An Analysis and Evaluation of the Academic Writing Processes of Third Year Students in the Sudanese Secondary Schools: Omdurman Locality Secondary Schools as a Representative

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ABSTRACT:
This study aims to analyse and evaluate English language academic writing processes of third year students in the Sudanese secondary schools. The study sets to find out ways that help students raise their awareness of academic writing techniques and how to use them effectively to improve their writing skill. The target group of this study is third year students in the Sudanese secondary schools represented by Omdurman Locality secondary schools for the school year 2013/2014. To achieve the aims of this study and to 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 are questionnaires for students and teachers and a writing test for students. After analysis of data, the results revealed that third year secondary students in Sudan rarely use effective academic writing techniques with very little awareness of the strategies. The study also revealed no significant relationship between awareness of the academic writing techniques and writing outcomes. The study recommended that third year students in the Sudanese secondary schools are to be made aware of the academic writing techniques to be used *before*, *during* and *after* the writing process.
Keywords: academic writing - writing process - writing outcomes

المستخلص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة لتحليل و تقييم استراتيجيات الكتابة الأكاديمية لدى طلاب وطالبات الصف الثالث بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية. و تسعى   هذه الدراسة لإيجاد طرق من شأنها ان تساعد الطلاب على رفع معرفتهم بإستراتيجيات الكتابة الأكاديمية و كيفية إستخدامها بطريقة فاعلة لتحسين مهارة الكتابة لديهم. و يتمثّل مجتمع هذه الدراسة من طلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية ممثلة بالمدارس الثانوية بمحلية أم درمان للعام الدراسي 2013/2014.   و لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة وللإجابة على أسئلتها استخدم الباحث المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لتحليل المعلومات التي جمعت من الفئة المستهدفة. و قد جمعت معلومات هذه الدراسة بإستخدام ثلاث أدوات شملت إستبانة لطلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية و إستبانة لمدرِّسي و مدرِّسات اللغة الإنجليزية للصف الثالث الثانوي و إختبار كتابة لطلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية. و بعد تحليل المعلومات أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن طلاب و طالبات الصف الثالث الثانوي بالمدارس السودانية نادرا ما يستخدمون إستراتيجيات الكتابة الأكاديمية الفاعلة مع قلة وعيهم بهذه الإستراتيجيات. كما أظهرت الدراسة عدم وجود علاقة بارزة بين الوعي لإستراتيجيات الكتابة الأكاديمية و نتائجها.   وقد أوصت الدراسة بضرورة تعريف طلاب الصف الثالث

بالمدارس الثانوية السودانية على طرق مختلفة من استراتيجيات الكتابة الأكاديمية لإستخدامها قبل وأثناء وبعد عملية الكتابة.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Writing is an intricate act of meaning making (Elbow, 1986). It is a complex process of problem solving involving memory, planning, text generation, and revision (Flower & Hayes, 1981). This process requires students to have linguistic and writing skills which enable them to produce a wide range of texts for a variety of purposes (Zakaria & Mugadam, 2013).

As most academic writing courses assess students through written assignments which include coursework and exam answers, I strongly believe that secondary students in the Sudanese secondary schools; in particular; third year students, necessarily need to work more on improving their academic writing as they are approaching a new stage of education, that is tertiary education. There, students will be faced by different tasks of writing such as assignments, essays and reports which are absolutely different from the tasks they have done before at secondary schools. Therefore, and to meet the stated expectations and aims, it is out of necessity that students are to be familiar and aware of academic writing processes which will enable them to carry out these tasks, and 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 writing show that students face writing difficulties either to lack of awareness of writing processes or inappropriate use of them. The researcher, being a teacher of English for nearly thirty years, thinks that this weakness is a crucial result of adopting traditional approaches that mainly focused on the product of writing which resulted in restricting students in what they can write, and encouraging them to use and memorize the same forms of writing regardless to content. White, 1988; Jordan, 1997; and Escholz, 1980(cited in Al Asmari 2013) argue that adopting the product approach encourages students not to produce texts but to focus on model, form and duplication. Thus, this study focuses on what goes on before students write. In other words, the study focuses on the writing processes that will enable students to make clear decisions about the direction of their writing by means of brainstorming, drafting and feedback. More importantly, the study attempts to find better ways to train and encourage students to use good writing processes to ensure good writing products and bearing greater responsibility for making their own improvements.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:
1. To review the literature for analyzing and evaluating of existing academic writing processes
2. To help students to better understand and develop their writing processes
3. To help students overcome the difficulties they experience by

developing clear, effective writing in English

4. To encourage and train students to practice academic writing processes

5. To assess the relationship between awareness of writing skills and writing outcomes as perceived by students and teachers

Questions of the Study

The study tried to answer the following five questions:

1. What academic writing processes do third year secondary students in Sudan currently use?

2. To what extent do third year secondary students in Sudan use effective writing techniques and what factors affect their writing efficiency?

3. Is there any relationship between students' awareness of the main academic 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 writing processes?

Significance of the Study

The choice of this topic emanates from the importance of the writing skill in learning and the role it can play in learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, classroom observation and English teachers' reports indicate that secondary school students in general and third year students in particular, normally experience writing difficulties either due to lack of awareness of writing processes or inappropriate use of them. 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 regards to both curriculum and instruction. Thus, this study constitutes a challenging and significant attempt to analyze and evaluate the academic writing processes of third year secondary students, on the one hand, enhance good writing processes and on the other hand remedy poor writing ones. More importantly, the study sets out to assess the relationship between students'/teachers' awareness of 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. Other fields such as translation and journalism could benefit from the results of study as writing competence is required not only in such fields, but many others.

Limits and Scope of Study

This is a descriptive, analytical study which is confined to analyzing and evaluating academic 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

Lindemann (2001) defines writing as, "a process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader" (p.10). When people write, they use graphic symbols: that is, letters or combinations of letters which relate to the sounds people make when they speak. According to Byrne

(1991), writing can be said to be, "the act of forming these symbols: making marks on a flat surface of some kind." (P.1). The symbols have to be arranged, according to certain conventions, to form words, and words have to be arranged to form sentences (Byrne, 1991). Writing is an intricate act of meaning making (Elbow, 1986). It is a complex process of problem solving involving memory, planning, text generation, and revision (Flower & Hayes, 1981). A unique language act, writing requires thinking methods different from those used for listening, reading, or speaking (Emig, 1983). As well as being the means through which testing and assessment of learning regularly take place, for the learner writing is an important skill in supporting other learning experiences, " as a mean of recording assimilating and reformulating knowledge, and of developing and making through his or her own ideas. It may be a means of personal discovery, of creativity and self-expression." (Johnson 1999.359). According to Keith, J.& Helen, J. (1999.346) writing is viewed as, " a problem-solving cognitive activity, involving strategies of goal-setting, idea generation, organization, drafting, revising and editing.

 Many professional writers believe that writing is a difficult activity for most people. According to (Yavuz & Genc, 1998), most students, low and high achievers alike, find writing difficult and view it as something they just have to persevere through in order to pass certain exams (cited in Al Asmari, 2013).

Study writing is more concerned with academic writing which students practice in class for educational purpose. Li (1999.12) refers to academic writing

as, "the written work done in schools, colleges, and universities especially written work that involves introducing, reasoning, critiquing, and building on rather than written work in other styles such as literacy and free writing." Oshima, A. & Houge, A.,(2007.3) define academic writing as, "the kind of writing used in high school and college classes.". According to Oshima & Houge (2007), academic writing is different from creative writing and personal writing which are informal; whereas academic writing is formal and requires the correct use of grammar, vocabulary and organizing ideas in a certain way.

As most academic writing courses asses students through written assignments which include coursework and exam answers, I strongly believe that secondary students; in particular; third year students, necessarily need to work more on improving their academic writing for a number of reasons. For one reason, third year secondary students are approaching a new stage of education, that is tertiary education where they will be faced by different tasks of writing such as assignments, essays and reports which are absolutely different from the tasks they have done before at secondary schools. Ballad (1984) argued that while a student is inducted into a particular discipline through lectures, discussions, readings, and laboratory work, "it is through written assignments that the success of this acculturation is most commonly judged." (cited in Belcher & Braine, 1995, p.4). Another reason is that, students should learn how to express clearly and directly what they mean to communicate (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005). Moreover, Hedge (2005) argued that students should

produce whole pieces of communication, link and develop information, ideas, or arguments for a particular reader or group of readers. Therefore, and to meet the stated expectations and aims, it is out of necessity that students are to be familiar and aware of academic writing processes which will enable them to carry out these tasks, and build a solid foundation for becoming confident and independent writers in English.

Though many researchers into writing agree that writing is a complex process with a number of operations going on simultaneously, Smith (1982.117) thinks differently that the process of writing is not a linear one; moving from planning to composing to revising and editing. He stated that writing is, "a recursive activity in which the writer moves backwards and forwards between drafting and revising, with stages of replanning in between." According to Keith and Helen (1999.360), the writing process is, "the activity of transforming ideas to written text rather than on the outcome of that activity"

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). To produce a good piece of writing, "we do more than just put words together to make sentences"(Rumisek, L. & Zemach, D. 2003.3).Oshima, A. and Hogue, A. argue that, "writing is never a one-step action; it is an ongoing creative act" (2007.15). Based on the ideas and definitions of the writers and linguists, in particular Hedge (2005) and Al Asmari (2013), it is agreed that there are different activities that writers practice before, during and after writing.

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 (2007.18) believe that pre-writing, "engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition". 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)

Having considered their audience and purpose of writing after collecting data, writers move to the second phase of activity which is the writing itself. This phase begins with writing a first draft. According to Hogue (2008), writing the

first draft should take place in class as the teacher is available for immediate consultation and that he or she can check that everyone is on the right track. In this stage, Leki (1995) claims that writers should not worry about detail, but they should try to get their ideas down on a paper. Hedge (2005) supports Leki's idea that in this stage, writers tend to focus on getting the content right first and leave details until later.

Having written a first draft, writers move to the second activity in this stage which is writing a final draft. In the final draft, writers focus on the way in which they put the pieces of the text together, developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure (Hedge, 2005). There are different features and activities that students need to produce and practice in this phase of writing.

Among the studies on the stages of the writing process, research on the role of editing and revision is noticeable. It is believed that writing is a process of presenting and formulating. In other words, writing is a process of creating meaning. In this process, revision functions as a stage of representing and reformulating (Emig, 1971; Faigley&Witte, 1981; Hall, 1990; Murray, 1974; Sommers, 1980, cited in Li, 1999). The revision stage connects the other two stages of the writing process, planning and composing, in the way it examines (a) whether the finished draft presents the background knowledge the writer has collected for the designated topic, (b) whether the finished draft satisfies the imagine audience, and (c) whether the finished draft reflects the linguistic ability of the writer to the greatest possible extent. Faigley and Witte (1981) indicated that

revision could not be separated from planning and composing. Hedge (2005) indicates that revision activities only make sense as part of a much wider process of planning and composition. Hedge (2005.122) stated that:

Students need to be sure that their plans are reasonably well formed. Then they need to check a first draft to ensure that the 'global' structure of their writing is well organized. In this case, the concept and practice of revision needs to be closely linked with the concept and practice of planning

To many readers, it seems that revision and editing are the same. However, Leki, 1989; Hedge, 2005 and Oshima & Houge, 2007 argue that revision is different from editing. They believe that revising reconsiders the big issues of content and organization. In other words, writers focus on what they want to say and what ideas they want to express. When editing a piece of writing, writers work on the smaller issues of grammar, punctuation, and mechanics. In other words, when editing a text, writers concentrate on how they say something rather than what they say (Leki, 1989). If drafting is for the writer, revision is for the reader. During revision you consider your writing from your audience's point of view. You should revise for audience, purpose and form.

Thus, from this review of related literature, we can see that the field of academic 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.

Milroy and Gordon (2003) along with many other scholars point out," the strength of the conclusions we can draw from the results obtained from a selected small group depends on how accurately the particular sample represents the larger population." (cited in Dornyei,Z.2007.96). Based on the this point of view, the researcher considers third year secondary students at Omdurman Locality government schools a good sample as they are very similar to third year secondary students in Sudan in their most general characteristics such as age, educational background, academic capability, social class and socioeconomic status. According to Dornyei (2007.96), "By adopting appropriate sampling procedures to select a smaller number of people to be investigated, we can save a considerable amount of time, cost, and effort and can still come up with accurate results."

The reason for this level selection is that third year secondary students are approaching a new stage of education; so they need to improve their academic writing techniques 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 writing skills.

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. This study, therefore, uses multiple methods to generate answers to the research questions. The main reasons for the use of multiple methods are stated in Tindall (1996. 147) "All methods have their limitations, their own validity threats and distortions. A danger of using only one method is that the findings may merely be an artifact of the method." Golby (1994. 11) agreed that, "Methods should be dictated by the need to understand, not selected on doctrinal grounds." This allows for the information gathered through one method to be compared with that collected using alternative methods, so that weakness in a particular method can be overcome by the use of others.

3.3 Questionnaires

3.3.1 Students' Questionnaire

Students' questionnaire investigates the participants' perception and evaluation of the academic writing skills they adopt when they write a composition. To design such a questionnaire, the researcher first planned an initial design based on the use of relevant literature and dissertations related to the field. In addition, the researcher used his own experience of teaching third year students' textbook when it was first published in 1997. The questions were formed in such a way to find answers to the questions of study following this order: pre-writing, during writing and after writing techniques It consists of twenty questions which aimed to find out what activities and strategies students often use before, during and after writing. The last three questions of

the questionnaire were stated to investigate the factors that mostly affect students' writing efficiency.

3.3.2 Teachers' Questionnaire

Third year teachers of English are usually considered to be directors and trainers for students. They are supposed to lead and direct students to effective writing techniques. As such, it was deemed appropriate to form a questionnaire for third year teachers of English.

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

3.3.3 The Students' Writing Test

The writing test was used as one of the most important methods to collect data for the present study. The justification for using such a test in the study was the need to know how effectively third year students in the Sudanese secondary schools implemented their academic writing techniques to write an essay following the instructions and plan given.

Students were asked to write one composition on a certain topic related to the Internet. As it was difficult to test all different types of academic writing, the researcher thought of a popular area of academic writing in which students could express their own point of view. The choice of persuasive writing, to high extent, met the researcher's expectations as this type of writing forces students to think on their own,"take a stand on an issue, support their stand with solid reasons, and support their answers with solid evidence."(Oshima, A, 2006.142)

Students were given a class of forty five minutes to accomplish the task. I believe that such a topic might enable students to write freely and comfortably as it addresses an interesting and meaningful issue to them. The test was designed to assess students' ability to use academic writing techniques to convey their thoughts to the audience.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Awareness and Use of Academic Writing Techniques

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

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

Technique	Q	Frequency	Percentage
1. Pre-writing			
a. Brainstorming	1	63	11.8%
b. Freewriting	4	138	25.9%
c. Stating a purpose for writing	5	132	24.8%
d. Considering an audience	6	105	19.8%
e. Style (word choice)	7	133	25.0%
f. Collaborative Writing	8	32	4.3 %
2. Planning	2	62	11.8%
3. Revising			
a. Form	12	174	32.7%
b. Content	17	210	39.5%

4. Editing	15	51	9.6%

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 writing techniques, in particular prewriting and revising and editing 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 inexperienced student writers (cited in Al Asmari, 2013). In the present study, the researcher attributes students' insufficient awareness of the most common academic writing strategies to the absence of directed instruction on writing techniques by teachers during English writing classes, more specifically before and after the writing process.

4.2 The Relationship between the Students' 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 writing techniques and the writing outcomes.

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

Writing Feature	Awareness of Writing Techniques (Students' Questionnaire)	Writing Outcomes (Students' Writing Test)
	Percentage	Percentage
1. Planning	11.8 %	2.8 %
2. Content	26.7 %	31.4 %
3. Organization	45.1 %	17.4 %
4. Word Choice	25.0 %	18.8 %
5. Language Use	32.9 %	19.5 %
6. Mechanics	48.7%	25.6%

The issue of the relationship between students' awareness of the academic 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 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 shown by Spearman's Correlational Analysis below. As the results revealed drastic 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, only 7.8% of students are aware of the importance of making a plan for writing a composition after gathering ideas (see table 1.7). 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.

Table 3: Spearman's Correlational Analysis between Awareness of Writing Techniques and Writing Outcomes

Number of Techniques	Correlation	Significance
6	0.429	0.397(0.4)

It is worth to comment on the poor writing achievement in the students' writing test designed for this study. Due to long experience in teaching English writing, the researcher was not really shocked by the drastic and dreadful writing outcomes achieved by third year secondary students in Sudan. In fact, the decline in students' writing performance is not only confined to Sudanese secondary students. It has become a common problem almost everywhere. Many studies conducted in this field revealed significant decline of students' writing level.

As the current study is concerned with third year secondary students in Sudan, and as one of the most important questions it tries to answer is related to students' writing outcomes, the researcher believes that students' low achievement at writing is understandable and justifiable for a number of factors. First, teaches' lack of professional knowledge, in addition to lack of training courses, accompanied by low English proficiency among some teachers all resulted in practitioners who

are ill-equipped to deliver the material in the way expected by course designers. Second, students' passive attitudes toward English and who many of them still consider English as a subject to pass in exams rather than a means of communication played a negative role in students' achievement at English writing. The researcher attributes students' low motivation to the learning and teaching situation practices, class sizes and classroom environment. Third, the researcher considers students' course book, which has been the main text book for nearly three decades, as one of the factors of students' low achievement at the writing skill as it completely ignores the writing process. Finally, O'Brien (2013.13) concluded that:

No one factor could be isolated as singularly responsible for the decline in English Language standards in Sudanese schools. A multitude of issues from psychological to pedagogical to economic to social and linguistic were concluded to be contributors to the observed decline.

4.3   Gender   Differences

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

4.3.1 Gender Differences in Awareness of Academic Writing Techniques

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

Table 4: Male and Female Students' Awareness of Academic 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%
8 Drafting	78	14.6%	91	17.2%
9. Organization	110	20.8%	129	24.3%
10. Mechanics	119	22.4%	140	26.3%
11. Language Use	89	33.8%	86	32.5%
12. Revising Form	78	29.7%	96	35.7%
13. Revising Content	97	18.3%	113	21.2%
14. Editing	20	7.6%	31	11.5%
15. Feedback	46	8.6%	62	11.6%

As shown in table 4 above, and by using Mann-Whitney's Test (Table 5 below), it was found that there are no significant differences between male and female students' awareness of academic 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 writing techniques.

Table 5: 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	266.32 266.68	-032	.974
	Female	269			

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		
Drafting	Male	263	263.79	-.431	.666
	Female	269	269.15		
Organization	Male	263	267.63	-.179	.858
	Female	269	265.39		
Mechanics	Male	263	266.00	-.084	.933
	Female	269	266.99		
Language Use	Male	263	264.00	-.388	.698
	Female	269	268.95		
Revising Form	Male	263	255.40	-1.705	.088
	Female	269	277.35		
Revising Content	Male	263	242.15	-3.906	.000**
	Female	269	290.30		
Editing	Male	263	253.72	-1.973	.049*
	Female	269	279.00		
Feedback	Male	263	274.79	-1.684	.092
	Female	269	258.39		

*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 writing outcomes.
Table 6: Differences between Male and Female Students' Writing Outcomes

Writing Feature	**Male**	**Female**
Planning	1.1%	4.5%
Content	31.4%	28.1%
Organization	15.0%	20.0%
Vocabulary	16.4%	20.6%
Language Use	17.0%	21.8%
Mechanics	24.1%	26.8%

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 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.

Table 7: T-Test for Finding Differences between Male and Female Students' Writing Outcomes

Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	DF	T-value	Sig.
Male	261	3.2490	3.82543	524	-3.201	001*
Female	265	4.4340	4.62171			

*Significant at 0.01

4.4 Teachers' Awareness of Academic Writing Techniques

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

Table 8: Teachers' Awareness of the Most Common Academic Writing Techniques

Technique	Q.	Frequency	%
Academic Writing Techniques Awareness	1	10	20.2%
Pre-writing	2	9	18.2%
Collaborative Writing	3	27	54.6%
Organization	4	16	32.2%
Paragraph Structure Techniques	5	21	42.5%
Drafting	6	26	52.0%
Revising	7	12	24.8%
Editing	8	9	19.6%
Peer Editing	9	12	24.0%
Feedback	10	8	16.4%

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 writing processes, particularly prewriting techniques,

revising , editing and feedback (see table 3 above). The researcher attributes teachers' low awareness of academic writing techniques to a number of factors. First, not all English language teachers are recruited according to their qualifications, as it is observed that some English teachers are not specialized and not qualified enough to teach English. Second, almost English teachers lack training courses and professional development workshops that can enable them cope with the most current teaching techniques and methods. Third, 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. Four, most secondary schools do not have libraries where teachers of English can find references on academic writing techniques. Five, 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 explore and evaluate academic writing processes of third year secondary students in Sudan. To achieve this goal, the researcher formed three types of instruments which included a questionnaire for third year secondary students in Sudan and a questionnaire for teachers of English in secondary schools, in addition to a writing test for third year students. After data analysis, the results revealed that third year secondary students in Sudan rarely use effective writing techniques with very little awareness of the strategies. The study also revealed no significant relationship between awareness of the academic writing techniques and writing outcomes. Finally, the study revealed English teachers' low awareness of academic 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, and that further research and studies are to be conducted on the issue of academic writing processes at the early grades in secondary schools to improve students' writing skill.

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