The Effect of a Corrective Feedback Technique on Reducing Nonnative-Speaking Students' Composition Errors

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Abstract. Most high-school Jordanian students' compositions suffer from a large number of grammatical, lexical, and orthographic errors. Their teachers wish to reduce such errors and would like to know how to do it. This study is an attempt in this direction. It aims at investigating the efficacy of Lalande Composition Correction Strategy (LCCS) on reducing the grammatical and orthographic errors of high-school students in Jordan. Forty eleventh-grade students were selected; 20 comprised and experimental group and another 20 comprised the control group. The experimental group underwent a special treatment using LCCS for ten weeks. A pretest was given to both groups at the beginning of the study and a posttest at the conclusion of the experiment. The t-test was used to compare between the means of errors of both groups. The results revealed that the experimental group committed significantly fewer errors. The effect of LCCS was marked on article errors, spelling errors, and structure errors. Teachers are recommended to use it since it can help in developing their students' writing skill.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, researchers in the field of native language (L1) and foreign language (FL) learning have produced impressive products on the composing processes of L1 and FL learners. Part of this work has been on the incorporation of feedback in the revision of text and its effect on the quality of the writer's product [1]. FL teachers' feedback and intervention in writing instruction influences the final products of their students. Studies of teacher intervention and practices in L1 writing [2-4] and FL writing [5-11] indicate that certain forms of feedback affect students' writing products more positively than others. Process-oriented and collaborative models of writing instruction that feature teacher-student conferences and peer responses are prevailing more nowadays in L1 and FL writing instruction [15]. Yet in many FL settings teachers may still serve as the only audience for the texts produced by their students; they are the

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evaluators of and respondent to the written products of their students. In this capacity, teachers are the source of feedback [13-16]. In traditional writing instruction, where assessment consists of the assignment of a grade, the teacher's role as respondent is minimal. In such cases little if any positive effect of this practice will be left on students' writings [17]. Inconsistency and unevenness in evaluation by FL teachers, and even by the same teacher may contribute to their students' lack of writing proficiency [18-20].

Research in the field of L1 and FL writing assessment has shown that 'revision' contributes significantly to the development of the writing skill [21-24]. It is a complex process carried out with varying degrees of success depending upon the writer's competence and the effectiveness of the instruction received [25]. Revision should not be confused with editing [10]. Effective text revision requires the engagement of the writer, as well as a careful application of feedback practices which guide the writer to an awareness of the informational, rhetorical and linguistic expectations of the audience within a specific discourse community [26]. Feedback is an important element in the process of revision. Kobayashi [27] makes a distinction between 'evaluative' feedback and 'corrective' feedback which focuses on the correction made by the readers. Little empirical data are available on the potential effects of the latter type. Cohen and Robbins [28] found out that teachers' correction of their university students was ineffective in reducing errors because of their inconsistent evaluation of their students' writings. Hendrickson [29] did not find significant effect of direct teacher correction of foreign students' lexical and structural errors on the writing proficiency of such students. He noted that peer correction or self correction with teacher guidance may have the desirable effect and save the teachers' as well as learners' time and efforts. Kulhavy [30] in reviewing studies on feedback, found out that feedback had its utmost effect on incorrect rather than correct responses. Lalande [31] conducted a study to test the effect of two correction techniques on the combined grammatical and orthographic correctness of compositions written by intermediate level students learning German as a foreign language. The first technique used with the control group incorporated the teacher's correction of all the errors found in students' compositions; then students were required to rewrite their compositions with the teacher's corrections. The other technique used with the experimental group consisted of four components:

1 - comprehensive error correction,
2 - systematic marking of compositions,
3 - guided-learning and problem-solving, and
4 - instructional feedback.

His findings revealed significant better effect of the second technique since students' compositions treated by this technique improved significantly; fewer orthographic and grammatical errors were committed by the experimental group. Students of this group

produced better and more refined compositions than those of the control group. Lalande concluded his study by stressing that "while selective correction of errors was certainly defensible in the development of speaking skill, the same cannot be said about writing skill. Unless all errors are identified, the faulty linguistic structures and lexical items rather than the correct ones, might become part of the learners' interlanguage system"[31].

It is noticed that little empirical data are available concerning the potential effects of the corrective feedback in L1 [32]; in the FL it is rarely discussed. The present study is an attempt in this direction; it tries to assess the effect of the corrective feedback on the quality of the writing products of FL learners.

The Problem of the Study

Most Jordanian high school students are unable to produce a writing passage which is free from various types of errors. Such passages are considered incomprehensible and erroneous by their teachers. EFL teachers and their students wish to reduce the errors by adopting a practical easy-to-use correction strategy. Lalande strategy, which is proposed in this study, is hoped to be fruitful in this area.

The Purpose of the Study

In light of the findings of research in the area of the effectiveness of feedback on students' compositions, this experimental study was undertaken to investigate the efficacy of the Composition Correction Strategy (LCCS) proposed by Lalande [32]. It was hypothesised that students treated with LCCS would commit significantly less ($\leq$ .05) grammatical and orthographic errors in their compositions than those of the control group.

The Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study stems from the fact that it is an attempt to test the feasibility and efficacy of Lalande's strategy in correcting the compositions of Arab EFL high school learners, and its potentiality to help reduce various types of errors they commit when writing their compositions. It provides experimental evidence and support to the idea that corrective procedures can enhance the EFL learners' writing ability and improve the teaching situation of writing in our schools.

Method

Subjects

The study involved two sections of 40 male literary students in the eleventh grade in two separate public secondary schools in the city of Irbid; 20 students comprised the experimental

group while the other 20 were the control group. The two sections were randomly selected and given a writing pretest whose results revealed that no significant differences existed between the two sections in terms of their grammatical and orthographic errors.

Variables of the Study

The independent variable was the correction procedure (LCCS) while the dependent variable was the grammatical and orthographic errors in the compositions written by the subjects.

Treatment

The various phases of the treatment are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Experimental design.

Groups	Pretest			Treatment				Post-test		
	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	Lesson 8	Lesson 9	Lesson 10
Experimental	T1	T2	X+R	T3	X+R	T4	X+R	T5	X+R	T6
Control	T1	T2	R	T3	R	T4	R	T5	R	T6

T = test or composition.

R = rewriting the composition and replacing incorrect grammatical, orthographic, and lexical errors with correct ones.

X = treatment (commencement and implementation of problem-solving/active-correction activities and administration of the Error Awareness Sheet (EASE) to students).

Lalande Strategy

As indicated earlier, Lalande Strategy consists of four components:

1 - Comprehensive error correction

A policy of total correction was followed. Unless all errors are identified, the faulty linguistic structures, rather than the correct ones, may become ingrained in the students' interlanguage system.

2 - Systematic marking of compositions

Students' compositions were scored systematically without exceptions.

3 - Guided-learning and problem-solving

Students' compositions were marked by the Error Correction Code (ECCO) (Appendix A). It is a list of symbols that represent different kinds of errors. For example, if a student commits a spelling error, the error will be underlined and the symbol "Sp" will be written above it. Such symbols give a student hints about the nature of his errors without giving him the correct form.

4 - Instructional feedback

Feedback is indispensable if strategies of guided-learning and problem-solving are to be invoked by the student. Teachers systematically used error codes to alert students to the nature and location of errors. In so doing, the error codes served as a source of feedback to students.

Two instruments were used in LCCS. The first one is the ECCO that has been just described. The second instrument is EASE (Appendix B), which is a table that includes the symbols used in the ECCO. The students wrote down the number of each error type committed in each composition. This helped them monitor the frequency and recurrence of error types.

Writing composition was done in one class period, the implementation of problem-solving in another period, and the administration of the EASE to students in a third period.

Each period lasted for 45 minutes; ten minutes were needed to present the topic and to give outlines and helping vocabulary while the remaining thirty-five minutes were devoted to writing.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In order to choose five topics in which the students (subjects of the study) can write their compositions, the researcher looked into their present textbook as well as their past EFL textbooks (Petra Series 1-6) and suggested 10 topics related to the learned material. These topics were given to 10 EFL teachers of the eleventh grade to choose only five of them for the purpose of the study. The five topics which were considered to be more appropriate to the students in terms of level of difficulty and the availability of background information were chosen and given to the students. One topic was assigned for the pretest and posttest; four others for the treatment. A writing period was given per week to each group. The students were not informed of their participation in an experiment. In the third week of the first semester, the pretest was administered. Students were asked to write fifteen lines using the present tense. During the pretest, the subjects were not allowed to use their dictionaries or ask any questions. The same procedures were followed in the posttest.

Upon collection of the pretest data, students in the experimental group received copies of ECCO and EASE. During the treatment periods students were asked to write on the assigned four topics. One period was assigned for writing and another for correction and rewriting activities. The exact procedures observed in the pretest and posttest were observed in the writing periods except that students were allowed to use their dictionaries and seek the help of their teacher and peers. In the correction and rewriting activity periods, the compositions of the experimental groups were systematically marked by means of ECCO. All of the grammatical and orthographic errors were identified and the

compositions were graded. Upon receiving the marked compositions, students were charged with interpreting the codes, correcting their errors, and rewriting the entire composition in correct form. Where lexical errors were concerned, written explanations were entered into students' compositions. As the study progressed, students monitored the frequency and recurrence of error types by referring to EASE. The grades assigned to students' compositions were: A = excellent, B = very good, C = satisfactory, D = poor.

In the control group, all corrections were marked on students' compositions. Students were required to incorporate these corrections into a rewritten version only. The experiment lasted for ten weeks. In the tenth week the posttest was administered.

The pretest and posttest for both groups were marked in accordance with the ECCO. Only the first eighty words of each composition of the pretest and posttest were marked and analyzed because some compositions did not exceed eighty words. An independent sample t test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Besides, a t test for two related samples was used to test the means of differences of each group on the pretest and posttest at 0.05 level of significance. In addition, an independent sample t test was used to test the means of differences of both experimental and control groups at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 2 presents data of both groups: experimental and control.

Table 2. Sum total of grammatical and orthographic errors in the pretest.

Group	Frequency	Mean	SD	t - value df = 38
Exp.	402	20.1	5.81	
Cont.	418	20.9	8.73	0.34

$P \leq .05$, two tailed t value (2.02)

Table 2 shows that no significant differences exist between the two groups in terms of the grammatical and orthographic errors committed by the students in the two groups. However, the compositions were further scrutinized to identify distinct types of grammatical and orthographic errors committed by both groups in the pretest. Table 3 presents such information.

Table 3 shows that the insertion error category reflects a statistically significant difference at the .05 level, indicating that the experimental group made more errors in this category than the control group. Also, the data reveal that no significant differences exist among the other eleven types of errors.

Table 4 presents posttest data of combined experimental control groups.

Table 3. Distinct types of grammatical and orthographic errors as delineated on the ECCO in the pretest.

Code	Mean		SD		
	Exp.	Cont.	Exp.	Cont.	t value df=38
Sp	5.80	5.90	3.90	4.06	0.08
Art	2.85	3.80	1.51	2.42	1.49
NS	2.60	2.95	2.01	2.04	0.55
//	3.05	2	1.57	1.69	-2.04*
X	1.10	1.40	0.91	1.60	0.73
Agr	1.10	1.30	1.12	1.08	0.57
N	1.10	1.05	1.07	1.11	-0.15
V	0.60	1	0.88	1.21	1.21
Prep	0.60	0.45	0.75	0.76	-0.63
?	0.30	0.45	0.57	0.60	0.81
Wo	0.20	0.40	0.41	0.61	1.22
T	0.30	0.20	0.66	0.52	-0.53

*Significant value of two tailed t test at the .05 level (2.02).

Table 4. Sum total of grammatical and orthographic errors in the posttest.

Group	Frequency	Mean	SD	t - value df=38
Exp.	269	13.45	5.66	2.18*
Cont.	357	17.85	7.03	

*P ≤ .05, one tailed t value (1.68).

The data in Table 4 reveal statistically significant differences between the two means of composition errors of the two groups. The data show significantly better progress for the experimental group, indicating that these students committed significantly fewer errors than their counterparts in the control group. For a detailed investigation of the distinct grammatical and orthographic errors committed by both groups in the posttest, the following analysis was carried out.

Table 5 presents data for distinct types of grammatical and orthographic errors made on the posttest.

Table 5 shows that one of the error categories reflects a statistically significant difference at the .05 level, indicating that the experimental group made significantly fewer article (Art) errors than the control group. Also, the data reveal that the experimental group showed a marked decrease in the majority of other types of errors (e.g.: Sp, //, Agr, N, Prep, and Wo). However, this decrease was not statistically significant.

Figure 1 graphically shows the frequency of the grammatical and orthographic errors of the experimental and control groups in the posttest.

Table 5. Distinct types of grammatical and orthographic errors as delineated on the ECCO in the posttest.

Code	Mean		SD		t value df=38
	Exp.	Cont.	Exp.	Cont.	
Sp	3.50	4.90	2.21	3.23	1.61
Art	2.20	3.90	1.74	2.51	2.49*
NS	1.80	2.20	1.44	1.67	1.42
//	1.70	1.80	1.17	1.15	0.27
X	0.70	0.65	0.86	0.86	0.18
Agr	1.10	1.20	1.02	1.28	0.27
N	1.00	1.35	1.45	1.04	-0.88
V	0.50	0.50	0.75	0.95	0
Prep	0.35	0.45	0.49	0.69	-0.53
?	0.20	0.20	0.41	0.52	0
Wo	0.05	0.10	0.22	0.31	0.59
T	0.35	0.20	0.67	0.66	-0.24

*Significant value of two tailed t test at the .05 level (1.68).
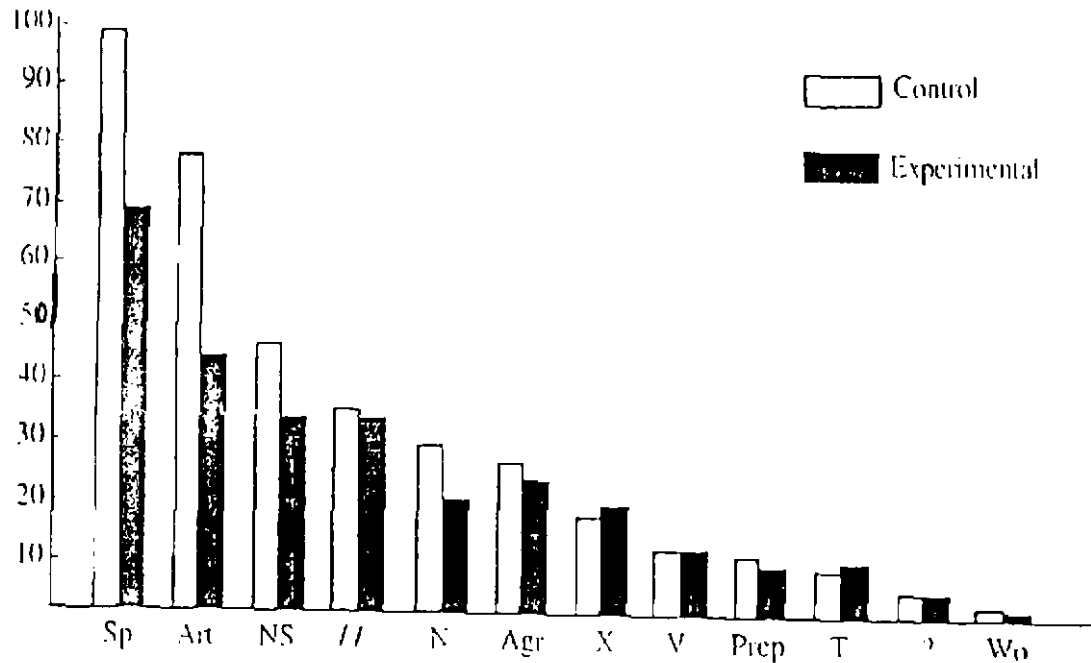

Figure 1. Frequency of the grammatical and orthographic errors of the experimental and control groups in the posttest.

Figure 1 clearly demonstrates that, in contradiction with the control group, the experimental group enjoys a marked decrease in the majority of the twelve types of grammatical and orthographic errors.

Table 6 presents pretest-posttest data for the experimental and control groups which show the gain realized by these groups.

Table 6 shows that there are statistically significant differences between the means of differences of the experimental and control groups. The data reveal that the experimental group achieved significantly greater gain than the control group.

Table 6. Pretest-posttest data of the experimental and control groups.

Group	ΣD	D	SD	*t* - value df = 38
Exp.	133	6.65	5.07	
Cont.	61	3.05	4.75	2.32*

*P ≤ .05, two tailed *t* value (1.68).

ΣD: the mean of these differences.

SD: standard error of the differences between the means of the two related samples.

For a more rigorous analysis of the differences between the two groups z test was used to establish the correlations between the pretests and posttests of both groups. The pretest-posttest correlation of the control group was found to be 0.86, whereas that of the experimental group was 0.61. After using the z test for establishing the correlation of independent samples at .05 level of significance, the pretest-posttest correlation of the experimental group was found to be significantly lower than that of the control group. This may be interpreted as that the improvement which occurred in the posttest of the experimental group is significantly greater than the improvement which occurred in the posttest of the control group.

Discussion of the Results

It was hypothesised that the application of LCCS would result in an appreciable decline in the grammatical and orthographic errors committed by high school students. More specifically, the group of students treated with LCCS would commit significantly less ($\propto$ ≤ .05) grammatical and orthographic errors in their compositions than the randomly equivalent control group treated by the traditional composition correction method. The results of this study confirm the validity of this hypothesis. The results indicate that the combination of error awareness and problem-solving techniques has a significant beneficial effect on the development of writing skills within the context of the experiment.

Furthermore, a detailed investigation of the data according to individual error categories reveals that experimental group students outperformed their control group counterparts in the majority of the nonlexical error categories (e.g., Sp, Art, NS, //, X, Agr, N, Prep, and Wo). With regard to the analysis of pretest-posttest scores, both experimental and control groups achieved significant decline in grammatical and orthographic errors. However, the

decline achieved by the experimental group is more substantial than the decline achieved by the control group. Regardless of the significant differences between the experimental group and control group in making errors, it is noticed that a great deal of grammatical and orthographic errors were made in the pretest and posttest of both experimental and control groups. One of the indications of this might be that composition errors committed by the students are not dealt with properly. Another interpretation might be that the students are not given the chance to practice writing sufficiently. It is worth noting here that many errors committed by the students in this study were due to literal translation from the Arabic language into the English language.

The findings of this study conform with the results of Lalande's study [35], which indicated that LCCS was more effective in reducing grammatical and orthographic errors than the traditional technique. The findings also conform with those of Bigg [33] and Stanley [34].

Although the ECCO used in this study covered a wide range of composition non-lexical errors, it failed to cover some frequent errors committed by the students. To make the ECCO more efficient and practical, the following modifications are suggested:

1.   It is noticed that some parts of speech are used in wrong functions, e.g.:
   *This is the different between the country and the city.
   *People work in agriculture activities.
   *It is very quietness.
   *The journey was interest.
   *We are very thanks.
   *Old people are wisdom.
   *They find difficult in travelling.
   *In the city industrial and trade is the main work.
   *They work hardly in their fields.

The code WF is suggested to be added to the error correction code (ECCO). This code means that a part of speech is used for the wrong function.

2.   Word order (WO) can be categorized under the error category of new structure (NS), because committing an error in order means giving a wrong structure and accordingly a new structure is required.

Pedagogical Implications

Several implications for the secondary classroom teacher of English have emerged from this study. These implications are:

1.   The use of LCCS can help in developing the writing skill, particularly in reducing grammatical and orthographic errors; so EFL teachers at the secondary level are advised to use it.

2.   Teachers should correct compositions systematically.

3.   Since students can be made aware of deficiencies in linguistic competence by correction of all written errors, teachers should consider the adoption of total correction of written errors.

4.   Students should receive instructional feedback on their compositions. They should be informed of the location and nature of errors, so that they can invoke problem-solving, which is an active correction activity.

5.   Students should correct their own grammatical and orthographic errors wherever possible.

6.   Teachers should endeavor to make writing an enjoyable and productive learning experience. This study has suggested several ways in which motivation for writing compositions can be enhanced, e.g., allowing students to consult teachers and peers, and to use reference materials while they are engaged in the writing activity.

7.   Teachers should consider "rewrite activities" as a worthwhile classroom acitvity and as an adjunct to composition writing.

Recommendations for Further Research

1.   Researchers are recommended to look for other correction strategies and put them into investigation in the Jordanian or an Arab context.

2.   Researchers are recommended to compare two or more correction strategies in terms of their effectiveness in reducing students' errors and improving the students' writing quality.

Appendix A: Error Correction Code (ECCO)

SP Spelling error, e.g., *City life is queit, or *City life is deferint from country life.

Art Incorrect use or omission of an article, e.g., *They work in a hospitals, or My father has car.

NS A completely new structure is needed to convey the proper meaning, e.g., *In city many government institutions from schools, and hospitals.

// Double lines through a word indicate that it is not necessary and must be deleted, e.g. *People in the country he plant their fields.

X One or more words are missing and must be inserted, e.g., *In the city a large post office.

Agr Subject and verb do not agree, or noun or pronoun and referent do not agree, e.g., *He live in a village, or *They should study hard, if you want to succeed.

N Substitution of the singular form of a noun instead of the plural form and vice versa, e.g., *It is a bad things,

or *He is one of the best student. The code also includes incorrect number assignment to a noun, e.g., *Some people like to live in the city or *They raise sheeps.

V Use of an incorrect verb form, e.g., *I must told you what I mean.

Prep Omission or incorrect use of a preposition, e.g. *They boy is afraid from the dog, or *Because this reason, I do not like city life.

? A question mark adjacent to word, clause, or sentence that is underlined indicates the reviewer could make no sense of it whatsoever.

The student should consult the teacher, e.g., *The flowers greens by grass.

WO Any error involving word order, e.g., *In the country can you work in any thing.

T tense selection is in some way inappropirate; usually the student has not been consistent.

Appendix B: Error Awareness Sheet (EASE)

	Essay # 1		Esssay # 2	Essay # 3		Essay # 4
Agr				2		2
Prep				1		1
Sp	5		5	2		2
V						
N		3	3		1	1
NS	1		1			
T					1	1
Art	1		1	1		1
WO	1		1			
X						
//	2	2	4		4	4
?	1		1	1		1
Grade	C	B		C	A	
Total errors	11	5	16	7	6	13

	Time # 1	Time # 2
Which three types of erros have you probably made the most on your last two essays?	a) ... SP ... b) ... // ... c) ...N ...	a) ... // ... b) ... Agr ... c) ... prep ...

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أثر استخدام أحد استراتيجيات التصحيح في تقليل أخطاء الإنشاء في مجالي القواعد والإملاء

عقلة محمود صمادي

أستاذ مساعد، قسم المناهج وطرق التدريس، كلية التربية ،

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ملخص البحث . يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة أثر استخدام استراتيجية لاند Lalande لتصحيح التعبير الكتابي في تقليل الأخطاء الإملائية والقواعدية التي يرتكبها طلبة الصف الحادي عشر في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية . تكونت عينة الدراسة من ٤٠ طالبًا يدرسون في شعبتين في مدرستين مختلفتين تم اختيارهما عشوائيًا ، حيث ضمت المجموعة التجريبية ٢٠ طالبًا والضابطة ٢٠ طالبًا أيضًا . تم إعطاء المجموعتين اختبارًا قبليًا للتأكيد من عدم وجود فوارق جوهرية بينهما ، ثم خضعت المجموعة التجريبية للمعالجة وفقًا لاستراتيجية لاند ، بينما تم معالجة كتابات المجموعة الضابطة بالطريقة التقليدية . استمرت التجربة لمدة عشرة أسابيع ، حيث أعطيت المجموعتان اختبارًا بعديًا . وتم استخدام اختبار «ت» لمقارنة الأوساط الحسابية للأخطاء التي ارتكبتها المجموعتان . أوضحت النتائج أن المجموعة التجريبية ارتكبت أخطاء أقل وتحسن أداؤها بشكل عام تبعًا لاستخدام استراتيجية لاند . وخلصت الدراسة إلى التوصية باستخدام هذه الاستراتيجية لتطوير مهارة الكتابة لطلبة المرحلة الثانوية .