

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

*"Writing is a process of doing and thinking"*

*Al Sharadgah (2014)*

In today's modern and challenging world, we are witnessing changing on day basis. As educators, it is important to roll with these changes in all aspects of the academic field, particularly in the field of writing. Besides, effective participation in today's demanding and requires students to be better thinkers while writing essays in English. The importance of essay writing for EFL student is undermined by Grabe and Kaplan (1996) who mentioned that students in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts will need English writing skills ranging from a simple paragraph and summary skills to the ability to write. (Grabe and Kaplan, 1996, p. 24-25)

### 1.2. Problem of the research

Though teachers in the English department of Sebha do great efforts to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for writing essays in English, many EFL students still have problems in writing essays. The students are unable to write good and creative essays in English. There is a great chance of possibility that obstacles in essay writing will discourage students and decrease their motivation in developing in English in general. Critical thinking is recommended to teach writing but unfortunately, most of the students do not have a clear idea about writing an essay with critical thinking.

### **1.3. Significant of the research**

Critical thinking is a process that involves using a range of skills as well as personal qualities by pushing the ideas forward. Accordingly, the present research is significant as it aims to help EFL students to be more creative and professional while writing essays through using those skills and qualities. This research is significant also because it will help to give an idea about writing essays by thinking critically. Understanding the relationship between critical thinking and writing essays is important to develop teaching syllabus, materials and evaluation method for teaching essay writing.

### **1.4. Research question**

**The main research question is** "Do the students of faculty of art in Sebha think critically while writing English essays?"

**Sub-research questions are:**

- 1- Is critical thinking teaching helpful in developing students' ways of writing English essay?
- 2- What are the ways for teaching essay writing by thinking critically?

### **1.5. Hypothesis of the research**

The researchers assumed that teaching essay writing by thinking critically will improve the students' level in term of creation and having good writing quality. It was also assumed that if teachers use critical thinking in writing classes that would help the students to improve their level not only in writing but also in English learning in general.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1. Essay writing**

#### **2.1.1. Definition of essay**

Ariyanti (2016) believed that "An essay is a product of academic writing where a writer should combine factual data and compare to existing experts' theories (Ariyanti, 2016, p. 63).

An essay is a piece of writing which discusses idea and concepts in a clear order. It is a chance to demonstrate to your tutor that you have fully grasped key ideas in your subject area, and that you can explain them clearly.

There is no doubt that the essay is a well-established genre in higher education. Originally, the word, essay, goes back in history 400 years to Michel de Montaigne, a lawyer who devoted his life to observing the world and writing about it. Four centuries later, Montaigne's writings make for remarkably good reading, for he was a brilliant thinker and writer who also happened to invent one of the major literary forms. Montaigne's Essay is a collection of his writings, most of them brief and on a single subject. The French word "essay" means literally "attempt." Figuratively, it means "excursion" or "exploration" (Pharr and Buscemi, 2005).

#### **2.1.2. Teaching essay writing**

According to Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017), to write a good English essay seems never very easy. It requires an ability of assessing a good grammar, imagination and thought, exploring major and supporting ideas, putting them together and revising then final editing. (Ariyanti and Fitriana, 2017, p. 113). Younes and Albalawi (2015) also claimed that writing needs huge effort as well as practicing it in terms of paragraph organization, language use, and mechanics. For the reason that those three aspects are potential in influencing the writing

performance such as content and vocabulary including elements of how to formulate ideas, develop and analyze them before displaying the essay writing as a final draft (Younes and Albalawi, 2015, p. 7). However, Bailey (2003) argued that, to learn writing; the students need to pay full attention to the process below which explains how to write an extremely qualified essay

- 1) Comprehend the concept of the essay – every essay has its own qualification
- 2) Choose only relevant sources to the essay topic
- 3) Quote only relevant theory from experts – an ability of paraphrasing and summarizing is needed in advance
- 4) Combine and compare theories among experts
- 5) Arrange an appropriate paragraph organization
- 6) Write introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs
- 7) Read the essay thoroughly, edit, and rewrite the essay
- 8) Final writing judgment

### **2.1.3. Problems of teaching essay writing**

Ariyanti (2016) pointed out that “The biggest challenge while writing essays is derived from the difference in cultural backgrounds between the students’ mother tongue and English, so it is possible to know the production of their writing does not 'sound' well in appropriate culture of English. Similarly, Grossmann (2009) argued that students whose better English skill can produce better writing than those whose first language interfere a lot.

Ariyanti and Fitriana (2017) claimed that EFL teachers find some challenges regarding to teaching essay writing. Some of the students' challenges were related to poor vocabulary. Moreover, students have low motivation in making composition. They also claimed that that

the students have poor basic knowledge of writing, in terms of sentence structure and grammar. They also have low ability in developing ideas in essay. More importantly, the EFL teachers admitted that their students lack the creativity while writing essays. (Ariyanti and Fitriana, 2017, p. 119). Hemmati (2002) mentioned some problems related to writing essays as he interviewed thirty (30) Iranian EFL students concerning various difficulties in their writing. He found that these learners have difficulties in both linguistic and performance. That is to say, their writings lack the linguistic knowledge of the target language along with the inability to perform this knowledge into appropriate contexts. He found that the lack of reading and the writing practice into the English language are the main reasons behind such a difficulty.

## **2.2. Critical thinking for teaching essay writing**

### **2.2.1. Definition and importance of critical thinking**

Critical thinking has become a very important educational goal over the last two decades. There is a burgeoning literature about what critical thinking is. For example, Willingham (2007) stated that critical thinking is not a set of skills that can be deployed at any time and in any context. Critical thinking is a general term that covers all thinking processes that strive to get below the surface of something: questioning, probing, analyzing, testing and exploring. Critical thinking requires detective-like skills of persistence to examine and re-examine an argument, in order to take in all the angles and weigh up evidence on every side. Kuhn (1991) viewed critical thinking as the skill of argument, while Ennis (1993) described it as reflective thinking focusing on tasks, people, or beliefs. It is important to note that both definitions exclude creative thinking. Further, Kuhn (1991) viewed attitudes or dispositions as very

important elements of critical thinking, which is conceptualized as a type of argument with an explicitly social dimension.

Pithers & Soden (2001) believed that students need to have 'good thinking' skills by using reasoning and logic focusing on what to believe or do based on the mechanism such as conducting conceptual and argument analyses for problem solving and decision making. They also viewed the ability to evaluate as necessary for critical thinking, since evaluation involves identifying a problem and its associated assumptions and then determining the intended outcome of the problem-solving process, clarifying and focusing on the problem by analyzing and understanding it. All these processes require inductive and deductive logic and synthesis in order to evaluate. As mentioned above, despite the widespread recognition of the importance of critical thinking, there is a noticeable lack of consensus as to what it really is.

### **2.2.2. Teaching essay writing by critical thinking**

In order to achieve a sense of creativeness, relatedness and effectiveness of ideas, teachers need to bring topics that help students to generate sufficient ideas (Tribble, 1997).

Belkhir & Benyelles (2007) argued that while teaching how to write an essay, the first step is to give students information about the structure of good essay. The next step is to encourage critical thinking by opening a debate to calculate which ideas need to be expended and are relevant to the topic. Afterward, the construction of the essay is required and needs to be done within group members. Within the Process Approach, the teacher's emphasis is to make them express their ideas at the same time developing implicitly coherence in their writing. The continuous use of this approach in groups gives positive results in terms of clarity and unity. Belkhir & Benyelles (2007) also recommended that teachers may design some activities where students are exposed to an essay in which some sentences are redundant and have

nothing to do with the core of the essay. Such an activity builds on learners the sense of awareness and their critical thinking in terms of coherence.

Writing course is a part of the teaching of critical thinking skill. In the writing process, learners develop their critical thinking skills involved in generating ideas by using problem-solving process employing a range of cognitive and linguistic skills. These will lead learners to identify a purpose, to produce and shape ideas and to refine expression (White, 1995).

### **2.2.3. Ways of teaching critical thinking**

Theorists are divided into two groups regarding whether critical thinking is best taught as a general skill applied to all disciplines or as a skill used in a particular discipline. Theorists in the field, including (McPeck, 1981, 1990; Nosich, 2005; Paul, 2005), agreed that critical thinking skills need to be taught within the context of a discipline, not as an isolated discipline. McPeck (1981), for example, believed that critical thinking cannot be taught as a separate subject. He suggested studying critical thinking as it relates to a specific academic discipline. Critical thinking instruction is not effective when taught in isolation. It must be a holistic and integrated component of the classroom curriculum. On the other hand, Facione (1998) and Siegel (1988) disagreed and believed that there are critical thinking skills that are general and can be applied throughout all disciplines.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researchers will talk about the methods of this research, the details of the participants who were chosen as a sample of the study, the procedure used for collecting the research related data and the steps, which the researchers followed to collect the data.

#### **3.2 Methods of research**

The researchers used mainly a questionnaire to collect the data from the participants. The questionnaire contained questions designed by the researchers to know the students' overviews and their opinion of how their level and problems in essay writing. Ahmed (2015) said that a questionnaire is a list of a research or survey questions asked to respondents, and designed to extract specific information. It serves four basic purposes: to (1) collect the appropriate data, (2) make data comparable and amenable to analysis, (3) minimize bias in formulating and asking question, and (4) to make questions engaging and varied.

The methodology of this research is quantitative because the questionnaire is structured. According to Brown and Rodgers (2014) 'quantitative research includes any research based on primary or original data. It is predominantly based on numerical data. The data also were collected from different sources like book, ELT journals and websites.

#### **3.3. Participants and Location**

The participants of this study were chosen from the English department in faculty of art, Sebha; Libya. There were 20 participants from the third and fourth semester because they study writing and essay writing. The number of participants is few because most of the



students were absent in the time of distributing the questionnaire because Sebha city had some political problems that affected the process of collecting the data from students. Moreover, the number of participants from males in this study is fewer than females because all the students in the third semester were girls while in the fourth semester there is only two males and the others are females. Their ages vary between 19 to 21 years. More details about the participants were given in followed table:

Location	Semester	Number	No. gender	Total
Faculty of art, Sebha; Libya	Third semester	10	0 males	20
			10 females	
	Fourth semester	10	2 males	
			8 females	

*Table 1: details about participants*

### 3.4 The Procedure

Firstly, the researchers choose the topic according to their interest. The researchers noticed common problem amongst EFL students in the English department. Most of the students are not good writers even in the advanced classes. So as a second step, the researchers started to collect information from different sources by reading books, ELT journals and even websites about their topic. This process took one semester (their seventh semester). Thirdly, the researchers stated the aims, problem, research questions and relevant literature. This process took about three weeks. At the same time, the researchers gave the questionnaire to the selected participants to save time because the time was limited (one semester) and this process took about one week. The data then collected and analyzed to have the findings and to answer the research questions of the research. This process took about one month. Finally, the

researchers conducted the conclusion and give some suggestions and recommendations related to this study.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSES, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1. Analysis of the questionnaire

The questionnaire's answers were in the following tables. The first table contains the answers in the form of the numbers. The second table shows the percentage of the same answers.

	strongly agree	agree	uncertain/	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Most of Sebha University EFL students exhibit low critical thinking skills.	1	11	0	7	1
2. Most of the students do not know the meaning of critical thinking	3	13	0	1	3
3. It is the responsibility of the teachers in the English department to train the students to think critically	5	12	2	0	1
4. It is the responsibility of the students in the English department to develop their own ways of critical thinking skills	5	11	2	2	0
5. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' ways of writing English essays	7	9	3	1	0
6. Most of the students have problems in writing Essays in English	11	4	4	0	1
7. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' Language proficiency while writing essays	3	12	2	3	0
8. Thinking critically is essential to engage students with issues of identifying their own biases and understanding their multiple perspectives	3	10	5	2	0
9. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' academic level in writing in general	6	11	1	0	2
10. The positive development and training on how think critically will help to improve the ways of writing essays and different writing topics in English	8	7	1	2	2

*Table 2: Questionnaire answers (numbers)*

	strongly agree	agree	uncertain/	disagree	strongly disagree
1. Most of Sebha University EFL students exhibit low critical thinking skills.	%5	%55	%0	%35	%5
2. Most of the students do not know the meaning of critical thinking	%15	%65	0%	%5	%15
3. It is the responsibility of the teachers in the English department to train the students to think critically	%25	%6	%10	0%	%5
4. It is the responsibility of the students in the English department to develop their own ways of critical thinking skills	%25	%55	%10	%10	0%
5. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' ways of writing English essays	%35	%45	%15	%5	0%
6. Most of the students have problems in writing Essays in English	%55	%20	%20	0%	%5
7. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' Language proficiency while writing essays	%15	%60	%10	%15	0%
8. Thinking critically is essential to engage students with issues of identifying their own biases and understanding their multiple perspectives	%15	%50	%25	%10	0%
9. Thinking critically is essential to develop the students' academic level in writing in general	%30	%55	%5	0%	%10
10. The positive development and training on how think critically will help to improve the ways of writing essays and different writing topics in English	%40	%35	%5	%10	%10

Table 3: the questionnaire answers (percentage)

## 4.2. Findings of the questionnaire

After the analysis of the questionnaire, the researchers found the following:

1. Most of the students have problems in writing essays in English.
2. The majority of the students agree that they do not have good critical thinking skills.
3. Most of the students also agree that they do not know exactly the meaning of critical thinking
4. Most of the students strongly agree that thinking critically is essential to develop their ways and language proficiency while writing English essays.
5. Most of the students believe that thinking critically is essential to develop their academic level in writing in general as that will help to engage them with issues of identifying their own biases and understanding their multiple perspectives.
6. Student believed that the positive development and training on how to think critically will help to improve their ways of writing essays and different writing topics in English.
7. Some of the students believed that it is the responsibility of the teachers in the English department to train them to think critically in writing classes while others think that it is the students' responsibility to develop their own ways of critical thinking skills.

## 4.3. Discussion

The current research aimed mainly to answer the following main research question, "Do the students of faculty of art in Sebha think critically while writing English essays?".

After collecting the data, it was found that most of the students do not use critical thinking as a main strategy to develop their own ways while writing essays. The findings also revealed that most of the students do not even know the exact meaning of critical thinking.

However, the researchers also aimed to answer two main questions. The first question is "Is critical thinking teaching helpful in developing students' ways of writing English essay?. After collecting the data from the books, journals and ELT websites, it is believed that critical thinking is essential in writing classes as it helps to develop the students' ways while writing by connecting the ideas with each other. Carter, Bishop, and Kravits (2007) for example, believed that critical thinking is important and described critical thinking as the process of collecting information, analyzing it in different ways, and evaluating the objective of gaining understanding, solving a problem, or making a decision. Rankin (1999) confirmed this, saying that good searchers must show the ability to evaluate critically the information they are looking for to apply their judgment to the search process.

The second sub-research question was "what are the ways for teaching essay writing by thinking critically?". This question was answered in the Literature review. This study collected many views and arguments from different linguists about the different ways of teaching critical thinking in ELT classes. For example, Cooper (1995) believed that putting students in group learning situations is the best way to foster critical thinking. Cooper (1995) also clarified "In properly structured cooperative learning environments, students perform more of the active, critical thinking with continuous support and feedback from other students and the teacher."

To conclude this section, the researchers would believe that successful writing class should depend on the development of critical thinking through the learner's interest or expertise and through collaborative writing activities.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Conclusion

This study showed that students' essay writing can be developed if it is taught using critical thinking skills. Critical thinking involves asking questions, defining a problem, examining evidence, analyzing assumptions and biases, avoiding emotional reasoning, avoiding oversimplification, considering other interpretations, and tolerating ambiguity. Many researchers such as (Brookfield,1987; Facione & Facione, 2007; Moore, 2004; Muilenburg& Berge, 2000; Paul & Elder, 2006;Indah, 2017) clearly stressed the importance of helping students develop into critical thinkers. Developing critical thinking for EFL students is necessary especially in writing classes. The findings showed that if teachers help the students to become better thinkers, they would enable the students to become better writers and vice-versa. To end up, it must be said that there is a need to investigate other techniques and skills to teach essay writing more effectively.

#### 5.2. Recommendations

In light of the results of the study, the researchers recommend the following:

- It is recommended that EFL teachers should encourage their students to think critically while teaching essay writing.
- It is recommended that EFL teachers must help their students to know what is the meaning o critical thinking and ways of thinking critically.
- It is recommended that EFL teachers must give students more chances and time to write in different topics in order to enhance their writing abilities.

- It is recommended that EL students must read a lot about how they can develop their own writing strategies and skills. That will help them to improve their level while writing essays and in writing in general.

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