Investigating Metacognitive Awareness among Algerian EFL University Teachers of Academic Writing

تحري الوعي ما وراء المعرفي عند أساتذة التعليم العالي للغة الانجليزية في مقياس الكتابة الأكاديمية

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ABSTRACT:

   Teaching writing has always been subject for debate in EFL studies. One of the aspects of this controversy is teaching writing and metacognition. Metacognitive strategies are organizational strategies which regulate and control thinking. These strategies apply to both students and teachers and investigating the issue from both standpoints is a must. Plenty of research has been conducted with regard to student metacognition but not as many studies focused on the teacher. The present study aims to fill this void by investigating metacognitive awareness among Algerian EFL university writing teachers as well as their motivation, beliefs, and attitudes towards the teaching of writing in university settings. A metacognition awareness raising questionnaire was administered to eight university teachers from two different universities in order to explore the three components of their metacognitive knowledge: person, task, and strategy knowledge. The results of the survey revealed that Algerian EFL writing teachers are metacognitively aware about their teaching and that they have positive attitudes, beliefs, and are motivated to teach writing.

Keywords: Metacognitive strategies, metacognitive awareness, teaching writing, EFL teachers.

الملخص:

لطالما كان تعليم الكتابة قضية للنقاش في البحوث العلمية المشتغلة باللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية. أحد جوانب الاختلاف هي تعليم الكتابة والمهارات ما راء المعرفية. المهارات ما وراء المعرفية هي مهارات تنظيمية تقوم بالتنظيم والتحكم في التفكير. هذه المهارات تنطبق على الطلبة والأساتذة على حد سواء والتحقق من هذه المسألة عبر وجهتي النظر ضرورة حتمية. الكثير من البحوث اهتمت بالمهارات التنظيمية للطلبة على عكس الأساتذة الذين لم يتلقوا نفس الاهتمام. الدراسة الحالية تهدف لملء هذا الفراغ عبر التحقيق في الوعي المعرفي عند أساتذة الجامعة الجزائرية المشتغلين بتدريس مقياس الكتابة وكذلك التحقيق في مواقفهم أفكارهم، وحافزهم لتدريس مقياس الكتابة في الأوساط الجامعية. تم توزيع استبيان يعتني بالوعي ما وراء المعرفي على ثمانية أساتذة جزائريين من جامعتين مختلفتين بهدف استكشاف المكونات الثلاث للوعي المعرفي: معرفة الذات، معرفة المهام، ومعرفة التقنيات. نتائج البحث أبانت عن وعي الأساتذة ما وراء المعرفي وموقفهم الايجابي تجاه تعليم مقياس الكتابة للطلبة الجامعيين.

كلمات مفتاحية: المهارات ما وراء المعرفية، الوعي ما وراء المعرفي، تدريس الكتابة، اساتذة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية ثانية.

1- Introduction:

   Since the term metacognition was first introduced by Falvell in 1979 (Flavell, 1979), It has been the center of extensive research and study. Metacognitive strategies are organizational mental processes which organize one's thoughts and cognitive processes. It is suggested by

Wenden (1991) that metacognitive strategies are mental procedures and operations which learners use to regulate their learning. These strategies are the main executioners of writing tasks and involve three different stages which are: planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Metacognition has cemented its place in second language research (e.g., Blasco, 2016; Gustilo & Magno, 2015). Cognitive strategies are basically the first stage and the reason why there is a need to implement metacognitive strategies which main focus is to organize learning and thinking in order to facilitate solving these problems. We can divide learning strategies into six categories: memory-related, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and social as stated by Oxford (2003).

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) define learning strategies as "specifications, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task by students to enhance their own learning" (p.2). Writing at university level is a complex process which presents a major setback to students whose training is dependent on the mastering of this productive skill. There are two major aspects to learning writing, the linguistic factor (grammar use, acquisition of vocabulary, spelling, appropriate style and respect of genre) and communicative (Structure of written texts, topic, audience, thesis statements and supporting arguments). Teachers attempt to explicitly teach writing strategies to their students, whereas students falsely believe that it is the teacher's job to cater for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their writing. Teachers need to be informed on their metacognition so that they can plan, monitor and evaluate their teaching as it is highly believed that metacognitive teaching produces efficient results in terms of organizing the teaching process and ultimately writing and EFL achievement by the students. This research is a survey exploratory study which attempts to investigate teachers' metacognitive awareness about their teaching as well as their motivation, beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching of writing. This research aims to investigate EFL university writing teachers' awareness regarding their metacognitive knowledge as well as exploring whether they teach writing with and for metacognition. Eight (8) university writing teachers from the universities of Amar Telidji Laghouat and the University of Zian Achour Djelfa were administered a questionnaire which was designed to explore teachers' metacognitive awareness and ultimately their reflection on their teaching as well as their motivation, beliefs, and attitudes towards the teaching of the writing skill.

2- Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1989) defines language learning strategies as "the often-conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information" (p. 4). When students are informed and familiar with the different learning strategies at their disposal, they can shift from being passive learners into more active and conscious learners who are capable of self-regulation and control of learning.

Cohen (1998) defines language learning strategies as "Those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning

or use of a second or foreign language". Learning strategies can be divided into six categories: memory-related, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and social as stated by Oxford (2003).

3- Metacognitive Strategies:

The pioneer of the term metacognition was John Flavell, he argued that metacognition means "cognition about cognitive phenomena" or in more simpler terms "thinking about thinking" (Flavell, 1979, p. 906). Purpura (1999) suggests that metacognitive strategies have a "significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (p.289). In brief, metacognition is the knowledge of self, task, and strategy use, as well as regulation of cognition. Or as Kuhn and Dean (2004) explain, they are organizational strategies that allow learners to retrieve, employ, and deploy strategies learnt in order to solve problems in new contexts. Definitions of metacognition by researchers have been numerous, for instance, metacognition can be defined as "The knowledge and control children have over their own thinking and learning activities" (Cross & Paris, 1988, p.131). A similar definition of metacognition is "Awareness and management of one's own thought" (Kuhn & Dean, 2004, p. 270). Hennessey argued that metacognition is "Awareness of one's own thinking, awareness of the content of one's conceptions, an active monitoring of one's cognitive processes, an attempt to regulate one's cognitive processes in relationship to further learning, and an application of a set of heuristics as an effective device for helping people organize their methods of attack on problems in general" (Hennessey, 1999, p. 3).

4- Metacognitive Knowledge:

Metacognitive knowledge involves three prominent categories which are: person, task, and strategy knowledge (Flavell, 1979). Flavell (1979) defines Metacognitive Knowledge as "the knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products, or anything related to them" and metacognitive skills as "the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes" (p. 232). Metacognitive knowledge is basically what individuals know about themselves and about the world as cognitive beings and the relationship of this knowledge with their aims, goals, aspirations, and the way they approach them. Another similar categorization distinguishes declarative knowledge (Our own knowledge), procedural knowledge (How to reflect on our knowledge) and Conditional knowledge (When and why to reflect upon our knowledge). This permits cognitive individuals to know what to know, to reflect on how they know it, and to reflect on when and why to use their strategies and knowledge (Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Paris, Lipson & Wixson, 1983). Wenden (1991) distinguishes between person knowledge (i.e., the effect of affective factors and cognitive ones, such as, language aptitude, personality, age and motivation, on learning in general and on one's personal learning in particular), task knowledge (i.e., the purpose and the

requirements of a task), and strategic (i.e., the strategies employed to achieve tasks and learning outcomes.

5-Regulation and Control of Metacognition:

Metacognitive strategies or regulation of metacognition can be defined as tasks to oversee and regulate learning (Brown, 1987). He is one of the early scholars to refer to the term metacognitive strategies as the type of activities that are used in order to regulate learning. Brown suggested that these strategies involve planning (predicting results, setting goals, and scheduling strategies). It is the first stage of the regulation of metacognition and it involves setting goals, organizing pre-requisites, predicting results ... etc. Monitoring (checking, monitoring, testing, revising, and changing strategies). Monitoring is the stage where individuals check their progress, revisit their predetermined strategies, and monitor the success of their strategies and changing goals, techniques and strategies if necessary. As well as evaluation (evaluating the results with comparison to the devised strategies). Evaluation has to do with determining the success of the strategies put to use, whether the objectives set earlier were attained, what has worked and what needs to be changed next time. The term self-management also refers to metacognition sometimes by Paris and Winograd (1990a, 1990b).

This term is defined by suggesting that it is concerned with metacognition in action and how it organizes problem solving. They categorize planning (the coordination of cognitive processes to reach a cognitive goal), evaluation (evaluating the revealing of cognition as the task is being performed) and regulation (monitoring of progress, revising and/or modifying strategies, and plans based on the outcomes) (Jacobs & Paris, 1987).

6- Metacognitive Strategies and Academic Writing:

Successful teaching and learning of writing require explicit instruction of writing strategies as well as metacognitive awareness from both the part of the teacher and the students. Research about L2 writing strategies has been active during the past few decades (Arndt, 1987; Cumming et al. , 1989 ; Mu, 2005 ; Raimes, 1985 ; Roca de Larios et al., 2008 ; Sasaki, 2002, 2004, 2007 ; Victori, 1999 ; Whalen & Menrad, 1995 ; Wong, 2005).

For instance, the results of Chien's (2012) study about writing strategies of 40 EFL college students showed that students with better writing achievements employed planning, revising, and reviewing strategies extensively more than those whose writing proficiency was lower. Chien, 2012; Mu, 2005; Raimes1985; Bai et al., 2013; Sasaki, 2000, 2002; Victori, 1999).

There are several factors which affect the development of writing, previous research revealed that L2 learning and writing proficiency are influenced by several factors such as motivation, attitude, and learning strategies. Writing is an important skill which is widely used among schools and educational institutions. It is a complex process which involves the implementation of several cognitive and metacognitive strategies, explicit teaching of writing strategies, acquisition of grammar and vocabulary, memorization skills and extensive reading.

Metacognition goes hand in hand with the teaching of writing, especially in the process approach as opposite to the product approach. Harmer (2007) argues that contrary to the product approach, the process approach caters for the many processes of writing such as planning, drafting, revising, reviewing, and editing (Harmer, 2007). The product approach, however, focuses on teaching students to reach a final product that is linguistically correct as suggested by the teacher. This approach teaches students to "develop competence in particular modes of written communication by deconstructing and reconstructing model texts" (Christmas, 2011, p.1). Teaching metacognitively entails teaching either with metacognition or teaching for metacognition. Teaching writing metacognitively requires teachers to reflect about their teaching. Metacognition enables teachers to organize and reflect on their teaching, i.e. attain knowledge about themselves as teachers, the tasks they need to undergo to improve their teaching and the strategies best suited for them as teachers. Their metacognitive control aids them to plan for their teaching in the sense that they will be able to set goals, strategies and expected outcomes of their teaching, they will also be able to check the process of their teaching, how appropriate the strategies they have devised are, and the need to change goals and strategies if necessary. Evaluation of their teaching is another benefit of teaching metacognitively. Teachers who teach metacognitively are able to evaluate what worked in their teaching, what didn't work, and it will give them insight on what to do next. Teaching for metacognition entails devising the instruction with what will help students develop their metacognition and achieve better results with regard to their writing competency. Hartman (2001b) distinguishes this into two categories: strategic knowledge and executive management strategies. Strategic knowledge entails knowledge about "what information/strategies/skills you have, when and why to use them, and how to use them," whereas executive management strategies entail "planning what and how you are going to teach, checking up on or monitoring how the lesson is going as you are teaching, making adjustments as needed, and evaluating how a lesson went after it is finished" (p. 150). Paris and Winograd's (1990) and Schraw's (2001) taxonomies suggest, teachers' awareness of cognition is the strategic knowledge, while teachers' regulation of cognition is the executive management strategies.

University writing teachers are therefore encouraged to apply both constructs into their teaching, teachers need to think and reflect about their teaching constantly, paying attention to who they are as teachers and cognitive beings, how they should approach their teaching, and why and when they should apply the teaching strategies they have devised beforehand. A regulation of their teaching is also of equal importance. Teachers need to be aware of the various stages of metacognitive regulation and apply these stages to their teaching. For this aim, the following research questions have been formulated:

Q1: Are Algerian university EFL writing teachers metacognitively aware of their teaching?
Q2: Do Algerian university EFL writing teachers teach with or for metacognition?

7- Methodology:

7-1- Participants:

To conduct this study, eight university teachers were administered a metacognition assessing questionnaire, they were Algerian and spoke English as a foreign language, they varied in age from 26 to 52 and all had higher education degrees. The metacognition awareness raising questionnaire was designed to explore teachers' awareness regarding their metacognitive knowledge, namely their person, task, and strategy knowledge as well as investigating their beliefs, attitudes and motivation in teaching writing. The number of the participants was fairly limited due to the fact that not so many departments of English have large numbers of writing teachers; therefore, the researcher randomly selected a sample of eight (8) teachers from two different universities, the university of Amar Telidji Laghouat and Ziane Achour University in Djelfa.

7-2- Instruments:

7-2-1- Questionnaires:

The research instrument used in this study to collect data from the participants was a metacognition awareness raising questionnaire adapted from Petric & Czarl (2003). It was mainly used to investigate teachers' metacognitive knowledge as well as their motivation, attitudes and beliefs towards their teaching of the writing module. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, each part destined to investigate one of the components of metacognitive knowledge which are: person, task, and strategy knowledge. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed statistically using SPSS based on the frequency and percentages of the participants responses as well as the Mean and Standard Deviation of each response. The findings of the research instrument were presented in the form of tables and figures. Each table and figure presented finding from the whole sample as can be seen from tables 2 to 7.

8- The Results:

Table 1. Profile of the Information

|	Label	Frequency	Percentage
Experience	1-6 years	3	37.5%
	7-11 years	1	12.5%
	12-17 years	4	50%
sex	Male	5	62.5%
	Female	3	37.5%
Age	26-35 years	4	50%
	36-44 years	2	25%
	45-54 years	2	25%
Total		8	100%

Investigating informants' profiles revealed that half of them 50% were relatively young teachers, aged 26-35 years old while the relatively older teachers made up for the rest of the sample. The teachers questioned were mostly experienced 50% had 12-17 years of teaching while the rest had from 1 to 11 years of teaching experience.

Table 2. The Importance of Teaching and Learning Writing

	Strongly agree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	M	SD
Teaching Writing is a burden to me	12.50%	75.00%	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	2.25	1.16
Teaching pupils to learn is important for their academic success	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	37.50%	62.50%	4.62	0.57
Learning how to teach Writing facilitates the teaching/learning process for me and my pupils	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	75.00%	12.50%	4.00	0.53

Most teachers 75% expressed that teaching writing is not very difficult to them while only a few believed teaching writing is a burden. They also strongly believe that teaching writing is important for students' academic career 62.50% strongly agree and 37.50% agree on this. A large portion of the sample also showed readiness and a positive attitude towards learning how to teach and its effect on the facilitation of the teaching and learning process 75%. Only 25% slightly disagree with this and believe learning how to teach writing is not very important.

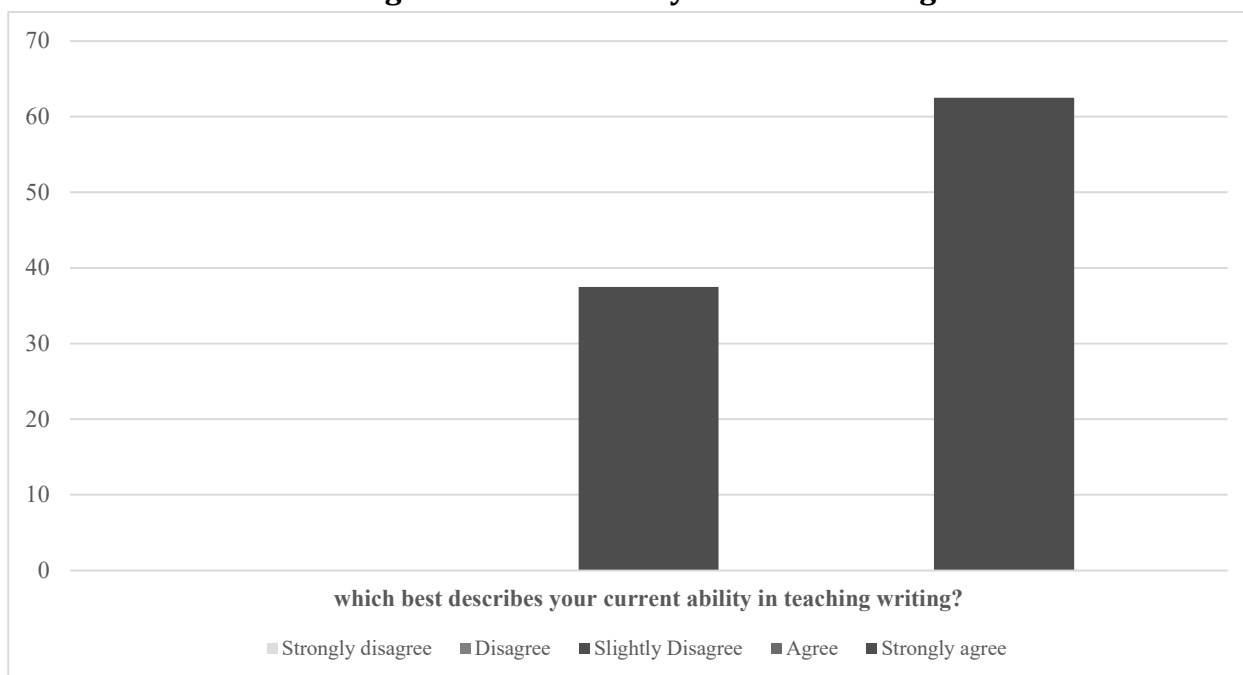**Fig 1. The Importance of Teaching and Learning Writing**
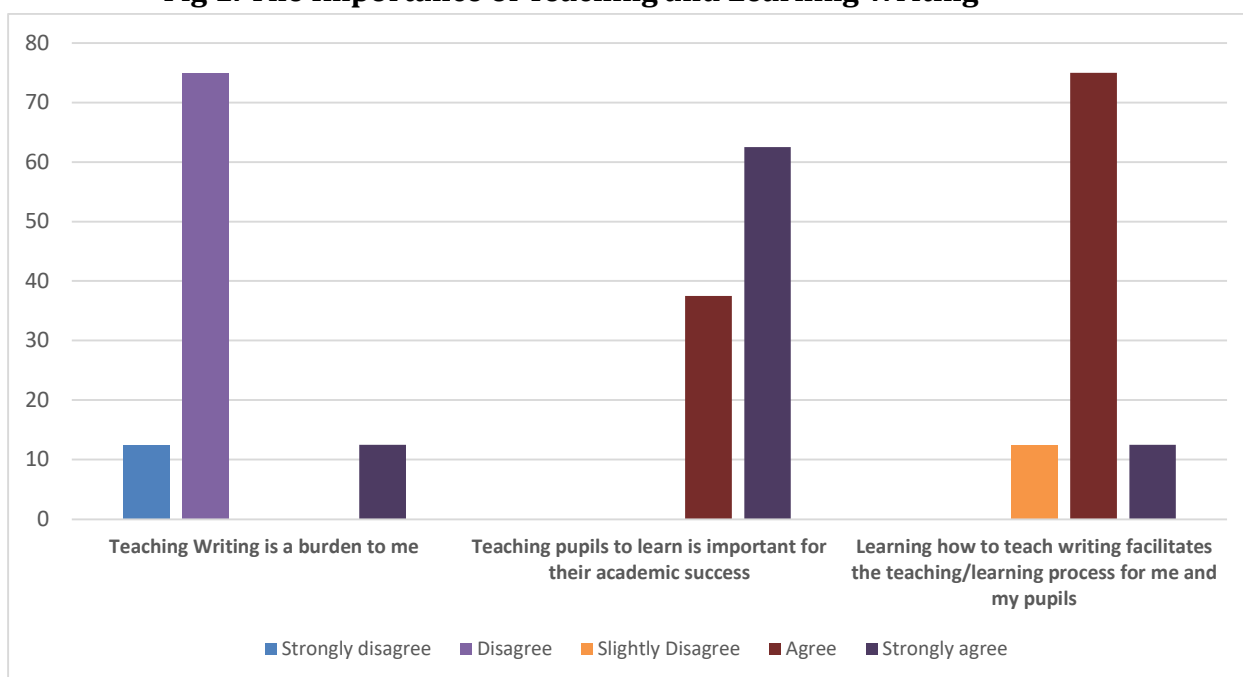
Table 3. Teachers' ability to teach writing

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Which best describes your current ability in teaching writing?	0.00%	0.00%	37.5%	0.00%	62.50%	3.62	0.51

Results show that 37.5% of the participants were fairly confident in their ability to teach writing, while 62.5% expressed great confidence in their writing teaching ability which indicates that university EFL teachers are well equipped to teach the writing skills and they have a positive stance towards the teaching of this productive skill. This goes to say that teachers reflect upon their teaching and constantly assess their current ability as EFL and Writing teachers. It also suggests that contrary to what is commonly known that teaching writing is difficult, the participants in this paper express their ease with teaching writing to university students.

### Fig 2. Teachers' Ability to Teach Writing

which best describes your current ability in teaching writing?

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Slightly Disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Table 4. Teachers' Ability to Perform Writing Tasks and Instructions

	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
Design warm up activities to introduce pupils to the writing task	0.00%	0.00%	12.50%	75.00%	12.50%	4.00	0.53
Teach pupils brainstorming techniques	0.00%	12.50%	37.50%	25.00%	25.00%	3.62	1.06
Give clear and concise instructions for the writing activity	0.00%	0.00%	37.5%	50.0%	12.50%	3.75	0.70
Monitor pupils during the drafting phase	0.00%	37.5%	12.50%	50.0%	0.00%	3.12	0.99
Encourage pupils not to worry about grammar and spelling mistakes during drafting	0.00%	0.00%	37.50%	37.50%	25.00%	3.87	0.83
Urge pupils to re-read their drafts when finished	0.00%	0.00%	25.00%	50.00%	25.00%	4.00	0.75
Get students to self and peer correct their drafts	0.00%	12.50%	12.50%	62.5%	12.50%	3.75	0.88
Design remedial work to overcome student weaknesses	0.00%	25.00%	25.00%	50.00%	0.00%	3.25	0.88

The majority of the teachers 75% expressed their confidence to design warm up activities before the writing class. This was not the case when it comes to teaching students brainstorming techniques as they 37.5% were not as confident as they were about designing warm up activities. 12.5% of them had more or less a negative impression about their ability to teach brainstorming skills. Half of the sample 50% strongly believed they can give clear and concise instructions for writing activities while 37.5% were confident they could do that. This was the same case for monitoring students during the drafting phase as 50% strongly expressed their ability to perform this activity while 37.5% were more or less confident they could do this. All teachers expressed a positive attitude towards their ability to encourage students not to worry about grammar and vocabulary mistakes during the drafting phase. This was the same case for getting students to revisit their drafts and get them to peer review their productions when finished 62%. This reveals that teachers are capable of designing, instructing, and monitoring students well during the writing process. Not all of them are capable of designing remedial work, however.
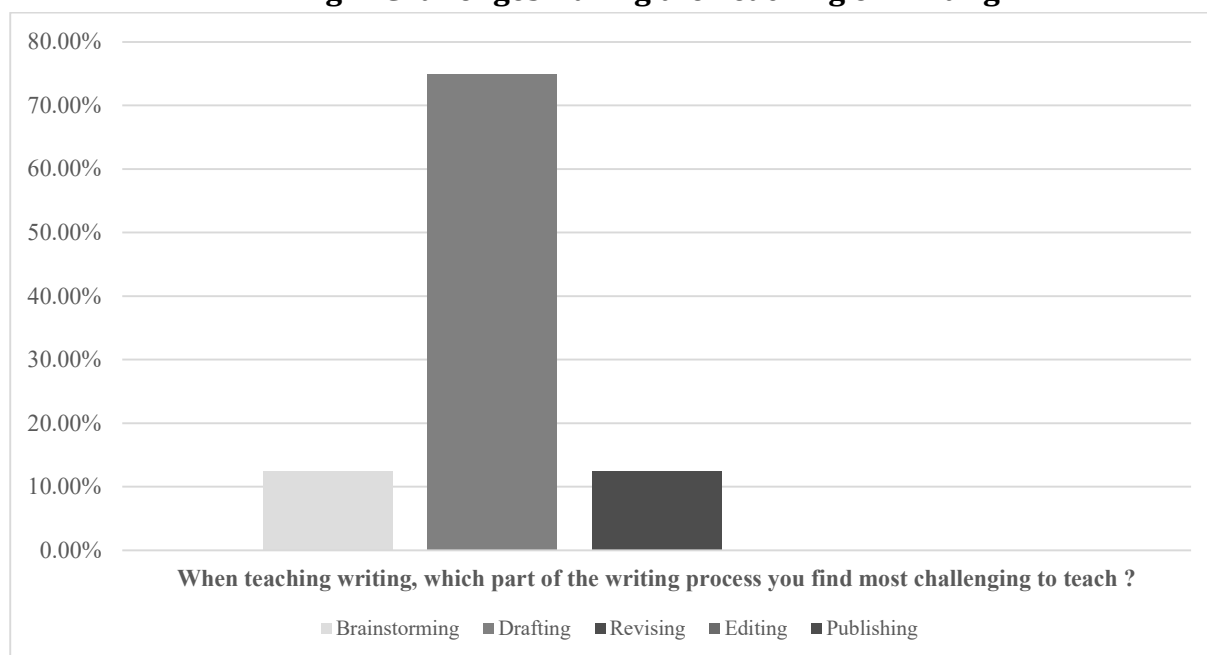
Fig 3. Different Steps of the Writing Process
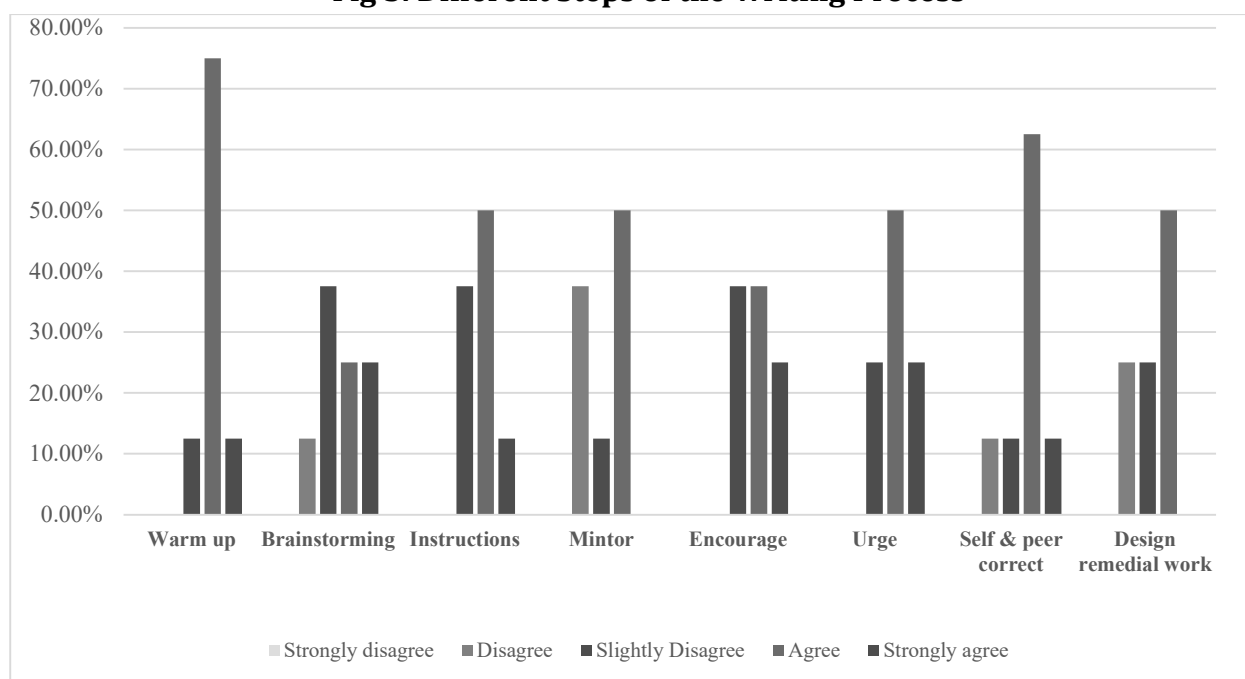
Table 5. Challenges during the Teaching of Writing

	Brainstorming	Drafting	Revising	Editing	Publishing	M	SD
When teaching writing, which part of the writing process you find most challenging to teach?	12.50%	75.00%	12.50%	0.00%	0.00%	2.00	0.53

Fig 4. Challenges During the Teaching of Writing

Most teachers 75% expressed that the drafting phase is the most challenging step to teach in the writing process, brainstorming and revising are equally challenging as well since 12.5% of the sample believe that these two steps are the most challenging to teach. Editing and publishing seem to be a lot easier to teach since none of the teachers expressed their discontent with these two phases. This indicates that teaching students to produce poses a challenge, getting them to brainstorm and revise their production also seems to be problematic.

Table 6. Teachers' Correction Preferences

	My self	Their peers	Another teacher	M	SD
I prefer students' writings to be corrected by	62.50%	37.50%	0.00%	1.37	0.51

Results in this table revealed that the majority of teachers 62.5% prefer to correct students written production by themselves, while 37.5% prefer that students' productions be corrected by their peers. This indicates that teachers still hold to the traditional approaches when it comes to assessment and evaluating students' performance in writing.

Table 7. Reaction to Difficulties Students Face when Writing

	Percent	Percent of cases
Encourage them to overcome them on their own	37.50%	75.00%
Assign a classmate to help them out	18.80%	37.50%
Help them myself	43.80%	87.50%
Total	100%	200%

Results reveal that nearly half the sample 43.8% tends to offer personal help when their students face difficulties in writing, while 37.5% encourage students to overcome these obstacles on their own. 18.8% assign classmates to help the students facing difficulties in writing which indicates that not all teachers are in favor of peer and group assessment as opposite to teacher direct evaluation and interference.

9- Ethical Considerations:

This study involved eight (8) EFL university writing teachers from two Algerian universities as participants in the research. Ethical issues such as anonymity, consent, and confidentiality were taken into account. To get access to the sample, the researcher contacted the teachers in person and asked for their permission to participate in the study. They were also informed about the research aims, objectives and benefits before being administered the questionnaire. They were also promised protection for their confidentiality and acceptance of withdrawal from the research at any moment they desired.

10- Discussion:

This study aimed to investigate Algerian EFL writing teachers' metacognitive awareness about their teaching and if they taught with or for metacognition. The research intended to assess writing teachers' current level of their metacognitive knowledge about their ability to teach writing as well as their confidence, beliefs and attitude towards the teaching of writing. The findings derived from data analysis of a questionnaire administered to teachers from two Algerian universities show that teachers are metacognitively aware about their teaching of writing and they constantly reflect on their teaching. The majority of the sample had a positive attitude towards the teaching of writing and they were confident in their current ability to teach this productive skill. They showed awareness in terms of the three components of metacognitive knowledge which are person, task and strategy knowledge.

Regarding person knowledge, participants showed considerable awareness regarding metacognitive knowledge of themselves as cognitive beings as well as EFL writing teachers. Data from tables 2 and 3 show that teachers find teaching writing to be unproblematic as they expressed good writing teaching ability, they also believe that teaching writing is important for their students' academic success and that learning how to teach writing makes their job easier. Results from table 4 indicate that teachers are capable of designing warm up activities, instructing students clearly, monitoring them during the drafting phase and encouraging them to review their works. They, however, seem to be in favor of teacher evaluation in contrary to peer evaluation and they showed their discomfort with designing remedial work activities. As for task knowledge, data from table 5 reveal that teachers find the drafting phase the most challenging for students, with brainstorming and revising to be less challenging. The findings of table 6 seem to indicate a traditional tendency by teachers in terms of evaluation as they prefer their students' writing to be corrected by themselves primarily, and by their peers in the second place. As for strategy knowledge, teachers seem to interfere in person when students face difficulties during writing, and not play the role of a moderator or a guide, although some teachers prefer to assign a classmate and/or encourage the students to overcome these difficulties on their own Table 7. The data analysis of the questionnaire administered to teachers from the two universities show that EFL writing teachers are, to a considerable extent, aware of their metacognitive knowledge when teaching and that they teach with and for metacognition,

but still, they seem to be clinging to traditional assessment and evaluation techniques and they find it more practical to sometimes interfere in person rather than to encourage a learner centered approach.

11- Conclusion and Limitations:

The focus of this study was to explore and evaluate teachers' awareness about their teaching and metacognitive knowledge during the teaching of writing. It has also attempted to investigate whether EFL writing teachers teach with or for metacognition or both. The data collected and analyzed from the questionnaire revealed that teachers constantly reflect on their thinking and teaching of writing and that they have awareness and understanding of their metacognitive knowledge, i.e., their person, task, and strategy knowledge. The findings of the research also showed that teachers are not in favor of the modern assessment and evaluation techniques and would rather follow the traditional methods of evaluating their students' written productions. Teachers seem to be teaching with and for metacognition concerning the teaching of the writing module.

Several limitations have been identified in the results of this study. Including, limited number of samples, non-generalizability and lesser variety of research instruments. The findings of this study still provide valuable information, nonetheless. The researcher, therefore, recommends further research into the exploration of metacognitive knowledge as well as regulation and control of cognition among teachers of writing in Algerian universities through the use of larger samples and with the use of more research instruments which are aimed to investigate the regulation of metacognition. In this sense, a more generalized conclusion can be made regarding the current situation of metacognitive awareness among EFL writing teachers in Algeria which can lead to the designing of a more appropriate plan that can improve the level of writing teachers in Algerian universities and that of the students by association.

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