Incorporating Cultural Background in Teaching EFL Writing in Libyan: A Critical Literature Review

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Abstract: This study explores the crucial influence of cultural background on the writing performance of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, focusing specifically on the Libyan context. The impact of cultural background is observed across various dimensions of writing, encompassing content, organization, style, language, and conventions. Additionally, cultural backgrounds shape the writing strategies adopted by EFL and ESL learners. Considering the significance of this influence, the paper advocates for awareness among EFL and ESL teachers regarding the cultural backgrounds of learners when designing or adopting instructional techniques for teaching EFL writing. The literature review critically examined the roles played by learners' cultural backgrounds in shaping their writing skills. It explores the role of the English language in Libya and assesses the current practices in teaching EFL writing within the Libyan educational landscape. The study discovered that very few studies have been conducted concerning EFL and cultural background in the Libyan context. Thus, it identifies challenges faced by Libyan undergraduates in EFL writing due to their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which differ from that of the English language. In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between cultural background and EFL writing performance. The paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Libyan students and provides practical recommendations for instructors. Furthermore, the study identifies potential avenues for future research in the dynamic field of EFL writing instruction.

Keywords: *Cultural background; EFL writing; Libyan undergraduates*

A. INTRODUCTION

English as a Second Language (ESL) and Foreign Language (EFL) learners face various challenges in trying to acquire or develop their writing skills. Writing is a complex skill that requires not only language proficiency but also knowledge of the conventions

and norms of academic writing. For EFL writers, developing writing skills has been particularly challenging, as they must navigate the nuances of English grammar and syntax while also mastering the conventions of academic writing (Silva, 1993). These challenges are the result of many factors. One of the factors that influence ESL writing performance is the learners' cultural background (Kuo & Anderson, 2010). Culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, customs, and norms of a group of people and shapes the way individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to different situations (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). ESL and EFL learners come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds which is different from that of English. Thus, they may interpret, and respond to situations in a manner different to that of English. Scholars believe that language is deeply intertwined with culture, and thus, learners' cultural backgrounds significantly affect their language learning experiences (Kramsch, 1993).

Research has shown that cultural background has a significant impact on ESL learners' writing performance (Kuo & Anderson, 2010; Lee, 2011). For instance, Benesch (2001) argued that students from non-Western cultural backgrounds may struggle with the Western academic discourse and conventions that are emphasized in English language teaching. As a result, these students may face difficulties in developing coherent and effective written texts that meet the expectations of their instructors. Another part of a culture that affects students' writing performance is their gender. Carson (2001) pointed out that gender may influence language choices and writing style. Carson argued that these gender differences in language use may impact the effectiveness of written communication and academic writing. Similarly, the cultural background of ESL students may also influence their language choices, writing style, and the effectiveness of their written communication. Kaplan (1966) argued that cultural thought patterns play a significant role in intercultural communication.

The cultural background of ESL/EFL learners can impact their writing in terms of content, organization, style, and conventions (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010; Kuo & Anderson, 2010). For instance, some cultures emphasize indirect communication, which may manifest in ESL learners' writing in terms of vague or implicit statements (Kuo & Anderson, 2010). Other cultures may place a higher value on collective or group orientation, which may influence the organization and development of the writing (Lee, 2011). Moreover, cultural background can also affect the writing strategies that EFL

learners use. For example, EFL learners from some cultures may prioritize memorization and reproduction of information, while others may prioritize critical thinking and analysis (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010). Understanding how cultural background influences EFL learners' writing performance is crucial for developing effective writing instruction techniques that cater to diverse learners' needs (Abou, 2017).

Several other studies have also investigated the impact of cultural background on EFL/ESL students' writing performance in different parts of the world. For example, Li and Zhu (2013) found that Chinese ESL students' writing style was influenced by their cultural background, particularly the Chinese rhetorical style. The study also suggested that Chinese students may struggle with organization and coherence in their writing due to the differences in Chinese and English rhetorical styles. Similarly, Matsuda and Tardy (2007) found that cultural background impacted ESL students' writing style, particularly in terms of sentence structure and the use of rhetorical strategies. The study also suggested that teachers should be aware of the impact of cultural background on students' writing and tailor their instruction accordingly. Moreover, Alvi and Kamal (2013) investigated the impact of cultural background on ESL students' writing performance in Pakistan. The study found that students from different cultural backgrounds had different writing preferences and that cultural background impacted their ability to express their ideas effectively in writing.

From the studies so far, it is concluded that their diversity poses a significant challenge for teachers in terms of developing effective writing instruction techniques that cater to the diverse needs of these learners (Birjandi & Bagherkazemi, 2010). This is because students from different cultural backgrounds may have different writing styles and expectations at a particular time. Based on the studies above, it has become imperative for teachers to be aware of the impact of cultural background on students' writing and tailor their instruction accordingly. Also, teachers should consider their students' cultural backgrounds in designing their ESL/EFL writing instructions. Despite the growing interest in the impact of cultural background on EFL writing performance, there is a lack of awareness by many EFL teachers on how to integrate students' cultural backgrounds in designing EFL writing classes. There is a lack of empirical research in this area in the Libyan context. Also, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the specific aspects of writing performance that are influenced by cultural background.

Therefore, this study examines the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Libyan EFL learners which may influence their EFL writing performance. It is aimed at helping Libyan EFL teachers to be aware of the cultural and linguistic factors in designing their EFL writing classes which eventually develop the student's writing performance.

Right from the emergence of English as a foreign language, as the language of global trade, business, and in essence, a symbol of modernity, there was a huge concern by many people because of its dominance over native languages and culture especially in countries like Libya (Khilafat, & Reddy, 2022). This resulted in societal disruptions, cultural disputes, and political difficulties resulting from the teaching of English in schools and universities in nations like Libya. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, the teaching of English as a foreign language in Libyan schools and universities was canceled by Gaddafi's regime for about ten years. The teaching and learning of English in the country resumed in the late 1990s, after the restoration of political relations with the West following the resolution of the Lockerbie case. Since then, English teaching has been gaining momentum as an academic profession and as a business despite the hard conditions experienced by the country in the aftermath of the revolution, which led to the downfall of Gaddafi's regime (Mohamed, 2014).

To many Libyans, teaching English to Libyan students means teaching them a culture different from theirs especially in terms of classroom behaviour and peer engagement (Khilafat, & Reddy, 2022). Many EFL learners believe that the EFL teaching and learning processes focus more on the target culture while ignoring the learners' cultural background (Ariza, 2007). As a result, they do not take EFL learning seriously thinking that they may lose their culture and eventually themselves. Many Libyan EFL teachers are more concerned about the preservation of Libyan culture in their classrooms (Khilafat, & Reddy, 2022). This shows the need for teachers to skillfully integrate the EFL learners' cultural background in the teaching and learning process to create a positive attitude in the minds of the learners.

However, since the restoration of the teaching of English in Libyan schools and universities, teaching English in Libya has been facing numerous challenges including a lack of qualified teachers, a shortage of teaching aids for the language, language laboratories at schools, and an absence of programmed language training for the teachers, (Mohsen, 2014). This could be the result of the long period of absence of teaching English

in the country. For instance, Diaab, (2016) reported that many Libyan English language teachers lack adequate teaching approaches that can help to improve the student's proficiency in English. They mostly over-rely on traditional methods that emphasize extensive linguistic input rather than communicative output. This has been supported by Elabbar (2011) who pointed out that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is the most popular and accepted approach to teaching English in Libya. This is simply because most teachers believe that when students memorize a large amount of vocabulary and grammar rules, introducing various activities to practice language use would be easy. As a result of the poor teaching and learning methods employed by the teachers, many students face challenges in learning the language. Alsied and Ibrahim (2017) revealed that Libyan undergraduates face various challenges with their writing in English especially academic writing the most challenging. It was also found that Libyan teachers had negative attitudes towards their students' research due to the following reasons: lack of motivation, insufficient background knowledge, lack of library resources, inadequate number of courses, and unavailability of the Internet in the college. Based on these, there is a need for Libyan EFL teachers to be aware of various factors, such as learners' cultural background, which may affect their teaching and learning processes. They also need to be aware of how to integrate these factors into their teaching and learning processes. Recognizing and valuing students' linguistic and cultural identities can enhance their motivation to learn English (Norton, 2000). Therefore, this study aims to review and reveal the cultural and linguistic factors that influence the EFL writing performance of Libyan undergraduates.

B.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a systematic literature review to examine articles addressing cultural background in teaching EFL writing in Libyan context. The procedure implemented in this study is in four stages: databases and keywords, data collection, data analysis, and synthesis to enable the researcher to answer the research question.

Databases and Keywords

Research databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Science Direct were conducted. Also, relevant academic journals in the field of EFL education, cultural

studies, and applied linguistics were searched. Various keywords "EFL writing," "Libya," "cultural background," "pedagogy," "teaching," and "English as a Foreign Language" were searched for comprehensive results. However, only literature that involves EFL writing in the Libyan context is selected for the study.

Data Collection

After conducting the systematic literature search, a compile a list of articles, research papers, and studies that are directly related to the incorporation of cultural background in teaching EFL writing in Libya was developed. The materials were organized and the references were.

Data Analysis

After collecting and organizing the data, reading, and reviewing the selected literature were carried out to identify common themes, trends, and key findings related to the research questions. Categorize the literature into themes or subtopics, such as "Challenges in integrating Libyan culture," "Effective strategies for cultural integration," and "Impact on EFL writing outcomes." A matrix table was created to organize and compare the literature based on various criteria, such as publication date, research methods, and key findings.

Synthesis

The data were synthesized from each selected literature source, emphasizing how each contributes to the understanding of incorporating cultural background in EFL writing in Libya. From the synthesis, the identified challenges, barriers, and best practices in the integration of Libyan cultural elements into EFL writing classes were analyzed. The literature review was concluded by summarizing the main findings, the extent of cultural integration in EFL writing instruction in Libya, and the challenges and best practices. It also offers recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers based on the synthesis of the literature. These recommendations should address how to improve EFL writing instruction in Libya by incorporating cultural background effectively.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section entails the analysis of articles to address the proposed research questions The analysis involves a comprehensive examination of the content of these articles, focusing on identifying patterns, key findings, and relevant interconnections among the information presented. The outcomes of this analysis are anticipated to provide a comprehensive insight into the posed research questions, thereby supporting further understanding and exploration of the discussed topic. Table 1 below presents some of the studies found in the literature search.

Table 1: Summary of the Literature Review

Research Title	Author(s)	Date	Research Method	Key Findings
A Study on the Diagnostic Effect of Social Media on Libyan EFL University students' Writing Skills in General and Day-to-day Written Communication Specifically.	Almushwat, R. F. & Sabkha, S. A.	(2023).	A survey research design was employed.	The results suggested that Libyan university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) perceive social media as having a beneficial impact on their language abilities. Additionally, the study revealed that among the language skills, writing is the most influenced and enhanced through the use of social media for English language learning.
Role of culture in EFL teaching in Libya: A comparative study on perceptions of teachers and students.	Khilafat, M. & Reddy, G. C.	(2022).	A survey research design was employed and data were collected using a questionnaire.	The findings showed both EFL teachers and students shared a largely positive opinion about the prevailing teaching culture at the selected institution. The findings further show that the students prefer dialogue-based learning of culture

				rather than using other channels such as reading about culture.
Cultural content analysis of the ELT textbooks in Libya.	Ramazanoğlu, I. & Kürüm, O. U. Y. K.	(2022).	A comparison between the ELT textbooks series in Libya	
Academic writing difficulties faced by Libyan EFL undergraduates at Elmergib University.	Milad, R. M., Almalul, R. M. & Lawej, A. I.	(2021)	The data was collected via a questionnaire survey and face-to-face interviews	The results showed that the most common reasons that led to these academic writing difficulties in English are: lack of motivation which is the main reason followed by lack of writing practice; lack of ideas and then lack of reading.
Errors Analysis of Libyan EFL Learners' Written Essays at Sebha University.	Alsied, S. M., Ibrahim, N. W., & Pathan, M. M.	(2018).	Data were collected from participants' descriptive essays	The results revealed that Libyan EFL learners committed grammatical errors, mechanics errors, discourse errors, lexical errors and spelling errors. The most frequent errors found are fragments, s-v agreement, misuse of an article, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, run-on sentences, poor paragraph development, selection of the lexical items and omission.
Teaching English as a foreign language in Libyan schools: Issues and challenges.	Pathan, M. M., & Marayi, Z. E.	(2016)	Questionnaires, observation and informal discussions with the teachers were used for data	lack of teacher training and development of professional skills, lack of coordination among the teachers-school authorities and quality

				collection.	inspection authorities, shortage in the basic educational infrastructure, teaching and learning aids and materials, in addition to the lack of motivation among most of the students.
The impact of cultural imperatives on academic writing in Arab contexts	Al-Asadi, S.	(2015)		A mixed methods research methodology was adopted. An Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design	A modified integrated process-genre model (MIM) extend and enrich the repertoire of Iraqi undergraduates' writing competence
Perceptions of Libyan English language teachers towards teaching the target culture.	Ahmed, K. M.	(2015).			The findings showed that the majority of the participants hold positive attitudes towards the integration of EFL culture in teaching the English language in Libya.
The effectiveness of feedback on EFL Libyan writing context.	Omar, N. A.	(2014).		Data were collected using writing essays, questionnaires and interviews	The findings showed that students improved on their essay writing by committing fewer errors after receiving written feedback from their teacher on the submitted essays. They also had a positive perception towards giving and receiving feedback.

The table above provides a comprehensive summary of key literature in the field, presenting various research titles, authors, publication dates, research methods, and key findings. Almushwat and Sabkha's (2023) study focuses on the diagnostic effect of social

media on Libyan EFL university students' writing skills. Employing a survey research design, they found that social media is perceived as beneficial for language abilities, with a notable impact on writing skills. Similarly, Khilafat and Reddy (2022) examined the role of culture in EFL teaching in Libya, employing a survey research design and a questionnaire. The study highlighted positive perceptions of the teaching culture among both teachers and students, emphasizing a preference for dialogue-based learning of culture.

Moreover, Ramazanoğlu and Kürüm (2022) conducted a cultural content analysis of ELT textbooks in Libya, offering insights into the content of English language teaching materials. Milad, Almalul, and Lawej (2021) investigated academic writing difficulties faced by Libyan EFL undergraduates, revealing reasons such as lack of motivation, limited writing practice, and inadequate reading. Alsied, Ibrahim, and Pathan (2018) focused on error analysis in Libyan EFL learners' essays, uncovering various grammatical, mechanical, and lexical errors. Pathan and Marayi's (2016) study delved into challenges in teaching English in Libyan schools, identifying issues such as teacher training deficiencies, lack of coordination, and infrastructural limitations. Lastly, Al-Asadi's (2015) mixed methods research explored the impact of cultural imperatives on academic writing in Arab contexts, while Ahmed (2015) investigated Libyan English language teachers' perceptions of integrating EFL culture into English language teaching. Omar (2014) studied the effectiveness of feedback on EFL Libyan writing, revealing improvements in essay writing and positive perceptions towards feedback. The collective insights from these studies contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics and challenges within the Libyan EFL education landscape.

The data collected from the literature search revealed that a very limited number of studies related to EFL and cultural background have been so far conducted in the Libyan context. This shows the need for further studies to empirically examine the roles of cultural background on the EFL writing performance of Libyan undergraduates.

Discussion

After analyzing the data, cultural and linguistic factors that influence the EFL writing performance of Libyan undergraduates are identified and presented in the following subsections.

Factors Influencing Libyan Undergraduates' EFL Writing

Like many EFL learners in other parts of the globe, Libyan undergraduates also face numerous challenges in EFL writing due to their cultural and linguistic background which is different from that of English. Some of the cultural and linguistic backgrounds are highlighted below.

1. **Linguistic Differences**

Most Libyan EFL learners speak Arabic as L1, thus the differences between Arabic and English become a challenge for many of them in acquiring writing in English. For instance, the difference between the two languages in terms of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and discourse structures can pose difficulties for many Libyan EFL students. Arabic is a Semitic language, while English belongs to the Indo-European language family, leading to variations in sentence structure, word order, and idiomatic expressions. Arabic, as the first language of Libyan students, differs from English in terms of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and discourse structures (Ghazal, 2017). Libyan students may attempt to transfer the features of Arabic writing and rhetorical patterns to English writing tasks, and this may result in many challenges. The variations in sentence structure, word order, idiomatic expressions, and cultural rhetorical patterns pose obstacles for Libyan students in adapting to English writing conventions (Abdel Aziz & Adel, 2020; Almushwat, & Sabkha, 2023). Therefore, teachers designing writing instructions and tasks for Libyan EFL learners should consider the linguistic differences between the two languages.

In addition, findings have revealed that many Libyan EFL learners made grammatical errors, mechanics errors, discourse errors, lexical errors, and spelling errors in their writing in English. The most frequent errors were fragments, subject-verb agreement errors, misuse of articles, punctuation errors, coherence issues, cohesion issues, run-on sentences, poor paragraph development, selection of inappropriate lexical items, and omissions (Alsied, Ibrahim, & Pathan, 2018).

2. **Cultural Rhetorical Patterns**

Navigating the nuances of linguistic and cultural differences poses a distinctive challenge for Libyan students transitioning between Arabic and English writing. The divergence in rhetorical patterns and organizational structures between the two languages accentuates this complexity. Arabic writing, characterized by an indirect, circular, and

elaborate style, contrasts sharply with the more linear, concise, and direct approach typical of English writing. In Arabic, communication often takes a circuitous route, employing intricate expressions and elaborate phrases. In contrast, English writing prioritizes clarity, brevity, and a direct progression of ideas. The adjustment required by Libyan students to seamlessly transition between these contrasting styles is substantial. It demands not only linguistic versatility but also an acute awareness of the cultural underpinnings shaping each language's communicative norms. Addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering effective cross-cultural communication and ensuring Libyan students can confidently navigate the intricacies of both Arabic and English writing domains.

3. L1 Interference

The impact of the first language, Arabic, on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing among learners, as illuminated by Almushwat and Sabkha (2023), extends beyond a mere linguistic transition. The transfer of linguistic elements from Arabic to English often manifests in syntactical errors and nuanced vocabulary choices, reflecting the inherent syntactic and lexical disparities between the two languages. These challenges not only impede grammatical accuracy but also influence the overall coherence and fluency of English writing. The intricate syntactic structures prevalent in Arabic, characterized by flexibility and complexity, may lead to convoluted expressions when transposed into English, which typically favors a more straightforward and linear syntax. Additionally, the rich lexicon of Arabic, with its diverse registers and nuances, may prompt learners to select words in English that do not precisely convey their intended meaning. Consequently, these linguistic carryovers can pose obstacles to effectively communicating ideas in English, demanding a nuanced understanding of the interplay between linguistic influences and the development of EFL writing proficiency among Arabic-speaking learners. Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted pedagogical interventions that go beyond surface-level language instruction, acknowledging the deeper interlingual dynamics at play in the process of EFL writing acquisition.

4. Sociocultural Factors

The intertwining of Libyan cultural values with the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing, as elucidated by Khilafat and Reddy (2022), underscores the multifaceted impact cultural norms can have on the learning process. Fundamental Libyan

cultural values, characterized by a profound respect for authority, a tendency to avoid self-expression, and a strong adherence to traditional norms, can significantly shape the approach of Libyan students toward EFL writing. The value placed on authority may translate into a deferential writing style, where students exhibit caution in challenging established ideas or expressing independent viewpoints. Similarly, the inclination to avoid self-expression may limit the extent to which students infuse their perspectives into their English writing, potentially hindering the development of critical thinking skills and stifling creativity.

5.   Motivation and Learning Attitude

The findings indicate that lack of motivation is one of the primary factors contributing to academic writing challenges in English including among Libyan undergraduates followed closely by insufficient writing practice. Additionally, issues such as a dearth of ideas and limited reading engagement were identified as contributing elements (Milad, Almalul, & Lawej, 2021).

Moreover, Libyan cultural values, such as collectivism, respect for authority, avoidance of self-expression, and adherence to traditional norms, can influence students' approaches to EFL writing tasks (Elhawary, 2020). For example, the classroom setting and practices may influence the students' EFL learning because some of the teachers and the students are more concerned with the preservation of the Libyan culture. Khilafat and Reddy (2022) instigate the role of culture in EFL teaching in Libya by examining the teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes towards the teaching culture. The study observed that the teachers are more concerned about the preservation of Libyan culture in teaching EFL. Libyan undergraduates may face difficulties in engaging in critical thinking, independent expression, and creativity due to the influence of these sociocultural factors. The approach to teaching writing in Libya is another factor that poses challenges to Libyan EFL learners. Most teachers adopt a product approach or a genre approach in teaching writing in Libya which puts many students in a disadvantaged stage (Fageeh, 2003). Many scholars criticized (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2003) for being too prescriptive and restricting learners from having freedom of expression. For example,

The six-stages of Badger and White' (2000) model: plan for teaching academic writing: Preparation, Text modelling and reinforcing, Planning, Joint text construction,

Independent text construction, and Revising are challenging to Libyan undergraduates because of their limited exposure to academic genre in terms of its textual and linguistic attributes (Al-Hazmi & Schofield, 2007). In addition, the cultural thought patterns of L1 English users are different from the EFL learners (Kaplan, 1966; Hirose, 2003) which as a result brings about many challenges.

D. CONCLUSION

The current study examines the roles of students' cultural backgrounds in their EFL writing performance. It is discovered that a very limited number of studies have been conducted in the area of EFL writing and cultural background in the Libyan context. The paper also highlights some challenges faced by Libyan undergraduates in EFL writing due to their cultural and linguistic background which is different from that of English. Such as linguistic differences between Arabic and English, differences between Arabic rhetorical patterns and organizational structures from those in English, L1 Interference, and sociocultural factors. The paper makes some recommendations for policymakers, material developers, and teachers in Libya to improve the teaching of EFL writing in the country which eventually enhances the students' EFL writing performance. These include increasing cultural literacy among teachers and curriculum designers, integrating Libyan cultures such as traditions, customs, historical events, or local issues in designing EFL writing materials, utilizing authentic materials, creating rhetorical awareness, and utilizing other instructional methods. The study has some limitations. The major limitation of the study is that it is not an empirical study. Thus, future researchers should conduct empirical studies on the roles of students' cultural backgrounds on EFL writing performance. This can give more insight into the specific aspects of the student's writing influenced by their cultural background. This would help teachers and further researchers to adopt appropriate strategies for addressing the problem. Despite the limitation, the study perhaps contributes to a better understanding of how cultural background influences EFL students' writing performance. This knowledge could inform the development of more effective writing instruction techniques that cater to the diverse needs of EFL students not only in Libya but also from other cultural backgrounds.

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