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## **Group Work as Motivational Factor In Enhancing Students' Writing Skill: The Case of Third Year EFL Students In Foreign Languages Department at Ahmed SALHI University Center, Naama**

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## Abstract:

Being fully aware of the importance of Writing skill as a cornerstone of EFL students' academic and career life, their teachers should always look for what might help their students increase their proficiency and avoid their writing apprehension . Therefore, this present research attempts at investigating the EFL learners' perception towards group work as motivational factor to write effectively. The descriptive method has been adopted using questionnaire for both third year EFL students and their teachers at the department of English in Naama University Centre. The results show that group work is an effective technique for enhancing and increasing students 'motivation to write.

Keywords: Group work; motivational factor; EFL Writing skill.

## المخلص:

لأهمية مهارة الكتابة لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في كل من حياتهم الأكاديمية والمهنية، يجب على معلمهم دائماً البحث عما قد يساعدهم على زيادة كفاءتهم وتجنب مخاوفهم الكتابية. لذلك يهدف هذه المقالة إلى دراسة التأثير التحفيزي لاستخدام العمل الجماعي في تدريس التعبير الكتابي أين يفترض الباحث أن العمل الجماعي يعزز دافعية الطلاب للكتابة لأنه يخلق بيئة مناسبة يمكنهم فيها الكتابة بحرية ودون تردد. يحاول هذا البحث معرفة العلاقة بين العمل الجماعي كأسلوب تعليمي ودوره في تعزيز دافع الطلاب للكتابة. تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي من خلال استخدام استبيانين: أحدهما لطلاب السنة الثالثة ل م د والآخر لمعلمي قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في مركز الجامعي بالنعامة. تظهر نتائج أن العمل الجماعي هو أسلوب فعال لتعزيز وزيادة دافع الطلاب للكتابة لأنه أحد أفضل الطرق لتزويد المتعلمين بالإنتاج الكتابي المكثف والتواصل وتبادل المعرفي

العمل الجماعي ؛ عامل تحفيز؛ تعزيز مهارة التعبير الكتابي الكلمات المفتاحية

## 1. INTRODUCTION

World- wide changes resulting from the Globalization , have imposed educational reform as a major condition for human development and educational reform. Nowadays, the English language is the dominant international language and indispensable key to the changing world of science, technology and communication. It is no longer the property of the English speaking countries alone. Instead, it has become a sort of universal language: a vehicle that is used globally and will lead to more opportunities. It belongs to whoever uses it for whatever purpose or need. Consequently, the English language has become an essential component of the development process, and as a part of this globalized world, Algeria is trying to reserve a seat in this contest of development as well, by starting to give the English language some importance over the last decade.

Teaching and learning a foreign language, however, is not an easy task for both the teacher and the learner, the process demands a lot of efforts by the students and the right teaching strategies by the teacher. In

fact, mastering all the skills of English language is hard. In recent years, there have been many studies related to writing in a foreign language since it is very important in academic studies; it is regarded as a challenging task for students since it requires a lot of knowledge. What make the situation bitter is the students' writing apprehension resulted from their negative attitudes towards writing and fear of making mistakes since they are often seen as intricate problem to student especially when they realize that they are used by their teachers as a reflective method to check whether a given language elements is assimilated or not .

As an effective way to enhance students' writing skill, Group work is one of the best ways to provide learners with extensive written production and communication. Thus, organizing the class into groups is one of the effective techniques to help learners overcome their writing problems, and be motivated to take part. Therefore, this research paper endeavors at exploring the following researchquestion:

**To what extent can group work enhance students' writing skill? And what are learners /teachers attitudes towards the use of group work as a motivational factor in enhancing their writing skill?**

For the sake of investigating the question stated above, a range of concepts should be considered; they are summarized in the following lines:

### **1.1 Writing Defined**

Acquiring a language involves four main skills ordered according to the way they are acquired and taught i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and writing .This latter is one of the basic language skills(Hedge, 1988). Yet it is called forth and last communicative skill, whether in the first or in the second language because of its relative difficulty and because of its consolidating role in language learning (Harmer, 2004). Similarly, (Rivers, 1968, p. 293) maintains that **writing plays the role of consolidating learning in other skills and is of paramount usefulness in testing** . Writing, therefore is not a skill that can be picked up by exposure, it needs to be taught through formal

instruction. In this respect ,(White & Arndt, 1991, p. 3)see that: **“Writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable effort of time”**. Additionally, (Zemach & Islam, 2005, p. 11)go on the state **“Writing is also one of the most difficult skills to master in both first language and second language. Student can find it challenging to find ideas to include in their writing, and each culture has its own style for organizing academic writing”**.

Finally, it is important to grant greater attention and concern to the development of this skill by learners but this skill often poses some problems and, consequently, affect their writing achievements during the learning process, as it will be explained in the next point:

#### **✓ Grammar**

The lack of grammatical competence in writing is considered to be crucial problem to EFL learners as the majority their teachers focus just on their final products to check their errors.

#### **✓ Spelling**

Spelling is a fundamental skill in written expression, which allows the writer to convey meanings and to communicate effectively.

#### ✓ Punctuation

According to (Grellet, 1996, p. 8) the role of using punctuation is **“to make the text you write clear and easy to read. Defective punctuation can make a text very difficult to understand, and even leads to misunderstanding»**. Without it, writing has no importance. Lacking perhaps the most kind of accentuation like full stop or comma, this can make confusion in seeing the significance and decipher accurately.

#### ✓ Vocabulary

Learning vocabulary has a basic part in language and it has also been respected a fundamental component in the context and writing process. It plays a significant role in writing, since it is the fundamental part of language

#### ✓ Anxiety

One of the problems that might affect students ability and their attitudes towards writing is writing apprehension or anxiety . It is generally understood to mean, **“Negative, anxious feelings (about oneself as a writer, one’s writing situation, or one’s writing task)**

**that disrupt some part of the writing process”**(Rankin-Brown, 2006, p. 2)

All in all, writing is a difficult skill where the writer/ learner is required to show control over a number of variable simultaneously.(Raimes, 1983) puts these variables into nine categories. These components are: *content, organization, grammar, syntax, mechanics (spelling and punctuation), word choice, audience, and writing process.*

### 1.2 Group Work and Motivation in EFL Classroom

There is a general consensus that student-centered instruction leads to better language learning and better affect compared with teacher-centered instruction, because students have better performance when they are encouraged to think instead of doing the thinking for them .

(McCombs & Whistler, 1997) suggest that learner-centeredness creates a learning environment that promotes the highest levels of motivation and achievement for all learners. Because of this, students' motivation in learning ought to be supported , and kept up through

different strategies, and group work is one among them.

### 1.2.1 Group Work Defined

:

‘Group Work( or GW for a short) is a teaching method utilized in the classroom to improve student communication and participation . To represent this, (Wallace, 1991, p. 45)states that group work is a method of instructing and realizing which is characterized as being **"any form of learning activity which is done by groups of learners working together. Often distinguished from class work, in which the whole class works together.**

‘ GW’ is also defined as a form of cooperative learning that helps, supports and facilitates the students’ learning process through interaction with other .In this respect Olsen& kagan (1992, cited in(Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 192)clarify that: **“Cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others learners”.**

### 1.2.2 Criteria for Designing Group Work:

Creating groups is not a simple undertaking; the instructor needs a cautious arranging while doing as such, s/he should think about: its formation, size and structure.

#### ➤ Group Formation

While dividing the class into groups during an interactive action, the teacher must consider how to assemble them to make and set up social relationship among students because it is the main aim of the classroom interaction.(Harmer J. , 2001) lists the following principles that can help teachers in designing groups : friendship, streaming (the act of arranging students into groups according to their abilities) and chance, which is the easiest way of creating groups.

#### ➤ Group Size

Group size is an important factor when applying cooperative learning methods in the EFL classroom. The optimal size varies from four to five. According to (Jacob, 2006) four members in a group seem to be the most popular size. (Nunan, 1989) also focuses on the importance of group size; he asserts that at whenever point the group size gets

smaller, the students discussion time will be raised.

### ➤ **Group Structure**

Groups may be organized in different manners. However, whatever the group structure is applied, the significant thing is that students act and interact in the classroom among themselves.

### **1.3.4 Group Work and Motivation**

Before highlighting the link between them ,one need to define motivation. Different definitions may be given to motivation but the most shared one was that given by (Richards & Schmidt2002 ‘, p. 343)who define motivation as "**the driving force in any situation that leads to action**". In other terms, it is defined as the factor that determines a person's desire to do something.

After reviewing the main literature items of group work and motivation, it is extremely significant to examine the relationship between GW and motivation.

(Lamb & Nunan, 1996) claim that group work increases learners' motivation which means increasing learners' self-confidence, satisfy their needs and interests. Moreover, GW creates an enjoyable, relaxing atmosphere in the classroom. In

group work learning activities, a convenient and comfortable atmosphere is formed and the self-esteem is reinforced since GW creates a strong social support system in which student feel esteemed and linked to one

Anxiety, moreover, is decreased and self-confidence is reinforced since the class attention is not concentrated on an individual but on a whole group and when an error is made, it becomes a teaching tool rather than a public criticism (Slavin & Karweit, 1981)Thus, students' motivation raises and they feel free to reveal their language without hesitation

Since the desired outcome, of any motivational strategy, is participation by each learner, GW can be a very effective strategy for educators to be used .Moreover, GW, as a form cooperative learning, is proved to make learners want to be high achievers and make them believe that learning new ideas is significant and pleasant. As a result, students would build a high intrinsic motivation when working together.

## **2. Methodology**

In the current study, the population chosen is the third year LMD students at Naama university

center from which a sample of thirty (30) students (22 females and 8 male) is studied, as they are already familiar with the use of group work inside the classroom. They enrolled during the academic year 2018.-2019. Their age ranges between 21 and 26 years. While the second selected sample is six(6) teachers of different modules from the same setting . Additionally, their experience in teaching English ranges from 8 to 20 years.

## 2.1 Learners

### Questionnaire Analysis

In order to get students 'perception about learning of the writing skill and their attitudes towards using group work as a strategy to motivate and enhance it , the researcher has opted for a questionnaire submitted to the sample .The questionnaire consisted of fourteen (14) questions which varied between open , open/ended and essay questions to collect valid and reliable

quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire is divided into four parts:

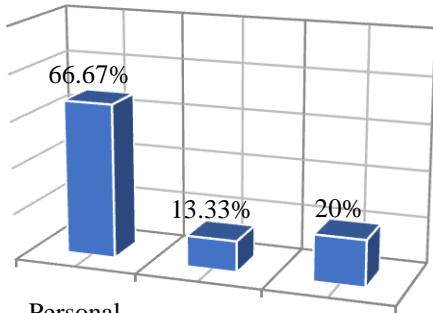
- **Demographic information: age and gender.**
- **students' perception about writing skill (from question 1 to 6 )**
- **Their opinions towards the application of group work in the EFL classroom(From question 7 to 11)**
- **Students' perception towards the effectiveness of group work in enhancing their motivation to write.( from 12 to 14)**

### 2.1.1 Results of Learners Questionnaire

The following charts summarize the main results collected through the questionnaire:

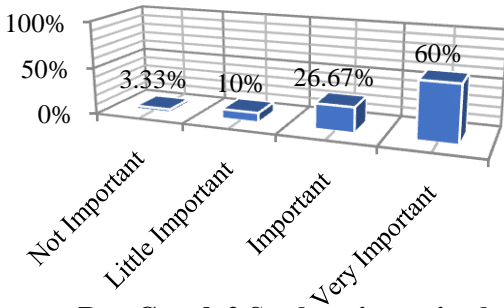
**Question 1:** Is your choice of studying English.....





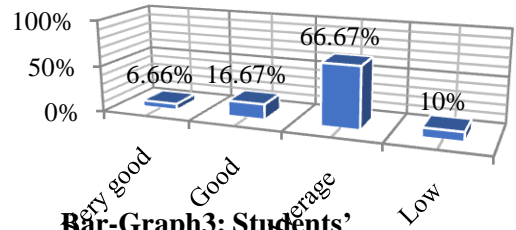
**Bar-Graph 1: Students' motives to study English**

**Question 02:** How is the writing skill important to you?



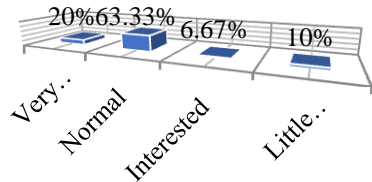
**Bar-Graph 2 Students'perceived importance of writing**

**Question 03:**How do you consider your ability in writing English?



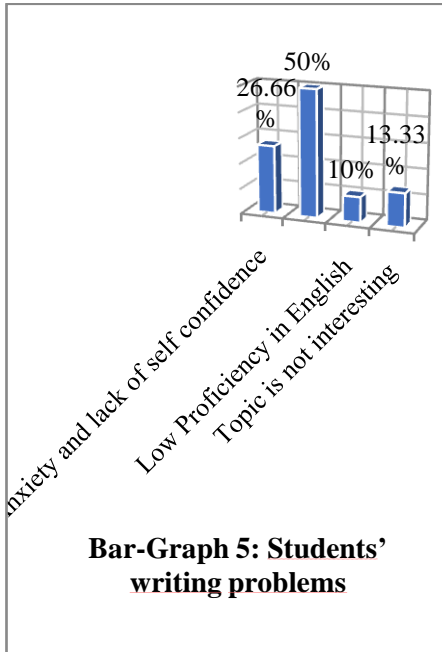
**Bar-Graph3: Students' perceptions about their English writing abilities**

**Question 04:**How much do you feel interested in writing English in the classroom?

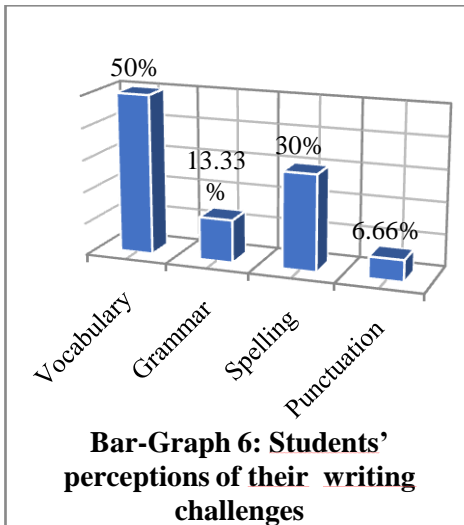


**Bar-Graph 4: Students'interest in writing English**

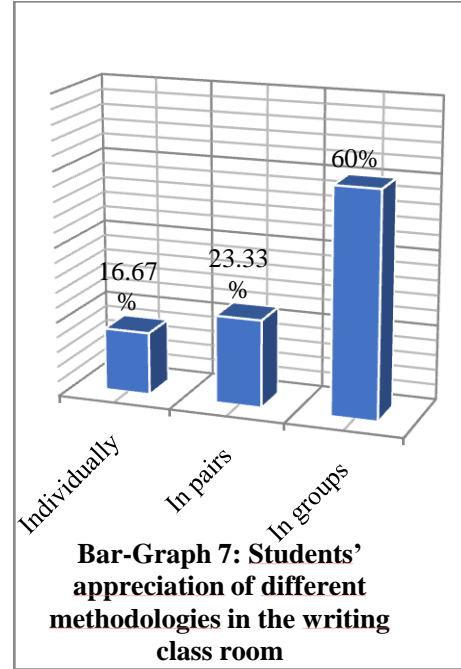
**Question 05:** what makes you unwilling to write in the classroom?



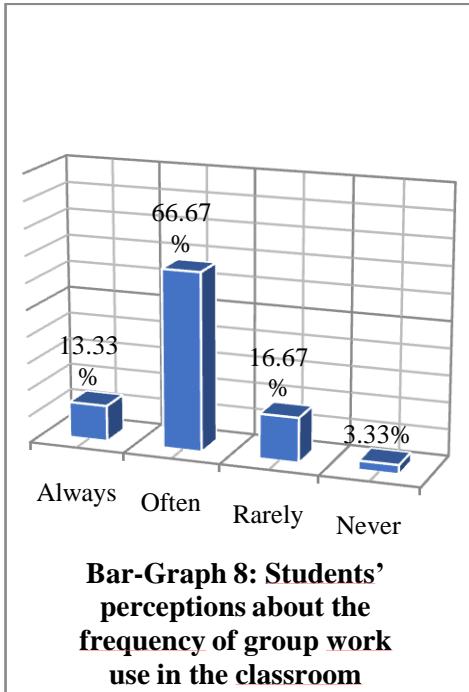
**Question 06:** Which of these does constitute the biggest writing challenge for you? Please, justify?



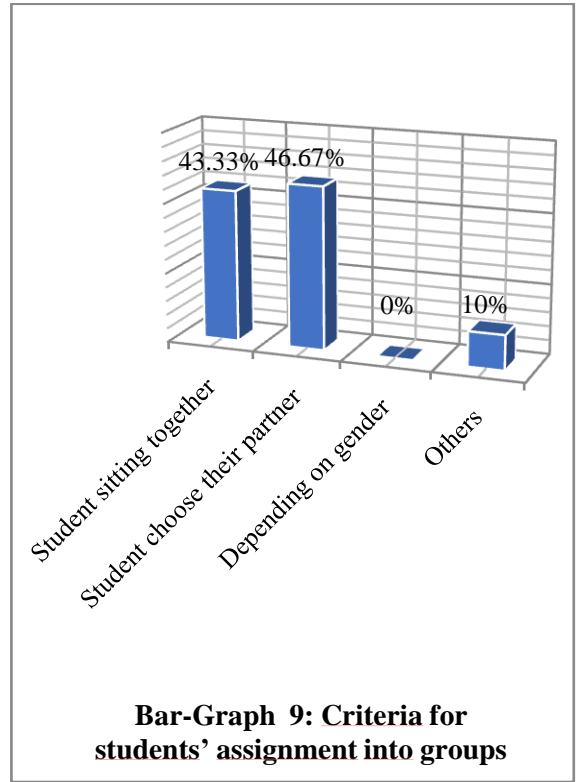
**Question 07:** During a written expression session, do you prefer to work:



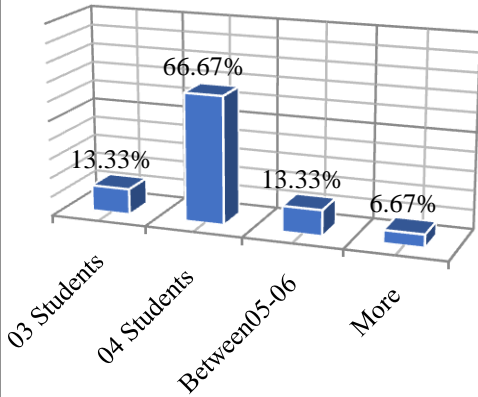
**Question 08:** How often does your teacher ask you to work in groups?



**Question 09:** On which basis does your teacher group you?

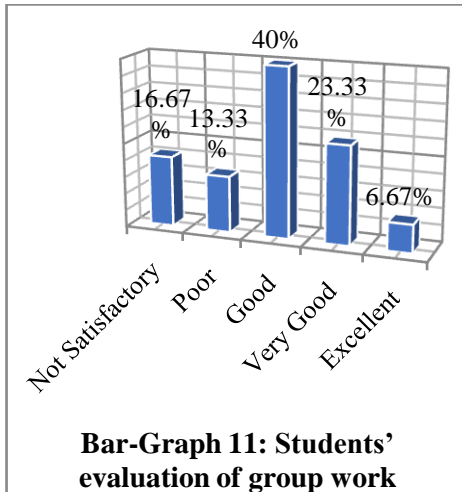


**Question 10:** Approximately, how many students are there in each group?



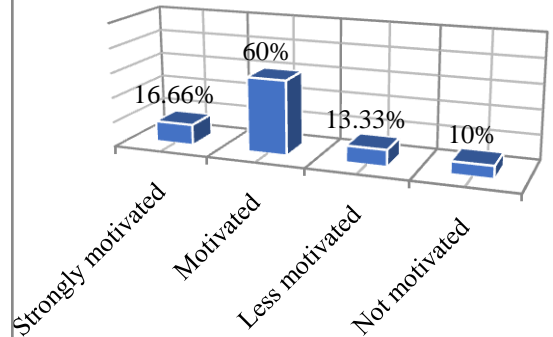
**Bar-Graph 10: Students' perceptions about their group size**

**Question 11:** According to you, group work when compared to individual work is: Please, justify?



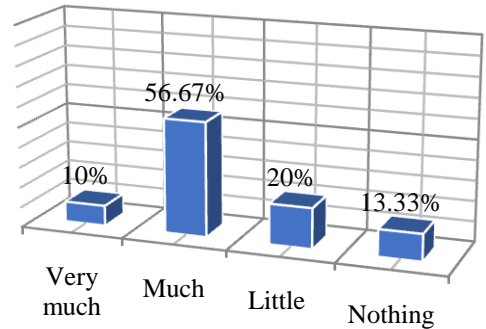
**Bar-Graph 11: Students' evaluation of group work**

**Question 12:** When you work in small groups, do you feel that you are :



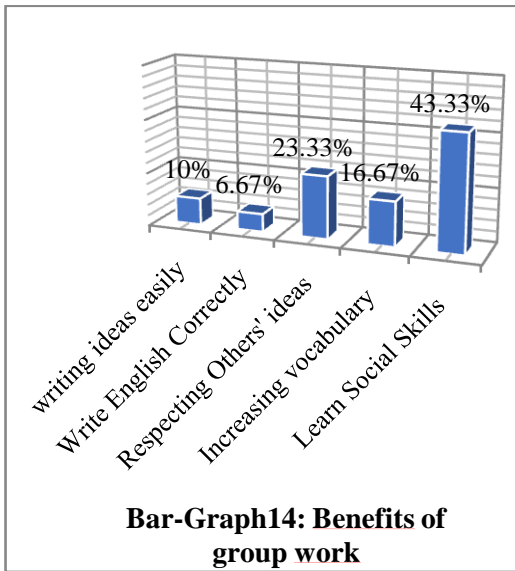
**Bar-Graph 12: Students' motivation in group work**

**Question 13:** How much did you learn from group work?



**Bar-Graph 13: Students' views about knowledge learnt from group work**

**Question 14:** Do you think that group work helps you to:



## 2.2. Teachers' Questionnaire Analysis

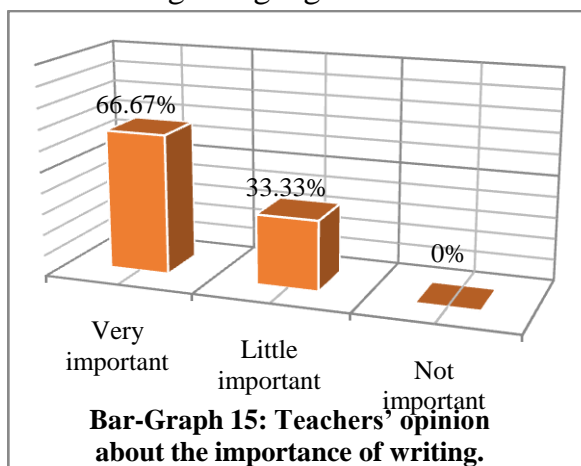
The teachers questionnaire consists of 12 questions which varied between open , open/ended and essay questions to collect valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire is divided into four parts:

- **Part one : Teacher's background information**
- **Part Two: The writing skill in the EFL classroom ( from question 1 to 6)**
- **Part Three: teachers' attitudes towards the application of GW in the EFL classroom? ( question 7 and 8 )**
- **Part four: teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of GW in enhancing students' motivation to write and their suggestion to improve students' writing proficiency.( from question 9 to 12)**

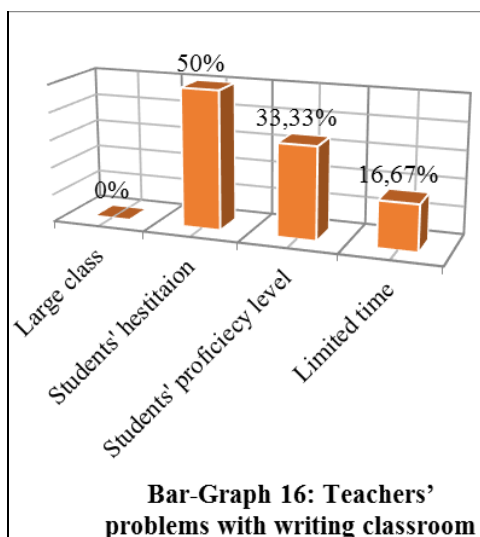
### 2.2 .1 Results of Teachers' Questionnaire

The following charts summarize the main results collected through the questionnaire:

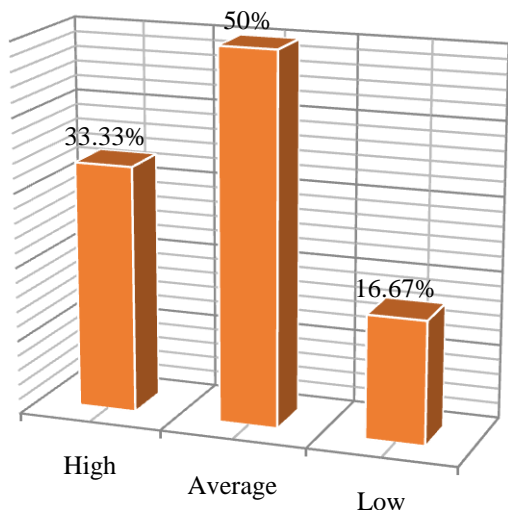
**Question 1:** To what extent do you think that writing is an important skill in learning a foreign language?



**Question 02:** What problems are you facing in teaching writing?

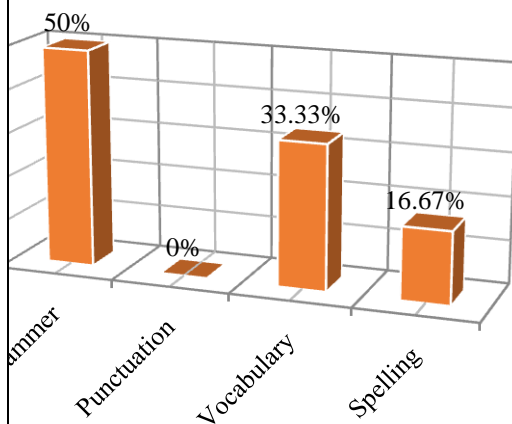


**Question 03:** How would you describe the level of your students?



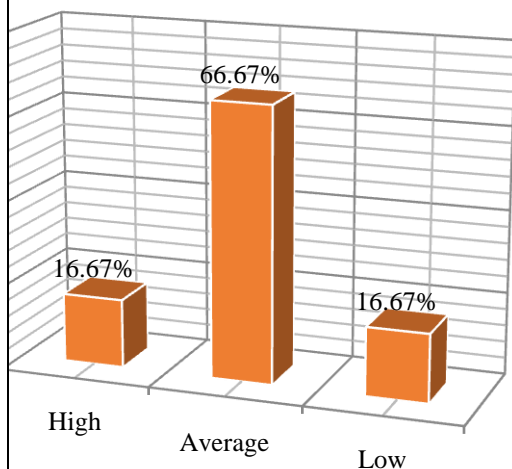
**Bar-Graph 17: Teachers' views about their students' written proficiency**

**Question 04:** What do your students struggle with most when writing?



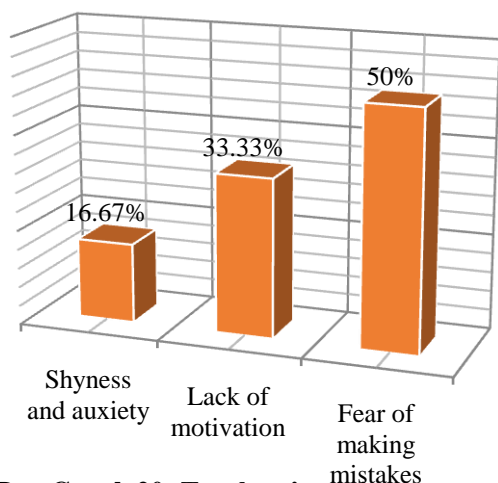
**Bar-Graph 18 : Teachers' opinion about students' writing challenges**

**Question 05:** how would you describe your students 'writing motivation?



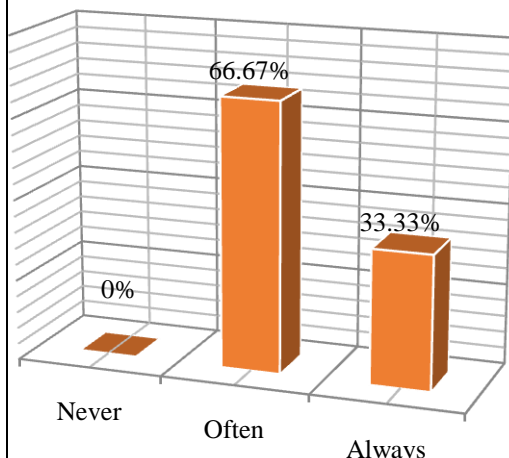
**Bar-Graph 19: Teachers' perception about their students' motivation to write.**

**Question 06:** What are the difficulties that make EFL students unwilling to write in the classroom?



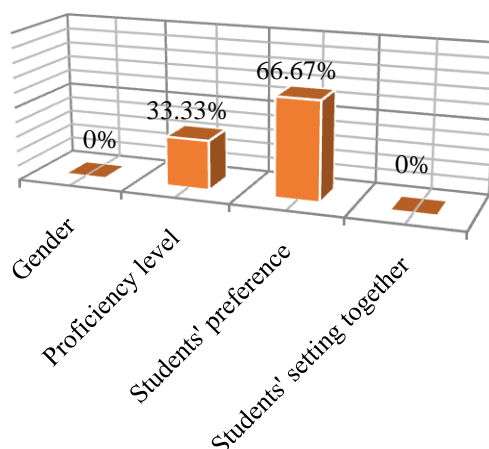
**Bar-Graph 20: Teachers' opinion about the factors preventing student's writing**

**Question 07:** How often do you use group work when teaching writing?



**Bar-Graph 2.21: Teachers' preceptions of the frequency of group work use in the classroom**

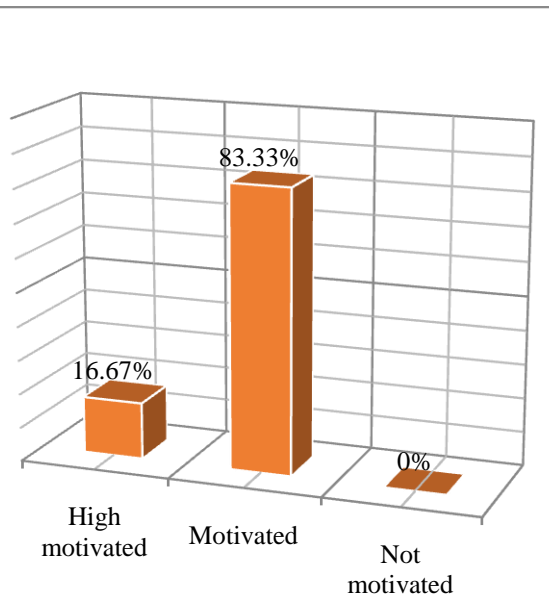
**Question 08:** Do you set up the groups on the basis of :



**Bar-Graph 22: Factors' determining students' assignment into groups**

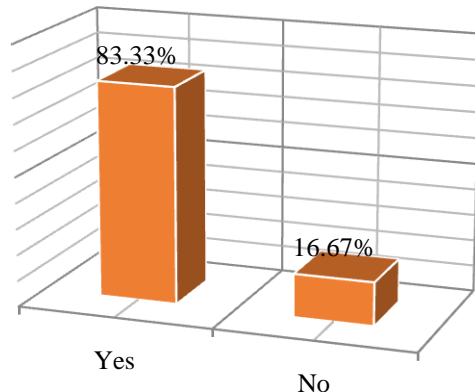


**Question 9:** When using group work technique, do you think your students are:



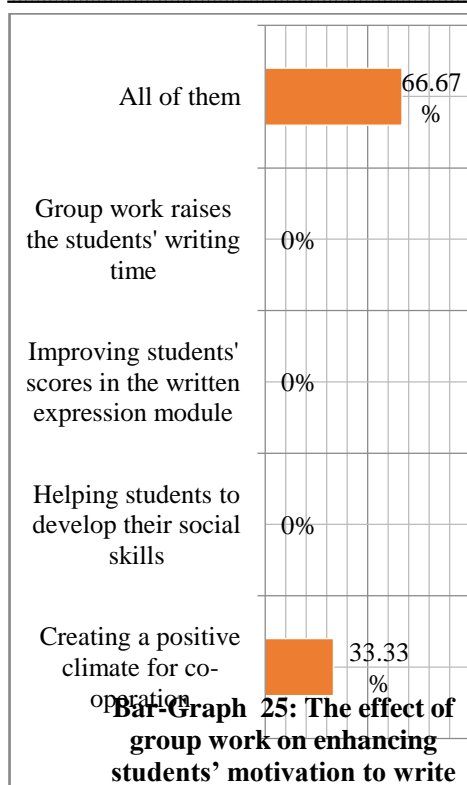
**Bar-Graph 23 : Teachers' opinion about students' in group work**

**Question 10:** Does group work help students to be more responsible about their learning? Please justify your answer in either choice .



**Bar-Graph 2.24: Teachers' attitudes towards the effect of group work in developing the learners' responsibility to learn**

**Question 11:** How can group work play a major role in enhancing students' motivation to write?



As far as the qualitative data are collected through their justifications of the above questions and the following question :

**Question 12:** what do you suggest to enhance your students writing skill?

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data gathered through teachers and learners questionnaires have displayed the following results:

- Writing is considered to be an important skill in the learning of EFL .
- Group work is among the most important teaching techniques that help students in improving their writing

skill. Both teachers and students agree on this idea.

- Motivation which is a basic element for mastering learning is highly emphasized by teachers who confess their role to motivate students. It can therefore be said that it is significant for our educators to make learners interested in writing. Indeed, when asked about their interest in the written form of the language,

most of students claimed that they are interested in learning writing. Thus, teachers' efforts in motivating students are advantageous.

- Group Work is an effective way to enhance the teaching and learning process that helps learners to perceive ideas, retrain them, and improve their skills. The results showed that indeed, group work creates a positive

atmosphere for cooperation and play a major role in enhancing language skills in general and writing skill specifically

- To sum up, both educators and learners agreed upon the idea that group work is efficient in terms of enhancing students' motivation to write. Thus, these results confirm our hypotheses.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Enhancing the writing skill of foreign language learners is a difficult task. However, teachers should know that the act of writing could be greatly influenced by such influential psychological factors like: anxiety, self-confidence, motivation ...etc. In fact, these factors were found to have strong effects on the students as well as their achievement. On the affective side, group work can raise students' motivation, foster their self-confidence and lower their anxiety.

Implementing group work in the writing classroom ,therefore ,is very beneficial in the sense that learners can learn in a relaxed and

friendly situation where the students can learn all the social skills that facilitate communication without hesitation .Finally, group work raises student's desires, interests, and aptitude toward learning the written form of the English language .

All in all, it has to be said that group work ,as a teaching and learning aid, is not the only tool that should be taken for granted in teaching writing skills, but there are other techniques and strategies that may be more efficient and beneficial . This will open doors for further researches in attempt to test their impact and contribution.

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