

Boosting Writing Performance of University Students by The Lens Offering Solutions to Global Issues in An Academic Writing Course

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ABSTRACT

Our world is under the threat of many global issues encompassing wars, poverty, climate change, inequality, and contagious diseases. The role of educational institutions in making society contemplate the uncured problems and offer sensible solutions through wisdom is prevalent. Thus, they can be socially conscious of global problems and seek ways to eliminate them. In this regard, equipping learners with such skills is a necessity in EFL classes so that they can transfer them to other domains in life. This theme has been probed thoroughly globally; however, the scarcity of studies in Iraq inspired the researchers to conduct this mixed-method design study at a private university in Erbil, Iraq. To this end, 28 students in various departments such as IT, medical analysis, pharmacy, computer engineering and dentistry were chosen through simple random sampling to represent control or experimental groups within 3 months in the 2023-2024 academic year. The former received writing instructions with varied writing topics. Conversely, experimental group students' writing topics focused solely on global problems, including climate change and chronic diseases, through brainstorming, debates, and collaborative writing exercises. The effects of the treatment were gauged through pre-test and post-test instruments. The findings revealed that students who received education based on global issues earned more satisfactory marks in writing, raised their awareness, and boosted their critical thinking and civic engagement skills; however, the control group students' progress was far less than significant. This study's findings can have some reflections for the authorised bodies interested in actively inserting the UN's SDGs into academic writing courses.

KEY WORDS: Academic Writing, Climate Change, Global Issues, The UN's Sdgs

1. INTRODUCTION

Our world suffers from major issues, including climate change, poverty, inequality, migration, global health crises, and cybersecurity. They have widespread impacts across countries and regions, transcending national boundaries and requiring joint global efforts (Bayraktar Balkir, 2021). To name a few, climate change, driven by greenhouse gas emissions, leads to high global temperatures, sea-level rise, and increased repetition of extreme weather conditions like heatwaves, droughts, and tornadoes.

It makes it tough to reach food and water instantly, as well as harming ecosystems and triggering people for mass migration. Subsequently, unfair distribution of income, wealth, and access to essential services remain significant between and within countries, albeit progress in reducing extreme poverty (Kara, 2024). High levels of poverty and inequality prevent social mobility, increase social tensions, and contribute to political instability. Similarly, migration can be driven by economic disparities, conflict, and climate change. Seeking better life opportunities overseas due to wars, persecutions, or rare job opportunities is also rising. Large-scale migrations can pose grave risks for countries that receive migrants or lose their youth through brain drain (Porto, 2016). More specifically, authorities in host countries can come across issues by integrating them into social life and employing appropriately. Additionally, the countries that lose their skilled citizens cannot compensate them in the

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short run. Afterward, the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS has highlighted the fragility of global health systems. These health crises, along with cancer, diabetes, obesity, and drug abuse, can overwhelm healthcare infrastructure, increase mortality rates, and have long-term economic impacts (Al-Jarf, 2022; Yucedal et al., 2022). Finally, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has created a global reliance on cyberspace, making cyber threats a significant concern. Cybersecurity threats can disrupt critical infrastructure, compromise privacy, and pose risks to national security (Hubbard & Seiersen, 2023; Kucuk & Daskan, 2024). As it is evident, challenges are interlinked, affecting economic stability, social cohesion, and the sustainable future of our planet. That's why, integrating such life-threatening issues into English classes can have far-reaching effects to be aware of them and take sensible precautions by considering students' insightful ideas in related writing tasks.

Global issues drive humanity to handle them and holistically cure all the wounds of nature, human beings, wildlife, and the planet due to the significance of the issues. Aligning with this unanimous call, a well-reputed global organization, the United Nations (UN), has launched several high-stake projects since 1945. To illustrate, the UN commenced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 to tackle global issues and find a lasting solution to ensure sustainability in all stages of life regardless of region, race, or gender (Karam, 2024; Schramade, 2017). More specifically, goals were set to eliminate poverty, neutralise hunger, receive basic healthcare, get quality education, have adequate sanitation, minimize the negative effects of climate change, and find decent work. Additionally, UNICEF (the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) has addressed many chronic issues regarding children's education, health and overall protection so that their well-being is guaranteed. Subsequently, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) has undertaken a weighty responsibility to prioritise peace, security, and sustainable development through international cooperation in terms of education, science, culture, and communication (Othman & Omer, 2024). UNESCO also encourages policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators to modify the curricula based on the principles of SDGs at educational institutions because educational institutions play integral roles in empowering society with knowledge, skill, and devotion (Celik et al., 2024; Shields, 2022). Besides, when global issues are handled in writing classes, students can have brilliant ideas to share in community so that the positive atmosphere spreads rapidly which help reducing catastrophic effects of global issues.

Academic Writing courses have taken precedence at the tertiary level to equip students with the requirements

of social, professional, and personal lives. Correspondingly, it is highly advised to insert real-life issues into the themes of writing courses so that students can be engaged in activities more ambitiously (Mantashe, 2023). In this regard, SDGs are at the heart of individuals' daily lives, which drives educators to highlight some of their points in writing classes, thereby raising awareness of the need to behave more responsibly. There are numerous compelling reasons to integrate SDGs into writing tasks, some of which are developing critical thinking skills, contributing to global issues positively, and fostering empathy because students are inclined to read, watch, analyse, and synthesise further, paving the way for permanently fixing chronic issues (Abdulrahman & Kara, 2022; Suryanto & Brawijaya, 2024). In addition, learners can improve their civic literacy skills, thereby inspiring other citizens to come together and demand changes from the authorised bodies to protect the environment or ensure societal equality. Moreover, learners can increase their interdisciplinary knowledge because the headings of SDG are comprehensive enough to have some dimensions in history, math, geography, psychology, sociology, and science (Adams et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2024; Daskan et al., 2022). In this respect, having background information is ensured to articulate ideas more creatively in written works ranging from reports to essays.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Our planet faces numerous global challenges, prompting all industries to take immediate action and seek solutions to these issues. Apart from taking tangible actions in social life, authorities who are in charge of running educational institutions have set a roadmap to increase awareness about global issues in courses since their adverse effects were felt deeply. Accordingly, many studies have been carried out to gauge the impact of courses that have paid the utmost attention to global issues. The rationale for carrying out such studies is that educational institutions are places where students can be educated to brainstorm and come up with lasting solutions to severe problems for the betterment of society, thereby raising the quality of life for all citizens. To name a few, Lee et al.'s (2012) study showed that students can take advantage of covering global issues in science classes because they improved their scientific competence, civic literacy, and problem-solving skills in the Korean context. Students also reiterated that they became more responsible for changing the world positively. Subsequently, Eglitis et al. (2016) pointed out that diving into the root causes of global issues in a sociology course in the US setting fostered students' learning to research actively and produce rational solutions for major environmental problems. Besides, Schultz et al. (2015)

conducted a wide-scale study in 6 countries encompassing Brazil, the Czech Republic, Germany, India, New Zealand, and Russia, which unearthed that students who received the education to be aware of global issues could shape their characteristics well because they learned the value of responsibility, mercy, dignity, compassion, honesty, fairness, and transparency. Furthermore, Raath and Golightly (2017) pointed out that field trips were beneficial in raising students' awareness about incurable environmental disasters, so they could gather to contemplate the issues and change this cycle positively from school to the whole community in South Africa.

The necessity to cover global issues in courses has spread to EFL and ESL domains because such dimensions of language learning have considerable effects on students, thanks to their scopes. To illustrate, Chuku (2020) measured the influence of eco-oriented instruction on developing Nigerian students' performance in writing classes, which revealed that content-based writing instruction yielded better results in enhancing students' writing scores. Similarly, Arabaci and Okyay (2023) implemented a noteworthy instruction in Turkey where students read ecology-based stories with a well-established plan. Their study showed that developing habits toward reading stories about environmental issues elevated students' reading performance and raised their awareness dramatically. Subsequently, Bjelica's (2022) study in Poland displayed that diving into ecology-oriented podcasts could multiply students' listening scores as well as urging students to be lifelong learners. Moreover, Al-Jarf's (2022) study documented that covering global issues in EFL classes had numerous benefits in increasing students' speaking scores in EFL classes because they were driven to read, watch, analyze, and exchange their ideas with their peers in classes, thereby putting all principles of a democratic atmosphere.

Meanwhile, certain studies have been undertaken by scholars who work in Iraq as EFL lecturers about implementing instruction to cover global issues. To name a few, Kara (2023) enriched writing classes with global issues, such as pollution, climate change, global warming, poverty, and wars. His study pointed out that integrating global issues into academic writing courses substantially boosted students' writing grades at a university in Iraq. Additionally, students articulated that they expanded their vocabulary breadth about ecological issues considerably. Additionally, Khalil and Saalh (2023) conducted a study on pre-service teachers who postulated that paying attention to reading exercises on global issues could raise students' reading performance because they could devise many strategies to understand texts and respond accurately at a university in Iraq. Besides, Ali's (2022) study shed light on essential points in increasing the value of covering EFL classes with

topics taken from real life. His study unearthed that students' macro and micro-skills could be enhanced significantly if global issues were leveled in EFL classes because they had untapped potential in English lessons at a university in Iraq.

2.1. Significance of the Study and Research Questions

This research study is an attempt to explore EFL students' perceptions and writing scores after being exposed to writing instruction based on covering global issues in the form of paragraphs or essays at the tertiary level. The underlying reason to undertake such a responsibility is that it is unavoidable to escape the adverse effects of global issues ranging from climate change to pandemics. However, some campaigns can be launched in cooperation if all parties agree unanimously. In this respect, covering global issues in writing classes can raise people's awareness and writing scores, respectively, thereby urging all people to be more proactive in gradually eliminating their negative effects. Thus, the study can contribute to the existing literature in Iraq, where people also suffer from global issues, just like other countries. In light of this, research questions were formulated accordingly:

RQ 1. What are the participants' perceptions on highlighting global issues in writing classes?

RQ 2. What is the impact of enriching writing classes with global issues in increasing writing scores?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Explanatory sequential mixed methods research design was employed in the present study because it allows researchers to gather qualitative and quantitative data and triangulate in the final phase (Kimmons, 2022). Thus, more reliable interpretations can be made by cross-checking the analysis of each data collection instrument. In this respect, writing exams, questionnaires and interviews were formed, directed at students and evaluated based on the mixed methods research design phases.

3.2 Setting and Participants

28 students at the Language Preparatory School (LPS) at a private university in Erbil, Iraq, constituted the primary focus of the study, so they represented either the control or experimental group. Simple random sampling was activated to select participants from the whole population amounting to 60. The sampling method was activated in a sequence that involved defining the population, constructing a sampling frame, assigning numbers, picking the sample using a popular application, and placing them in groups according to the

recommendations of Adeoye (2023). Thus, 14 students were chosen in each group to represent the control or experimental group. Demographic analysis revealed that the proportion of female students ($n=16$, 57%) exceeded that of male students ($n=12$, 43%). Upon comparison of their ages, it was seen that all students ranged from 18 to 28 ($m=20$) years old. As of the 2023-2024 academic year, the university welcomed over 4,000 students across 33 departments, using English Medium Instruction except for the law faculty. A typical LPS student is placed after receiving a low mark on the proficiency exam, which has been specifically designed by Oxford and Cambridge experts and meticulously curated by testing professionals at the university. Additionally, some questions from students' English curriculum in the high school were integrated into the proficiency exam. The Proficiency Exam has sections about all macro and micro-skills. Zip Grade is used to evaluate listening, reading, grammar or vocabulary sections because it uncovers the results within seconds through its world-renowned automated scanning system. In summary, it shows results instantly, present a comprehensive analysis for each examinee, deliver a reliable source of precise grading, and supply clearly interpretable graphs for examinees and other interested parties. Moreover, writing and speaking exams were evaluated by two raters and concluded by the authorized examination committee members. Upon placement, students received an exceptional education in technology-enhanced courses led by skilled and dynamic lecturers, lasting ten months to reap the program's benefits fully. The ultimate goal was to enhance learners' written and spoken English, enabling them to adjust to departmental courses in the subsequent year, thereby positively impacting their professional careers.

3.3. Instrument and Procedures

This study used four instruments to homogenize, compare writing exam results, and statistically obtain perceptions via questionnaires and interviews. In this regard, the Nelson Placement Test (NPT), Braskam et al.'s (2014) Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), Thompson et al.'s (2022) Global Perspective Interview Scale (GPIS), and writing rubrics were used. It is worth mentioning that all instruments were modified to accommodate the specific needs of the researchers based on the research questions.

NPT has been used widely in EFL classes to check students' proficiency levels and divide them into groups homogeneously. The rationale for using this test is that it includes multiple-choice questions, which are practical to grade. Additionally, it grants the freedom for the researcher to insert writing and speaking questions to employ a holistic approach. In this regard, fifty questions were directed to the students to test students' listening, grammar, reading and vocabulary performance which

was followed with speaking and writing tasks. Prior to the actual test, it was piloted on other students whose levels were approximately the same as the participants. In addition, the items were investigated by EFL experts to ensure that they were relevant, comprehensive and accurate considering the Cronbach Alpha Index, .96. Additionally, four EFL experts probed the content and face validity to ensure the accuracy and intelligibility of items. Upon the completion of the pilot test and validity checks, it was found satisfactory to proceed and collect data based on the pre-defined plan.

GPI was also devised to assess perceptions of cultural identity and value systems. It also helps evaluate how individuals utilize a global perspective within a pluralistic society with chronic problems. It has three domains: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive. Although it had 35 items, the researchers reduced them to 7 by merging some items to save time and instantly get sincere responses with their experienced colleagues' assistance. It is worth noting that the questionnaire items were created with a 5-point Likert Scale.

GPIS was formed to get students' opinions about the effects of covering writing classes with the integration of global issues. The scale included two prompts to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment. More specifically, the first prompt asked for students' overall opinions, whereas the second asked to underline the positive and negative aspects of the treatment period.

The final instrument was the rubric to grade students' pre-test and post-test papers. The rubric included criteria for addressing the topic effectively, expanding the topic with clear explanations or examples, displaying unity, writing coherently, and demonstrating syntactic variety and range of vocabulary. Additionally, grammar and mechanics were inserted into the rubric to ensure fair grading.

3.4. Procedure

The current study's data collection process lasted 3 months, starting in June and ending in October 2024, excluding official holidays. In the pre-treatment period, students received two extensive workshops to become more familiar with the study. More specifically, they saw some videos, movies, presentations and read reports and articles about global issues. After that, students got clarification about their rights and responsibilities from the beginning till the end of the process. For instance, due to time constraints, some students with a busy assignment cycle were replaced with others. Moreover, students' weekly lesson plans were shown to orient them towards the whole process. They wrote the essay for one week and briefly presented it in the subsequent week. For instance, each student was informed that they would brainstorm, read some excerpts, watch videos, analyze the sample, and write an essay collaboratively under the guidance of

the lecturer. In the final phase, students were given 30 minutes to compose their ideas and convert them into essay format. Having written their work, the lecturer would grade their writing performance based on the rubric weekly and offer each student constructive feedback in a face-to-face format. Subsequently, some examples were shown to become more knowledgeable about global issues and finding lasting solutions. After that, the instruments were introduced to students in advance so that they could get in-depth knowledge about the conduct of the study, objectives, and common goals. Having received satisfactory responses for the treatment period, students were placed and received the instruction according to the framework. To illustrate, control group students' lessons varied from introducing themselves to elaborating their lifelong dreams. On the other hand, the instruction of the experimental group focused on global issues ranging from poverty to global warming. In other words, global issues were matched with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Thus, all writing topics were built based on the solid framework set by the UN to have a more sustainable life. The topics covered during the study in the control group are as follows in Table 1.

Table 1
Writing Topics in the Control Group

No	Topic
1	Introducing Best Friend
2	Describing Daily Routine
3	Emphasizing Strengths and Weaknesses
4	Illustrating Promising Occupation
5	Having Strategies for Eliminating Pollution
6	Practical Ideas on Reducing Poverty

As shown in Table 1, describing the qualities of the best friend, mentioning daily routine, depicting good and bad personal qualities, defending the most promising occupation, and devising ways to eliminate pollution or poverty are covered in the control group. The topics covered during the study in the experimental group are given in Table 2.

Table 2
Writing Topics in the Experimental Group

No	Topic	Matching with SDG
1	Most Important Problems	All 17 goals
2	Ensuring well-being	3
3	Combating Climate Change	7,11,12,13,14,15
4	Offering Quality Education	4
5	Reducing Pollution	7,11,12,13,14,15

According to Table 2, the topics of the experimental group students were matched with sustainable development goals to raise awareness and take action to change the negative cycle in the world. Topics encompass chronic problems, tips to be healthy, climate change, and quality education.

3.5. Data Analysis

NVivo and SPSS were selected to interpret transcripts in interviews or analyse questionnaires and writing exams, respectively. More specifically, descriptive statistics were activated to investigate differences in pre-test and post-test periods. Students' perceptions were taken into consideration, and written exams were evaluated statistically. Subsequently, NVivo was utilized to record students' thoughts anonymously, classify recordings under themes and highlight positive and negative aspects of enriching writing classes with global issues affecting the whole world regardless of whether being in a developed or underdeveloped country with varying degrees. In the final phase, the findings were triangulated to determine whether there were conflicts among them. Thus, a one-sided approach was halted by employing far-sighted mechanisms. The phases of the study are depicted in Figure 1.

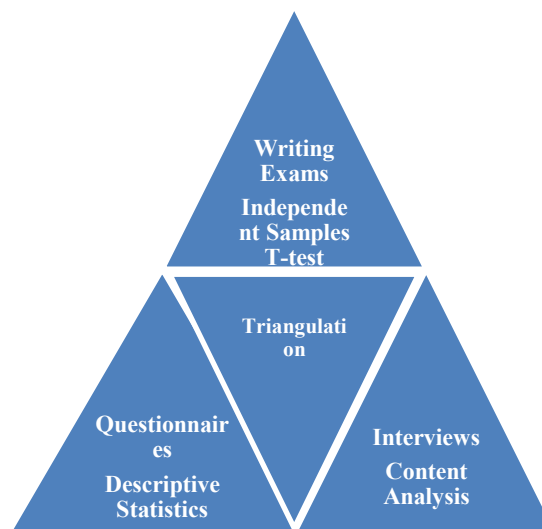


Figure (1)
Phases of the Study

According to Figure 1, quantitative data collection was followed by qualitative data to ensure triangulation. In other words, data collection was initiated by writing exams, followed by the questionnaire, and finalised by interviews.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. The Analyses of Questionnaires and Exams

To obtain quantitative data, students' perceptions were used in questionnaires and written exams. Correspondingly, they were classified under two headings.

4.1.1 The Analysis of the Questionnaires

Questionnaires sought different dimensions of integrating global issues into writing sessions. The details of which are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3
Pre-test and Post-test Questionnaire Results

ITEM	Pre M	Post M	Pre SD	Post SD	p
Covering global issues is appealing in writing classes.	2.71	4.71	1.68	.825	.000
Gaining in-depth knowledge about global issues can sharpen my writing skills.	2.79	4.86	1.52	.363	.000
Reading sources from various websites can trigger my creativity.	2.93	4.79	1.68	.579	.000
I expand my vocabulary when I read news about global issues.	2.71	4.57	1.43	.756	.000
Covering global issues can inspire me to watch videos and docuseries.	3	4.71	1.51	.469	.001
Brainstorming and writing cooperatively boosted my self-confidence.	3.21	4.86	1.57	.363	.002
I wish I could have joined such writing classes earlier.	2.64	4.93	1.39	.267	.000

The questionnaires sought certain implications of covering global issues in academic writing courses by comparing pre-test with post-test scores. To begin with, item 1 was composed to determine whether enriching writing classes drew students' attention, revealing that they were intrigued to learn more ambitiously upon the instruction because their mean score was only 2.71 in the initial phase, but it converted to 4.71 with a .000 p-value at the end of the treatment period. It hints that participants' opinions changed positively after having appealing classes thanks to the inclusion of global issues in writing lessons. Besides, the treatment period to elevate students' capabilities in grammar yielded better results. After that, item 2 was formed to pinpoint whether there was a correlation between inserting global issues into writing sessions and improving writing competency, unearthing that it was a promising approach to substantially sharpen students' writing performance. To illustrate, the mean scores rose from 2.79 to 4.86 with a highly significant p-value of .000. Furthermore, item 3 was about gauging the differences in terms of triggering

creativity by covering certain topics on global issues. The findings uncovered that students' creativity was boosted substantially after doing thorough research on global issues and turning them into written works in the subsequent phase. To substantiate, it was 2.93 in the pre-test stage but 4.79 in the aftermath of the study. The next item was added to the questionnaire to determine whether there was a link between expanding vocabulary knowledge and covering global issues. The findings revealed that students could strengthen their word capacity with the power of delving into global issues in writing classes. More specifically, mean scores reached 4.57, albeit initiating with 2.71. Subsequently, item 5 was designed to determine whether diving into global issues in writing classes could prompt students to read and watch further. The findings showed that covering global issues can urge students to do interdisciplinary research, so it is not uncommon for them to refer to extra reading and audio-visual materials. The sixth item showed the correlation between boosting speaking skills and touching on global problems in writing sessions. The findings unearthed that students could show exemplary performance in writing classes, considering the dramatic rise in mean scores from 3 to 4.71. The final item was asked whether learners felt sorrowful about taking such instructions earlier. The findings documented that approximately all students would like to receive such visionary instruction earlier to benefit more. As is obvious, participants reiterated that they had numerous benefits in different skills during the treatment period, which was enriched by covering global issues in writing classes.

4.1.2. The Analysis of Writing Exams

Apart from questionnaires, writing exams were employed to measure the influence of the treatment period on students' writing scores. In this regard, the committee members randomly chose topics from the pool through software. After, students were informed about duration and grading criteria. In the next stage, they wrote to be used as pre-test and post-test consecutively. Their exam scores are given in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4
Writing Scores in terms of Pre-test

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Experimental	14	49.64	20.61	26	.046	.963
Control	14	49.29	20.18			

As shown in Table 4, a noticeable difference was not prevalent between the students' of the experimental and control groups considering the p-value, .963, which was higher than 0.05. Similarly, students' mean scores were nearly the same which justified the significance value as well.

Table 5
Writing Scores in terms of Post-test

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Experimental	14	73.57	13.64	26	3.481	.002
Control	14	50.36	20.89			

On the other hand, students' scores differed remarkably in the post-test. To name a few, the p-value, .002, was less than 0.05, which was quite significant. In the same vein, experimental group students increased their average to 73.57 from 49.29, whereas control group students could increase no more than 1 point. Those statistical analyses confirm that covering global issues in writing classes yields far better results than covering topics in a randomised manner. The stark differences between the groups can also be observed in Figure 2.

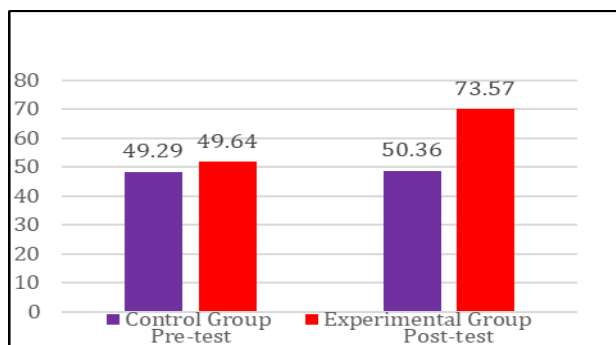


Figure (2) Comparison of Writing Grades

As Figure 2 shows, the control group students did not take advantage of the writing sessions as much as the experimental group.

4.2. Qualitative Analysis

Students' opinions on an integrated writing approach to cover global issues systematically in writing classes were sought through semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, the following questions were directed:

- What is your opinion towards integrating global issues into writing classes?
- What are some pros and cons of covering global issues in writing classes?

4.2.1. Content Analysis to Reflect Students' Perceptions

Participants' opinions were categorized under several themes to highlight the pros and cons of global issue-enriched writing instruction. Table 6 visualises the pros, while Table 7 illustrates the cons.

Table 6
Pluses of Global-Issue-Enriched Writing Instruction

Theme	Frequency	%
Boosting Critical Thinking	4	29
Building Awareness & Empathy	4	29
Guiding to Overcome Real World Challenges	3	21
Fostering Civic Engagement	3	21

Each writing approach has two sides, which may have positive and negative reflections. Table 6 delves into the positive sides of covering global issues in academic writing courses. The findings unearthed those students boosted their critical thinking (29 %), built awareness and empathy (29 %), devised logical strategies to handle real-world challenges (21 %) and became more alert for civic engagement (21 %). In other words, brainstorming about global issues drove them to be critical thinkers. Likewise, they became more aware of global issues and understood victims' sufferings hastily. In the same vein, they learned how to face, devise strategies, and resolve global issues with individual attempts or collaborative acts.

Table 7
Minuses of Global-Issue-Enriched Writing Instruction

Theme	Frequency	%
Overwhelming	2	14
Time-consuming	1	7
Boring	2	7

It does not necessarily mean that highlighting global issues ensures positive thoughts by participants. Some students underlined that there were some weaknesses in covering global issues in writing classes, which were feeling overwhelmed (14 %), wasting much time (7 %), and getting bored (14 %). Although their numbers are limited, they can offer insightful points to take such interpretations seriously, thereby unhesitatingly increasing students' satisfaction rates. Apart from content analysis, noteworthy remarks of participants are noted below to reflect their sincere thoughts:

This study motivated me to be a bookworm because I wanted to learn more and more about global issues. As I explored more, I was intrigued to read another book. At the end of the period, I was more knowledgeable about climate change, global warming, pollution, wars, poverty, and inequality. Now, I can confidently tell that I have so much information about global issues to have debates with my peers, teachers, parents, and friends. In addition, such reading attempts supported me to write more creatively in writing classes because I had the required background information to organize my paragraphs and compose my essays convincingly. (St 2)

Writing classes were not engaging for me in previous years because the topics were varied and unappealing for me. However, this study changed my attitude towards writing

classes. Initially, we determined global issues. Later, we discussed the causes of them. After that, we brainstormed about finding sensible solutions to global issues. Afterwards, we wrote sample essays together and individually. Finally, we received constructive feedback from the lecturer. All stages were beneficial for us. I wish we could have joined such great writing sessions earlier. (St 3)

I had noticed some problems in my neighbourhood before, but I understood the gravity of the situation after seeing or reading some graphs, maps, videos, books, and newspaper articles. In addition, we exchanged our ideas with our classmates, so I wanted to do more for the sake of protecting the environment. After that moment, I was more ambitious to figure out problems and set a concrete plan to solve them sensibly. This learning cycle fostered my learning in terms of critical thinking, developing empathy, and improving my writing skills. Thus, I could improve my skills orally and in written format considerably throughout the treatment period. (St 5)

The concept of global issues was vague to me before joining the study. We divided them into manageable sections. We understood each of them clearly. We pointed out clear plans. Finally, we composed our ideas into writing works. We also noticed that we needed to read and watch more to have background information about writing topics, so we were inclined to expand our knowledge through various means incessantly. I am glad that I have joined this study. It was one of the most fruitful moments in my life. I suggest every student opt for such studies. (St 8)

Taking writing topics from real life was a game changer in this study because we only touched on such topics slightly in previous writing classes. On the other hand, we got in-depth knowledge about global issues throughout the study. Additionally, we learned about some alarming dangers that needed to be fixed as early as possible. Setting a plan to solve chronic problems in our community and spreading it to other countries globally really broadened our horizons. We also observed that tiny measures can positively make a huge difference in our lives. Having received the required information comprehensively, writing essays was the easiest part of the study. I am grateful to have been privileged to join the study. (St 12)

5. DISCUSSION

Given the scarcity of research on integrating global issues at Iraqi educational institutions in academic writing courses, the present study sought to expand the literature by exploring the potential impacts of highlighting universal problems in enhancing university students' writing performance. The study's findings uncovered crucial points to be contemplated seriously and get some vital messages. To name a few, writing exams documented that contrary to traditional writing approaches, employing novel approaches to cover global issues in writing classes emerges as promising because

students incorporated their knowledge into writing works cohesively and raised their writing performance dramatically. On the other hand, students whose lessons encompassed regular writing topics in varied themes did not improve their writing skills considerably. This finding resonates with the study of Chuku (2020), which pointed out that driving students to explore and compose their ideas in classes can yield better results in terms of boosting their writing performance. Aligned with other studies, Raath and Golightly (2017) asserted that choosing real-world problems attracted students' attention hastily so that they could enhance their writing performance substantially.

Questionnaires also unearthed that embedding global issues into writing sessions could offer insightful gains for students. For example, they could regard the topics as appealing, expand their lexical repertoire, get the inspiration to watch docuseries or read varied sources, and express their ideas more confidently regardless of having oral or written tasks. It is consistent with the noteworthy study of Moosavi et al. (2024) that underlined that combining visual elements with written texts can encourage students to merge ideas and learn English holistically. They also concluded that inquiry-based learning could urge learners to discover and act accordingly for society's betterment.

Qualitative data from the interviews also unleashed those students stimulated their critical thinking skills, raised their awareness, acknowledged real-world challenges, and fostered civic engagement thanks to delving into global issues to understand the causes and offer sensible solutions. They reiterated that multiple gains could be gathered thanks to inter-weaving topics in a systematic order. This dovetails with the study of Lee et al. (2012), which proved that writing classes could be used to raise awareness about global problems and organize conventions to resolve them cooperatively in common sense. In contrast, few students voiced some of their concerns, such as feeling overwhelmed, spending much time, and getting bored, about the effectiveness of the instruction, which was in line with the principles of Chuku (2020). He asserted that breaking monotony and managing the sessions harmoniously can largely reduce students' dissatisfaction.

6. CONCLUSION

This research is an attempt to integrate global issues into writing classes, thereby increasing students' writing skills gradually. Quantitative data revealed that students' writing competence improved significantly. Additionally, their civic literacy was boosted, so they became more aware of the global problems and offered sensible strategies to overcome them. Apart from exam scores and questionnaires, interviews also supported

qualitative data. They revealed that real-world topics were engaging, up-to-date, and fundamental, so they were inclined to expand their knowledge to turn the world into a more livable place in line with the UN 17 SDGs. Triangulating data also revealed that they were compatible with each other, confirming that inserting global issues into manageable sub-sections could elevate students' writing levels and boost numerous 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, leadership, responsibility, creativity, and empathy.

Some pedagogical implications can be examined for the practitioners in the English Language Teaching domain. To begin with, educational institutions should seek ways to enrich writing classes with global issues so that students' linguistic levels and civic awareness can be increased. In addition, lecturers who cover academic writing classes should put problem-solving approaches into the centre of lessons, thereby learning the causes of global issues with lasting solutions. Besides, intensive workshops should be held to teach global issues efficiently in writing classes; otherwise, it can be inevitable to find the instruction overwhelming and tedious. Subsequently, lecturers should motivate students to read and watch further before composing their ideas. Thus, they can equip themselves with the required information and write more convincingly. Moreover, academic writing lecturers should seek ways to finalize writing topics with concise presentations, thereby empowering them orally and in written forms through repetitive task-based exercises. Furthermore, debates and peer feedback should not be underscored in writing classes to reap the benefits of learning from each other and shaping their knowledge-gaining journeys correspondingly. Several recommendations are made to trigger researchers for further studies regarding the study's limitations. Firstly, the scope of the study was limited to students at a preparatory school in Erbil, Iraq, which can be expanded to include other stages and institutions in the region. Additionally, global issues are common for all people, so further studies can be conducted on primary, secondary, and high school students rather than focusing solely on the tertiary level. Moreover, writing expansion was sought in this study, which can be extended with other macro and micro skills. Subsequently, only two groups were investigated in the study, which can be increased to measure the effectiveness of the treatment by various groups and variables. Finally, only students whose mother tongue is not English were invited to join the study, which can be enriched with native English and ESL students to represent the population more extensively.

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