2 Gender Differences in Writing Outcomes

The table below presents the differences between male and female third year secondary students' differences in academic pre-writing outcomes.

Table 5: Differences between Male and Female Students' Writing Outcomes

Writing Feature	**Male**	**Female**
Planning	1.1%	4.5%

With regard to the second part of the question which deals with gender writing differences, the researcher believes that this topic has remained a controversial issue as whether it influences students' academic writing or not. Though some studies have shown no significance in the performance of males and females in essay writing (Radin,1991; Balarabe, 1994 and Bodunde, 2001), the present study revealed significant differences between male and female third secondary students in Sudan in writing outcomes as female students performed better in writing, in particular planning than male students as shown in table 6 above and table 7 below. Thus, the results of this study are consistent with Hutt (2001) who claimed that girls are better in writing essays and in language than boys. Also, the results of this study coincided with a study conducted by King (2004) who pointed that females perform better in writing than boys (cited in Fidelia, 2015). Finally, a study conducted by Chambers and Schreibes (2004) revealed that a gap between the achievement of boys and girls has been found, with girls showing better performance than boys (cited in Farooq,M. et al (2011).

The researcher attributes the significant differences in writing achievement between male and female third secondary students in Sudan to a number of social, traditional and economic factors.

Most importantly, the researcher argues that female students' attitude and motivation play an important role in writing achievement differences. In the classroom, female students appear to be more disciplined, more confident and more responsible than male students. The results of 2015 Sudanese Secondary Certificate which were announced on 20/06/2015 reinforce the results of the present study that female students perform better than male students. The results revealed that out of the first hundred students, seventy one of them were girls.

4.4 Teachers' Awareness of Academic Pre-Writing Techniques

The table below presents teachers' awareness of the most common academic pre-writing techniques.

Table 6: Teachers' Awareness of the Most Common Academic Pre-Writing Techniques

Technique	Q.	Frequency	%
Pre-writing	2	9	18.2%

By analysing teachers' questionnaire, it is found that most teachers who teach English writing at third secondary level have low awareness of the most common academic pre-writing processes. The researcher attributes teachers' low awareness of academic pre-writing techniques to a number of factors. First, almost all English teachers lack training courses and professional development workshops that can enable them to cope with the most current teaching techniques and methods. Second, the English language main textbook, SPINE 6, does not provide teachers or students with the main features of the writing process. Moreover, the textbook does not have a teacher's guide to help teachers deal with the writing material. Third, most secondary schools do not have libraries where teachers of English can find references on academic writing techniques. Finally, most secondary schools do not have local internet network so that teachers can get access to the internet and find relevant teaching material.

5. Conclusion

The present study was intended to assess and evaluate academic pre- writing processes of third year secondary students in Sudan. To achieve this goal, the researcher used three types of instruments. They were: a questionnaire for third year secondary students in the Sudanese secondary schools, a questionnaire for teachers of English in the Sudanese secondary schools and a writing test for third year students. After data analysis, the results revealed that third year secondary students in Sudan rarely use effective pre-writing techniques with very little awareness of the strategies. The study also revealed no significant relationship between awareness of the academic pre-writing techniques and writing outcomes. Finally, the study revealed English language teachers' low awareness of academic pre-writing processes and their role in the writing process.

This study could be considered a preliminary investigation on the issue of academic writing strategies in the Sudanese secondary schools, in particular pre-writing and that further research and studies are to be conducted on the issue of academic pre-writing strategies at the early grades in secondary schools to improve students' writing skill.

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