Failure of Senior Literature Students to Write Academic Research Projects at the English Department of College of Languages in Salahaddin University-Erbil

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Abstract

Problems with writing academic research by the senior literature students of the English department of the college of languages at Salahaddin University in Erbil have been occurring literally since the establishment of this department. Students face many difficulties while setting out to write research projects which are part of their graduation requirements. They usually feel frustrated at the beginning stages and struggle with their research title, outline and structure. Graduation research has been a big challenge for the department and teachers, too. It becomes a controversial topic every new academic year, and discussions around it conclude with either removing this subject from the department curriculum for fourth-year students or actions to be taken up to improve its existing situation and mechanisms of conducting it. This research study is an attempt at looking at the problems surrounding this subject at the English department, going to the roots of these problems and finding relevant solutions so the situation changes for the better and students face fewer problems with their research works.

Keywords: English department, senior literature students, curriculum, literature teachers, and educational system.

1. Introduction

The curricula for senior students of the English department has been designed in a way that apparently concludes the four-year study at this department. Subjects are introduced at a higher level and are meant to give enough knowledge that should result in the graduation of an academically well-equipped English department student. One vital subject that constitutes the curricula of the senior stage is research writing. Petrella and Jung (2008, p.91) argue that "incorporating a research component along with a sound academic foundation enables students to develop independent critical thinking skills along with oral and written communication skills". This subject is compulsory, and students are required to conduct research on a specific topic. Students are typically divided into two groups of literature and linguistics, a division meant to help the department organise the process of research writing more effectively. Literature students are supervised by literature teachers, and they are required to write their research projects on a literary topic without specifying the genre of literature. The same is true for linguistics students as they write their research projects under the supervision of linguistics teachers. This process starts at the beginning of each new academic year, and students will be given lists of research topics by the department from both disciplines to select from according to their desires and field of interest. This mechanism is one of the crucial problems that will be investigated later in this research. Once the topics are

selected, supervisors will be allocated to the students according to their research interests and the topics they have provided for the department list of research topics.

It is worth pointing out that all students in the junior stage will be modestly exposed to the techniques of research writing, and they will be asked to practise such techniques in monthly exams and quizzes. Homework is also given to apparently broaden the students' knowledge of academic research writing. This pre-exposure to the techniques of research writing will be another question of this study to see how effective this class is run and how much students will learn from this class before they pass to the senior stage. This background information is very crucial as it diagnoses problems with department curricula and the ways such curricula are designed and taught.

Research projects are conducted jointly by the students and supervising teachers, and it is from here where problems with the academicness of these projects arise. From the day of the topic selection by the student, problems start to corner both the student and the supervisor, and the nature of these problems is different from one student to another and from one supervisor to another. The aim of this research work is to identify these problems, which obviously affect the quality of research projects conducted at the English department of the college of languages at Salahaddin University in Erbil. More specifically, this study will pick on research projects produced by senior literature students and their supervisors with the aim of narrowing down the topic for a more concrete result.

The few points mentioned above could make part of the research questions of this study. However, to concretize the results and significance of this work, it is important to come up with a number of research questions to guide the study course and keep the flow and consistency of the concepts and notions to be introduced throughout the writing phase. The most essential questions to be addressed in this work are:

1. What are the factors that influence or impede students' production of publishable academic research projects?
2. What is the role of curriculum and instructors in the students' failure to write authentic academic research works?
3. To what extent do the educational system, culture, and mindset hinder the production of academic and/or quality research?
4. What are the common perceptions of the instructors/supervisors regarding the students' failure to conduct academic research works?

2. Theory and Method
2.1 Research Participants
Participants of this research are literature students and teachers of the English department of the college of languages at Salahaddin University. The students are from the senior stage, those who have research projects to carry out. The students are chosen from the beginning of the year so answers are made for some questions which are related to the selection process of research topics, their design and the way students collect data. This study goes for students who are both good and poor at research writing to compare the knowledge they have obtained about the subject and the way they approach the writing process. The number of students selected for this study is fourteen. Seven are female, and the other seven are male students to maintain gender equality.

As for the department teachers, ten literature instructors are selected who are charged with the supervision task with the students. Five male and five female literature teachers are chosen. Again, it is important to select teachers who work hard with the students and teachers who go through many difficulties with the students because they are either ignored by the students when feedback is given or students face problems with the teachers because they are less responsive and harsh with them. It happens that sometimes a teacher is very serious, but the student trails behind because they do not know how to start with the project and what to

write about. And the opposite also happens that the student is good and a hard worker, but the teacher does not have interest in supporting them or struggles with the techniques of research writing.

2.2 Procedure

The viable theory that would help the study achieve its aims is the quantitative approach. The study includes some statistical data, so quantitative theory is used to analyse such data to reach some relevant results. Quantitative data:

> Uses numbers to describe what exists. A major benefit of these data is that they may be fed into a computer where they can be counted, stored, and manipulated… the use of numbers in quantitative research makes it more likely that studies can be replicated and that the results of research are *reliable* because it is easier to repeat the data collection procedures that generate numbers than exactly to re-create the conversations and observations that typically form the basis of qualitative research (Gray *et al.* 2007, p.42).

The research structure is cultivated in a way where questionnaires play a significant role in making responses to the research questions stated above. Two different types of questionnaires are created. One for the students' attitudes and assessment of the research subject taught at the department, and the other for evaluating the teachers' perceptions of the students' failure to write quality academic research projects. Of course, samples from both literature students and teachers are taken for this purpose.

The questions of the two questionnaire forms are explicitly designed to answer the research questions, and the answers are analysed in the light of relevance and importance. Additionally, relevant data that would significantly support the study's assumptions and address its problems is collected and analysed succinctly. All types of resources– online and hard– are visited and used. Meanwhile, immediate relevance to the research title and objectives is considered during the process of data collection, and only data that would enrich the quality of the work is used. Data collected from the students and teachers is viewed as authentic as it directly contributes to the resolution of the research questions and has a close connection with the work. It is this primary data that is to be concretized and be given a central place in the study.

3. Academic Research
3.1 Definition

As the section title suggests, academic research is research conducted in academia. It is a research activity that academics and students do as part of their university profession or study responsibility. Monippally and Pawar define research as "a process of generating knowledge through the adoption of science-based approach. A distinctive feature of science-based research is that it seeks to develop, verify and refine theories" (Monippally and Pawar 2010, pp.10-11). They state that any research plan or action would adopt a specific procedure to produce knowledge in agreement with the norms that science endorses. This means that research aims at generating fresh and unread information or knowledge that will eventually contribute to the resolution of some problems.

Academic research constitutes a vital part of academic life. No institution or university can survive effectively without having an active and exuberant research community. In this regard, Åkerlind (2008, p.26) provides a well-formulated definition of research and sees its function as:

Part of academic job expectations. The primary intentions underlying being a researcher are extrinsically focused on keeping one's job and/or being seen to appropriately fulfil one's role as an academic. Research is seen as involving a process of identifying and solving a problem, using a set of specific research procedures or skills…

This indicates the key importance of research projects and being an academic researcher, as well as the expectations that academic institutions have from academics. Research shows the ways an institution or any plan should work. It sets the basis on which a project should leap into action. Research diagnoses the pros and cons of any course of action, warns against the failure of a plan and predicts its success as well. Consequently, it is very significant that in the universities both inexperienced academics and students are taught how research is conducted, why it should be conducted and what impact it will have on their future. In considering the value of research for universities, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia, Paul Johnson, says that, "research is not only critical to the economic and social development of society; it is also critical to the mission of our University", adding that "it is this research which is the foundation for knowledge that makes possible so much of the innovation and application that provides wider benefit" (Johnson 2012). Thus, research will always remain the cornerstone of the development of universities and the multiple services they provide to students and the public.

Meanwhile, research writing contributes to the enhancement of the critical thinking ability of the researcher. Hubbuch asserts that a research paper "is an invitation to sharpen your ability to think critically" (Hubbuch 1996, p.4). She argues that critical thinking, or one's critical thinking, lies at the heart of any research project thought about or planned for with the aim of solving specific problems. Hence, she says, "when you set out to do a research project for one of your college courses, regardless of the department in which the course is taught, you are beginning a process of inquiry…" (*ibid.* p.5). That process of inquiry usually includes asking questions and collecting enough information on the subject in hand to make answers to the questions asked.

3.2 How is it conducted?

Academic research projects are carried out in different ways. The fields where such research is conducted differ from one another. Each field has specific rules and regulations that guide the research path. In this work, research conducted in the field of humanities will be the subject matter. Books on how to write a research project abound, and it is not possible to include here all the rich and broad information available on how research work is conducted. However, the most common steps will be elucidated that form the basis of every research writing project. Information to be mentioned in this section should help a lot with some of the problems students in the English department have with writing academic research projects in the area of literature. It should explain some of the difficulties they face while asked to prepare a research project.

There is no doubt that when a researcher plans to do research, they should immediately think about a subject or topic. Such a topic should be original and undone before. Rozakis believes that "the right subject can make your paper; the wrong one can break it" (Rozakis 2007, p.12). She understands that developing a subject or topic on one's own is quite often part of the research paper process itself, arguing that such a step "teaches you to generate ideas and evaluate them. It helps you learn valuable decision-making skills in addition to writing and research methods" (*ibid.*). Most writers, if not all, find this stage as the most challenging part of research writing. It requires deep thinking and careful consideration of the area in which such research is conducted, as any repetition of the subject is considered

plagiarism and trite. For Rozakis, it is the selection of the subject that will mark the success or failure of the research process. She says:

> Choosing a subject for a research paper calls for sound judgment and solid decision-making skills. Experienced writers know that the success or failure of a research paper often depends on the subject; even the best writers find it difficult (if not impossible) to create a winning paper around an unsuitable subject (*ibid.*).

Once the tentative (because it usually is subject to change or modification) subject or title is chosen, it will be time to start a literature review and collect resources and relevant data. The literature review is an essential part of the research writing process since it helps with the authenticity of the subject and the methodology to be taken up to conduct it. It is an extensive critical review of the literature that is available on the research topic. According to Clare and Hamilton (2004, p.9), writers conduct a literature review:

> To demonstrate that they have a profound grasp of all aspects of the topic investigated. A primary purpose of the literature review in traditional research is to establish what is already known about the topic studied to precisely locate and define the area of new knowledge the present study addresses.

As such processes are carried out, the amount of data collected will be huge and will need a relaxed mind to sift through. All the data gathered should be converted to a draft. At this stage, the actual shape of the work could not be precise. Berry practically thinks of this operation as having three stages: "making a skeleton outline, preparing an initial rough draft and improving the rough draft" (Berry 2004, p.59). As the main aim of this study is not to give full details about how to write a research work, but, rather, why students are unsuccessful to write academic research projects, so, to my knowledge, it is possibly unnecessary to provide further details about research writing and all the component parts or sections it has. To obtain full precise knowledge about how a research project is conducted and how each part is written, readers can read selected books about this subject, examples of which could be: (Murray and Hughes 2008; Wallwork 2011; Thody 2006; Berry 2004; and Booth and *et al.* 2008). These books will surely open up the eyes of novice researchers and help them be successful in their research projects.

All that is mentioned above will take a smooth path when the researcher or the student in the case of this study is assigned an academically professional supervisor. The following subsection discusses the essential role supervisors can play to make a research project academically correct and get to a level where it deserves to be published.

3.3 Role of Supervisor

A supervisor is an academic teacher a department chooses to help a student who is required to conduct research on a specific topic. In the context of this research, supervisors are teachers of literature who are charged with the responsibility of supervising senior stage students who prefer to write their research projects on literary subjects. Supervisors usually provide academic support in guiding students on how to start with their research, what steps they need to take for making progress, how to write an outline, how resources are gathered, and content of the research is developed. Supervisors mostly play the role of advisors, and they can stand behind the success of a research student in accomplishing their job with perfection. The good supervision relationship between a supervisor and a student is the basis of quality research. Murray and Hughes state that:

> Your supervisor is a key figure in the research process; somebody who you will meet regularly and whose job it is to guide you, act as a sounding board for your ideas, and keep you motivated during periods where your project may feel like it's floundering (2008, p.125).

Once a supervisor decides to accept the task of supervision, they should also have thought carefully about several issues, such as knowledge of the subject the student is researching about, availability to the student so they do not feel the pressure of time and understanding the weaknesses and strengths of the student so the process does not interrupt in the middle of the time allocated to the project. Perhaps the same mechanism is true for the student who should also enquire about the academic personality of the supervisor assigned to them to make sure they can successfully proceed with the supervision process, though in most academic institutions supervisors at the undergraduate level are assigned randomly to the students. Murray and Hughes (2008, p.126) assert that supervisors should encourage their students and help them through any lows they might face in the course of their project, adding that "they need to be approachable, comfortable to work with and available" (*ibid.*). This fact clearly indicates the significant role an academic supervisor can see in bringing a research project conducted by a student to fruition.

It is worth indicating that supervisors, in most cases, become observers of students' needs, gaps in their research knowledge and ability to pursue the process. They are supposed to act on a friendly basis and be so close to the students to identify the shortcomings that might hamper the whole research process. Other than this form of supervisor-student relationship, the project may fail to yield a satisfactory result and may have low academic quality. In their research on the influential role of interaction between students and supervisors, while conducting research projects, Moskvicheva and her coauthors come to the fact that:

> For successful communication in the research project it is necessary for supervisors, first, to understand the needs of students in the specific types of support at different stages of research projects, and secondly, to evaluate accurately students' research potential. Misinterpretation of students' motivation can lead to inadequate ways of interaction and encouragement of students, underestimation of cognitive abilities can end up with the fact that supervisors will not provide students with the necessary level of independence, and revaluation can bring about low-quality implementation of research projects (2015, p.578).

Hence, a supervisor is an integral part of the research process, without whom success is impossible, and quality research works will not come into being. Supervisors stand atop the production of publishable studies, and they can play a crucial role in building the research capacities of students who are new to the world of research projects. Any negligence or passive reaction from them will have bad academic consequences for the students.

4. Analysis of Questionnaire Responses

This section is more analytical, where responses given to the questions asked in the questionnaire forms by both literature teachers and students, whose research topics are about literary subjects, are studied and analysed in the light of relevance to and importance for this study's research questions. As stated earlier, the data presented here is of primary significance since it comes directly from the concerned audience of this research. This section is supposed to provide concrete answers as to why senior literary students at the English department of the

college of languages at Salahaddin University have so far failed in their entirety to write academic research projects that deserve to be published. It discusses the views of the selected literary supervisors and students who were invited to fill up the two electronic questionnaire forms designed for the specific purpose of this study. The two forms are developed separately with almost different contents. Therefore, they are analysed in two separate subsections, with teachers' form first and students' second. The conclusion of this study is mainly drawn from the answers to be analysed here.

4.1 Teachers' Responses

The questionnaire form answered by the literature teachers of the English department investigates their role as supervisors of literary subjects researched about by the senior students. It looks at the form of academic relationship between the supervisor and the student, the mechanisms adopted to manage the supervision task, how the research process is developed and achieved. The questions raised in the form precisely address the nature of the research work conducted at the English department. They cover the research process right from its inception until it reaches the final stage, exploring the way the research topic is selected, the roles played by both the teacher and the student in the selection of the topic, student's reaction to the subject and the whole process, the problems faced while the topic is developed and written about, the impact of department curricula on the process and the supervisor's understanding of the entire situation and their view on the low quality of research works achieved at the department.

The questions asked in the teachers' questionnaire form are 1. The teachers' gender. 2. Who decided the topic of the research you are supervising? 3. What was the role of the student in the selection of the topic? 4. Was the student serious and knowledgeable about the research topic? 5. Please state briefly some difficulties you have faced in your research supervision. 6. Was there good cooperation and coordination between you and the student? 7. What are the common problems students have while writing academic research? 8. Do you think research writing is important for the students? 9. Do you think the department curricula motivate students to be good/successful researchers? And 10. Why have students, in general, failed so far to produce publishable research papers at the English department?

The teachers' gender is stated clearly as five are male, and the other five are female. This division is significant as it helps maintain gender equality and the expression of views on an equal basis between male and female teachers. Regarding the second question, the responses vary. One teacher says that it was the department's scientific committee that decided on the topic, while four teachers say the topics were chosen by both the students and them. There are three teachers who confirm that it was the students who decided on the topics, but contrary to that, two teachers make sure that they chose the topics for the students. From this tiny sample, it is clear that the selection of the topics is carried out in an unprofessional way as there are many sides that decide which topic is to be researched about. This situation always brings chaos to the research writing process, and the efforts exerted by the teachers and the students do not eventually bear fruit since the process from its very beginning starts on a shaky structure. Moreover, it is not evident on what basis the topics are chosen as several groups get involved in the process without an indication of the main objective of the whole process. This shows that the primary aim of the research project is not clarified at all and why and how specific topics would be researched about. On the significance of the research topic, Winkler and Metherell argue that:

> No single step is as important to the whole process of writing a research paper as the choice of a topic… Ideally you should choose a topic that interests you, that is complex enough to need several research sources, and that will not bore—or talk down to—your reader (Winkler and Metherell 2012, p.13).

The third question about the role of the student in the selection of the topic is answered in two different ways. The responses can be divided into two groups: one group states that the students were given enough freedom to share ideas about the topics with the supervisors and that their role was considered in coming to the final decision about the topics, whereas the other group denies any role to have been played by the students and says that it was the supervisors who forced the topics on the students. Again, this division tells that there is not a unified stance on how students are to be treated when they are assigned research topics. Students' views are to be considered when they start conducting a research project because if they are not interested in a topic they are obliged to write about, the result will be a failure and the completion of an unacademic piece of work. Collaboration on all levels between students and supervisors right from the beginning of the project is key to achieving a quality research paper.

The fourth question which investigates the seriousness of the students and how much information they had about the topics they were required to write about is given promising answers. Out of ten responses, eight ensure that the supervised students were ready to work hard; they had some background information about their research topics and were interested in the projects. The questioned supervisors argue that if the students are guided and observed, they will successfully write a good piece of literary work. The eight positive answers show that there was a learning tendency from the students' side, and students did not have any problems with the research projects provided that they were taught and helped on how to start doing them. It is clear from the answers that some were not that knowledgeable about the process, but that did not demotivate them from pursuing it. If the supervisor-student relationship works effectively and takes an academic path, the research process will yield a positive result. However, the remaining two responses demonstrate no sign of interest from the students in their research titles and no apparent reasons are given as to why the students were so frustrated and just wanted to finish off with their projects in whatever way they are conducted.

The fifth question about problems with research supervision and the difficulties supervisors face when dealing with students is given answers that are pivotal to the problems raised in this research study. Nine supervising teachers point to the core of the matter, arguing that lack of knowledge about research writing techniques and methods is the main problem with their research students. They state that students are poor in their research writing skills; most of them lack command of English language and commit so many mistakes while writing about their research topics. This, in fact, is related to another problem of this research work which is about the development of curriculum at the department. Students are not adequately taught about academic research writing and, in practice, they are not required to do research in the earlier stages or are not fully familiarized with the techniques of research writing so they apply when they come to the senior stage and are asked to submit a research project as a graduation requirement. As indicated in the answers, not knowing how to collect resources or paraphrasing information taken from the resources or even how to cite the references shows a grave problem with the curriculum. Poor English is an exceptional case and varies from one student to another, but ignorance of the basic research writing techniques is a clear reason behind the production of low-quality research works. As is mentioned in an answer, students stick to plagiarism because they are unaware of the methods and techniques of research writing. In this respect, for students to finish their research projects in an academic way and to avoid plagiarism and poor writing, they need to be taught courses in academic writing in a professional way. Sajid and Siddiqui affirm that "academic writing is extensively acknowledged as a key skill for students to boost their educational performance at higher education level" (2015, p.176). Thus, if academic writing does not become one of the main

courses of study and is not taught diligently at the department, senior students' consistent failure to write academic research projects will persist.

The sixth question addresses the relationship between the supervisors and the students. It questions the type of coordination and cooperation that was existing between the two sides. Once more, the answers look positive in terms of the required academic relationship that should be there between the supervisors and the students to accomplish the projects successfully. However, the teaching policy in place and the syllabus have negatively affected that relationship and did not capitalize on it for the students to end their projects in a highly academic manner. The problem does not seem to be majorly with the supervisors and the students. Instead, it is the system and culture of teaching that are the main obstacles for the research projects to be low in quality. This conclusion takes us back to the assumptions made in the previous question about the study programs at the department. It is noticed that out of ten answers to the question about the relationship between the supervisors and the students, seven admit the fact that the students were very cooperative and hardworking. Only three say that they were not interested in their research projects. Consequently, students have no objection to producing quality research works provided that the teaching system helps them in the first place with the techniques and methods of research writing.

The seventh question about the common problems students have while writing academic research receives similar answers given to question five above. All the supervising teachers agree that poor English language and poor research writing skills are the main reasons students fail to write academic research projects. They also blame the curriculum, stating that it that does not prepare the students in the earlier stages to write research works. They believe that students' weak knowledge of research writing techniques and methods pushes them towards plagiarism and writing a project that entirely lacks academic qualities. This dearth of knowledge is again the reason why some students look unenthusiastic about and uninterested in the subject of research writing.

The eighth question makes sure if research writing is important or not for the students. Seven teachers answer with "yes", stating that this subject is necessary for the students provided that their problems are addressed and the curriculum is reformed. Meanwhile, three teachers see it as unnecessary and say other subjects can replace it. Possibly, the three last answers elicit from the teachers' disappointment in improving the curriculum.

The ninth question investigates the curricula studied at the department to find if the subjects taught are relevant to academic writing and prepare students to be good research writers. It is unfortunate to find out that almost all the respondents agree that the curricula do not improve the writing skills of the students. They say that academic writing is a neglected subject and is not taught by qualified or specialised teachers. Academic writing, a respondent affirms, should be taught as an independent subject. Students should be taught how to select a topic from the earlier stages and develop ideas to write paragraphs and essays. The improper teaching of academic writing is a significant gap in the department's curricula and is one of the main reasons students fail to write publishable academic research papers. Teachers who are supposed to teach academic writing must have a deep interest in the subject and be specialised enough to the degree that they know how to pass the writing skills on to their students. In a fascinating study entitled "Changing How Writing Is Taught", Graham asserts that:

> Classroom writing practices are further influenced by teachers' beliefs and knowledge… Teachers devote more time and attention to teaching writing if they are better prepared to teach it, feel more confident in their capabilities to teach it, derive greater pleasure from teaching it, and consider it an important skill (2019, p.282).

If this is put in the context of the English department of the college of languages, it becomes evident even from the answers of the supervising teachers that such teachers are not yet available or are available but teach with less enthusiasm and interest in the writing subject. The last question mirrors the title of this research and looks for answers about students' failure to write quality research projects that deserve publishing. Once more, all the respondents provide a very similar answer. They all see the curricula and the teaching system behind students' failure to write publishable research works. They argue that students are not taught how to write academically. They make sure that a severe lack of knowledge about academic writing techniques and the English language stands behind the students' inferior writing products. Students feel demotivated and uninterested in the writing subjects from the early years because the curriculum is not designed to teach them academic writing. The writing subjects are not research-oriented and thus fail to train and raise the students to be good researchers.

4.2 Students' Responses

The questionnaire form designed for senior literature students to give their input about the research projects they write focuses more on the titles of their research, how they were chosen, if they were given by the supervisors or were their topics of interest, how much background information they had about their titles, the challenges they faced while writing their research papers, the level of support they received from their supervisors, the extent they were familiar with the techniques of research writing and, lastly, their understanding of the significance of writing research projects. The form examines the subject of research writing from a student perspective and considers the role of literature students in providing certain concrete answers to the questions this study raises. As an essential part of the department's research process, students, through their answers, can identify issues related to the problematic nature of the research subject. They are critical players of the process and individuals for whom the subject is designed. Without them, conducting this research work would be meaningless and incomplete.

Thus, the eight questions asked in the students' form are 1. What is your gender? 2. How did you choose the title of your research project? 3. Did you have any background information about your research? 4. Was it your topic of interest? If not, why did you decide to write about it? 5. Briefly state some difficulties you have faced during your research writing. 6. Was your supervisor helpful and cooperative? If not, why? 7. Do you have previous research writing knowledge? And 8. Do you think research writing is important? If not, why?

Answers to the first question are similar to the answers given to the same question in the literature teachers' (supervisors') form regarding the number of male and female participants. Out of fourteen students, seven are female, and seven are male. This gender equality gives credibility to the research's conclusion as both genders are listened to on a similar basis. The second question is given two equally different answers. Answers can be divided into two groups: a group says that it was the supervisors who provided the titles of the projects, and in some cases, the titles were even forced upon the students, meaning that the students had no choice but to write about a topic they might have no interest in. Bell warns against this mechanism of topic selection, stating that "if you become bored with a topic, the time will drag unmercifully and the likelihood is that the quality of your research will suffer" (Bell 2010, p.28). However, the other group affirms that they had the freedom to choose a topic, and in coordination with the supervisors, they were able to find a title that was both their favourite and they had enough background information on. The latter practice is what most scholars and experienced researchers agree on.

The third question with regards to the background information about the research projects the students conducted is again answered in two different ways. Two equally

different groups can be drawn from the answers, with one group claiming that they did not have any sort of background information about their topics and the other group confidently stating that they had the required information about their topics. What can be inferred from the answers is that students who had the research titles imposed on them suffered from comprehending their topics, whereas students who were given a choice to decide for their topics were much better at tackling their research projects. This situation returns us to the previous point that students should be interested in the topics they plan to research on; otherwise, the result will be inadequate and unsatisfactory.

Answers to the fourth question show a dramatic change in the views of the majority of students concerning their research topics. Nine students say that they finally liked their topics and learned something from them. Maybe they eventually had received some help from their supervisors on how to start with their topics and had access to enough resources. However, the other five students insist on being forced to write about topics they did not like at all. They also add that they struggled with their research projects because they did not know how to start writing them. They blame the department for not teaching them the methods and techniques of academic writing, a situation that seems to have left them no choice but to resort to copying and pasting material from other sources.

In answering the fifth question, some very interesting points are raised. Some concerns are similar to those raised previously by the supervising teachers in their answers, especially problems related to writing academic research techniques and methods. Thus, four respondents criticize the supervisors for being unresponsive, non-cooperative and unready to help them with the writing process. They state that the supervisors neither answered their calls, emails nor met with them to discuss their work content. Supervisors ignored what they had written and did not give them feedback to build on it to improve their work. This is one of the serious problems of research writing subject that has contributed hugely to the low quality of the papers. On the influential role of supervisors, Murray and Hughes assert that:

> They should help you identify potentially productive lines of inquiry, source relevant literature and related projects (completed or in progress) and even put you in touch with useful individuals and/or institutions, where this may be beneficial (2008, p.126).

Accordingly, if supervisors fail to work with their students or manage the research projects they supervise, the work output will definitely be catastrophic. Students, in this case, have no other option but to leave such supervisors. A supervisor should not be assigned just as a name but should be an active role player in the whole research process.

The other ten respondents reflect on the actual process, highlighting the fundamental problems that even supervising teachers have invoked in their answers. They refer to the lack of textbooks, poor library shelves, weak and occasionally unavailable internet connection as obstacles ahead of their successful completion of the projects. Language seems to be another difficulty as the majority indicate that they failed to write their projects in academic English, which in some cases made it hard for the supervisors to understand the content. The students once more refer back to the poor academic curriculum and teachers in the earlier stages who did not do their utmost to teach them academic writing techniques and how research projects are designed and developed. They make it clear that the technicalities of research writing were new to them.

The sixth question is given answers that share some similarities with the answers provided for the fifth question. As the question dwells on supervisors' role, five respondents look to be so disappointed with their supervisors, pointing out that the supervisors were not so helpful and did not do enough to finish their projects with success. They say their excuse was being busy and not having enough time to read the projects. The respondents also write that

some supervisors kept being absent from college for no clear reason. Nonetheless, nine respondents admit that their supervisors were kind and cooperative and allocated time weekly to discuss their research progress with them. They felt being cared for.

The answers to the seventh question centre more on the curriculum studied in the department. The respondents attribute their inability to write in an academic manner to the failure of the subjects they study in the department, especially essay writing which they studied in the third stage. Six students clearly say that the process of writing a research paper was something rather new to them. They reveal that they had very little information on how to carry on with their projects. Meanwhile, eight respondents give somewhat more positive answers, stating that they studied research writing in the third stage in essay writing but not in full details. They criticize the curriculum for not being up to the standards to teach them all the techniques of research writing and how they can independently develop research projects. Thus, the curriculum appears to have a central role in delivering quality education to students. Glenn (2018) argues that:

> An effective curriculum provides teachers, students, administrators and community stakeholders with a measurable plan and structure for delivering a quality education. The curriculum identifies the learning outcomes, standards and core competencies that students must demonstrate before advancing to the next level. Teachers play a key role in developing, implementing, assessing and modifying the curriculum.

Hence, what students raise in answering the seventh question calls for an urgent revision and reform of the English department's curriculum.

Ultimately comes answers to the last and eighth question, which sees if research writing is important or not in the students' eyes. This question is meant to evaluate the general academic atmosphere in the department and its effect on the students' ambitions to pursue academic success, particularly in terms of research writing. From the answers, it is obvious that students generally desire to learn how to write quality research projects, but problems with curriculum, style and form of supervision and availability of resources stand in their way to achieve that. Therefore, four students show disappointment at how this subject is taught and managed in the department, arguing that research writing is important, but because it is not taught academically, it has become a neglected subject, producing very low-quality research projects. They say that if projects are mostly copied and pasted from sources, they do not need to be written. It is just a waste of time. However, ten students clearly point out that research writing is very significant as it helps with improving one's academic English and writing skills. They state that the subject is undeniably necessary provided that it is taught correctly and topics chosen for research are authentic, not hackneyed and significantly contribute to the fields they are written about. Kinzie, Husic and Elrod reiterate the same fact stated by the ten students, stressing that:

> Besides contributing to an individual student's professional development, undergraduate research can and should also result in contributions to the discipline or to community or to solving even larger societal problems. While the contributions to a discipline by any single student might be small, they contribute to a larger body of collaborative work done by other students and a faculty mentor over time. Some undergraduate research projects can be categorized as transformative—a term defined by the National Science Board (NSF 2007) as research driven by ideas that have the potential to radically change our understanding of an important existing concept or leading to the creation of a new paradigm (2010).

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    As a result, research writing is an essential part of the academic life of students and should be carefully taken into consideration when the academic curriculum is designed and developed by faculty members. It is a subject that determines the future of the students.

Conclusion

Research projects are an integral component of academic study. They represent the bright side of any academic institution, especially when written in compliance with academic rules and principles. As this study shows, research writing plays a crucial role in developing society and an individual student's career and academic performance. However, this vital role of research projects seems to have been overlooked in various ways at the English department of the college of languages at Salahaddin University in Erbil. The principal factor associated with the weak role of research projects at the department is the improper teaching and management of research writing subject, which this study has made crystal clear. From their inception, research projects become entangled with many problems. Problems start right from the moment topics are assigned, given or imposed on the students. This study discovers that topics are not chosen on an academic basis, and they lack originality and uniqueness. In most cases, neither the students nor the supervising teachers have an interest in the topics. They are treated routinely and only as a requirement from the department. The process of topic selection sometimes goes against the mechanism set by the department to manage the subject and topics become selected according to the desires of the students and, more often than not, what supervisors find suitable.

    This research work also identifies the unsound relationship between some students and their supervisors that largely affects the result of the research projects. There are certain situations where the required academic bond between students and supervisors is lost. Indeed, quality research results from a quality and effective collaboration between students and supervisors. Another significant reason research projects are low in quality is a severe shortage of knowledge by the students about the techniques and methods of writing research works. Both students and supervising teachers raise the issue of curriculum, arguing that the subject of research writing is to be given extra attention and importance and students have to be taught academic writing in its actual form and sense. Lacking the basic skills of academic writing is what the majority of the participants of this study indicate. Besides, this study also concludes that the educational system in place is not up to the required level and does not always take quality education into account, particularly when it comes to research writing projects. It is always assumed that undergraduate students are not qualified enough to write academic research projects, a perception that most frequently than not permeates pessimism amongst the students not to try harder to achieve academic success. It can be argued that research writing as a subject is given a marginal space in the department curriculum and does not receive what it deserves as an academic subject.

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Electronic Questionnaire Forms:
Appendix A
-Link to access the electronic responses of the selected supervising teachers in the field of literature:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1N--wdWT186zsuwBiveYhjUvThAS6iwwxIt1UVsvNeRA/edit?usp=sharing
Appendix B
-Link to access the electronic responses of the selected senior students who wrote about literary topics:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DPo2lvsOZFZSjoHuVvYTcPYJGiUjWk8FsUxuEuf2b8c/edit?usp=sharing

فشل طلاب المرحله الرابعه في كتابة مشاريع البحث الاكاديمي في مجال الادب في قسم الغة الانكليزيية /كلية اللغات جامعة صلاح الدين- اربيل

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ملخص

تحدث مشاكل دائمية لدى طلاب المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الانجليزية، كلية اللغات، جامعة صلاح الدين-اربيل عند كتابة البحث الاكاديمي في مجال الأدب منذ بداية تأسيس هذا القسم. يواجه الطلاب العديد من المشكلات حين يبدؤون بكتابة مشروع البحث وهو جزء من متطلبات التخرج. الطلاب في البداية يشعرون بخيبة الامل، ويواجهون المشاكل بالنسبة للعنوان والخطة ومكونات البحث. بحث التخرج كانت مشكلة كبيرة للقسم والاساتذة. وكان دائما موضوعا للجدل في بداية السنة الدراسية الجديدة، وكانت النتائج إما حذفه من منهج الدراسة للقسم في المرحلة الرابعة، وإما القيام بإصلاح حالة الموضوع وأسلوب تطبيقه. وهذا البحث محاولة لإبراز مشكلات مادة البحث في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية والبحث عن جذور المشكلة وإيجاد علاج ناجع لتحسين حالة المادة ومساعدة الطلاب لتذليل الصعوبات امامهم وقت كتابة مشروع ابحاثهم.

الكلمات الدالة: قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، طلاب المرحلة الرابعة،المنهج، أساتذة الأدب و النظام التربوى.

شکست هێنانی قوتابیانی قۆناغی چوارەمی بەش زمانی ئینگلیزی لەکاتی نووسینی پرۆژەی توێژینەوەی ئەکادیمی لە بواری ئەدەب لە کۆلێژی زمانی زانکۆی سەڵاحەددین-هەولێر

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پوخته

کێشە وەگرفت لە کاتی نووسینی توێژینەوەی ئەکادیمی لە بواری وێژە (ئەدەب) لەلایەن قوتابیانی قۆناغی چوارەمی بەش زمانی ئینگلیزیی کۆلێژی زمان لە زانکۆی سەڵاحەددین لە هەولێر بەردەوام رووبیان داوە هەر لە سەرەتای دامەزراندنی ئەم بەشەوە. قوتابیان رووبەرووی چەندین ئاستەنگ دەبنەوە کاتێک دەست بەنووسینی پرۆژەکانی توێژینەوە دەکەن کە بەشێک لە پێداویستی دەرچوونیان. ئەوان هەر لە سەرەتاوە نائومێد دەبن و رووبەرووی گرفت دەبنەوە سەبارەت بە ناونیشان و پلان و پێکهاتەی توێژینەوەکانیان. توێژینەوەی دەرچوون بۆ بەش و مامۆستاکانیش سەرکێشیەکی گەورە بووە. هەمیشە بابەتێک بووە کە بۆتە جێگای مشتومڕ لە دەستپێکی هەر ساڵێک نوێی خوێندن و دەرئەنجامی گفتوگۆکانیش سەبارەت بەم بابەتە یان لادانی بووە لە پرۆگرامەکانی خوێندنی بەش لە قۆناغی چوارەم، یانیش ئەنجام دانی کاری پێویست بووە بۆ چاککردنی رەوشی بابەتەکە و شێوازی بەجێگەیاندنی. ئەم توێژینەوەیە هەوڵێکە بۆ دەرخستنی گرفتەکانی بابەتی توێژینەوە لە بەش زمانی ئینگلیزی و گەڕان بە دوای ڕەگ و ڕیشەی ئاریشەکان و دۆزینەوەی چارەسەری پێویست بۆ باشترکردنی دۆخی بابەتەکە و هاریکاریکردنی قوتابیان بۆ ئەوەی کەمتر رووبەرووی ئاستەنگ ببنەوە لە کاتی نووسینی پرۆژەی توێژینەوەکانیان.

وشە کلیلییەکان: بەش زمانی ئینگلیزیی، قوتابیانی قۆناغی چوارەم، پرۆگرامی خوێندن، مامۆستاکانی وێژە (ئەدەب) و سیستەمی پەروەردەیی.