

Features of Credibility in the Writing of Sudanese University Students
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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Features of credibility in the writing of Sudanese EFL Students. A descriptive, analytical research method is adopted. A questionnaire is utilized to collect the data. The subjects of the study is the students majoring English at Al.Neelain University. The findings of the study indicate that the Sudanese EFL students' writing was –to some extent- void from the features of credibility. The findings also suggested that the features of credibility might interfere with other writing features such as the appeal to the audience needs and reasoning.

Key words: descriptive- analytical- credibility- appeal-reasoning

المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استقصاء سمات مصداقية الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات السودانية. فقد تم استخدام المنهج التحليلي الوصفي حيث تم استخدام استبانة لجمع البيانات. تكون مجتمع الدراسة من طلاب جامعة النيلين الذين يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية كتخصص رئيس . أشارت نتائج الدراسة الى أن مهارة الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات السودانية تكاد . نوعا ما. خالية من سمات المصداقية. و قد أشارت النتائج أيضا الى أن سمات المصداقية ربما تتداخل مع بعض سمات الكتابة الأخرى المتعلقة بالاحتكام إلى رغبات القراء و المنطق.

كلمات مفتاحية: وصفي ، تحليل ، مصداقية ، احتكام ، منطق

Overview

Writing is always considered as the most difficult skill compared to reading, speaking and listening. This is due to the fact that writing involves complicated cognitive processes such as specifying the ideas, contemplating them, interpreting them and production of a written text. Thus, persuading the audience has become a real challenge to writers. In fact, persuasion requires enriching writing with evidence brought form credible sources. However, in the context of Sudan, we find that many students, particularly in the Sudanese government and private universities, could not write persuasively. That is, it is observable that most of the Sudanese EFL students' writing lack authentic documentation, credibility, suitability for audience and purpose, respect for various point of

views and non-reliance on reputable source. So the primary objective of the current study is to investigate the extent to which the Sudanese EFL students write persuasively and appropriately.

Questions of the Study:

This study attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do EFL students do not use appropriate language in their writing?
- 2- To what extent do EFL students do not engaged with the topic in their writing?
- 3- To what extent do Sudanese EFL students do not use credible supporting materials in their writing?
- 4- To what extent do Sudanese EFL students do not present a balanced argument in their writing?



Hypotheses of the Study:

In order to answer the research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- 1- Students do not use appropriate language in their writing.
- 2-- Students do not engaged with the topic in their writing
- 3- The Sudanese EFL students do not use credible supporting materials in their writing.
- 4- In their writing, students do not present a balanced argument.

Literature Review

• **Credibility and Persuasive Writing**
“Credibility,” which traces back to Aristotle, who coined the term “ethos” to describe qualities of the source that facilitated persuasion, refers to the degree to which the audience considers the writer believable, or simply put, what the audience thinks of the writer. It includes three core dimensions: expertise, which refers to the knowledge or ability ascribed to the writer; trustworthiness, which refers to the writer’s perceived honesty, character, and safety; goodwill, which means that the writer has the audience’s benefit at heart, shows understanding of others’ ideas, and is empathic toward his or her audience’s problems. Generally speaking, a writer perceived as an individual of integrity and character, and with rich knowledge and goodwill is more credible and therefore, more likely to work wonders in persuasion, gaining the audience’s trust and inspiring them.

Just as a speaker may have high credibility for one audience and low credibility for another and may also have high credibility on one topic and low credibility on another, a writer’s credibility can also be strengthened or weakened by his/her

message and how he/she delivers it. If the audiences consider the writer sincere and competent, they will be much more receptive to his/her ideas and are more likely to change their attitudes or to do behaviors.

Since the audiences are more likely to trust those who have personal warmth, consideration of others, a good mind and solid learning, to trust those with whom they share convictions about what is right and wrong, and to trust those who are sincere in purpose, well-informed about a particular subject and fair in arguing, it is fairly necessary for writers to try every possible means to make themselves appear capable and trustworthy. Specifically, they can employ the following strategies to establish and enhance credibility.

• Strategies for Establishing the Writer’s Credibility

When writing, it is necessary to demonstrate several strategies so as to convince the audience. For instance, it is fundamental to vividly express ideas. Vividness in deciphering ideas can be achieved via employing strong, specific and concrete words and phrases instead of general and abstract ones. Instead of saying that ‘Ali is anxious and nervous when he receives the telephone call’, it is effective and precise to describe his psychological state by saying ‘Ali leaped from the edge of the chair and grabbed for it, when the telephone rang’. So in this way, a reader could have a complete image about Ali’s nervousness and anxiety. Additionally, giving details can be of great help to audience. Furthermore, (Lucas, 1989) claims that presenting ideas emotionally is another strategy for establishing credibility in writing.



This strategy could be achieved by addressing the feelings and emotions of the readers. This will also assist in putting the audience in suitable mood (Yang, 1984). Presenting our ideas with personal integrity, on the other hand, is considered as strategy for establishing credibility in writing. Such a strategy is obtained via respecting the attention of the audience (Trimmer, 1988). Being reasonable in presenting ideas could be another strategy for building credibility in writing. According to Lucas (1989), reasoning in writing is more important than providing evidence. Thus, to convince audience, it is necessary to change their attitudes, values and behaviors.

Keke Zhang (2019) examined credibility in writing of Chinese students majoring English. He adopted a theoretically-based data-driven approach proposed by Knoch (2009). Findings indicated that the students failed to demonstrate credible writing.

Materials and Methods

In the current study, a descriptive, analytical research method is adopted. The qualitative data will be collected via a questionnaire.

Population and Sampling

The population is a complete set of elements (persons or things) that possess some common characteristics defined by the sampling criteria established by the researcher. The population of this study is composed of the EFL teachers and students majoring English Al-Neelain University. Concerning the students, they are the students who are in the third levels. Their ages ranged from 18 to 21. Most of them were native speakers of Arabic. Very few of them are second

language English speakers (Nigerians). Some of them had received their primary and secondary education in some of the Gulf countries: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar and Oman.

With regard to the choice of the aforementioned subjects, it was determined by some factors. For instance, the students are in a position (English learners) which might help in providing deep insights into the use of vocabulary learning strategies. Teachers, on the other hand, are the most experienced to provide beneficial information about the syllabus.

Sampling

Sampling is a process of selecting a few from a bigger group. Creswell (2009) claims that sample designs are divided into two types: probability (random) and non-probability. Kothari (2004) claims that while non-probability sampling involves deliberate selection of items, the probability sampling does not. It is worth mentioning that both probability and non-probability sampling are further categorized to include multiple types of samples. In the current study, a non-probability sampling technique was adopted. This technique is projected in using convenience sampling which is a subcategory of non-probability sampling. This type of sampling has been selected because it appears ideal for testing entire population, for its inexpensiveness, fastness and availability. In addition, convenient sampling is useful for detecting relationships among different phenomena.

In the current study, the students chosen for sampling consisted of 30 at Al-Neelain University the third level students.



Questionnaire

Brown (2001, p.6) states that a questionnaire refers to “any written instruments that provide respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers”. Adding to that, questionnaires allow researchers to gather information that learners are able to report about themselves such as their beliefs and their motivation about learning or their reactions to learning and classroom activities and instructions. On the other hand, Dornyei (2003, p.8) claims that questionnaires provide the researcher with three types of data about the respondents ‘factual, behavioral and attitudinal’. Thus, in the present study, a questionnaire is adopted with the aim of seeking factual and behavioral data towards the strategies that the learners used to discover the meaning of vocabulary and particularly near-synonyms of English.

The learners’ questionnaire (LQ) is formulated in accordance with Likert 5-point Scale. Thus, five choices are given. Participants are asked to choose one of the five choices (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) by ticking the box that suits their actual use of the reasoning strategies.

Procedures of Data Collection

After finishing piloting the instruments, the researcher began collecting data in November 2019. It took place at the Department of Languages. Prior to data collection process, a short meeting was held with Head of English Department in

which the purpose of the study and the process of data collection were explained. During this meeting, permission for data collection is granted to the researcher. Similar short meetings were held with the staff teaching and students in which they were enlightened about the purpose of the study and the need for their participation. Upon granting the participants’ willingness, data collection began the following day.

Firstly, the questionnaire was administered. Before handing out the questionnaire, the students were told that there was no wrong and right answer to the statements, and that they should respond as honestly and accurately as possible, and that their responses would remain confidential. Furthermore, the students were provided with an example of how to respond to the questions in the questionnaire.

30 students from the third level completed the questionnaire. The researcher was present when the students were completing the questionnaire in order to answer any question or clarify any item that they might not understand or might find ambiguous. In order to achieve the most possible results of the questionnaire; the students were given a three-day period to answer it. On the third day, all the respondents- except 10- were able to submit their scripts. It is worth mentioning that those who were not able to submit their scripts promised to submit them the following day. After collecting all the scripts, they were coded for the purpose of statistical analysis.

Results of Data Analysis

Table 1: Students' use of ethos (related to the credibility of speaker) in their writing

Statement	Number of Respondents	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students appear more competent in their writing	30	2.04	.455
While writing, students share their personal information	30	1.66	1.096
In their writing, students present a balanced argument	30	1.54	1.170
Students depend on credible sources in their written discourse	30	1.30	.466
Students use appropriate language in their writing	30	1.40	.724
Students appear engaged with the topic in their writing	30	1.43	1.040

Scale: 5: Strongly Agree 4: Agree 3: Neutral 2: Disagree 1: Strongly Disagree

Table 1 shows the overall respondents' views on the ethos used by the students in their writing. It is obvious that the mean indexes are ranging between (1.30) and

(2.04). This result indicates that all of the respondents agreed that the students utilized all these persuasive discourse features when writing.

Figure 1: Students appear more competent with their writing

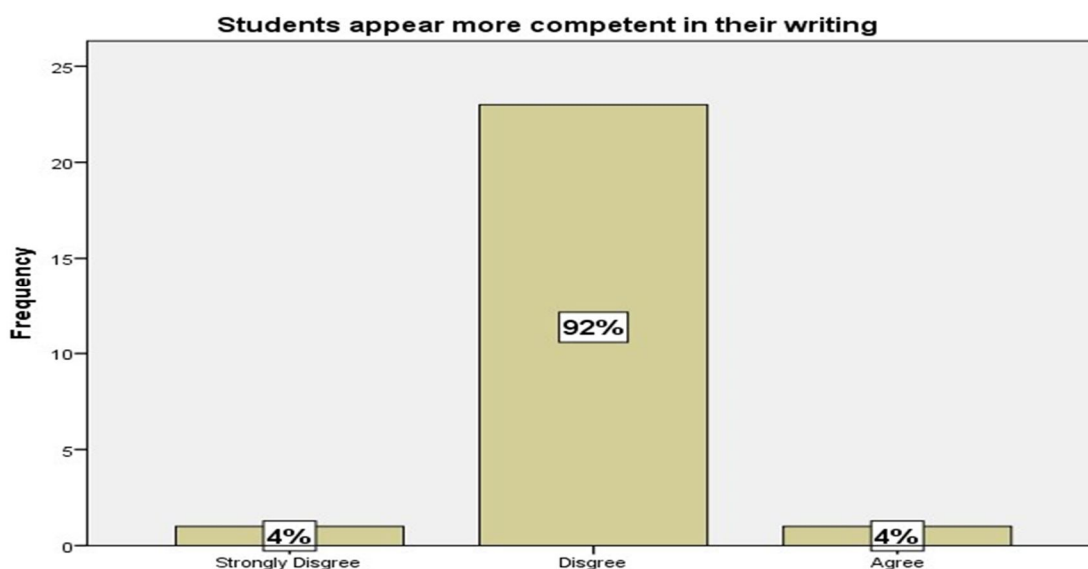
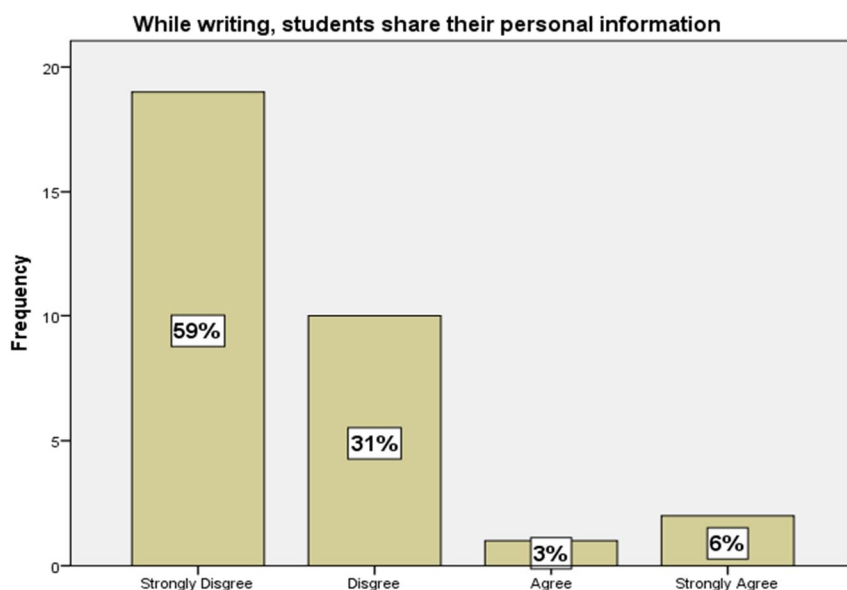


Figure 1 indicates that 92% of the respondents disagreed with the statement (students appear more competence in their writing). This disagreement is also strongly supported

by 4% of the respondents. However, only 4% of them agreed with the students' competence when producing writing.

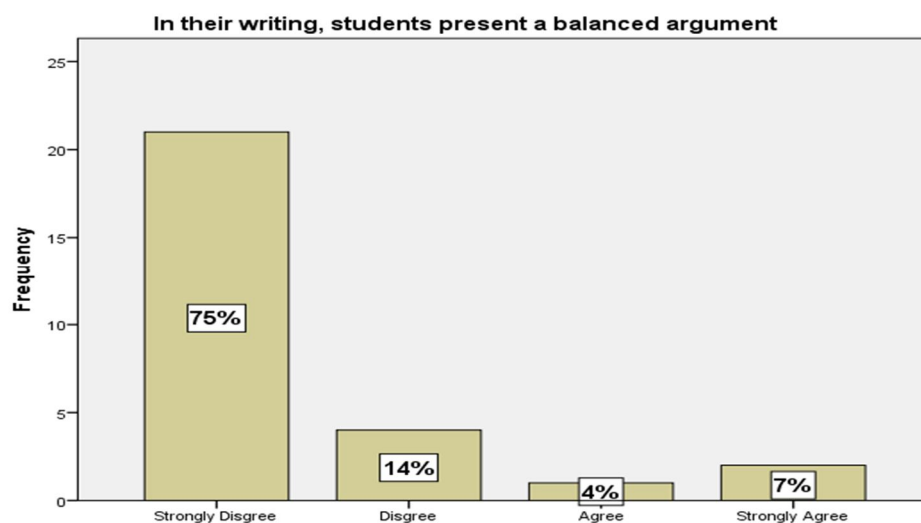
Figure 2: While writing, students share their personal experience



The statement; while writing, students share their personal information, was strongly rejected by 59% of the respondents. This disagreement was

more supported by 31%. In contrast, only 3% and 6% of the respondents agreed with it.

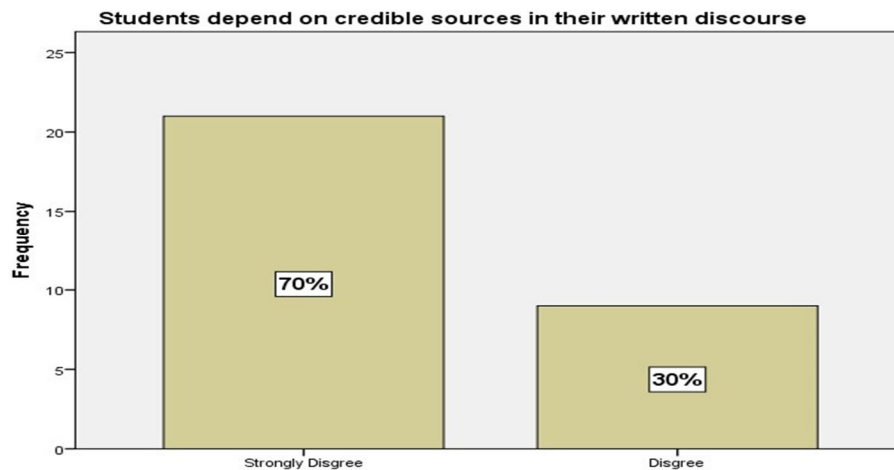
Figure 3: In their writing, students present a balanced argument



Presenting a balanced argument in writing was strongly rejected by most of the respondents. It receives the highest percentage index of 75. Furthermore, another 14% of the

respondents disagreed with this statement. What is remarkable is that only 7% of the respondents strongly agreed on it.

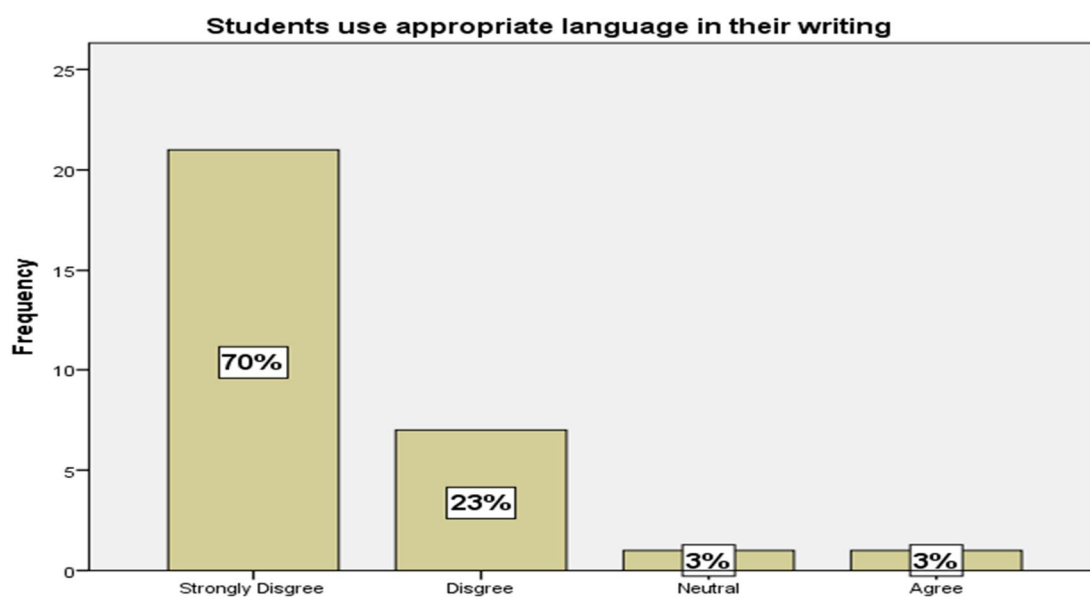
Figure 4: Students depend on credible sources in their written discourse



In the above mentioned figure, there is a complete consensus on that the students did not depend on credible sources when

writing. That is, 70% strongly disagreed with this statement and another more 30% supported such a disagreement.

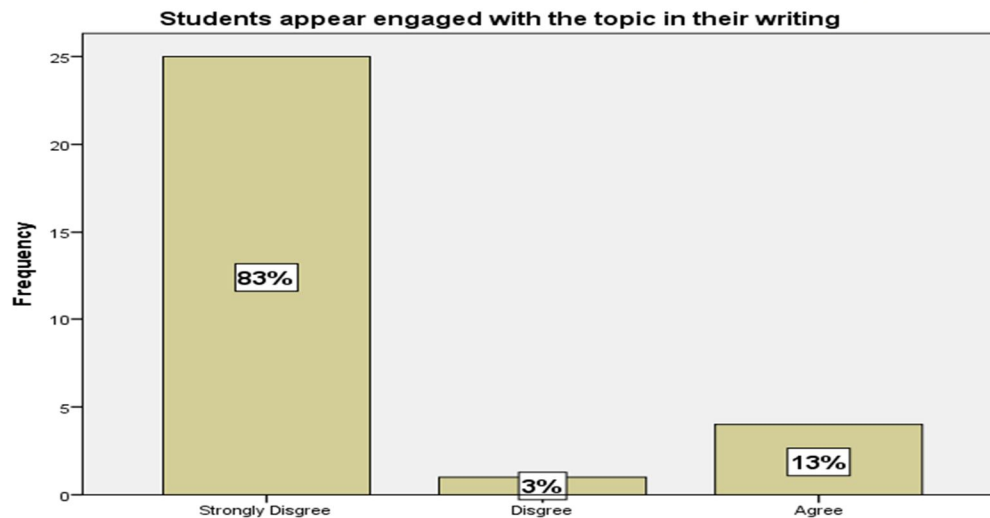
Figure 5: Students use appropriate language in their writing



Similarly, students' use of appropriate language in their writing was strongly rejected by 70% of the participants. Moreover, another 23% of them disagreed with this statement.

While 3% of the respondents agreed on the students' use of appropriate language, 3% of them remained neutral.

Figure 6: Students appear engaged with the topic in their writing



Students' engagement in the topic when they are writing was strongly rejected by 83% of the respondents. In addition, this strong disagreement was supported by another 3% of them. However, this rejection was faced by the agreement of 13% of them.

Discussion and Verification of Hypotheses

The present study is an investigation into strategies of credibility used by Sudanese EFL students when writing. It also seeks to confirm the following hypotheses:

- 1- Students do not use appropriate language in their writing.
- 2-- Students do not engaged with the topic in their writing.
- 3- The Sudanese EFL students do not use credible supporting materials in their writing.
- 4- In their writing, students do not present a balanced argument.

Concerning the hypothesis (**Students do not use appropriate language in their writing**), the results of the questionnaire indicated that the respondents strongly supported this hypothesis with a percentage of 70%. A possible justification for this hypothesis is that the students do not have sufficient amount of vocabulary plus their ignorance of using it properly. Regarding the second hypothesis (**Students do not engaged with the topic in their writing**), the results of the questionnaire indicated that 83% of the respondents supported it. No doubt, engagement in writing requires the knowledge of the whole writing techniques since it encompasses a wide scope of interrelated processes. Concerning the third hypothesis (**The Sudanese EFL students do not use credible supporting materials in their writing**), it was backed up by 70% of the respondents and rejected by 30% of them.



Lack of providing credible information in the writing of Sudanese university students may be due to their ignorance of providing information as such. It may also be referred to their ignorance of the nature of the topic that they are addressing. **Failure to present a balanced argument in writing**, was supported by 75% of the respondents. A possible justification for this failure could be the students' inability to support their argument by providing suitable evidence in addition to their failure in indicating which ideas are for the argument and which ones are against it. So, the more the writer balances between the ideas that support and that reject the argument, the more he succeeds in convincing his audience. Such results are in line with the results of Keke Zhang (2019).

Findings and Conclusion

The present study is an investigation into the strategies of credibility used in the writing of the Sudanese university students. The qualitative data were collected by a questionnaire. The findings indicated that the Sudanese EFL students produce credible pieces of writing in terms of documentation, reliable sources and respect for audience. The study also suggested that the ways of being credible in writing may interfere with other writing styles such as appealing to the needs and reasoning.

Recommendation of the Study

The study recommends that teaching of various writing styles to students so that

they can produce a fairer and persuasive piece of writing.

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