Competency in First Language: Does It Affect the Quality of Second Language Writing?

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at investigating the effect of the Arab EFL learners’ competence in writing of their L1 on the quality of their L2 compositions. Forty eight (48) Saudi English major native speakers of Arabic were chosen as study subjects (Ss); all were full time students at the Department of Languages and Translation, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia. These subjects were divided into four groups according to English and Arabic proficiency tests: (1) LB, Lower-competence in Arabic and Beginners or lower-proficiency in English; (2) LI, Lower-competence in Arabic and Intermediate or higher-proficiency in English; (3) HB, Higher-competence in Arabic and Beginners or lower-proficiency in English; (4) HI, Higher-competence in Arabic and Intermediate or higher-proficiency in English. In order to fulfill the study objectives, two types of writing processes were implemented: (1) writing in Arabic then translating into the L2 (English); (2) composing directly in the L2.

The results showed that higher-competence in Arabic has a significant positive effect on the overall performance of the students' writings in English. HI students significantly performed better than LI students in both writing tasks (direct vs. translation). The task of writing first in Arabic then translating into English (translation task) had a positive effect on the content of the compositions written by our students of this study particularly HI group.

With respect to the length of compositions, students in all four groups wrote significantly longer texts through translation and used more complex sentences in terms of words per T-unit in their translations. Higher-competence in Arabic has shown positive effect on the length of the compositions these students wrote whether in the direct writing or translation tasks. HB and HI significantly wrote longer compositions than LB and LI did.

With respect to the quantity of errors, the study shows that, overall, more errors occurred in translation than in direct writing, and error type was a significant factor: awkward forms were more frequent, lexical choice errors were next in frequency, and transition errors were relatively infrequent. This tendency to produce more awkward forms in the students' translation version correlates positively with increased syntactic complexity. This may be related to the findings that increased prediction resulting from attempts at more complex integrative thinking by L2 writers leads to more problems in terms of clarity at the syntactic level.

KEY WORDS: Effect of L1 on L2, Competency in L1, L2 writing/composition. Saudi Learners of English, Arab EFL learners, Language Transfer. Error analysis, Translation versus direct writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study was undertaken in a foreign language context, in which issues involving the effect of L1 on L2 writing were looked at from a rather a new perspective. In an EFL situation such as Saudi Arabia, unlike the case of an ESL context, classroom instruction with emphasis on the use of the native language, mainly through translation, prevails throughout the language learning experience of students at every level. The methods used in teaching English in Saudi Arabia are largely the audio-lingual and grammar translation methods. Teachers often use Arabic in teaching English or depend on translation (Abu-Gararah, 1986, 1990; Al-Ahaydib, 1986). As a result, instructional effects are easily seen in student attention being directed only to
surface level similarities between the native language and the language being learned, and such effects often result in Saudi students’ over-dependence on their L1 in their written foreign language production. On the basis of this, it is argued that these learners’ competence of their L1 (Arabic) knowledge will proportionally affect the quality of their L2 (English) writings. The present study aims at investigating the effect of the Arab EFL learners’ competence in their L1 system on the quality of their L2 compositions.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The effects of a first language on second/foreign language writing have been studied both on the product and the process levels. In terms of product, studies of compositions written by L2 learners focus, most notably, on contrastive rhetoric, by analyzing the transfer of L1 rhetorical patterns into second-language writing (Kaplan, 1983). The influence has also been accounted for in terms of developmental and cognitive factors (Mohan and Lo, 1985; Ringbom, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992; Noor, 1994, 1996b; Verhoeven, 1994). L2 research on composing processes has identified similarities between the behaviours and strategies of L1 and their counterpart of L2 learners. In particular, within-subject comparisons of writers composing in their L1 and L2 have revealed the transfer of L1 knowledge of writing (Edelsky, 1982) and thinking and revising strategies (Cumming, Rebuffot and Ledwell, 1989; Hall, 1990) into L2 writing. The positive effects of L1 writing expertise on the quality of texts produced in an L2 have also recently been addressed by scholar (Cumming, 1989; Kobayashi and Rinnert, 1992, to mention just a few). Second-language research has also shown that L2 writers employ their L1 to “get a strong impression and association of ideas for essays” and produce essays “of better quality in terms of ideas, organization and details” (Lay, 1982:406) and to “meaningfully link image to word” (Spack, 1984:664). L2 learners have also been found to use their native language as “an important resource in their continual processes of decision making while writing” (Cumming, 1989:128). This heavy usage of the L1 in L2 composition might be affected, in both quality and quantity, by the student’s conscious awareness or competence of the L1 knowledge. According to this view, it can be hypothesized that L2 learner’s competence in his L1 will proportionally affect the quality and quantity of his written products in terms of content, organization and style. The more the L2 learner is competent in his L1 writing, the better quality and quantity his composing in the L2.

Beside, previous literature has revealed some interesting findings in this concern. For example, Cummins et al. (1984) found that their subjects’ (Japanese and Vietnamese EFL learners) academic-, cognitive, and literacy-related skills in English were strongly predicted by a number of variables, among which was L1 academic proficiency. Cummins (1991a, 1991b) also showed that considerable transfer from one language to another is possible, given sufficient exposure to L2 and motivation to learn it.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effect of the Arab EFL learners’ competence in writing in Arabic on the quality of their L2 (English) compositions in terms of content, organization and style. To achieve the above main objective, the following research questions were posed:

1) Is the quality of students' written compositions in an L2 affected by their original language of composition (English or Arabic)? Does this vary with students’ proficiency in the L2?

2) Are syntactic complexity and quantity of errors in students’ written compositions in an L2 related to students’ competence in their native language?

3) Does the students’ competence of their native language proportionally affect their decision to transfer from their L1 while composing in an L2?

4) Does low competence in L1 affect the quality of the L2 learners’ writings in terms of content, organization and style?

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

Study Subjects

Forty eight (48) Saudi English majors who are native speakers of Arabic were chosen as study subjects (Ss); all were full time students at the Department of Languages and Translation, Taibah University, Saudi Arabia. The subjects were divided into two language ability groups-
BEGINNERS (BEG) and INTERMEDIATE (INT) with 24 Ss in each group, according to their performance in an English proficiency test. Also a native language (Arabic) test was administered to both groups in order to divide each into two subgroups: one with high competence in Arabic and the other with low competence. We had four different groups (12 Ss in each):

1) English beginners with high competence in Arabic.
2) English beginners with low competence in Arabic.
3) English intermediate with high competence in Arabic.
4) English intermediate with low competence in Arabic.

PROFICIENCY TESTS

The English Test

Aitken (1977), Alderson (1979) and others indicate that the Cloze test is so highly valid and reliable that it could be used to measure proficiency. This test was used to measure the level of the proficiency of the Ss of this study. A pilot study (see below) was implemented to test the validity and reliability of this test.

Two passages from D. Cobb’s (1980) Constructive Comprehension were randomly chosen. Instructions for the two cloze tests were written at the beginning of each test and were also read aloud by the test administrator. An example was provided at the beginning of each test. It was pointed out to the Ss that only one word should be used per blank. The subjects were divided according to their results in the cloze tests to the following categories: (1) those who scored 20-40% were classified as BEGINNERS (BEG), (2) those who scored 50-70% were classified as INTERMEDIATE (INT).

The Arabic Test

An Arabic version of the cloze test was used to measure the Ss’ competence of Arabic.

A passage from a reading book for the intermediate students was randomly chosen. Instructions for the cloze test were written at the beginning of the test and were also read aloud by the test administrator. An example was provided at the beginning of the test. It was pointed out to the Ss that only one word should be used per blank. The subjects were divided according to their results in the cloze tests to the following category groups: (1) those who scored 20-40% were classified as learners with low competence in Arabic (low), (2) those who scored 50-70% were classified as learners with high competence in Arabic (high).

Elicitation Technique

In order to fulfil the study objectives, two types of writing tasks were implemented:

1. Writing in the native language (Arabic) then translating into the L2 (English).
2. Composing directly in the L2 (English).

The subjects were asked to choose one of four topics and complete a composition about it within 60 minutes. The four topics involved the expository rhetorical pattern of comparison:

1. Compare life in the city and life in the country.
2. Compare travelling by a car and travelling by an airplane.
3. Compare study in secondary school and study in college.
4. Compare camping in the desert and camping near a sea.

Collection of data was divided into three phases:

Phase one: The four groups of the subjects were divided into two halves; one half was requested to choose a topic and write about it in Arabic, the other half was also requested to choose a topic and write about it in English.

Phase two: The same procedure was followed, except that the writing assignment was alternated between the two halves and the subjects were requested to choose a different topic from the one they had written on previously.

Phase three: All the Arabic versions were returned to their subjects who were then asked to translate them into English.

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2 This book was intended for intermediate secondary school and adult students of English, who have been learning English for a minimum of three years.
3 The schooling system in Saudi Arabia consists of three major levels: Primary (age 7-12), Intermediate (age 13-15), and secondary (age 16-18).
4 The expository rhetorical pattern of comparison was chosen to see the effect of the mother tongue factor (if there is any) to the performance of the Subjects of the study.
The Pilot Study
Ten students from Taibah University, Almadinah, Saudi Arabia participated in the pilot study. Both English and Arabic Cloze Tests demonstrated two distinct levels of proficiency (Beginners and Intermediate for English and Low and High for Arabic). The composition topics were familiar to the participants in the pilot study.

Data Preparation
The 96 English test papers were rated for three major components of the writing: (1) content, (2) organization and (3) style (language use). Ratings consisted of holistic judgements on a 5-point scale for 11 analytical subcomponents, making up the three major components: (1) content: specific, development of ideas, overall clarity, interest and thesis; (2) organization: introduction, logical sequence of ideas, conclusion and unity; and (3) style: vocabulary use and variety of forms. Appendix 5 gives the criteria applied in evaluating each subcomponent.

All 96 blind-coded compositions were scored by two experienced English language teachers (the researcher and another PhD holder in English) after training in the 5-point scale.

For the analysis of syntactic complexity, two counts were made: (1) the overall number of words in each composition and (2) the mean length of T-units. The T-unit-defined by Hunt (1977) as “a single main clause (or independent clause) plus whatever other subordinate clauses or non-clauses are attached or embedded within, that one main clause” (p.93)– has been empirically proven to be an objective instrument to measure students’ writing proficiency (Kameen, 1979; Flahive and Snow, 1980; Perkins, 1980).

The analysis of error frequency was based on counts of three types of errors that are likely to interfere with the communication of a writer’s intended meaning: (1) lexical choice, (2) awkward form (phrases and sentences) and (3) transitional problems. Wrong lexical choice was defined as an inappropriate or incorrect use of a word that made the writer’s intended meaning to be obscure or misunderstood.

1. I’m very surprised by prosperity of videos.

Awkward form errors consisted of grammatically and/or semantically deviant phrases or sentences that interfered with naturalness of the writer’s expression and/or obscured the writer’s intended meaning:

2. College life needs to become independent myself.

Transitional problems included inappropriate or incorrect use of transitions, either on a sentence or a discourse level, that disrupted the logical sequence of the writer’s ideas and often involved a logical leap:

3. An ordinally type of cars costs thousands of dollars, otherwise, that of bicycles does only twenty or thirty dollars.

For quantitative measures, total words were counted by computer, and two judges (the researcher and another experienced English language teacher) counted T-units, and the three types of errors in all the papers. When differences in the judges’ counts occurred, they were resolved through discussion.

Statistical Analysis
To study the effect of the competence in the native language on the quality of students’ written text in the L2, a 2X2X3 (proficiency level [BEG vs. INT] X competence level in the L1 [high vs. low] X composing process [translation vs. direct composition] X writing component [ideas, organization and details] factorial design was used. For the analysis of error frequency, a similar 2X2X2X3 (proficiency level X competence level in L1 X composing process X error type [lexical choice, awkward form, transitional problems]) factorial design was employed. In both cases, the proficiency, competence and process factors were operated as independent variables, and a holistic rating scores for each component of writing and frequency counts of error types was created as dependent variables in the two analyses. For the analysis of syntactic complexity, the total number of words, the average length of T-units, and the number of Sentence-nodes per T-unit were treated as dependent variables in 2X2X2 (proficiency level X competence level X composing process) factorial design.

The SPSS package for MS Windows was used to calculate the degree of significance while testing the research hypotheses.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS
As shown in Table (1) (Direct Writing), the resuits of a repeated-measures ANOVA revealed significant main
effects for the factors of writing components \( [F(3,48)=3.45, P<.05] \), syntactic complexity \( [F(3,48)=893.79, P<.001] \), and error types \( [F(3,48)=18.77, P<.001] \).

The same results were also found in the subjects' performance in the translation process (see Table 2); whether in the writing components \( [F(3,48)=3.93, P<.05] \), syntactic complexity \( [F(3,48)=1577.26, P<.001] \), or error types \( [F(3,48)=1071.33, P<.001] \).

### The Effect of The Students' Mother Tongue on The Results of The Study

Pearson correlation coefficient test shows that higher-competency in the students' mother-tongue has a positive effect on the overall performance of the students' writings (see Table (3)).

Table 3 above shows that there is a high correlation \((0.791)^7\) between higher-competence in the mother-tongue of the students (Arabic) and the students' performance in the compositions they wrote. We traced these results in the performance of the students, whether in the quality of writing, syntactic complexity or the quantity of errors these students committed.

7 The results of the study show a proportion of more than 0.75 correlation which indicates a highly significant result \( P<.001 \).
Table 4: Means of the Percentages the Students' Performance in the Dependent Variables (Content, Organization and Style).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Groups</th>
<th>Direct Composition</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C = Content, O = Organization, S = Style

Quality of Writing

Table (4) shows the means of the subjects' performance in the dependent variables (content, organization and style) in both writing processes (Direct writing and Translation).

The data shows that translations were rated slightly higher than direct composition (total percent mean scores: 60.3 for translation and 58.8 for direct composition).

The significant interaction effect between proficiency (BEG vs. INT), competence (LOW vs. HIGH), and process (Direct vs. Translation) indicates that three student groups (LI, HB and HI) did not benefit as much from translation as did lower-proficiency and competence students (LB). As shown in Figure (1), LB scores were more than 4 percentage points higher on translation (64.4% vs. 60.3%, t=3.08, p<.05), whereas the other groups' means translation scores were less than 1 percentage point higher (LI= 55.3% vs. 54%; HB= 56.3% vs. 54.3%; HI= 66% vs. 66.7%, see Table 4).

The data shows another interesting result, where competence in the mother tongue (Arabic) did not affect the performance of the lower-proficiency students (LB vs. HB) it showed a significant effect on the higher-proficiency ones (LI vs. HI). Figure (1) above shows that HI (higher-competent in Arabic and higher proficient in English) students did perform significantly better than LI (lower-competent in Arabic and higher-proficient in English) students in both processes' direct composition (LI 54% vs. HI 66.7%, t=4.53, p<.01) and translation (LI 55.3% vs. HI 66%, t=4.42, p<.01).

Figure (2) shows that translations significantly outscores direct writings only in content (71.8 vs. 67.8, t=2.66, p<.05). The results have not shown significant differences in the other two variables (organization and style).
This result shows that the subjects of this study did not benefit much from translation in terms of organization and style. One can argue here that organization and style could be seen as a relative strength of direct compositions, but not of translation.

The results of this study also show some interesting observations. Lower-English proficiency students (whether with low or high competence in Arabic) scored much better in translation-content variable than in direct-content variable (74% vs. 66% for LB and 69% vs. 65% for HB). This may indicate that these students relied more on their mother tongue (Arabic) in expressing the contents of their compositions. This result supports many studies that show that L2 learners employ their L1 to “get a strong impression and association of ideas for essays” and produce essays “of better quality in terms of ideas, organization and details” (e.g. Lay, 1982:406; Spack, 1984:664; Cumming, 1989:128).

Another interesting finding the study has shown, is that higher competence in Arabic has a positive effect on the performance of higher proficiency English students. Table (4) shows that HI scores in content variable were more than LI scores in the same variable, whether in direct composition variable (74% vs. 66%, t=4.89, p<.01) or translation variable (76% vs. 68%, t=4.82, p<.01). This shows that competence in the mother tongue has a positive influence on the content of the compositions these students wrote. This result supports many studies that revealed the transfer of knowledge about L1 writing and thinking and revising strategies into L2 writing (e.g. Edelsky, 1982 Cumming, Rebuffort and Ledwell, 1989; Hall, 1990; Kobayashi and Rinner, 1992).
Figure 4: Means of the Number of T-Units in the Subjects’ Writings in Direct and Translation Variables.

Table 5: Means of the Number of Words in the Subjects' Writings in Direct and Translation Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Groups</th>
<th>No. of words</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>% + / -</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>126.4</td>
<td>214.6</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>167.3</td>
<td>222.7</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>180.9</td>
<td>236.8</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>170.5</td>
<td>268.1</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>645.1</td>
<td>942.2</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Means of the Number of T-Units in the Subjects' Writings in Direct and Translation Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Groups</th>
<th>No. of T-units</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>% + / -</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Frequency of Means of Error Types among the Subjects' Groups in Direct and Translation Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects' Groups</th>
<th>Direct Composition</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LC</td>
<td>AF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LB</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LI</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>9.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LC=Lexical Choice; AF=Awakward Form; TP=Transitional Problems.
Syntactic Complexity

With respect to length of compositions, students in all four groups wrote significantly longer texts through translation (942.2 vs. 645.1, t=65.85, p<.001, see Table (5)) and used more complex sentences in terms of words per T-unit in their translations (49.8 vs. 40.1, t=50.03, p<.001, see Table (5)). Figures (3) and (4) demonstrate the variations of the students' performance in both writings; direct and translation.

Table (5) shows that students with higher competence in Arabic (HB and HI) wrote significant longer compositions than the lower-competent ones did (LB and LI) in both direct writing and translation (504.9 vs. 437.3) and their translations increased in syntactic complexity in terms of number of words per T-unit (27.5 vs. 22.3) (see Table (6)). These results further support our findings in this study, that higher-competence in Arabic improved our students' (whether those of lower or higher proficiency in English) writings. That is, it helped them to write longer compositions and also had a positive influence on their writings. This was seen in the improvement that occurred in the content and ideas of the students' writings.

Higher proficiency students in English (LI and HI) wrote significantly longer compositions than the lower ones did (LB and HB) in both direct writing (337.8 vs. 307.3) and translations (490.8 vs. 451.4) (see Table 5) and their translations increased in syntactic complexity in terms of number of words per T-unit in both direct purpose of comparison. The same procedure was adopted to compare the performance of both LB and LI (see Tables 5 and 6).
writing (21.3 vs. 18.8) as well as translation (26.2 vs. 23.6), see Table (6).

**Quantity of Errors**

Overall, more errors tended to occur in translation than in direct writing, and error type was a significant factor: awkward forms were more frequent (17.87 vs. 9.73, t=6.581, p<.001), lexical choice errors were next in frequency (11.87 vs. 3.95, t=3.577, p<.05), and transition errors were relatively infrequent (2.2 vs. 1.2, not significant; see Table (7)).

The results have shown that students with higher competence in Arabic (HB and HI) produced more awkward errors (AF) than lower competence (LB and LI) in both processes, direct writing (22.8 vs. 16.1, t=3.577, p<.05) and translation (39.8 vs. 31.7, t=3.296, p<.05) (see Figures 5 and 6).

One can argue here that the tendency of the students to produce more awkward forms in their translation versions correlated positively with increased syntactic complexity. That is, as syntactic complexity increased in the translation versions, awkward forms more frequently interfered with the intended meaning. This tendency may be related to the findings that increased prediction resulting from attempts at more complex integrative thinking by L2 writers, leads to more problems in terms of clarity on the syntactic level (Jacobs 1982). At the same time, a portion of the tendency toward more errors in translation may result from over attention to surface level translation, as suggested by Lado (1979) in interpreting his findings that translation led to more syntactic errors than written recall of reading passages did.

The results have also shown another interesting finding: students with higher competence in the mother tongue and higher proficiency in the L2 (HI) committed more errors than those of lower proficiency (HB) (see Figure (6)). This result may be due mainly to the reason that these students have not yet acquired much vocabulary in L2. As a result, they intended to transfer negatively from their mother tongue the lengthy ideas they wrote in their Arabic compositions, in order not to affect or modify the content of their compositions.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that higher-competence in Arabic has a significant positive effect on the overall performance of the students' writings in English. HI students significantly performed better than LI students in both writing processes (direct vs. translation). The task of writing first in Arabic then translating into English (translation task) had a positive effect on the content of the compositions written by our students of this study particularly HI group.

With respect to the length of compositions, students in all four groups wrote significantly longer texts through translation and used more complex sentences in terms of words per T-unit in their translations. Higher-competence in Arabic has shown positive effect on the length of the compositions these students wrote whether in the direct writing or translation tasks. HB and HI significantly wrote longer compositions than LB and LI did.

With respect to quantity of errors, the study shows that, overall, more errors occurred in translation than in direct writing, and error type was a significant factor: awkward forms were more frequent, lexical choice errors were next in frequency and transition errors were relatively infrequent. This tendency to produce more awkward forms in the students' translation version correlate positively with increased syntactic complexity. This may be related to the findings that increased prediction resulting from attempts at more complex integrative thinking by L2 writers, leads to more problems in terms of clarity on the syntactic level.

**Pedagogical Recommendations**

The findings show that the task of composing first in Arabic enabled many students to explore ideas fully on their own intellectual and cognitive levels, than composing directly into English. Those whose L2 competence is so limited as to impede discovery of meaning through L2 writing, can benefit from invention and exploration of ideas in their L1, especially in the prewriting and planning stage. These students include most of the lower-level students in this study, whose attempted level of complexity of ideas seemed to have been beyond their ability to express it directly in English.

Learners, on the other hand, may benefit from the practice of direct writing in the L2 to increase fluency in L2 writing and eventually develop the ability to discover meaning directly through L2 writing, without sacrificing quality or complexity of ideas. If the ultimate goal is English-like discourse, students should be encouraged to express themselves in English as much as possible. The extensive use of translation may hinder L2 writing fluency and delay the development of an awareness of the
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expectations of an L2 audience. This awareness of audience can help Arab students realize that, in English discourse, they are expected to demonstrate logical progression of ideas, state their main points relatively early in their composition, and take the responsibility for making the message clear and convincing to their readers.

The findings also suggest that while we, researchers or teachers of English, pay attention to developing teaching English to the Saudi Arabian EFL learners, we should also pay the same amount of attention to these learners' competence in the mother tongue which has, as this study has proven, a proportional effect on their writings in English, especially in the prewriting and planning stage. This could be achieved by teaching both Arabic and English in a communicative approach and through daily usage.

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