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**EFL Students Making Sense of Good Writing: The Case of Algerian
Third Year Pre-service ENSB Teacher Trainees.**

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Abstract:

Writing plays a major role in students' academic success as a skill used in both English language teaching and evaluation in the EFL context. This study investigates third year students' perceptions of good writing as it is taught and practiced at L'Ecole Normale Supérieure de Bouzareah-Algiers (ENSB) by answering the following question: how do students perceive good writing? To answer this question, qualitative data was collected from semi-structured questionnaire and a follow up interview and were thematically analysed as part of a PhD thesis on students' journeys of becoming writers. Thus, I will focus on students' understanding of the standards of good writing while they negotiate access and recognition as writers of the academic writing community. The findings reveal five main features of good writing which are: mastery of English, positive impact on the reader, and finally having some writing ethics like honestly, commitment and responsibility towards the readers.

Keywords: EFL writing, good writing, discourse standards, and students' perceptions of writing.

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1.Introduction

This study, situated within the fields of academic writing, applied linguistics and EAP, investigates the EFL students' perceptions of good writing in the academic context focusing on argument writing as a widely used type of texts both for teaching and evaluation. The data used in this study consists of students 42 answers to semi-structured questionnaire and 11 answers to a follow up interview as part of the data collection process for a PhD thesis on EFL students' journeys of becoming writers in the academic context focusing mainly on students' experiences of writing argument essays. In this paper, I will focus on one aspect of students' journeys of becoming writers which is their understanding and meaning making of the academic writing discourse as represented by the standards of good writing (argument writing specifically) as they negotiate access and recognition as writers and thus members of the academic writing community which is composed of teachers, peers, friends, readers and people in general who belong to their society.

First, I will discuss how students perceive good writing and analyze the features of good writing students share and explain answering the open questions:

1 what is writing according to you?

2. What is good writing?

The two open-ended questions appeared in both the students' questionnaire and interview in order to compare students' answers, check their consistency and thus increase data validity. Students' answers were read several times, similar answers were color coded, grouped together and analyzed using thematic analysis in order to sort out the main features of good writing in general and good argument essay in particular.

Second, I will discuss how these features reflect the dominant discourse of academic writing in students writing environment or community which covers students writing practice both in class and outside the classroom as complementary spaces for students in their journeys of becoming writers in the Algerian academic context.

One important tool students' need along these journeys is the language of the writing community which the members should understand and master to communicate with its other members. This language is the result of the academic context and its discourse which as Ivanič and Clark (1997, p11-12) covers language, texts and practice of writing in a specific context. This can be academic like higher education represented in university, colleges and teachers' training institutions as it is the case of the participants of this study or professional settings as well. This practice is often inspired by different approaches to writing and thus different understandings and philosophies adopted by teachers of writing in different contexts including the EFL context. As Raimes (1983a, p261-2) states:

Many ESL classrooms still rely on writing textbooks which stress paragraph models, grammar and usage rules, and vocabulary development as their entire curriculum. The large majority of these textbooks, while advertised as process

oriented, do not typically emphasize purposeful writing activities. ‘Current traditional’ approaches are also alive and well in L1 writing instruction, particularly in secondary and university level classes. (Raimes, 1983a cited in Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p31)

This language of writing is also about the rules, conventions and standards of academic writing and good writing which is supposed to meet certain expectations and criteria. In their attempts to become writers, EFL students seem to struggle to apply these standards and use them to achieve good writing. However, what makes good writing in the academic context is not always obvious to both teachers and students. Although there are a number of features of texts and language which come to mind when we hear the expression “good writing”, this notion of good writing remains very subjective and often controversial among teachers and students alike.

Speaking the language of the writing community i.e., understanding and effectively using the writing conventions and standards is key to students to become writers and thus active members of their writing community (Creme and Lea, 1997, p14). This means that they are or become able to not only have access to this community as they join university or higher education as pre-service teachers as it is the case of the participants of this study, but being legitimate and acknowledged, recognized and active members of this community who do not passively consume its discourse, but participate in its making, construction and change and development.

The position of English as a global language at the age of globalization has resulted in the widespread of standards for its users whether they are native speakers, second language users or EFL users which is the context of this study. This standardization is apparent in how language skills are evaluated by many international language tests like IELTS and TOEFL and mainly academic writing. Because writing is a dominant skill in the academic context both as a tool for teaching and evaluation since writing is a tool student use to learn English and at the same time a tool for evaluating their academic achievement and knowledge. This gives it more power as an instrumental skill which determines students’ success or failure students seem to be aware of this and the participants of this study are no exception. This situation was clearly expressed by Freedman et al. (1983):

Learning to write in English when it is not your first, but a second or a third language poses its own problems. It presents difficulties (of a peculiar nature) to the teaching profession as well, and until recent years has been the neglected child in the family of the four skills. (Freedman, Pringle and Yalden, 1983, p186) Being a foreign language, English is not widely used in the students’ social lives and therefore developing their writing skills is a real challenge to them. Therefore, most of the writing practice of these students is done in class and thus the classroom instruction is the main source of students’ knowledge of writing and their writing skills.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Defining writing in the academic context

Writing is a complex process which is characterized by its recursive nature. Flower and Hymes (1981) describe this complexity in their model, widely accepted by scholars who regard writing as involving three main stages: planning, writing and reviewing. This model is viewed by Zamel (1983) as: "...non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning." (Zamel, 1983:165 cited in Hyland, 2003, p11)

Writing being a process implies a certain amount of complexity which makes this skill a real challenge to most students at university or higher education including EFL teacher trainees as Hedge (2000) explains:

Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process, which is one of the gradually developing a text. It involves a number of activities: setting goals, generating ideas, organizing information, selecting appropriate language, making a draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing. It is a complex process which is neither easy nor spontaneous for many language writers (Hedge 2000, p302)

These demands are often specific to the academic environment students try to have access to once they join university and which can also be described as their writing community. The environment where students practice writing, deal with readers and writers and learn the communicative functions of writing in real life and in a specific discipline. This goes in tandem with the fact that writing in the academic context is both a tool for learning English and the nuts and bolts of writing as a language skill. This is often known as learning to write and writing to learn. Writing is a way for students to show what they have learned, how they think and perceive reality and the world. It's more than language but it has to do with thinking, communication and social interactions with others in the academic context or community and beyond. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) explain:

Students in advanced academic contexts have needs for writing which go beyond the basic goals for communication and for learning new information. (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p341)

Each academic community might have a specific academic discourse. This community might include different disciplines which share a common discourse as it can be limited to a specific discipline. For example, one might expect students at the department of English to write in the same way as there are common features of the expository or argument essay in English. Yet, students of literature are sometimes encouraged to use sophisticated vocabulary which is widely used in literature unlike the students who study applied linguistics who are encouraged to keep their vocabulary simple, relevant and easy as their priority is to simply complex notions through simple language. Sophisticated vocabulary might sometimes be seen as a distraction which should be avoided.

This shows that writing is the result of the context in which it is taken place.

The context is also used in this paper to refer to the writing environment or community in general or a specific context like a department of English in the EFL context at university or teacher's training college as it's the case of the participants of this study.

Once students join university, they are expected to socialize with this academic community by understanding its discourse, values and rules. The latter are often reflected in the language of the community or its discourse. This language is also present or reflected in how texts are structured and the features of good writing which is often a contested concept even if the members of the writing community like teachers might agree on some common features and therefore require students to respect and apply them when they write as Grabe and Kaplan clarify (1996):

[...] Writing is no longer seen as primarily for personal expression or presenting school-based information, though they remain important issues. Rather, the advanced writer is also often concerned with analyzing and interpreting information critically, synthesizing disparate sets of information, creating information, arguing alternative perspectives, and presenting and promoting research. (Grabe and Kaplan, Ibid.)

However, writing is not only about reproducing models of essays using specific features but it's a manifestation of students' identities, thinking, voice and experiences as individuals and members of the writing community. In this paper, I will discuss how a group of EFL students who are undergraduate and pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language perceive good writing in the academic context.

To answer this question, I used two main research tools for data collection which are a semi-structured questionnaire and a follow up interview.

2.2. Academic writing and its main features

Academic writing is often defined as any writing done to fulfil the requirement of a college or university. Academic writing includes a number of texts or genres such as report, summaries, journal articles, theses, dissertations and essays. The latter can have different types, aims and functions. This study focuses on argument essay as a key type of academic writing texts.

Academic writing is the one done at university or higher education by the members of the academic community who are students, teachers and researchers who write in different subjects. This context influences how language is used and thus writing. These features are promoted in universities formal documents and guides as well as their educational websites which are often used as a learning source for their students. This is the case of Glasgow University which is used as an example in this article. Therefore, academic writing is characterized by a number of features which are discussed as follows:

a- Formal register: this requires a specific vocabulary often common in a given subject or shared in a number of subjects or disciplines like human or social sciences. This vocabulary should be relevant, clear, direct and rich to

allow students and other members of the academic community to express their ideas effectively and clearly with their teachers or readers for academic purposes. This means that oftentimes students are not encouraged to use pompous vocabulary which might sound exaggerated unless it is needed as it is the case in literature where sophisticated vocabulary is an important part of the literary writing discourse.

b- Precision: academic writing is also known for being precise and concise and thus the students are expected to use relevant content, ideas and details only if they directly relate to the topic they are writing about since they aim is usually to explain, clarify or teach something specific to the reader or to show their understanding of a specific topic related to their subject of study. Writing which involves unnecessary details is regarded as messy, confusing to the reader and of a poor quality because it tells that the writer doesn't know exactly what details are relevant to the topic and this results in a bad text. Precision also has to do with the choice of vocabulary which is supposed to be specific and relevant to the topic. If the topic is technical, the language and vocabulary should follow and students' mastery of the jargon of their subject or technical language is another prove of knowledge and mastery of the subject matter which are supposed to be reflected in academic writing.

c- Grammatical complexity: precision and good word choice can't be achieved without students' abilities to develop complex sentences to be able to express complex thoughts. Therefore, grammatical complexity is another key feature of academic writing. Consequently, students in this academic context, are often required to avoid overusing simple sentences as they make the writing style boring and are encouraged to use a variety of sentence structures like compound, complex and compound complex sentences in their writing. For example, the government imposes more taxes is not as complete as even though the workers' income has remained the same, the government decided to impose more taxes on income.

d- Impersonality: this feature of academic writing has been very controversial recently. Usually, academic writing is characterized by being objective, neutral and scientific as these qualities help them convince the reader as they try to explain, discuss or present complex topics and make them simple to understand. This means that students and writers are not encouraged to involve their personal experiences, opinions and feelings in their writing as this is regarded as subjective, weak and non-scientific. This impersonality is often achieved by the use of the passive voice, cleft sentences, some modals like should and would and personal pronouns like "we" instead of "I". However, there is a tendency recently in the academic writing literature which encourages students to use their personal experiences and knowledge in writing in order to make it authentic, credible and thus more influential on the reader.

e- Caution: as a result of being scientific, academic writing is full of expressions which express the writer's caution and uncertainty. This feature is also known as hedging by which writers inform the reader that the ideas, issues and insights they are sharing with the reader should not be taken as

facts. In addition, writers tend to avoid making strong claims and therefore they adapt their language accordingly by using modals like *may*, *might*, and *could* instead of *must*. The passive voice is also used for this purpose. Writers, in addition to the use of less strong modals, tend to consider the other possibilities which exist besides their claim and the conditions in which their claims can be valid. This stand is often regarded as safe, scientific and practical especially in research which can be full of controversy.

2.3. The controversy over good academic writing

There is a strong and logical link between defining writing, teaching and evaluation of this skill and English language in general. Thus, good writing is the result of the concept or understanding of writing which greatly varies from one student to another and among teachers and practitioners in higher education (Weigle, 2002, p5). Good writing is also related to other vital and interrelated concepts like writing competence, performance and fluency which meet in the assumption that good writing is the result of students' ability to use language effectively to achieve specific purposes and interact with the reader and their environment in the written form. Clearly defining those concepts is as challenging as defining good writing itself. Huck (2015) defines good writing as follows:

“My simple answer to the question “What is good writing?” Is that it is the writing typically produced by a writer who is recognized as a good writer by other good writers?

That definition of good writing, of course, will pull no weight unless powered by considerably more precision. The terms “good writing” and “good writers” come with broader connotations than I'd prefer, since one might, with reason, pick out both Alice Munro and a random fourth grader as good writers under different conditions. What I'm aiming for is more like the writing equivalent of fluency in speaking. We say that a normal native speaker of English achieves fluency in her language by her teen-aged years—and that's the kind of fluency I mean with respect to writing, a naturally achieved fluency that indicates an ability to converse easily with peers, to convey easily what one wants to convey, and to be easily understood by one's conversational partners”. (Huck, 2015, p xii-xiii)

Because students are members of the academic community as they join higher education, they become aware that they should adapt to its values and standards as they start their process of socialization and trying to integrate this new environment where writing is used for specific purposes and should meet specific criteria determined by the dominant standards of the academic writing discourse as they are taught by teachers of writing. Because writing is widely perceived as an instrumental skill by students, most of them feel the need to understand, master and apply the features of academic writing as they write. However, although most students seem influenced by this discourse and its standards and thus, they try to reproduce the features of good writing,

they also have their own perceptions of good writing which sometimes contradict, differ from or resist these standards.

This controversy appears to influence teachers' practice of writing mainly teaching and evaluation and sometimes teachers at the same department evaluate writing differently since they perceive it differently. While these differences in perceptions among teachers might give students more options and choices, they might cause some difficulties especially if the students see good writing differently from their teacher who is not only a key reader but an examiner who has the authority to judge whether students' writing meets the standards and thus is good or not.

3. Method:

This article is based on qualitative data collected for the sake of my PhD thesis on becoming writers. This study aims at understanding the psychological aspects of EFL students' journey of becoming writers and how they struggle to be recognized as members of a given academic writing community and how this struggle forges and reinforces their identities as writers by helping them develop relevant writing skills and knowledge for a successful written communication for academic purposes in the classroom and beyond. I am specifically using some open-ended questions from a semi-structured interview I conducted with a focus group of eleven third year students (1 male and 10 females). I have also selected these specific questions based on the topic of this article and the points I decided to cover and discuss in relation to my experience and that of my students on writing as a political act in the EFL context and mainly teachers' education writing instruction and practice.

3.1. Sample:

The participants in this study are eleven male and female third year pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language aged between 22 and 23 years old who prepare are enrolled in a degree course at a teachers' training college in Algiers -Algeria. They have accepted to participate in this study which is about writer's identities in the EFL context and their writing performance varies from good to less- good writers based on their exam marks.

3.2. Research tools:

A semi-structured interview (only the focus group of, 12 students was interviewed. It was composed of 2 males and 10females) was used for the sake of this study in addition to a semi-structured questionnaire which was administered to 42 students (4 males and 38 females). The two research tools aim at getting insights on students' perceptions and knowledge of academic writing in general and argument writing in particular. Thus, some of the questions relate to participants perceptions of academic writing and their writer identities, their writing abilities, attitudes towards readers and teachers, and writing conventions. Some relevant answers are used to discuss the four main points of this article as mentioned above.

3.3. Data collection and analysis:

Data collection took place at the end of the second semester of the participants fifth year (two years after the primary data was collected) as a follow-up tool

to back up and validate the data collected using other research tools such as a semi-structured questionnaire and participants argument essays on topics of their choice. The semi-structured interview used for this article was analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants answers were read several times to obtain the main codes which were put together into similar categories which in turn were used to build up the main themes. Finally, the semi-structured questionnaire was analyzed qualitatively except the few closed ended general questions about the participants' linguistic background.

4. Results (Students' perceptions of good writing)

Participants seem to perceive good academic writing and therefore use different adjectives to describe it. After reading these descriptions many times, some qualities or themes have emerged. The later are also related to the qualities of the good writer since the process of writing cannot be separated from the person who writes (the writer). Those qualities are summarized as follows:

4.1. Ability to master English (rich vocabulary and correct grammar)

Some students believe that good writing is the one which demonstrates a good mastery of language. By this, they mean correctness or accuracy which is the result of the good use of grammar. Texts which contain many grammatical mistakes are not good texts according to students who almost think that mistakes are "crimes that students should not commit when writing" (Students' questionnaire). The good writer for those students is "... the person who masters language and grammar." He is also able to write "organized, coherent and clear texts." He should also have "selective vocabulary." And has "good language." and "rich vocabulary." He is also "aware of his words." He "knows a lot about language."

This strong rejection of mistakes reflects students' conceptions and beliefs on good writing and at the same time the values and beliefs of the writing instruction and the teachers of writing as sometimes students get these values from the way teachers teach and evaluate their writing. Mistake free texts are unrealistic and hard to achieve for both teachers and students because writing is a messy and complicated process where ideas get clearer with writing itself and one cannot get this done from the first shot but after writing many drafts and improve them via revision and editing. However, in practice, both teacher and students seem obsessed by avoiding mistakes and aim at writing mistake-free texts which makes writing even harder than it is and cause students to suffer from the writing block and get stuck starting writing simply because they often set the bar very high. Language is a major source or tool for writing.

It is vital because it helps students to express themselves and get their ideas written down, but it is also important as a tool for reflection as it helps students think clearly and generate ideas. In addition, to write argument essays, students are not only required to think but to think critically as well. This criticality is built and manifested through language. This means that

students should select the best arguments and then present them in a logical way to convince the reader of their logical thinking. A text that confuses the reader because it is not logically developed makes reading the text difficult, interrupts the reader's comprehension of the text, or cause the reader to give up reading the text altogether.

According to participants' claims, both in the questionnaire and interview, they seem to believe that language and mainly vocabulary, grammar and structure are vital tools they can use to explore, manifest and share their critical thinking skills with the reader. Being unable to speak up their minds clearly and thus their ideas, feelings, knowledge and experiences because they can't find the right words might hinder their ability to express themselves and their critical thinking in writing. Writing is often defined as a thinking process and thus it is directly linked to critical thinking especially argument writing which seems to give more room and freedom to students to invest their" personal aspects in writing and use them as a source for writing. The personal opinions, perspectives, experiences and knowledge become a source of ideas and content for writing. This both makes writing real, credible and of quality as it is no longer about completing a writing task but a real process of self-discovery and self-expression.

4.2. Ability to effectively communicate with the reader

Some students were more pragmatic and realistic as they described the good writer as someone who" is able to write." they also said that he should be "able to express ideas easily". He also should be able to "tackle issues and produce texts." Here writing is mainly a communicative process that allows the writer to get his message across. Thus, writing is functional as it allows the writer to achieve his aim or get a task done. In addition, he should have a "mastering of writing convention".

Thus, those students are positive about the writing conventions as they believe they help them write better and are an important feature of good writing. Expressing oneself is an essential and existential need to students. To them, writing is mainly about expressing their feelings, thoughts and thoughts. Thus, they write to reflect on their lives, problems, and experiences. Through writing, they try to understand their reality in order to change it towards the better.

As a result, writing becomes a journey of self-discovery and empowerment as it allows them to find solutions to their problems through reflection and then action. Another function of writing, according to students, is that it links them to the world and helps them get out of their isolation as individuals who don't always have access to help and support in their immediate environment or don't find available and trustworthy people who can listen to them and help them solve their problems. In other words, writing allows desperate students to create an alternative universe which is better and where they have more possibilities to dream, plan, and grow as individuals. This shows again the psychological functions of language and writing. Thus, understanding the students' psychology of writing can allow me to understand who the students

are through how they write and what they write about. This idea is emphasized in the literature where there is a strong link between writers and writing. Thus, I believe that it is hard to me to understand how students write without understanding how they see themselves as writers and why they don't see themselves as writers.

This can give me important insights about what students' understandings and perceptions of writing in general and argument writing in particular. So, I decided to tackle the issue of writer identity for this reason despite the difficulty and challenges that this tricky and slippery concept poses to me as a researcher. In fact, I tried to avoid this concept before analyzing the data, but this issue appeared again in the data and thus, I couldn't ignore it even if it would take my research in new directions which makes it even more interesting to me.

4.3. Ability to influence /impact the reader positively

The strong link between writing and reading reappears here again as some students believe that good writers are also "good readers." This allows the writer to have an easy access to readers through language and be able to positively influence them. This also shows that writer identities cannot be built in isolation from the other "the reader" since the way we see ourselves as writers is also shaped by how we are seen by the readers of what we write. For example, an isolated writer who does not share his texts would always think that he is a great writer until he interacts with readers and shares his texts with them. Only at that moment, he can have a real and clear idea about his ability to write i.e., a real writer identity or identities. This means that writers cannot survive in isolation from readers whether they are real or imaginary and the interaction between them is vital for both. Some students said that the good writer is the one who "has an effect on readers." This effect can have different forms as explained below.

Because the writer is presented as a teacher, philosopher and a source of inspiration by some students, readers can benefit from all these qualities when reading the texts written by the good writers. The learning process and exchange of ideas and experiences can only take place when readers interact with the text as they cannot always directly interact with the writers themselves because they are usually physically absent at this stage. Just as writers struggle in the physical absence of readers, readers also may struggle in the physical absence of writers. But good writers make the struggle more manageable by writing clear texts that meet the readers' expectations and thus impact them in a positive way. For example, good writers can inspire the reader by provoking and challenging their thoughts, pushing them to rethink about them, assess them and then take actions. As a student described, "... the writer can touch something in me, push me to be better."

This positive impact is the result of the easers recognizing the writer's identity by validating his skills and knowledge which helps build a trust-based

relationship between the writer and the reader and provides the conditions for this mutual learning and exchange of thoughts and experiences to take place.

4.4. Ability to be creative

Creativity is another criterion for good writing, according to some students. Writing is a way of creating something out of language. It is a way of presenting familiar experiences in an unfamiliar and strange way. This quality is appreciated by some students who link it to good writing. This creativity attracts the reader's attention and raises their interest in reading the text and eventually may help the writer influence the reader and convince them too. This is why some students described the good writer as “an artist, philosopher, and a good teacher” (interview) who is able to use language creatively to impress and entertain the reader and teach them something important about a given topic.

According to students, this creativity also requires the writer to use imagination to think differently and create his own style that becomes a signature which differs them from other writers because he has “an artistic style”. This imagination makes the writer “a source of inspiration” for the reader as some students put it. Some went further saying that the good writer “... has something interesting and beneficial to say.”

4.5. Ability to an aesthetic writing style (attractive, beautiful, and special)

Aesthetic aspects of texts are also appreciated and valued by the participants who consider the beauty of language and style as an important feature of good writers and texts. It is true that writing serves some practical or technical functions like getting a message across, but this does not mean that it is purely technical and does not allow room for the readers' to be entertained and their taste to be considered. Readers do not always read to grab a piece of information from a text and run away, therefore, they expect the writer to make the text beautiful, attractive and nice to read.

Even if the aesthetic aspect of texts is not always a priority for readers, but it contributes to the success of the text as it facilitates and improve the quality of the reading experience. For this reason, some participants mentioned this aspect by saying that good writers can produce, “marvelous and brilliant writing”. They also have “an artistic style.” This means that they “care for details and “know when to provide details, are able to interpret images.” They also use “beautiful and attractive language.” This shows that writing is “a passion” for good writers and not a task only. So, there is no way for good writers to fall into the trap of “plagiarism and imitation” as they have already developed their own writing style which they are known for and is part of their identity as writers.

5. Discussion:

The findings of the study indicate that students differ greatly in the way they perceive and understand good writing even though they have been taught academic writing in the same way as they all are studying for a degree of secondary school teachers of English as a foreign language. While some believe good writing requires a good mastery of English which allows them

to write correct sentences and put them together in a coherent way to develop paragraphs and then an essay with less grammar mistakes and a good variety of words or vocabulary in addition to some writing conventions or mechanics like correct spelling, punctuation and capitalization which help ensure accuracy. Those students seem strongly influenced by the dominant standards of academic writing as they have been taught to them and used to evaluate their texts in exams and daily classroom writing practice which seems to heavily prioritize mastery of language over communication and thus though writing is often taught as a process, the product aspect of writing is omni-present in teaching and evaluation. Unlike these students, others think that good writing is about their ability to express themselves clearly and effectively and share their thoughts, emotions and experiences with the reader even if their English is not quite accurate and their texts contain different types of mistakes.

Therefore, communication is more important than language, according to them, as expressing themselves and sharing their thoughts is the only way to influence the reader not the good mastery of English which becomes just a tool to express themselves not a priority. The impact on the reader or impact are not possible without attracting the reader's attention by using a different writing style which is possible by using specific vocabulary or choosing the topics of interest to the reader. Attracting reader's attention can also be achieved by aesthetic aspects of language. Language is not all about accuracy and clarity, but it's about making better linguistic choices to help the reader enjoy the reading process by appreciating the beauty of language.

This ability of using language aesthetically is part of their personal touch or writing style which result from their creativity which is another aspect of good writing to some students. The latter argue that writing is more than producing a text in a mechanical way by jotting down words on paper but it's a creative process of manifesting one's critical thinking which relates to students ability to analyze and discuss different ideas and opinions and logically present them and defend them with strong evidence especially in argument writing where they aim at convincing the reader of the validity of their positions and opinions which is quite challenging to most students including those who have a good mastery of English.

These differences in students understanding and perceptions of good writing seem to be the result of several factors like their perceptions and beliefs of academic writing, its purposes and functions, practice and experiences of writing in class and beyond which reflect their formal and informal learning experiences and knowledge and understanding of the essay as a genre, a text and the reader's expectations including the teachers of writing. Although these perceptions are crucial as they influence the way students write, teachers are sometimes unaware of them or have a vague idea about them through their class discussions with students. Teachers of writing try to communicate the criteria of good writing as they are presented in academic writing teaching

materials and criteria for writing evaluation or sometimes the teacher's own philosophies and understanding of good writing, but in spite of this communication, students still have their own understandings of good writing and therefore might have different priorities when writing than those explained, presented, encouraged or at times imposed by the teacher.

This conflict in perceptions of good writing can sometimes lead students to resist or reject the writing instruction and practice as they see them as a limitation of their philosophies and understandings of good writing which also result from their beliefs and attitudes about writing as a skill, its aims and functions in the academic context and beyond as well as their personal writing experiences which are different even though similar at times since students write in the same writing environment or community. For example, the students who believe that writing is an art or talent tend to show more resistance to writing conventions and instruction compared to those who believe that writing is a skill which can be learned through learning and practice with the help of the teacher who is seen as a guide and facilitator in their journeys to becoming writers.

Therefore, teachers are required to pay more attention to students' perceptions of academic writing and treat them as student writers who are able to take their own decisions and choices when writing rather than passive consumers of the academic writing discourse and its standards and conventions. The latter should be used as guidelines for good writing not as rules which must be strictly followed up by students since this passivity takes students empowerment, agency, creativity and freedom away from students instead of making writing more meaningful, engaging and empowering by giving them more options and choices rather than rules and restrictions. This empowerment is in favor of the fact that students are and should be treated as legitimate writers not students who have to write for specific academic purposes and are sanctioned if they don't follow the rules of academic writing.

6. Conclusion:

In a nutshell, writing is vital skill which students are expected to master in higher education as it determines their academic and professional success. To achieve this goal, they need to integrate their writing community and understand and apply its academic writing discourse or language. The latter is often represented in the way writing conventions are taught in class by teachers of writing. Although most students try to accept and use those conventions for good grades, some of them, as the findings of this study have shown, do resist the imposed standards of good writing as they see writing differently and thus have a different understanding of good writing. Consequently, writing is related to language but not limited to it as these students believe good writing should be creative and reflect the writer's identities both as an individual and a member of a writing community. Therefore, freedom of self-expression, creativity and ethics are way more important than the mastery of language which is represented as being at the core of good writing in the academic context.

7. List of references

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