INTRODUCTION

1. Statement of the Problem

Nobody probably objects if we say that writing is perhaps the subject that should be given a great deal of attention in a curriculum. In the past, there was no special curriculum in the department of English, University of Biskra, for teaching this subject. At that time, the attitude towards teaching writing depended on the teacher's familiarity with the subject as well as his/her own ingenuity. Sometimes the course was merely limited to reading a passage and asking comprehension questions, and occasionally, assigning a topic to write about, without any prior guidelines. We do not say that the situation has changed radically but we do believe that teachers are now aware that teaching writing involves much more than the above activities, although many of them still use large chunks of grammar exercises hoping vainly that it would help improve the writing skill.

Despite its importance, writing is still viewed as the "bête noire" of many Algerian EFL students, as teachers see the writing skill as the most complex process to deal with. It requires employing a variety of strategies and activities. Hedge (2000:302) states the different activities involved in the writing process: "It involves a number of activities: setting goals, generating ideas, organization information, selecting appropriate language, making draft, reading and reviewing it, then revising and editing. It is a complex process which is neither easy nor spontaneous for many second language writers."

It has been recognised after the first term examination in written expression, that the poor results in written expression module (Appendix I) compared to other modules, oral expression and phonetics, actually showed clear evidence and foster one to conduct a study that would help Biskra University teachers and students to overcome this problem and possibly all students elsewhere at large. It has been noticed that students are facing difficulties related to how to produce a meaningful piece of writing due to the lack of good knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence pattern. Students have been noticed to write in fear of making mistakes and some of them do not really find what to write.

The motivation of this topic came from the hypothesis that the use of cooperative learning in the language classroom especially in teaching writing, can offer the opportunity for students to explore and foster the language. Furthermore, it has been proved that the use of CL seems to be more interesting, as it attracts learner's attention, offering an incomparable variety of vocabulary and expressions.

Via the aforementioned problem, it is thought judicial to attempt to overcome student's feebleness to write a satisfactory piece of writing. Moreover, CL technique has proven successful across a wide range of subjects and levels. It also enhances the motivation and psychological adjustment of language learners (Kagan 1994).

Hence, the following question can be stated:
How to raise teacher's awareness about using CL in teaching the writing skill?

2. Hypothesis

It can be hypothesized that our learners may overcome their inability to write if teachers are aware of the advantages of CL. It can also be hypothesized that a good diagnosis in terms of weaknesses in the teaching of writing would raise their understanding on how to best teach such a skill

3. Aim of the Study

It is vital to try to build an atmosphere where the students will no longer feel shy or reluctant. By introducing the technique of CL and getting students closer to each other, low level students may learn from average or good ones.

Our main objective is to show teachers that CL may help students' overcome their feebleness and where they need reinforcement. It would also be pointed out that this research tries to suggest some teaching recommendations concerning the use of CL to develop students writing skill. Through this work, we attempt also to bridge the traditional way of teaching written skills where the teacher is always the source of

information with the one where students seek information by themselves to learn from each other, that is to extend our understanding of the issue of using CL in teaching writing, and to find way to make writing easier to learn for foreign language learners.

As a matter of fact, the outcomes obtained do not seek any generalisation because they concern the study of a case.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Choice of the Method

The present research investigates whether some principles of CL are implemented by teachers to develop learners' writing skill at the university level. In this instance, the independent variable is CL and the dependent variable is good writing skill.

The nature of our study is to inspect the issue of writing within CL in particular with English department teachers, which actually calls for a descriptive method.

4.2. Population and Sampling of the Study

The population of the present study consists of teachers of written expression. There are six teachers who have been teaching written expression for the semester under study.

It has been observed at University level (second year students of English) that most of them do not write well given the fact that the technique used does not encourage frequent writing practice; thus, it can be said that writing has become a phenomenon that needs description and identification. The research tool adopted is a questionnaire to teachers which is gauged, and studied once handed back. The sample is made up of 06 teachers chosen randomly to having only the best or the worst ones.

4.3. Data Gathering Tools

Since our subject study touches directly local students at Biskra University, administering questionnaires to gather data and have access to the respondents attitudes and opinions comes to be the most useful and effective technique. Two questionnaires have been handed out. One to teachers and the other to students.

Structure of the Study

The present study contains six chapters. Chapter one entitled "Writing Skill" defines writing as a skill. It highlights the nature and importance of the skill, which is different in many respects from speech. It traces the different approaches to teach the process of writing. Much of what is said in this chapter points to the important features likely to help students' writing.

The second chapter "Cooperative Learning" shed light on CL. First it defines CL as a technique. Second, it discusses CL advantages in the process of teaching. Third, it displays CL activities.

The third chapter "Cooperative Writing" attempts to delineate the way, teachers use CL in teaching the writing skill. It also introduces group work types, pair work and closes with the different ways of forming groups.

Chapter four paves the path for the descriptive study. First, it gives a description of the approach opted for, variables, target population, sample and the participants. It also focuses on data collection procedures through the questionnaires, and finally the conclusion.

The fifth chapter begins with the description of the teachers' and students' questionnaire followed by the analysis of the data gathered where every section is analysed separately with tables representing the different findings followed by comments.

Chapter six is devoted to suggestions and recommendations for teachers to help students in written production. These suggestions and strategies center on the use of CL in teaching the writing skill.