

Investigating perceived challenges
in English language writing
instruction: An action research
study in a Saudi university
preparatory programme

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Summary

In most classroom contexts, both teachers and students would agree that learning to write is a challenge *per se*, let alone writing in a second language. There are certainly factors which might lessen such challenges and help students to learn to write better (for instance, more accurately, more meaningfully, more extensively). This study investigates English language writing in a Saudi university context. Saudi learners in general find it difficult to take hold of their own learning as they have usually been ‘spoon fed’ throughout their years of education, relying primarily on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge. Specifically, Saudi students tend to find writing in English a very elusive and challenging task. Many students while in school are told to memorize passages of writing to pass their English language tests. Even though writing is a component of the curriculum, not much attention is paid to teaching writing in terms of genre, discourse or various other communicative aspects. Instead the focus is generally placed on grammar, spelling and writing mechanics.

Very little research has been conducted on Saudi students’ English language writing. In elucidating this project, it became clear that teachers as well as learners should be involved in any investigation of English language writing. Teaching methodology plays a prominent role in the way students perceive the writing process. Teachers in Saudi Arabia frequently complain about the low writing proficiency of Saudi students. It is important look into both how the teachers approach writing instruction, and the way in which students respond to their methodologies. Through an action research project, this study seeks to ascertain students’ and teachers’ perspectives on writing classes in a Saudi university, the methods used in their writing classes, students’ preferences, and ultimately how to improve the quality of writing instruction. The study hopes to contribute to an improved understanding of the challenges faced by Saudi students when learning to write in English, and how approaches to writing instruction could be improved to help address such challenges.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, giving some background on the study of second language writing and setting out the rationale for the action research project conducted in a preparatory year programme at King Abdul Aziz university. In Chapter Two, I explore the construct of writing, in order to set the scene for this study of second language writing. I provide a brief account of the phenomenon of writing and discuss the relationship between writing and speaking before moving on to consider second language writing in particular. The remainder of Chapter Two deals with key theoretical approaches proposed by pedagogical researchers in second language writing instruction. I turn to second language writing in Saudi Arabia, elaborating on the effect of setting, culture and transfer in second language writing. I end the chapter by presenting some relevant studies conducted in the field of second language writing in the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia. Chapter Three introduces the methodology of the study. It provides an array of definitions for action research. I discuss the trustworthiness of action research, the ethics involved in action research, and justification for choosing this methodology over others for this study. I end the chapter by providing examples of action research studies conducted in relevant contexts. In Chapter Four, I describe the context of this study by initially describing Saudi Arabia as a country, then its higher education system, approaches to English language teaching, English language teacher training, the English language curriculum, and the English Language Institute at King Abdul Aziz University. I provide a rationale as to why action research needs to be implemented in King Abdul Aziz University. I introduce the design of the action research phases. Chapter Five introduces the exploration and intervention phases of the research in great depth. I describe the exploration phase which includes the teacher interviews, classroom observations and learner interviews. I then describe the intervention phase, which includes the students' profiles, and the four cycles of action research conducted along with post intervention interviews with learners. Chapter Six elaborates on the reflection phase. It analyses the large dataset obtained and discusses the outcomes of the exploration and intervention phases. This includes how writing is perceived by teachers and students, challenges faced by teachers and students, and the outcomes of the workshops upon students.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I provide a conclusion to the study. This includes reflections on conducting action research, teaching second language writing in ELI, learning second language writing, strengths and limitations of the action research project and consider some possible future directions for future research.

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Acronyms

KSU	King Saud University.....	16
KAU	King Abdul Aziz University.....	16
ESL	English as a Second Language.....	19
EFL	English as a Foreign Language	16
ELI	English Language Institute	20
L1	First Language.....	37
L2	Second Language	37
L1WS	First Language Writing system.....	37
L2WS	Second Language Writing System	37
EAP	English for Academic Purposes	38
PYP	Preparatory Year Programme	58
AR	Action Research	70
LTD	Leadership Teachers Development	82
SPS	Scholarship Preparation School	95
IELTS	International English Language Testing System.....	99
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language	99
TOIEC	Test of English for International Communication	99
iBT	Initial Basic Training	99
CEFR	Common European Framework of References	99
COLT	Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching	111
GPA	Grade Point Average.....	157

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Learning to write in a second/foreign language

Second language writing instruction, in the history of language teaching, has undergone many changes. Writing in classical education was restricted to non-creative acts such as copying and dictations. In the first half of the twentieth century, second language writing (SLW) in the foreign language classroom was mostly taught through a controlled or guided composition method (Ferris, 2016, p. 146). In the latter half of the century, the audio-lingual method of language instruction had an impact on how writing was taught. Learners were taught through the repetition of grammatical sentence patterns in oral drills. Writing was seen as a secondary skill useful to support practice in listening and reading (Raimes, 1983), and to reinforce speaking skills. This type of approach to teaching writing was tightly structured in order to minimize errors, along with the “paragraph-pattern” method that emerged in the 1960s (Ferris, 2016, p. 147). This method taught learners how to write paragraphs or essays according to a prescribed pattern, an approach that was adapted from the way composition in first language pedagogy was taught. It became widely used in second language (L2) teaching for several decades.

A key shift emerged with the process approach to writing in the 1980s. As in paragraph-pattern writing, the process approach grew out of first language approaches to teaching writing. The Flower and Hayes cognitive process framework (1981) was a key aspect of this shift, moving from concentrating on the text to focus on the cognitive processes involved in writing. The second remarkable shift in SLW occurred in the 1990s (Manchón ,

2012, p. 1), where it became an independent field of study with the emergence of a dedicated journal (The Journal of Second Language Writing), co-founded by Leki and Silva in 1992. A focus from this point onwards on “post-process pedagogy” advocates the “multiplicity of perspectives” (Matsuda, 2003, p. 67) and the “multifocal nature” (Atkinson, 2003, p. 12) where writing is viewed as socially and culturally contextualized and takes into account variables related to individual differences, such as the role of power and politics. Current conceptions of discourse shift attention from correctness of writing to the resourcefulness of writers as social actors who bring personal and cultural histories to their writing and particular understandings of the text they are asked to write.

One problematic factor in research in this area is the many different definitions of what “good writing” is, making it difficult to compare studies in foreign language settings (Reichelt, 2001). In foreign language settings, writing becomes a completely different task to those who are in a second language settings, where the target language is spoken in the surrounding community. The social aspects of writing, such as an authentic purpose, context and audience, are often missing to second language writers in foreign language contexts. Learners of second language writing are surrounded by ways to practice English in their context, for example, filling in forms, conversing to native speakers. The purpose to speak English is spontaneous and purposes arises in itself. However for foreign language learners, these opportunities do not arise and need to speak English do not always present itself. Yasuda (2011, p. 112) describes how foreign language (FL) writers,

are likely to approach writing tasks with the belief that such texts are autonomous and context free. This belief held by FL writers

may prevent them from seeing writing as a social action that is performed through interactions of purpose, audience, and linguistic choice.

Culture plays an important role in the way we write. From my experience as a Saudi learner, I was never instructed to use my own voice in Arabic writing. It was considered a non-academic form of writing. In fact, it was perceived that students who attempted to voice their opinions through their voice in writing were told that their reflections did not matter, and what mattered was merely citing others. This idea coincides with Ramanathan who, in another context, points out that “not all cultures value individualism to the extent that mainstream North American culture does; neither do all cultures promote the ability to be skeptical or think critically” (1996, p. 28). Arabic-speaking students, for example, most routinely view things as black/white, right/wrong terms and sometimes refuse to compromise (Oxford, Holloway, & Horton-Murillo, 1992, p. 444). I experienced this when teaching Saudi students writing. Often, more than one answer is acceptable, but in a culture where black/white dichotomies are usual, the teacher who accepts more than one correct answer is deemed to be educationally ignorant (Oxford et al., 1992).

The role of the teacher cannot be underestimated, who, as Gee puts it, “stands at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural, and political issues of our time” (Gee, 1990, pp. 67-68). The implication for teachers knowing their students’ learning styles provides insights to plan their lessons around using these tools. Teaching English-language writing in a Saudi context creates specific challenges for teachers. Arabic-speaking learners are more prone to memorization of written passages, which are then written down on paper for exams. This type of strategy is not considered plagiarism as it would

be elsewhere. Many Arabic-speaking cultures encourage a concrete-sequential learning style which entails strategies such as, memorisation, planning, analysis, sequenced repetition, detailed outlines and lists, structured review, and a search for perfection (Oxford & Anderson, 1995, p. 207).

1.2 Setting the scene

This PhD project emerged from reflections on my own teaching practice in King Abdul Aziz University (KAU) regarding the challenges of EFL writing classes. Through general discussions between colleagues and friends in KAU, I realized that my students' needs were not articulated in the curriculum, and the writing classes did not lead to improved outcomes in English written production. In general, students learning writing as a second and especially as a foreign language face a variety of challenges. The specific challenges of Arabic-speaking student writers have not yet been articulated through research in any Saudi context to my knowledge. Some groundwork has been done however. A recent study in the same university (Kabouha & Elyas, 2015, p. 85) reported on the harsh "reality" that places students under "tremendous pressures" in order to pass their English language tests conducted after each module "within a limited period of time". Kabouha and Elyas (2015, p.85) found that students were unable to write "coherent and cohesive essays", and that in fact, students generally memorized sentences. Even though Saudi students receive six years of English language instruction prior to entering university, they "remain incompetent in their ability to use the language" (Kabouha & Elyas, 2015, p. 248). Al Fadda (2012) conducted a study in King Saud University (KSU) on difficulties experienced by students in learning

English academic writing, focusing on learners' needs and objectives.

Questionnaires were distributed among a sample of 50 postgraduate students, and the results found that whilst students face many difficulties in English writing, they were particularly challenged by the differences between spoken and written English. Students expressed preferences for approaches to writing which would draw on their different learning styles, and the usefulness of some strategies such as drafting, planning, writing and revising, and using computer-assisted writing instruction (Al Fadda, 2012, pp. 127-128). Such research findings prompted me to investigate how, given the traditional approach to teaching writing in Saudi university, such approaches to teaching writing would be perceived by teachers and students in this context.

1.3 Why action research for this study

The conceptual framework of this action research is located within the social constructivist paradigm. This framework posits that we as humans and as learners are socially constructed, and that we construct our experiences in context together. Action research is a form of research conducted in real classroom situations in order to improve the teachers' teaching by taking systematic steps (McNiff, 2013). The foundation that action research is based on "is to improve practice" (Elliot, 1991, p. 49). Action research goes by a variety of terms including, reflection and enquiry "to describe how teachers try to understand and improve their practice" (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2008, p. 2), however the most popular term is "action research" which was first used by Kurt Lewin (Baumfield et al., 2008, p. 3). Unlike other research paradigms, in which, research controls variables to measure, and that considers the researcher

as an objective observer, action research is subjective. When we look at research as “continuum of approaches, with scientific, or positivistic, research at one end, and the more naturalistic and interpretive approaches at the other”, action research is located at the end of the continuum (McAteer, 2013, pp. 12-13). At this end of continuum data collection methods are more qualitative and tackles research through exploration, explanations and description of practice (McAteer, 2013, p. 13). This type of research is also called practitioner researcher wherein the teacher is a teacher but also the researcher. This is my role in this study; I was an active participant who was actively involved in the discussion with colleagues and students throughout the research process. The objective behind this system of inquiry is to learn as much as possible about the teachers and learners in order to understand their needs and to better find solutions to improve the teaching practice. Action research has been accused of investigating topics that lack generalizability, because they are based on contextual, solution-based theories. However, such studies can be generalisable and relevant to other contexts with similar characteristics. This is why this type of research needs to be published and made public for others to value it, and possibly take on the recommendations and implications that fit their contextual setting.

Most action research projects are small studies conducted in settings for immediate remedial solutions, and are not publicly reported, though this trend is beginning to change in recent years. For this reason, there are not many research projects to cite from in the field of second language writing that one could replicate it in another educational setting. One useful example to help show the possibilities of action research is a study conducted by Jones (1998) who purposefully offers an example of how to apply action research to

improving English as a foreign language (EFL), and English as a second language (ESL) writing instruction. He conducted his study over a period of five years while he was teaching advanced EFL writing to Chinese undergraduate English majors at Tsinghua University. Through systematically gathering and analyzing information from the students, he was able “to develop tasks that would both accommodate and challenge” his students Jones (1998, p. 3). Through the study, he experienced a lack of interest from his students during their first year in university. They found the course to be non-enjoyable experience. Therefore, in order for him to determine the expectations of students about the course as well as their learning style preferences, he administered surveys at the beginning of the year and asked the students what they would like to learn in class and what he could do to help them achieve their goals. At the end of his course, he asked them to write down what they learnt about writing in class, what activities were most and least helpful, and what he could have done better to aid them to improve. He took precautionary measure to ensure honesty in their responses by advising the students not to identify themselves on the surveys (Jones, 1998, p. 9). With an initial aim of improving the quality of my teaching in writing, and to subsequently to gain a holistic perception of what is happening in writing classes through the lens of teachers and students, I decided to seek out information that would identify my students’ and colleagues’ perceptions of their writing classes, and help promote the kind of instructional changes that could improve the quality of teaching for my students. This was implemented through an action research-based workshop intervention, which would allow students’ learning needs to be voiced and heard. Ultimately, the aim of this project is to share its findings in ways that will be hopefully insightful and helpful both in the context of the

English Language Institute at King Abdul Aziz University, the broader Saudi and Arabic-speaking world, and more generally to inform FL writing in other contexts.

1.4 Evolving research questions

Every research project has a point of departure. It can be relatively easy to pose a simple research question. As I started off on my journey into this project, I asked: How can I improve the writing of my students in the preparatory program at the English Language Institute (ELI)? I faced many challenges when conducting this research project. I questioned the type of writing instructions provided in the context, how the teachers viewed their own teaching, and in turn how they perceived their students' perceptions of their writing classes. As I was embarking on this journey of discovery in the early stages of this study, I realized I needed to focus more precisely on the challenges my students were facing, and eventually, through an inductive process, came to the specific area of inquiry into the challenges my students face in writing in this Saudi university, contextualised through the voices of the learners, teachers and my own.

1.5 Methods of investigation

The action research project at ELI was organized according to three main phases: an exploration, intervention and reflection stage. This action research project generated a vast amount of data. I used interviews, classroom observations, field notes and classroom diaries to investigate the perceptions of my colleagues and students on writing in the English Language Institute. In the

exploration phase, I explored the writing setting in my workplace. This was achieved by classroom observations throughout the academic year of 2013-2014 where I observed the writing classes in terms of teaching and how the students responded to writing instructions. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers and students. I asked the teachers how they viewed writing in their setting, what approaches did they use, how they perceived their students' writing, and how they perceived the ELI writing curricula. The students were also interviewed. In the second phase of this study, I conducted an intervention that consisted of twenty-four writing workshops throughout the academic year with seven students who committed to the project. The workshops were divided into four main cycles. Each cycle consisted of six workshops. The writing workshops were designed to meet the students' needs, through discussions with students to identify topics and through trying out different approaches to teaching writing. The design of the writing workshops was emergent, and rather than following a pre-set plan, I followed an action research approach within each workshop whereby I observed and took notes and then based on my observations, planned the next workshop, and so on. This allowed the students to guide me rather than the reverse (which is usually the norm in educational settings, especially in Saudi Arabia). During the workshops, students were prompted to use writing portfolios including a vocabulary log and classroom diaries. In the third and final reflection phase, I analyzed the collected data I gathered from the previous two phases and reported on my reflections. The figure below provides a guide to these three phases and a timeline for the project.

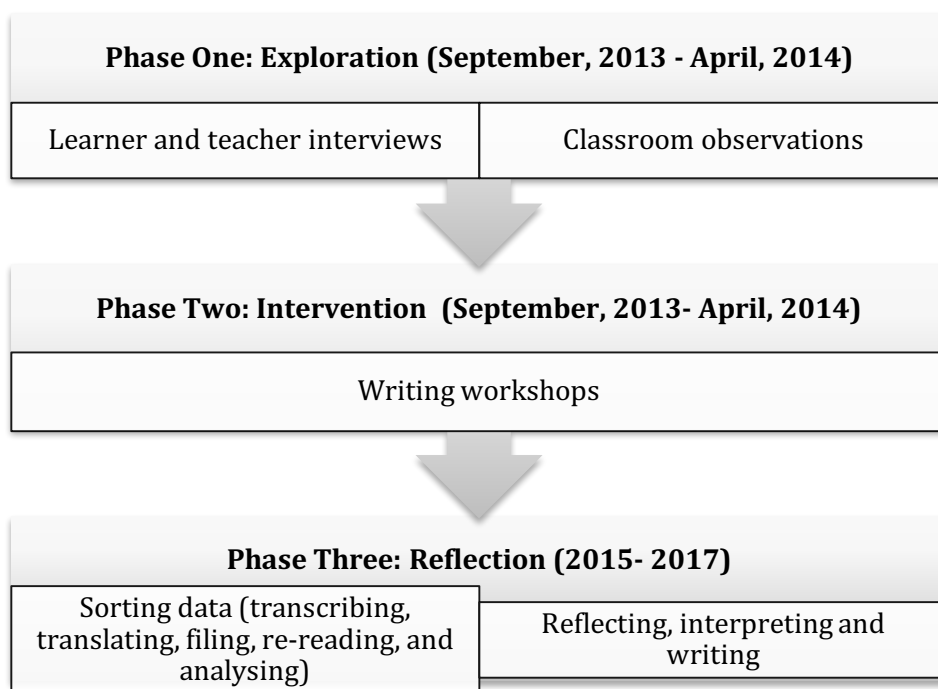


Figure 1: Chronology of the action research project

1.6 Potential contributions and implications of this study

To my knowledge, this study is the first of its kind in the research context of language learning in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia. Thus, this research can contribute to our understanding of Saudi learners in university language classrooms, and how listening to their perceptions and expectations can feed into bettering the teaching practices. Investigating the challenges faced by the students and teachers can enable possible solutions. I hope that this project can therefore be considered as a stepping stone and starting point for other researchers to continue their investigation into the writing pedagogy in this context. Looking at a broader contribution to the field of second language writing and writing instruction, this research highlights the importance of listening to voices from the classroom, both teachers' and learners' voices.

Chapter 2: Writing

2.1 Introduction

Writing can perhaps be considered one of the greatest inventions in human history, since writing itself has made history, as we know it, possible (Robinson, 2016). Cherry describes the development of our civilization as dependent on our “ability to receive to communicate and to record [...] knowledge” (1951, p. 383). In this chapter, I explore how writing, this ability to communicate with others and record our knowledge, can be defined and understood, from its early iterations through to the processes of learning to write in a second language. In the first section, I provide a short historical overview of writing before moving to some of the definitional debates in the area. I then move to explore the relationship between writing and speaking. The second section explores the challenges of learning a second language writing system. I then move on to review some key approaches to teaching second language writing, and finish the chapter with a review of some studies specific to the Saudi educational context.

2.2 Development and definition of writing

Writing systems can be classified differently according to how they are perceived. For instance, a writing system can be classified in terms of its functional use or its features. The most common division is to consider writing systems according to three broad categories of features: logographic, syllabic and alphabetic. This kind of classification can be regarded as overly simplistic, as different writing systems overlap in some of their features. Some

components of writing are depicted according to various functions and features, including scripts, characters, signs, and elements associated with that language such as punctuation, its orientation and finally, the materials used to convey the writing. This is not a definitive but merely an example of how different features of writing systems are distinguished.

Whilst experts agree that writing originated from spoken language, writing systems have never been just “speech written down” (Halliday, Matthiessen & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 7) . Writing systems are different from symbolic writing communications, such as numbers, road signs, mathematics, or maps, in that you do not need to know the language in order to understand such symbols. Coulmas (1999, p. 560) defines a writing system as “a set of visible or tactile signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way”. These systems can be in the form of morphemes (morphemic writing system), phonemes (alphabetic writing system), syllables (syllabic writing system) or consonants (consonant writing systems), depending on the linguistic units of the language they represent. Language writing systems can also be defined in terms of their actual physical appearance. In this sense, the language system can be seen as a “script”, a graphic form of a writing system (Coulmas, 2003, p. 35). Another way of distinguishing between writing systems is to examine those which are meaning-based, and those which are sound-based. Meaning-based systems connect graphemes and meaning directly. Graphemes are the smallest unit in the writing system. Other writing systems are phonologically-based, and located on a continuum that ranges from transparent to non-transparent in phonological terms. For instance, Arabic is considered to be more phonological than English; its writing system is more phonologically transparent to the extent that its graphemes correspond with the spoken sounds

of the Arabic language, in which case the Arabic writing system is sound-based.

2.2.1 The development of writing

Writing has been used since the prehistoric period to communicate between people, record knowledge, for trading and loaning usages, to document history and cultures. With the emergence of writing came also more ways to communicate. The idea of exchanging and receiving messages dates back to our earlier ancestors who used nonverbal gestures to communicate messages and spoken language evolved through it. Early means of communication have been visible through slashes on the bark of a tree, or branches arranged in a specific arrangement over a path, ways of transmitting ideas or instructions. Dating back to some 412,000 years ago, graphic symbols have been found on bones revealing cut lines at regular intervals. For example, the Ishango Bone found in Zaire had several markings which when counted, appeared to be made over a span of time and correspond with the lunar cycles (Fischer, 2001, p. 16). However, a growing need to recall important things from the past became a need for human societies. This need for an “extrasomatic memory”, meaning a memory outside of the body, as a means of communication led to the development of human writing as information-keeping (Crowley & Heyer, 2016). From this, one of the most important technologies of humankind was created. As Powell (2012, p. 10) puts it:

Writing is the most important technology in the history of the human species, except how to make a fire. Writing is the lens through which literate peoples see the world, feel the world, hate the world, love the world, defy the world, and imagine change. What is writing that, like the lens you never see, creates the world? The difficult topic is muddled and mixed up with other things that

have their own life – religion, artistic expression, speech, and human thought.

Writing as we know it today originated from Mesopotamia, modern-day Iraq. Other writing systems also developed independently and somewhat simultaneously, in China and Mesoamerica. In Mesopotamia, the first steps towards the emergence of writing were recorded in the use of tokens by Sumerians around 3500 B.C. Tokens were used as a means to record markings, used initially to keep record of economic transactions. Some one to six centimetres in size, they took many shapes including cones, spheres, disks, cylinders, etc. (Schmandt-Besserat, 1992, p. 7). At first, these were plain clay, but then they evolved to have illustrations etched on them, and, eventually, ideograms. For over 3,000 years, the different style scripts that emerged were diverse but eventually a writing system was composed to form what is called cuneiform.

Cuneiform is taken from Latin word “cuneus” meaning “wedge” (Woodard, 2008, p. 85). Cuneiform is one the most important ancient writing systems, used for a dozen different languages from the Mediterranean to the Iranian plateau and from the Black Sea to the Arabian Peninsula. Languages such as Indo-European (Hittite and Old Persian), and other Semitic languages (Akkadian, Eblaite and Amorite) all used the cuneiform writing system. For example, Akkadian utilized the cuneiform system of writing through various media, including wax, metal and stone, for recording monumental inscriptions (Woodard, 2008, p. 85). The Akkadian script is read from left to right, and is similar to the earliest Sumerian writing, which is logographic and has a phonetic value to its signs. The signs that made up the script are formed with

horizontal, vertical, oblique and triangular marks impressed into the mass of moist clay of tablets of different sizes. The combination of the wedges created characters. Cuneiform signs consist of logographic and phonetic values; each sign representing a word and a syllable at the same time (Glassner, Bahrani, & Van de Mierop, 2003, p. 2).

Around the same time that the cuneiform script appeared, the Egyptians developed their own writing system, emerging from what Coulmas (2003, pp. 1-8) describes as “the preliterate artistic traditions of Egypt”. The Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system appeared before 3200 BC and remained in use until the eleventh century AD, making it the longest continually attested language in the world (Allen, 2013, p. 1), and was gradually replaced by Arabic. The term “hieroglyphs” comes from Greek: “hieros” meaning sacred, and “glypho” meaning carvings (Ager, 1998-2016; Lo, 1996-2012). Egyptian civilization attributed writing as a gift of the gods, specifically to the god Thoth, whom they believed to be the god of science and magic (Schmandt-Besserat, 2010). Hieroglyphs were primarily used for monumental purposes, appearing on stone as the main source of material, and less frequently, papyrus (Woodard, 2008, p. 156). Hieroglyphic script appeared in horizontal lines from left to right or vice versa, or in vertical columns from top to bottom. Unlike the Mesopotamian cuneiform, hieroglyphs were only used to depict the Egyptian language. It consists of a set of some 750-1000 graphemes (Woodard, 2008, p. 156). These graphemes are pictographic signs that represent entities and objects, such as parts of humans or animals, plants, astronomical entities, buildings and so forth. It appears that they also include some phonological and semantic aspects (Woodard, 2008, p. 156).

The emergence of the Chinese writing system occurred during the Bronze Age, used for practical concerns such as marking property. The Chinese eventually developed thousands of signs that catered for the complexities of urban societies (Senner, 1991, p. 7). Writing systems such as the Sumerian and Chinese were all based on the syllabic principle. DeFrancis (1989, p. 184) describes both writing systems as a “meaning-plus-sound” syllabic system. As the name suggests, syllabic writing represents syllables, meaning a set of syllabic signs that is called syllabary. The syllable is a unit of meaning, often an independent word. The sounds that made up the syllabus may be quite simple and restricted such as in Sumerian, which comprises a maximum of three phonemes, or four to five, as in Chinese. The Chinese writing system as we know it emerged from the earlier scripts: the Han dynasty li shu and hsiao chuan and the late Shang dynasty script. In the Shang script, graph formation included pictures of men, body parts, animals, the sun and moon, falling rain, vessels and so on.

The use of an alphabet was a main turning point in the history of writing. Crystal (1992, p. 14) defines the alphabet as “a type of writing system in which a set of symbols (letters) represents the important sounds (phonemes) of a language”. The history of the alphabet development dates back to consonantal writing systems used in ancient Semitic languages (Ager, 1998-2016). Daniels (1990, p. 729) makes a distinction between “abjads” which contain only consonants (although vowels may be indicated using consonant letters, with or without diacritics), and “alphabets”, which contain both vowels and consonants. The term “abjad” was coined by Daniels (ibid.) to describe writing systems that emerged from consonantal scripts, including Semitic languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Early Aramaic and Phoenician.

Most present-day alphabets can be traced back to the Phoenician alphabet (Northrup et al., 2015, p. 24). The Phoenician language, or Punic/Canaanite, is a Northern Semitic language that originated around the 11th century BCE in the region surrounding modern-day Lebanon, Syria and Palestine (Healey, 1990, p. 12). This alphabet dates to around 1050 BC (Healey, 1990). The earliest inscriptions of the Phoenician alphabet are found in the royal inscriptions of Byblos dating from approximately 1000 BC (Martin, 1995, p. 28). The Phoenicians were a seafaring people who travelled extensively throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, who came into contact with many civilizations, and formed Phoenician colonies in Cyprus, Sardinia, Spain, North Africa and beyond. The Phoenician alphabet contained twenty-two marks or pictographs mapped to a discrete sounds (Markoe, 2000). For instance, the pictograph of a house was assigned the letter derived from the Semitic word *bayt* meaning “house”. Phoenician is an “abjad” script, so the sounds represented were consonants, and it was up to the reader to figure out the sound of the vowel. The Phoenician alphabet proved to be easily adaptable to other languages; it was also used by both the Greeks and Romans (Education, 2016; Marston, 2001, pp. 32- 34), and the Greek alphabet is derived from the Phoenician alphabet. The Greek alphabet is mostly known as “the first true alphabet” (Powell, 2012, p. 242), used since the 8th century BC (Cook, 1987). Unlike Phoenician, its script contains both vowels and consonants, its genius has been described as “its closeness to speech” (Powell, 2007, p. 113).

In terms of how meaning was embodied in writing, early writing was simply pictographic, with symbols representing concrete objects in the world of the writers. However, as Schmandt-Besserat (1992, p. 194) illustrates in the

case of the Sumerian tokens, abstraction developed from the activity of counting to also include quality. Symbols were used to function phonetically because of the need to record names for orders and donors of goods. Names were first written as symbols representing phonetic sounds, this process was referred to the rebus principle. A rebus occurs when pictograms and ideograms “were arranged in sequential order to create a very rudimentary form of written communication” (Senner, 1991, p. 5). The use of pictures to represent phonetic symbols is the essence of the rebus principle. For instance, a rebus to form the word “belief” would be a combination of pictograms one of a bee and the other of a leaf. In the next section, I discuss the definitions of writing.

2.2.2 Defining writing

One of the earliest definitions of writing was given by Aristotle (1938, p. 115) who connects linguistic entities to the material world:

Words spoken are symbols of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are symbols of words spoken and just as letters are not the same for all men, sounds are not the same wither, although the affections directly expressed by these indications are the same for everyone, as are the things of which these impressions are images.

This statement essentially formed the basis of the Western view of writing over the centuries. Aristotle’s objective behind his statement was to educate his readers regarding the complicated relationship between objects, ideas and words. It was the way of introducing logical thinking. Aristotle describes writing as a form of signs representing vocal speech. He viewed writing as dependant on speech and can only be investigated through the investigation of speech. Some believe that this earlier understanding of writing came about

because of the nature of the Greek alphabet, which was phonetically formed and therefore connected writing systems directly with speech. Powell (2012) agrees with Aristotle in terms of writing being interrelated to speech and other things such as religion and ideas and artistic expression. Though even before the alphabet, there were other forms of writing like markings in caves and pictography, such as the in the Egyptian scripts, therefore the means for communication can be generally called “graphic”. As Olson says, “The invention of writing systems provides a graphic means of communication, but then as it is verbalized ... it is viewed as a model of verbalization” (1996, p. 14). However, “verbalization” occurs and disappears with time, whereas writing has the ability to be mortal - if the means by which it is kept, can survive the test of time - and retrieved as it was originally conceived. Daniels and Bright (1996, p. 3) describe writing as, “a system of more or less permanent marks used to represent an utterance in such a way that it be recovered more or less exactly without the intervention of the utterer”. Coulmas (1999, p. 560) adds to this description by adding the word “tactile signs” which are:

[...] used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtue of which its units are encoded in the writing system.

Fischer (2001, p. 12) does not share the same concept of writing, he argues that not all writing systems can be considered writing. He defends his arguments by providing a criterion that “complete writing” systems should fulfil. Firstly, it must have its purpose as communication, consists of graphic marks, and relates to conventional or articulate speech. Sampson also discusses the definition of writing specifying how communication should occur, “What is writing? To ‘write’ might be defined, at first approximation, as: to communicate relatively

specific ideas by means of permanent, visible marks” (2015, p. 26). In Sampson’s (2015) definition the word “permanent” is used to describe writing because sign language is not included in his definition, as it would not be considered writing. In addition, the word “specific” means that though thoughts used in drawings and paintings are visible mediums and express thoughts, they are not examples of writings. Sampson (2015, p. 26) admits that to define writing can be problematic. He adds to his definition that communication should be in a “conventional manner”, that a script may be read if indeed the reader learns the conventions in order to interpret and read it. However, that also can be problematic, because “a script is a device ... representing a language (rather than a language itself)”. Sampson (2015, p. 27) states “[t]he proper definition for writing is that it is a system wherein it represents utterances of a spoken language by means of permanent visible marks”. He calls this definition “problematic” too, because written language is not only a transcription of spoken language; meaning not only used as dictation, but also the rules by which govern both writing and speaking have their small differences. For instance, contracted forms found in “don’t”, “I’ve”, and “he’s”, are written in full form in English as “do not”, “I have”, and “he is”. The same concept is present in the Arabic language wherein the spoken words when written are not the same, and be considered incorrect to write down. In China, the differences are even more extreme in that the language used for written communication is not what is used in spoken language, so a document that is read out loud is most likely not to be understood without consulting the written text (Sampson, 2015, p. 27).

2.2.3 The relationship between writing and speaking

Writing has often been seen as subordinate to speaking, or essentially viewed as just the same as speaking (Olson, 1993). The relationship between spoken and written language has been of interest in various fields, including, anthropology, psychology and education as well as in linguistics. Coulmas (2003, p. 1) points out six key distinctions between writing and speech (see Figure 2).

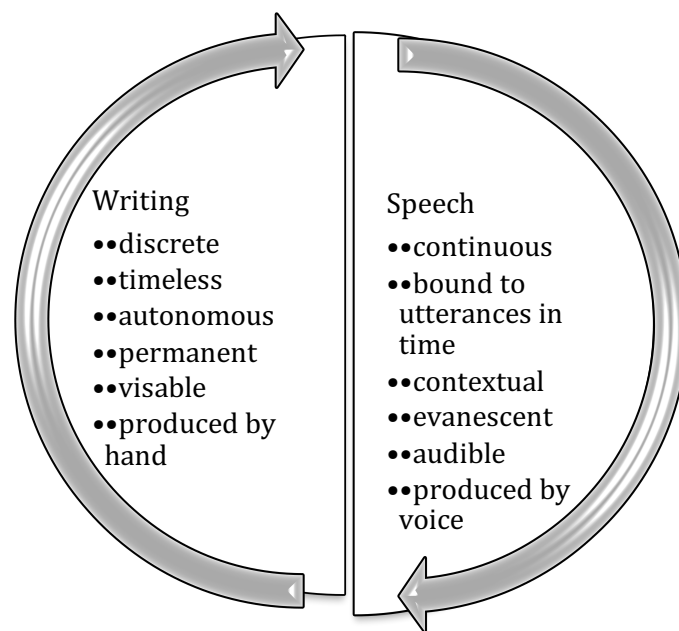


Figure 2: Differences between writing and speaking (adapted from Coulmas, 2003)

Coulmas (2003, p. 1) describes the relationship between writing and speaking through six points. Firstly, writing is disconnected and isolated, meaning that unlike speech where one talks continuously without stopping for punctuation (because the intonation, gesture and facial expressions are present), writing is carefully designed to make sense to the reader. Ideas are organized in a logical manner, whereas when speaking these are more random. Secondly, writing can be preserved over long periods, whereas speech exists for the limited time of

when the word is spoken. Thirdly, writing is autonomous rather than contextual. Context in writing must be gleaned through its medium, topic and audience, etc., the common culture that both the writer and reader share. Fourthly, speaking is brief and temporary, whereas writing is a permanent static object. Writing becomes an object, a physical artefact. It differs from speech in that it is objectified by separating the knower who is the writer from the knowledge. Fifthly, the ways in which we understand writing and speech differ in the senses we utilize. With speech, we hear it, and in writing, we see it. Lastly, both are produced differently: we use our hands to produce writing, and our voice to produce speech Coulmas (2003, p. 1).

Chafe points out one evident difference between writing and speech: “writing is a slow, deliberate, editable process, whereas speaking is done on the fly” (1985, p. 105). Whilst writing shares many similar speech components such as vocabulary, grammar and semantics, it differs from speech in that it contains signs related to the associated language. Using these signs, writing can be recorded and preserved over time, in words, sentences, and texts which convey meaning to the reader. This communicative potential of writing lies between the intersection of the two main domains of human perception: visual (iconic) and auditory (symbolic) (Robertson, 2004, pp. 19-20). Iconic refers the visual representation of language meaning where the symbolic denotes what it resembles or what it stands for. Robertson (2004) differentiates between spoken language as predominantly symbolic, whereas writing can be partly symbolic, but for the most part is iconic. (Lock & Gers, 2012, p. 11) argue that in order for writing to be created, both iconic and symbolic systems must be in place. This means that the phonetic alphabets are the representation of auditory sounds and also visual depiction of sounds (Robertson, 2004).

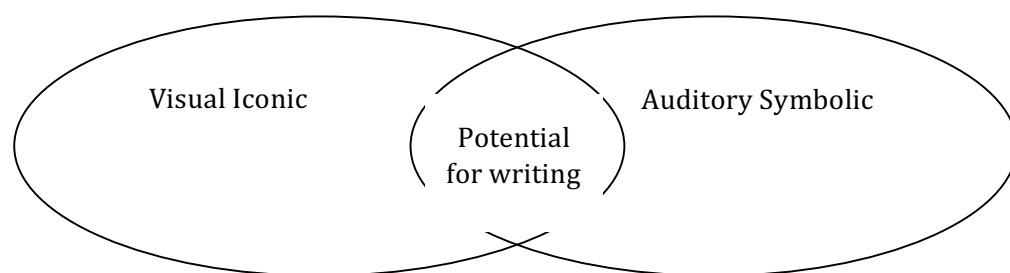


Figure 3: Intersection between visual and auditory perception adopted from Robertson (2004, p. 19)

On the other hand, Olson (1996, pp. 67-68) argues that writing systems were not created to represent speech but to communicate information, therefore the relationship between speech and writing is an indirect relationship. Olson suggests that the evolution of writing was not about language and its written structures, such as words and sentences, but rather about the ways by which we communicate our thoughts.

One of the differences between spoken and written language is the notion of “idea units”, as Chafe (1985, p. 113) puts it. Idea units refer to the spoken idea articulated within a few seconds. The length of the idea unit is considerably shorter than in the written language presumably because the writer has more time to pack information, whereas the speaker must produce on the spot information. The speaker’s consciousness can only have a certain focused amount of information in a limited space at a certain time. Writing, on the other hand, is produced more slowly in comparison to speaking. We have more time to linger over a large amount of information when we want to convey our thoughts. Also in terms of time, speaking language disappears almost as soon as it is produced, however, written language can be preserved as “a static object” (Chafe, 1985, pp. 113-122). It is therefore assumed that written language has a less tendency to change than the speaking language, or

at least it takes more time for changes to occur. In addition, the speaker is usually facing his/her audience and the involvement is present between speaker and listener. This is lacking in written language. In terms of the reliability of the knowledge communicated, when speaking, the speaker relies on knowledge induction whereas the writer has the time for “hypothesis formation and induction” (Chafe, 1985, pp. 113- 122).

On another note, Grabe and Kaplan (2014) have distinguished between writing and speaking in terms of “When and where” (p. 212). They argue that the concept of time and place differs from when writing and speaking:

The immediate situation of language use in speaking is of critical importance in determining the purpose of speaking and interpreting specific language use. The context of ‘here and now’ appears to be much less important to a theory of writing...these parameters play a much smaller and less consistent role as factors which contribute independently to written discourse. (ibid)

However, one could argue that even when writing the time and place a role towards the purpose of writing, whether it be writing a note for a specific time, or writing a history book for a particular era. Writing also can be said to take into the consideration where the writing discourse is written meaning the context by which it is composed.

2.3 Learning to write in another language

Second language writing can be defined simply as “writing done in a language other than the writer’s native language(s)/mother tongue(s)” (Silva, 1990, p. 19). Second language writing systems refers to systems other than those learned during the process of first language acquisition. The learning of a second language writing system is one of the key aspects of this study of Saudi

learners of English. In particular, writing systems require awareness of different linguistic units, such as an English learner learning Japanese language needs to be introduced to syllables and characters, whereas a learner of Italian or English needs to be introduced to phonemes and words, a learner of Arabic to consonants, and so forth. Discrepancies between two language systems can often play a role in the way a learner learns a second language writing system. Research and common sense suggest that the more similar the writing systems of the first language/s (L1) and second language/s (L2), the less time learners need to develop encoding and decoding skills (Odlin, 1989, p. 125).

Cook and Bassetti (2005) indicate that second language writing system (L2WS) users demonstrate differences from first language writing system (L1WS) users because of the effect of the other writing system that they already know. They outline the effect in the areas such as reading, metalinguistic – referring to the cognitive ability to transfer of linguistic knowledge across languages – and writing. In terms of writing, most studies conducted are on the effect of spelling of L1WS on L2WS and less on other orthographic conventions such as capitalization, punctuation, etc. In terms of the effect of spelling, users of L1WS of various writing systems that use the Roman alphabet had produced more spelling errors than L1WS of other writing systems such as Chinese, Japanese and Arabic (Cook and Bassetti, 2005, p. 41). Apart from spelling, other difficulties may be faced in learning a second language system. For instance, Arabic learners who are learning English may face challenges in terms of writing from right to left as opposed to left to right. Another aspect that may cause confusion is the level of phonological transparency between both languages. These writing differences play a role in terms of transfer when learning to write. Cook and Bassetti (2005) point out

that if the first language (L1) and second language (L2) hold similar linguistic units, reading becomes more beneficial for the learner. They are able to read faster and are able to encode the language more vastly. However, Arabic speaking learners need more time encoding the phonological passage in English. Secondly, learners need to recognize and distinguish between the letters and character shapes. Thirdly, learners need to learn the phonological sounds of the alphabet and the rules that govern the sounds of certain letters together. Fourthly, learners need to learn the forms and functions of language, for instances the written genres for certain purposes, such as a business email, or how to write a proposal, and so on. Fifthly, learners need to know to spell words. Sixthly, the use of punctuation and other typographic use of writing differs across language, and therefore learners need to be able to differentiate between the usages of certain typographic marks across languages.

In the past two decades, transfers of linguistic knowledge from L1 to the L2 have had many studies in the area of language acquisition. This came along with the evolution in the field of English for Academic purposes (EAP). We learn to write through applying writing skills from one situation to another that needs an act of writing. Therefore, transfer “involves the movement of knowledge and skills from one place to another” (Manchón & Matsuda, 2016, p. 52) . Scholars of linguistics such as Cohen and Brooks- Carson (2001) have interpreted the role of L1 transfer as a repertoire of strategies that L2 learners use during L2 acquisition. Other scholars such as Faerch and Kasper (1987) argue that transfer is a mental and communicative process by which L2 learners develop by activating previous linguistic knowledge.

Faerch and Kasper (1987) identified three types of transfer: the first is that strategic transfer wherein learners focus their attention on a

communicative problem and its solution. The second is called subsidiary transfer wherein there is no awareness of the problem, and the last type is automatic transfer by which when the learners make use of an L1 in an automatic manner. In L2 writing, transfer can be used as a learning device and as a strategy for communication obstacles. Odlin (1989, p. 36), adds “negative transfer”, wherein learners “underproduce” examples of the L2 language structure, a learner may avoid to produce. On the other hand, learners may “overproduce” which can be a result of the former negative transfer under-producing, whereby a learner avoids using a particular structure and instead overuses another. For instance, Japanese students may avoid relative clauses and instead use simple sentences (Oldin, 1989, p. 37). Oldin (1989) points out that writing strategies that are similar in L1 and L2 such as planning, and editing, can be used when coming writing in L2. Transfer can also be used to compensate for their lack of knowledge in L2. There have been numerous studies comparing L1 English essays and ESL essays written by different L1 learners to investigate L1-L2 transfer of cultural rhetorical patterns (Kaplan, 1966). For instance, Olsen and Huckin (1990) compared ESL tests written by four language groups; English, Arabic, Spanish and Japanese. His results indicated that there were rhetorical differences and he concluded that ESL learners write according to their preferred styles in their own cultures. This also corresponds with other studies, such as Oi (1984) and Kobayashi (1984) who both examined Japanese students writing in Japanese and compared it with Japanese students learning English. Both sets of writing from the groups confirmed transfer of L1 to L2 based on rhetorical pattern, and lexical features. Benahnia (2016) that for learners from an L1 Arabic background find it difficult to adapt to the linguistic, meta-linguistic, cross-cultural differences,

and to the complexities of the English language syntax and grammar (Benahnia, 2016). Indeed, for some learners, these problems may persist throughout their learning stages and therefore may seriously impede their progress in L2 acquisition and proficiency (Benahnia, 2016, p. 267).

2.4 Key approaches to second language (L2) writing instruction

In light of the above, there has been much research investigating different approaches to teaching writing for second language learners. In this section, I discuss five of the key pedagogical approaches which have been elucidated in the literature on second language writing: (i) writing as a product, (ii) writing as a process, (iii) the genre approach to teaching writing, (iv) the reader-oriented approach to writing and (v) free writing.

2.4.1 Writing as a product

Viewing writing as a product places emphasis on the text that is produced. In general, terms, a text can be both spoken and written language. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 3) text “refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language; we can characterize text as language functioning in context”. For the purpose of this section, text here is understood to be written language. Essentially, the meaning of the text is derived from the words, not the minds of the writer and/or the reader. This approach is also referred to as the form-dominated approach, one of the dominant approaches in the 1960s (Raimes, 1991). The perception is that form precedes meaning, which in turn reinforces a narrow perception of the writing function (Zamel, 1987). In this approach, both teachers and learners

treat writing as an application of grammatical rules, where the focus is solely on the correctness of linguistic features rather than content (Ried, 1984). Susser (1994, p. 36) describes this type of writing “as grammar instruction, with the emphasis on controlled composition, correction of product, and correct form over expression of ideas”. Hyland (2015, p. 4) describes writing in this view as “disembodied”. This means that the context, and any personal experiences of the writers and/or readers is not in any way connected to the text, because given the right skills, the text can be decoded and understood. This type of perspective views the writer as passively following the rules of grammar. Because the focus is on form, the improvement of writing is measured by the increase of writing features, such as relative clauses, modality, or whatever writing features the assessor is measuring. With the view of text being seen as “autonomous objects” the meaning of the text is to be understood as the same by all readers; because the same words are used, therefore we all see things the same way. Hyland (2015, pp. 4-5), however, points out that this cannot be attained because it ignores the writers’ response to various communicative settings. Each text responds to a relationship between the writer and the reader, but this view of text ignores this and instead views writing as independent fragments of words that hold a universal meaning to all who can encode it. Zamel (1987, p. 700) explains the role of the teacher when emphasis is placed on written accuracy rather than fluency:

[...] they attend to surface-level features of writing, and [...] they seem to read and react to a text as a series of separate pieces at the sentence level or even clause level, rather than as a whole unit of discourse. In fact they are so distracted by language-related problems that they often correct these without realising that there is a much larger, meaning-related problem that they failed to address.

The emphasis when teaching writing from this view is that language consists of sets of grammatical features. Writing is viewed as a way to demonstrate grammatical knowledge of the language, vocabulary, cohesive devices, and syntactic knowledge. Through writing learners need to demonstrate their understanding through constructing sentences that showcase their knowledge of the language. Therefore, it is considered “an extension of grammar teaching” (Hyland, 2015, p. 146). Typical teaching materials used would be “fill in the blanks” exercises, or carefully guided compositions, such as providing “wh-” questions. The teacher focuses on verb tenses, writing mechanics such as capitalization and punctuation. Lessons revolve around activities such as practicing a certain tense by writing in a particular topic. The aim is to test their grammatical use of tenses not writing on a certain topic. Therefore, the focus is on linguistic knowledge and not the formation of ideas. In fact, formation and organization of ideas are irrelevant as long as the writing is linguistically correct.

Hyland (2015, pp.146-147) identifies this approach to writing as a product that consists of four stages. The first is “familiarisation” wherein the learner is taught specific grammatical rules and vocabulary items through text such as a composition or article. The second stage is “controlled writing” and in this stage the learner practices what he/she learned in the first stage through exercise such as fill in the blanks and/or multiple choices. This is to allow the learner to use the learnt patterns merely in a controlled exercise. The third stage is “guided writing” whereby the learner imitates a given text. Finally, in the “free writing” stage the learner uses the language patterns taught in the previous stages to create their own piece of writing such as an essay.

As this approach to second language writing instruction has little to do with authentic communication, it means that assessing writing is invalid but reliable. It is invalid because it does not test whether learners are able to communicate according to the purpose and genre. On the other hand, it is considered reliable because the assessment on grammatical structures, vocabulary choices, and writing mechanics is easy to count, score, predict and so forth. The teacher's role therefore shifts from being a writing instructor to an examiner who perceives texts as a means of demonstrating linguistic skill rather than as a mean of expression of ideas (Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992), and written tests as an application of such rules.

2.4.2 Writing as a process

The process approach to writing is a writer-focused approach that centres on the writer in terms of how he or she composes a piece of writing, in other In the early 1980s, there was a shift in paradigm moving from the product-oriented view of writing to focus on the cognitive actions that occur when writing with the emergence of Flower and Hayes' (1981) process model of writing. They identify writing as a mental process by which the writer shifts from different stages when writing. They placed the "cognitive action in a hierarchical format that reflected the recursive nature of writing" (Becker, 2006, p. 25) such as generating or planning, translating, and reviewing. In this model, they distinguish between the three major elements: the task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing process. This approach came along to challenge the previous product approach to writing as it challenges its "traditional practice of teaching writing according to reductionist and mechanistic models" (Lockhart & Ng, 1995, p. 606). The

drive behind this shift of interest lies in its pedagogical orientation (De Larios, Murphy, & Marin, 2002). Writer focused teaching frameworks focus on the writer, he/her background, cognitive process, aspects that effect his/her writing, such as motivation, anxiety, and whether its writing in the first or second language as this will affect the way the compose their writing. Zamel (1976) was the first to introduce writing as a process to second language studies (Matsuda, 2003). The process approach emerged due to the fact that there was a lack of an approach that adequately fostered thought and expression. The existing approaches were controlled composition, and traditional rhetorical approaches which were product-based (Silva, 1987). Writing was mainly taught via features of the text, for example writing systems, sentence-level, structure, discourse-level structure and the effect of L1 on L2 writing texts (Kroll, 2003). At this time an obvious shift was being made by the way writing was perceived. Instead of the attention focused on the writing itself, the way writing was composed, the processes the writes does to compose a text was a means of focus. The writing process approach is one of the most well-known approaches used in English language teaching (Hyland, 2003). The process movement sprung from a pedagogical need (De Larios et al., 2002, p. 11). It originated from the concept that in order for a teaching methodology to be successful, it must be based on what the writer's processes when composing a text (De Larios et al., 2002, p. 12).The theory was that for writers to produce better texts, the teacher must identify the process the learner goes through in composing a text.

For the cognitivists, the word “process” referred to the mental operations writers use when they are trying to generate, express and refine ideas in order to produce a text (Faigley, 1986). The process approach focuses

on the process of writing unlike others, which focuses on the final written product. Zamel identifies writing as the discovery of meaning, since most writers do not know what they are going to write about. Zamel describes it, “the composing process was seen as a non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (1983, p. 165). Therefore, the perception of process meant developing the organization of both ideas and meaning by which writing strategies also became a prominent role in the development of second language writing, such as invention strategies, drafts, and brainstorming.

The task environment includes elements that are “outside the writer’s skin, starting with the rhetorical problem or assignment and eventually including the growing text itself” (Flower & Hayes, 1981, p. 369), consisting of the reader (audience), description of the topic, and the written piece under process. The writer’s long-term memory is where the writer stores knowledge of the topic, the audience, and writing plans. Thirdly, the writing process (described as writing strategies) entails planning, translating either from L1 or simply putting ideas on paper and reviewing.

One of the main differences between the approaches described, by Zamel and Flower and Hayes, is that Zamel perceives writing as a non-linear, exploratory and developing process, whereby writers discover and modify their ideas as they try to make meaning, whereas Flower and Hayes perceive writing as a linear process. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) expanded the evaluation and revision process that was earlier suggested by Flower and Hayes “by developing a compare, diagnose and operate (CDO) planning stage” (Becker, 2006, p. 26). They distinguished between both models: a knowledge-telling model and a knowledge-transforming model suggest that there is a clear

distinction between both types of writers in the way they cognitively process their writing.

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) describe the knowledge-telling model as a model related to the novice writers. They report that novice writers lack in processes such as planning and revising rather than with the content knowledge of their given assignment. On the other hand the knowledge-transforming model, Bereiter and Scardamalia describe their writers as being able to set goals for themselves, resolve any problems with the assigned task whether it is in the form, structure, style or organization. They were able to sum up the differences between experts and novices by contrasting between the knowledge-telling model of writing and the knowledge-transforming model of writing. The development of ideas during writing depends on the extent to which this retrieval of content is strategically controlled to achieve the writing rhetorical goals assigned. Novice writers, on the other hand, apply a knowledge-telling strategy wherein direct retrieval of content is stored in their long term memory and is produced when composing texts.

The process model is a goal-targeted approach to teaching writing focusing on specific processes in order to reach the desired well-structured writing. The fundamental principles of this approach are the cognitive processes the writer goes through in order to compose a piece of writing. In this model, the teacher draws learners' attention to a series of steps that they need to go through in a non-prescriptive way (see Figure 4).

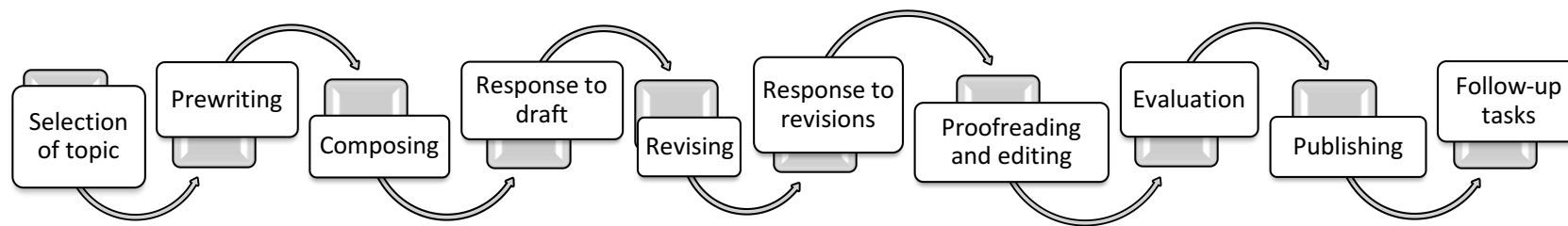


Figure 4: A process Model of Writing Instruction (adapted from Hyland, 2003, p. 11)

The important aspect of this approach is that the steps should not be considered as a rigid procedure. One may go back to process two or three as needed. The advantage of this approach is that teachers can teach learners where to start in their writing. The writing steps are defined so as to give a sense of direction to the writer. The role of the teacher is to guide and facilitate learners while teaching them different strategies to generate, draft and finally refine ideas. The teacher plays a less controlling role than the in the product-based approach to teaching writing. The teacher is non-directive and facilitates writers to generate and formulate their own ideas, assisting them in expressing their thoughts in a supportive and co-operative atmosphere (Zamel, 1983, Reid, 1994). As Zamel (1983, p. 182) puts it “intervening throughout the process sets up a dynamic relationship which gives writers the opportunity to tell their readers what they mean to say before these writers are told what they ought to have done”. It features two main principles “awareness and intervention” (Susser, 1994, p. 34). The student is aware that writing is a complex recursive process of formulating meaning through ideas and is not just a transcription of linguistic units to test grammatical features.

The product and process approaches have both been criticized for telling writers what writing should be like rather than seeing writing as a social act that highlights its complexity. Context and culture play a role in the way writing is produced and how it is produced. Clark and Ivanič (1997, p. 67) argue that the “context of situation” meaning “the immediate environment in which the text is actually functioning” (Meyer, Halliday, & Hasan, 1991, p. 46) along with the “context of culture” wherein the social and historical context is where language is used (Clark and Ivanič, 1997, p. 67).

2.4.3 The genre approach to writing

Genres are ways by which a text can be seen as belonging to specific domains.

Genre “refers to spoken and written contexts for language use, in which our expectations for the kinds of discourse that occur are shaped by our knowledge of the types of conventions in place for that type of discourse, that is, genre conventions” (Dean, 2008). The fundamental tenet of genre is that “we don’t just write, we write something to achieve some purpose” (Hyland, 2003, p. 18; 2004, p. 4). Martin (1992) defines genre as a goal focused because they focus on achieving specific purposes. These moves and stages within a genre are communicated and unique to different cultures. This is to help readers of that culture to relate and understand the message communicated in writing.

Genres are communicating actions that writers need to learn in order to achieve their purpose in the discourse community (Hyland, 2015, p. 148).

Discourse community has been widely researched by John Swales (1990). He defines it as being a set of common goals shared among a community wherein its members share the same mechanisms of writing. Writing genre is based on a systemic functional theory developed by Halliday (1978, 1994). For instance, writing an essay in English is very different from writing in Arabic. While in English writing is straight to the point, yet in Arabic, there tends to be a large introduction only to reach to the point towards the end of the essay. Therefore, writers need to understand these differences in order for them to achieve their purposes in writing. There are many advantages for students learning through a genre based writing pedagogy, especially for students who have very specific

objectives in learning a particular type of writing. This type of pedagogy teaches the learners explicitly the writing moves that need to be achieved in order for their writing to be communicating to the targeted discourse community. This approach acknowledges writing as a means of communication rather than just linguistic units as the previous outlook on writing. Texts have a certain type of patterns of organization with certain linguistic features and they function as units to communicate. This can be in a form of single words, or sentences which hold the conventional pattern of organization. The goal of the genre approach is to communicate with the reader, the audience. Learners can achieve this by being introduced to the conventions of writing, the organization of texts, and generally understanding what is expected from them. It differs from other approaches in writing in that it integrates discourse and contextual aspects of language use that can be neglected when attending structure, functions, or processes alone (ibid: 18). The genre approach to teaching writing to students is therefore close to the writing process approach in that it teaches writing through a series of stages. These stages are flexible, and form a cycle. The “learning-teaching cycle” encompasses three stages; modelling a text, joint construction of a text, and independent construction of a text (Firkins, Forey, & Sengupta, 2007, p. 343). Brookes and Grundy (Brookes & Grundy, 1990) have elaborated on these three stages. The first stage is the reading stage. An awareness of the generic structure of the texts read will have a positive effect on future writing. The second is the immediate planning stage (Brookes & Grundy, 1990, p. 28) where the findings of genre analysis will help writers grasp what is expected in the genre they are proposing to write. The third stage is the draft stage in which an awareness of genre conventions will help in the ordering and re-ordering of text.

The ultimate goal is to manoeuvre responsibility from teacher to student, so that the learners can take hold of their own learning process achieving autonomy in learning. This approach “pulls together language, content and context, offering teachers a means of presenting students with explicit and systematic explanations of the way writing works to communicate” (Hyland, 2004, p. 6). Writing is explored according to the learners’ objectives, proficiency, context, and the reasons why they want to write (ibid: 6). However, this approach does have disadvantages. Even though this approach seems well suited for English language learners, especially those with low proficiency levels, because it provides a kind of format for writing in different genres, it may limit the learner’s ability to think outside the box. In other words, if taken too far by the teacher, the moves of writing can become “over-prescriptive” (Dudley-Evans, 1995, p. 155). This may limit the learners’ understanding of genre. It is the teachers’ role to make students aware that moves may vary and linguistic form may differ. This approach has its shortcomings, it is nevertheless a starting point for students to understand how writing is shaped, and helps them to build up enough confidence to explore eventually variations in moves and linguistic forms.

2.4.4 Reader-oriented approach to writing

Writing with the reader in mind means that one must write in a way that the reader can easily read and predict the text. Writing is considered social as its communication is between the writer and reader. Language, in this case, is viewed as a social process as Meyer et al. (1991, p. 1) puts it, “[l]anguage arises in the life of the individual through an ongoing exchange of meanings with significant

others". This description concentrates on the writer's immediate context, and how it affects the writer and consequently, writing. The means of communication is purposeful and according to its purpose, writing is composed in a particular way that it is familiar to the targeted reader. Prior (2006) has identified that the sociocultural theories be the dominant paradigm for research in the area of writing. This view is also reflected in Light's (2002, p. 263) understanding of learners' writing which should be "socially constituted". Hamp-Lyone and Kroll (1997, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 19) defines writing from this perspective as "[...] an act of that takes place within a context, that accomplishes a particular purpose, and that is appropriately shaped for its intended audience". Hayes (1996, p. 5, cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 19) goes on to say:

[Writing] is also social because it is a social artefact and is carried out in a social setting. What we write, how we write, and who we write to is shaped by social convention and by our history of social interaction. . . The genres in which we write often reflect phrases earlier writers have written.

Writing from a social interaction point view sees writing as an interaction with the reader. The reader has expectations as in what he/she will read about, and the writer meets these expectations. The notion that writing is the same as a regular conversation moves away from the stereotype of notion of writing (Hyland, 2015, p. 22). Meaning between the writer and reader is negotiated through a discourse that is familiar to both sides. However, this is a difficult concept to digest for writers. Writers may predict their immediate audience; those that share a similar discourse, but not if it is a larger audience, then it can become somewhat difficult. For a writer to predict the rhetoric steps, the appropriate stance and genre for a text

can be a challenge when the audience is varied like audiences from various cultures where these aspects are diverse. Moreover, as Hyland (2015, p. 23) points out that the concept of audience is a debatable issue since it merely imagined by the write in the way the writers' linguistic choices. In this case, teaching learners through this approach, may require the teacher to familiarize himself/herself with the discourse community the learners are writing to. Course such as English for specific purposes, English for business; English for science tackle this arena. In this approach, the teacher may provide examples of different genres used in a specific area to familiarize the learners with how the text follows its rhetorical moves. The main objective of this approach to communicate clearly to the reader, and this is ultimately achieved through the vision that writing is a social act.

2.4.5 Free-writing approach

The focus in the free-writing approach is on the writer. Writing here is viewed as “a creative act of discovery”, and of “sharing personal meanings” (Hyland, 2003, p. 9). This approach is also called “expressivism”. Under the concept of personal expression, free writing teaching approach allows the student to explore their own ideas and find their own voices. It is not just a tool to exhibit learning (Raimes, 1986). The free-writing approach according to Raimes' (1983) relies on quantity rather than quality.

This approach focuses entirely on the student. The topics and ideas come from the students. It is the teacher's role to guide and assist students in finding their opinions and self-expression. Error correction is kept to a minimum. Raimes (1983) suggests that teachers encourage students to write freely on a topic for a

short duration. Even though it might pose as a challenge at the beginning, it is expected that gradually learners will become to write more fluently. The teacher's role is to comment on the content in the class and not correct them. It is an indirect approach to teaching as grammatical forms and genres are not taught to the learners. Therefore, in this approach "writing is learnt, not taught" (Hyland, 2015, p. 154). It is learnt through the processes the writer him/herself goes through to form meaning to communicate to the reader. The teacher would need to be creative herself in order to assist the writers to be creative. This approach does not have a model for teaching writing. There are no set forms or criteria that need to be taught. The teacher aids the writers on a needs basis.

There are some suggested guidelines for teachers conducting free writing with their students. Since it is aimed to acquire new knowledge and/or to arrange and manage existing knowledge in innovative ways (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004), they become strategies for learners to achieve better writing. Ferris and Hedgcock (2004) advise that when conducting freewriting to limit the duration to a short session ranging from three to five minutes, so that the writer can focus better on the aimed topic, and on the goal set for the writing. Because this type of writing is aimed to provoke ideas and thoughts, it is not recommended that teacher correct the writing samples

2.5 Studies on second language writing in Saudi Arabia

In this section, I explore the findings of relevant studies conducted in the field of writing in Saudi Arabia. The studies are grouped according to research topic: (i) the effect of Arabic L1 on English L2 writing, (ii) writing errors made by Saudi

learners, (iii) feedback in English writing classes, (iv) the use of technology, and (v) social media in writing.

2.5.1 The effect of Arabic L1 on English L2 writing

In the early nineties, a study was conducted on Arabic speaking learners by Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994). They conducted a study on sixty-two students in the Department of English and Translation in Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University. The study tackles the intelligibility of argumentative writing by Saudi students. They devised an evaluation and assessment sheet. Three raters rated the pieces of writing; two were researchers of writing and the third was a specialist in English literature. Results were then discussed in quantitative terms. The study highlights some of the difficulties Arabs face when writing in English. Arab writers tend to emphasis on the technicalities and formalities of writing rather than what the text communicates. Arab writers tend to concentrate on linguistic theories when writing rather than on writing at a discourse level. This could be because there is a lack of professional teachers who can assist students on how to approach topics. It could also be because the topics are irrelevant to students. The study suggests that it could be a lack of motivation and interest. The fact that there is limited exposure to authentic English can contribute to their low proficiency levels. In addition, the differences between Arabic and English rhetoric and the nature of writing as a skill can contribute to the complexity attributed to the difficulty found by Arab writes. Furthermore, the differences between the Arabic and western cultures (Al-Haq and Ahmed, 1994) is reflected in the way writing is composed. Although this study is conducted in the early nineties, it is ahead of its

time in the conclusions that put forward, and correlates with other recent studies.

This study is quantitative in its approach and does not give any evidence based insights as to why Saudi learners write the way they do and this is an area not yet explored in the literature regarding Saudi English language learners.

Writing for native speakers of English is a taught skill and is not simply acquired because they are natives in the English language. However, writing in English for non-native speakers can complicate the process because they had already acquired a particular type of contrastive rhetoric that mirrors their culture. When a non-native comes to write in English, the culture of what was learnt transfers to the English writing. Kaplan (1966, p. 2) points out that rhetoric varies from culture to culture. Studies are scarce on the cultural effect of L1 writing on L2 writing (Rass, 2011, p. 206). Rass suggests that Arabic speakers usually fail to think of their readers as result of such cultural transfer (2011, p. 206). In Arabic written rhetoric, writers write at length and indirectly. The writer keeps the reader guessing about what he/she is getting to, rather than stating the point obviously or at the beginning, as is typical in English language rhetoric. Like previous studies there have been no attempts to rectify the way Arabic speakers think about writing in English. This is a gap in the literature and this study comes to shed some light on it.

2.5.2 Writing errors made by Saudi learners

Alhaisoni, Al-Zoud and Gaudel (2015) conducted an analysis of spelling errors of Saudi Beginner learners of English enrolled in an intensive English language program during the students' preparatory year at the University of Ha'il. The aim

of the study was to identify deviant forms, analyzing and classifying spelling error through the participants' writing samples, and establishing a frequency count of the errors and its sources. A total of 122 participants, both males and females were given an hour and half to write on one of four familiar topics. Errors were classified into four categories using Cook's Classification (1999): omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition. The study found that spelling errors were made because of differences between the articulation of English words and the actual spelling of these words, and the differences between Arabic and English language systems. The most frequent errors were those of omission wherein the learners struggled with silent vowels and this is because they faced difficulty with their articulation of the words. The same occurred with substitution errors, wherein again learners struggled with the substitution of vowels. The Arabic language interference was detected to affect the learners' spelling errors but it also meant that when the learners were able to recall the articulation of the word and the words are written exactly how they are articulated (Alhaisoni et al., 2015).

The shortage of time dedicated to teaching writing seemed to be among the challenges that are faced by instructors in the Saudi context. In Javid, and Umer's (2014) study, who sought out to find the writing problems Saudi EFL learners face with writing, a total of 194 participated both males and females via questionnaires answered. The study highlighted that learners faced serious problems with lexical items, organization of ideas, grammar, preposition, and spelling. Javid and Umer (2014) suggest that not enough time is allotted to writing courses. The authors suggest implementing pair and group work in order to practice more. A case study by Aldera (2016) confirms the difficulty of writing for Saudi EFL learners in university. The study analysed the cohesion and coherence of eight participates

who wrote a free composition according to their undergraduate learning. The results of the study indicated that the learners were scored poorly in the areas of logical thought and organization and lacked proficiency in syntax, inter-sentence relations, cohesive devices and other advanced methods of composition (ibid). Learners displayed inadequate application of basic language and writing mechanics, and were unable to differentiate between good and bad models of English language writing.

These findings are in line with a study conducted in 2016 by Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) at Najran University. Fifty students' writing samples were randomly selected from different writing sections from their Preparatory Year Programme (PYP). Thirty questionnaires, using Likert's 5 scale (ibid), were gathered for the purpose of the study. Results indicated that students were unaware of the fact that they had problems with capitalization, punctuation, language use (grammar) and spelling. Sixty-six percent of students believed that, they had no problems in the area of punctuation and grammar and language use, and 76% believed that they had no problems in the area of capitalization. The results reveal a serious inconsistency between the students' actual writing and their beliefs about the writing. The lack of awareness on the students' part is what stands out in this study. It was observed through the results of the questionnaire that students use writing memorization techniques to pass exams. The researchers suggest that topics in such exams should be different to what is studied during the year so that students would not memorize such paragraphs. They also suggest the use of audio-visual aids in writing classes.

Hameed (2016) investigated the mechanics of writing and analysed the spelling errors made by 26 Saudi university students of varying proficiency levels.

The participants were asked to complete a dictation exercise of 50 words. The dictation included words chosen by the researcher as problematic (containing silent letters, consonant clusters, homophones, etc.). Results indicated that four types of spelling errors occurred: substitution, omission, transposition and insertions. Al-Khairi (2013) also investigated Saudi undergraduate writing errors. He examined their writing through a survey administered to 74 English majors. The study found the participants had major problems in lexical items, irregular verbs, prepositions, spelling, and punctuation. Al-Khairi (2013) attributed these problems to students' low English language proficiency, an insufficient number of language courses offered at the academic institution where the study was conducted, the teachers' lack of interest in assigning writing tasks, use of inappropriate teaching methods, insufficient opportunities to practise writing in the classroom, insufficient audio-visual facilities, and insufficient use of dictionaries.

In the above studies, the methods for gathering data are questionnaires and surveys. There has been no studies in this area – to my knowledge – that used interviews to look deeper into the other variables that effect writing errors, or low proficiency in the area of writing. There is speculation as to reasons why Saudi students commit so many writing errors such as low English language proficiency as Al-Khairi (2013) mentions, Mohammad and Haza's (2016) study along with Aldera's (2016) confirm that students lack the awareness of their own writing skills. They are unaware of their mistakes. This asserts the fact that students lack knowledge about their own writing skills, which brings me to question how they are taught writing, and what are the students view on their own learning. This is some of the questions asked in this current research. This research study comes to fill these gaps in the literature using a qualitative approach.

2.5.3 Feedback in English writing classes

In an exploratory case study, Rajab, Khan, and Elyas (2016) found three factors to be obstacles to delivering corrective feedback in writing classes: an overwhelming workload, large class sizes and a limited amount of time. One hundred and eighty four teachers of English as a foreign language (both male and female) participated in a survey and interviews aimed at identifying the teachers' perception and practices in the provision of feedback on writing. The authors note that teachers' perceptions of these issues are often invisible and disregarded in universities, only heard through such research (Rajab et.al, 2016, p. 126). This is a good example of research conducted in the Saudi context, and highlights the teachers' voices, however, the students' voices and what they need and their perception of feedback and writing classes in general is not heard. This research attempts to fill that gap. Hamouda (2011) also found that time pressure was a serious problem in correcting students' writing. In this survey study, the participants were two hundred native Arabic speakers in their preparatory university year and twenty EFL teachers who taught in the preparatory year programme. The data in study was collected via questionnaires devised to find out the students' and teachers' feelings and reactions to error written feedback for their writing pieces. Results indicated that since there are large classes, teachers were unable to correct all student mistakes. Also, because of the limited time given to the classes, teachers believed it was not feasible to provide written feedback to all students. The study also showed that feedback is not always constructive: 35% of students said they feared making more mistakes after they received feedback, and a further 30% of students were

unable to correct the mistakes given by the teacher, as the written feedback they received was not comprehensible. Hamouda (ibid.) calls for more discussion in classrooms about feedback and expectations about feedback. We also need to look at writing as a whole and what type of corrections are being made, and what are the students and teachers focusing on when teaching and correction writing.

Alqurashi (2015) explored students' perspectives on teachers' responses to their writing. Based on 86 questionnaires from students in their university preparatory year, the study found that English language learners were willing to read their written work again after their teachers commented on it. According to the researcher, this was a sign that they acknowledge the value of their teachers' written feedback on both the surface-level errors as well as meaning level errors. The use of solely questionnaires does not give a whole rounded view on how and why students and teachers focus on these errors. This could have been enhanced with face to face interviews and observations in writing classes.

2.5.4 Use of technology in writing

Saudi Arabia encourages the use of technology in education, and the Ministry of Education's ten-year plan 2004-2014 included an objective to develop the technology infrastructure in schools and universities (MoE, 2005). Using technology opens a window to the English language setting that cannot be accessed in the linguistic environment of Saudi Arabia.

Al-Jarf (2009) found that the use of technology can assist in improving writing skills through the use of mind-mapping software. Participants were divided into two groups, experimental and control. The experimental group who used the

software package responded to a post-class questionnaire about its implementation. A post-class writing test was given to both groups. The results indicated the experimental group exhibited better written production in the areas of organization and cohesion.

Allam and Elyas (2016) investigated the perceived benefits and barriers of using social media in the classroom among a group of English university teachers and whether they believed that social media could be adopted in classroom tasks. The sample population consisted of 35 male and 40 female teachers selected randomly from two different Saudi universities in two different cities. Most teachers thought that using social could be a motivating approach to teaching English writing in Saudi classrooms especially at university level, but a sizeable minority feared that the use of mobile phones with social media would be misused in the classroom (39%) and one third of respondents stated that they would not have time to incorporate use of social media in their classroom teaching.

Finally, in a recent study on the effectiveness of the WhatsApp application in developing students' writing skills, (Fattah, 2015) found that such a mobile learning technique can yield improvements. He divided his 30 participants into an experimental and control group. The control group was taught writing through the prescribed textbook, whereas the experimental group used WhatsApp to develop their writing skills. The pre- and post-test consisted of punctuating a paragraph, correcting a paragraph and writing an essay. The study highlighted significant improvements in three areas of writing: punctuation, sentence structures and generating ideas. The results demonstrated significant improvements in the participants who were in the experimental group, indicating that the use of this

technology could assist in improving some writing skills. This finding corresponds with Alsaleem's (2013) study of the use of the WhatsApp application for electronic journaling. Journaling in this research is defined as “[T]he act of a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly, etc., depending on the educational setting) over a semester, school year, or course” (Cisero, 2006, cited in Alsaleem, 2013, p. 36). Alsaleem's study was a quantitative, quasi-experimental study conducted during one English class, with 30 students randomly selected to electronically journal daily over a period of six weeks using the WhatsApp application. The participants were tested twice, once before the electronic journaling started and once after the completion of the six-week period on vocabulary choice and voice. Alsaleem (2013) suggests that the use of WhatsApp journaling may have positively affected the participants' writing skills especially in these two areas.

Ahmed (2015, p. 138) examined whether the use of Twitter had a positive impact on the writing skills of undergraduate students. This quantitative, quasi-experimental study took place over a period of eight weeks. The class was divided into a randomly selected experimental group and control group. The control group was taught using a traditional teacher-centred approach. The experimental group was asked to respond via Twitter to the instructor's questions about various articles. Answers were evaluated in terms of pertinence to the topics, grammatical and syntactical functions as well as their ideas, content, voice and style. In addition, the instructor also encouraged the participants to interact with each other via Twitter to each other's responses. Both groups were pre-tested and post-tested after they completed the eight-week period. The study showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test writing task.

The researcher observed that the control group were more conscious of their task and more inquisitive, whereas the control group showed little involvement and remained silent in class most of the time.

In the above study, we can conclude that the use of technology is a useful tool in today's classroom and specifically in writing classes. There is a need in the context of this study to make use of technology in language classes as well as writing classes to grab their attention and remain relevant to their lives. This research attempts to integrate the use of technology in the intervention phase which will be discussed in the coming chapters.

2.6 Summary

I began this chapter by introducing the development of writing and its various arrays of definitions. I discussed one of the major topics in the field of writing, which is the relationship between writing and speaking. I then moved on to discuss learning to write in another language. I approached this topic by discussing key approaches to second language instruction. These included, writing as a product, writing as a process, the genre approach to writing, reader-oriented approach to writing and finally the free writing approach. I concluded the chapter by providing an overview of studies conducted in second language writing in Saudi Arabia. This includes the effect of Arabic L1 on English L2 writing, writing errors made by Saudi learners, feedback in English writing classes, and the use of technology in writing. In doing so, I highlight the gaps in the literature and how this research attempts to investigate areas of writing that have not yet been researched in this context. In the next chapter, I discussed the design of this action research project.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I define and describe action research and consider how knowledge is viewed as constructed within this paradigm. I discuss the perceived trustworthiness of action research, the ethical issues that arise from action research and how these can be overcome. I describe action research projects in some relevant contexts before moving on to describe the context of this study.

3.2 Action research

There are different types of educational research according to the different purposes it serves, such as evaluation research, which focuses on the determining the worth or quality of intervention programmes implemented in an educational setting, or oriented research, which focuses on its attention to provide voices for those who are disadvantaged, and aim to reduce inequality (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 509). The objective behind educational research is to better the educational field, through providing a better understanding of learning and teaching processes and outcomes. Farrel (2001, p. 151) defines educational research as “an activity which involves gathering and analysing data to provide worthwhile information about, and insights into, teaching and learning and the educational settings in which they take place”. According to Farrel (2001), education research is a process involving collecting and obtaining information to present valuable discoveries into education in the areas of teaching and learning.

Action research is one form of educational research that focuses on real world questions – an approach, which dovetails with the aims of applied linguistic research investigating real world questions, related specifically to language teaching and learning. It is a form of basic research, which generates fundamental knowledge that can be shared with the larger community wherein it takes place (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 13). In the field of applied linguistics, where we aim to understand the role of language and its use in its social contexts (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015), qualitative research methods such as action research consider the context wherein language learning occurs. This approach to empirical research views language learning as a social phenomenon and considers the culture, institution, and values of the social community as key components of the research endeavour which cannot be treated or researched in the same way that physical reality or scientific subjects are researched (ibid.). Qualitative approach offers significant theoretical contributions to the field of applied linguistics (Wiersma, 1986). This project employs a qualitative approach to its data collection and analysis as an appropriate means of answering its research questions, which should allow deep insights into the challenges of Arabic L1 learners’ writing in a Saudi university context.

Action research involves two types of activities, as the term suggests. The first is the action component, doing something to make some kind of change to a specific setting, such as in a community, programme, or company. The second is the research component, conducted usually to raise understanding about a particular phenomenon. It can be particularly appropriate in an educational context, in the words of Burns (2010, p. 10), it “can be a very valuable way to extend our teaching skills and gain more understanding of ourselves as teachers, our

classrooms and our students”. Broadly speaking, action research revolves around four phases that act as a cycle of research. It is a cycle of inquiry in response to a situation or condition. (Bailey, 2001, p. 490) describes the cycle of action research as “an approach to collecting and interpreting data which involves a clear, repeated cycle of procedures”. There are usually several action research cycles that operate simultaneously with each one having different time spans. Brookfield (2014 , "Evaluating Action", para. 1) provides us with an analogy of action research cycles using the image of a clock:

The hour hand, which takes 12 hours to complete its cycle, may represent the project as a whole. In a large complex project, it may take several years to complete its cycle. The minute hand, which takes an hour to complete its cycle, may represent phases or a particular sections of the project. The second hand, which completes its cycle in a minute, may represent specific actions within the project, for an example a specific meeting or interview. As in the clock, where the revolution of the three hands are concurrent and where the revolutions of the second enable the revolutions of the minute hand, and the revolutions of the second and minute hands together enable the completion of the hour hand.

The first cycle is planning, a cycle which may be repeated several times until the researcher reaches a satisfactory outcome (Burns, 2000, pp. 7-8). During this phase, the researcher explores what problem(s) that he or she wants to address and then develops an action plan as to how to bring about improvements in a specific context. The second phase is the action or intervention phase, where a plan is carefully crafted and implemented in a deliberate intervention in the teaching situation. In this phase, researchers should be critical about their own beliefs and think “outside of the box” in order to think of multiple ways of doing things. The third phase is the observation or reflection phase. In this phase, the researcher

observes the outcome or effects of the action through documentation, taken from the implementation phase. It is where evaluation and a detailed description is given of the effects of the actions in order to draw conclusions about what happened. The aim in this final stage is to gain deeper understanding of the effect of the action/s taken.

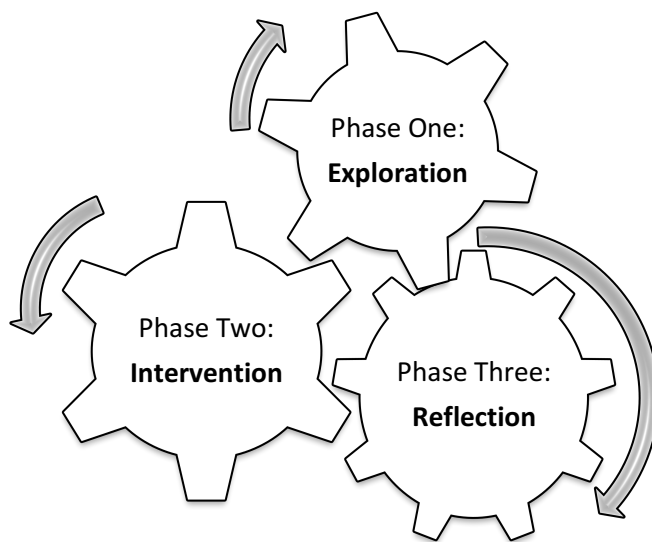


Figure 5: Three interconnected action research phases used in this project adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)

The epistemological perspective of action research links it to other action research features in that it generates knowledge by explicating the process by which knowledge was constructed and links “new knowledge with existing knowledge” (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996, p. 15). The ontological perspective adopted in the action research approach tends to be constructivist, that people construct of their own identities, and knowledge is constructed through learning experiences. McNiff (2013, p. 167) describes this knowledge as a never-ending process, and is

never complete. Unlike other research paradigms where specific questions and certain variables are carefully measured and are precisely defined, action research is an inductive type of approach. It starts with broad questions to clarify the area intended to be investigated. It asks the participants how they describe the area of inquiry and the manner by which things happen and how it affects them. Consequently, the focus is on how things are happening rather than what is happening (Stinger, 2014, p. 36). This type of research acknowledges that all elements involved in the context together provide us with a deep understanding of how situations operate and therefore allows effective remedial actions to be designed. In support of this type of research into contextualized human behavior, Stringer (2014, p. 43) elaborates:

Social reality exists as an unstable and dynamic construction that is fabricated, maintained, and modified by people during their interaction with each other and their environments. It operates according to systems of meaning embedded in each cultural context and can be understood only superficially without reference to those meanings.

Although action research is a form of qualitative research, quantitative methods may be used. However, the core of its investigation process remains qualitative. The purpose of the research is not to draw generalisations but to understand the local context and to find solutions or to support learning through understanding how the contextual elements in the classroom react to one another.

Action research involves self-reflective practice within one's own teaching/learning context. Burns (2010, p. 2) describes it as a process by which the teacher looks for an area that perhaps may need improvement. This can include anything ranging from the setting, teachers, students, or even the educational

organization as a whole. Burns (2000, p. 443) defines action research as “the application of fact-finding to practical problem-solving in a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it, involving the collaboration and cooperation of researchers, practitioners and laymen”, and describes the action research cycle whereby “a problem situation is diagnosed, remedial action planned and implemented, and its effects monitored, if improvements are to get underway” (ibid.).

The aim of this type of research is to bring about positive change by the means of intervening in a deliberate manner, unlike many other forms of research in this field. The improvement is based on the systematic data collected from the project. It can be used to either improve and develop activities and processes, or simply to understand and evaluate them. (Harmer, 2002, pp. 344-345) explains the rationale: “Action research is the name given to a series of procedures teachers can engage in either because they wish to improve aspects of their teaching, or because they wish to evaluate the success and/or appropriacy of certain activities and procedures”.

Action research (AR) projects share a number of common characteristics. As action research is therefore a process aimed at improving the quality of some aspect of the context, it is what Cohen and Manion (1985) define as “situational”. Burns (2005, p. 60) describes action research as “explicitly interventionist” and as holding a “subjective approach”, aimed to change issues that have a practical impediments in a particular situation in an educational system. McKernan (1988, p. 6) defines further characteristics of AR as a self-reflective process, by which practitioners “better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings”. It is “self-evaluative” meaning that modifications are made and recurrently evaluated

to better the performance. It offers its researchers a chance to bring about change in their practices and professions. By conducting action research, practitioners are able to learn from experience through their conscious decision to do so when reflecting on their own practices. The action research cycle is not only a research cycle but also a learning cycle. This can bring about improvement to the practice, therefore bridging the gap between practice and theory. Action research may be more difficult to do, because the researcher is the one who makes the change and in doing so takes full responsibility of any changes made. All changes need to be objectively justified. This can make the project challenging as the research has to adapt to the results the data yields. In conventional research, the literature decides your research whereas in action research the data defines the literature. Results in action research cannot be generalised on populations, its aim is not generalise or form a theoretical standpoint, but to find fixes for problems in the practice.

Edge (2001, p. 5) characterises action research through six types of orientations. The first is that action research is means-oriented. It is a means of reaching understanding in specific areas. For example, we know that we have teaching objectives regarding teaching writing to students, but how can we improve the students' writing in this course? Action research seeks to answer such questions. The second is that it is ends-oriented meaning, for instance, we know that these students want to achieve high grades, but how can they achieve a high grade? The end goal is achieving a high grade, action research aids in meeting such an end. Thirdly, action research is theory-oriented. Even though we claim to follow various writing teaching methods, but in reality what theory underlines our teaching practices in the classroom? Action research seeks to find out the theories that we encapsulate in our activities and how they reflect on the learning. Fourthly,

it is institutionally-orientated, meaning it takes the institutions regulation into account. Every element of the context is part of the study including the institutions' management even though they one may not able to make changes, but action research seeks to search to what extent are following these regulations/limitations affects teaching practices. Fifthly, action research is societally-oriented. It looks into the extent by which our community/society affects the course. Lastly, action research is teacher-oriented. Action research looks into the role the teacher plays in writing classes and how does it affect the students' learning. Burns (2000) also describes it as a "collaborative" type of research wherein practitioners are working along with the researcher. Its purpose is to seek knowledge from its participants. In doing so, it seeks to engage its participants "as equal and full participants on the research process" (Stringer, 2013, p.14). It is described as enabling the participation of all people, treating all participants with the same worth, "*liberating*" them from "*oppressive, debilitating conditions*" and "*enhancing*" their lives by providing opportunities for the targeted participants to reach their full potential (Stringer, 2014, pp. 14-15, original italics). The participatory nature of action research involves the learner's voice in research on the teaching and learning process. In fact, the learner's voice is one of the main aspects of AR. (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2012, p. 98) assert that the learner's voice is "a rewarding and insightful aspect of any enquiry", and that "all learners, regardless of age, can have useful things to say about their experiences of the institution, teaching and learning".

In action research, teachers become researchers. But, AR is also described as being "participatory" as the other actors actively play a role in the executing of the research: learners become closely involved in both teaching and learning. The

learners' voice is one of the main aspects of the AR process. Data in an AR project are collected from more than one source in order to obtain a fuller picture of the setting. Action researchers work from an ontologically constructivist perspective which understands that people create their own identities, that multiple perspectives co-exist in any given context, and that the construction of knowledge is a living process. Sometimes the view of knowledge is often conflicted as various individuals may view their experiences differently. In the classroom environment where action research is conducted, this approach involves contributions from the teacher, students and ideally a negotiation between them to form their ideal roles in order for the progress of teaching and learning practice. The role of the teacher is vital and significant in conducting action research, given their knowledge of the classroom environment, its dynamics, student abilities, and attitudes. Given the dual role of the teacher/researcher in AR, it is important to consider carefully teacher attitudes at the outset. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p. 5) argue this point:

Teaching is made up of individual teachers and these individuals all have their own personal and career histories, their own personalities, their own attitudes, values and experiences. Their views and experiences are shaped by their past, their gender, age and ethnicity.

Thus, the teacher who also plays the role of the researcher must clarify their position in AR and their criteria by which they evaluate their own teaching and in turn the practice of others (McNiff, 1988). In order to carry out AR from this standpoint, the teacher/researcher should take a step back from their own teaching to reflect and see their practice from a different angle. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p. 11) refer to "reflective teaching" as the process of investigation in an attempt to look beyond "the logic of common sense".

3.2.1 Trustworthiness of action research

Even though action research is gaining popularity in the research arena, it has been challenged if it is “a legitimate form of inquiry” (Stringer, 2014, p. 41). There are a variety of reasons why this is so. Cohen and Manion (1985) point out the main drawback in action research that it lacks what is commonly understood to be scientific rigor, related to the validity, reliability and replicability of research.

Nunan (2006) and Burns (1999) both identify that researcher faces problems when conducting action research: the teacher/researcher may find it difficult to critically reflect on their own teaching practice at the same time, and may lack expertise in carrying out such a project. There can be also difficulties in identifying participants, confidentiality issues and other ethical questions related to data collection, sensitivity in reporting negative findings, and more importantly lack of support from institutional or organizational actors (for instance, attitudes such as “teachers shouldn’t do research”/”teachers aren’t qualified researchers”). I will return in particular to the aspect of conducting research in an ethical manner below.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) were the first to propose criteria for ensuring rigour in such a non-quantitative paradigm. They suggest four characteristics to ensure the rigour of research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These characteristics replace the conventional constructs of positivist research, internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Lincoln, 2004). Credibility can be promoted by being specific with every procedure in the research. Trust between the researcher and participants must be established in an AR study. The credibility of a study for its readers can be further

enhanced through triangulation, when information is extracted from a variety of sources (Stringer, 2013). Transferability can be promoted by providing a detailed description of the social setting of the study. Unlike quantitative research studies where results can be generalized, AR's objective is not to achieve generalizability. Through a focus on possible transferability, other researchers can compare a study's context and settings with other contexts and situations and decide whether the study can be transferable to their own contexts. Dependability derives from the extent to which a reader of the research can depend on the results. This can be supported through a detailed description of the steps of the AR cycle and procedures followed in the research project. Fourthly, confirmability can be achieved by analysing the data, and reflecting and reporting its findings in a way that also enables participants and other colleagues to confirm that the researcher has understood the situation under investigation. Action research is considered authentic when the researcher authentically reports participants' views offering them a better understanding of their social context (Bryman, 2004). The application of AR in itself allows the promotion of students' awareness and reflection, because the nature of its process promotes reflection on one's own experience.

3.2.2 Ethics and action research

As I have mentioned above, action research represents a participatory approach to investigating a phenomenon, with the intended outcome of possible improvements. The dual role of teacher and researcher brings possible conflicts of interest. In this kind of research, it is therefore very important to ensure that it is conducted to high

ethical standards. Miller and Brewer (2003, p. 95) define ethics in such social research as being about “creating a mutually respectful, win-win relationship in which participants are pleased to respond candidly, valid results are obtained, and the community considers the conclusions constructive”. Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 109) further emphasise the importance of embedding ethical practices in research:

Ethics is not something that you can forget once you satisfy the demands of human subjects review boards and other gatekeepers of research conduct ... rather, ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with others and with your data.

Specifically in educational research, there are essential ethical considerations to take into account. One of the main ethical concerns to be addressed when conducting research is that participants have to be clearly informed about “the purpose, aims, use of results, and likely consequences of the study” (Stringer, 2013 p. 89); in other words, it is vital to obtain the informed consent of participants. In AR, where more control is given to the participants than in other forms of research, consent is a form of agreement between the participants and the researcher (ibid, p. 90). The researcher needs to inform the participants explicitly about all the research activities and participants should be to continue to ask questions during and after the AR project has been completed. Participants should feel entirely free to decline participation in the project, and it is the researcher's duty to explain that their willingness or refusal to participate will not affect their academic achievement in any way. The same conditions should be in place for continuing involvement, where participants should be aware that they are free to

withdraw from the study at any given time. When the action researcher is also the teacher, student participants may be reluctant and uncomfortable with the fact that the researcher is also the teacher who grades them. Students may feel forced to participate because they feel if they were to refuse, it would affect their grade. Conflict of interest is therefore a key element that all action researchers must consider.

Burns (2010, p. 37) cautions action researchers about the power differences between teacher and student. When planning a project, the researcher must insure that no harm is inflicted on the participants of the research project, and precautions need to be taken in order to avoid any conflict of interest that may occur in these sorts of asymmetrical relationships where one individual holds authority over others.

3.2.3 Justification for research methodology

The choice of action research as a methodology for this study was deliberate. I was conscious of the fact that my teaching needed to be evaluated and conscious of the need to provide remedies to enhance the teaching of writing skills in ELI. In choosing this particular paradigm for this research, I looked at the philosophy underlying other educational research paradigms. In this section, I briefly review three main educational paradigms, the empirical paradigm, the interpretive paradigm, and finally the action research paradigm. The empirical paradigm is a quantitative approach that deals with facts and figures. The purpose of it is to describe and explain how specific events occur and predict what the outcome may be. Bassy (1990, p. 12) describes its objective as it:

Tries to describe, interpret and explain events while evaluative researchers describe, interpret and explain events so that they or others can make evaluative judgements about them.

The underlying philosophy is that knowledge is external to us, and exists outside so that both knowledge and the researcher are separate. The purpose of this type of research is usually to add to existing knowledge or it attempts to prove and refute a targeted hypothesis. The researcher is therefore positioned outside looking in rather than being involved in the research.

On the other hand, interpretive paradigm interprets results. This paradigm is unlike the empirical one that deals numbers and figures instead it approaches its data from a more qualitative perspective. The researcher needs to find a framework by which it will base its analysis on. The purposes of this paradigm in Bassey's (1990, p. 16) words is to:

[..] seek systematically, critically and self critically to describe and interpret phenomena, which they take to be in the same work, which they inhabit and which therefore may be disturbed when try to investigate it.

Action research is an approach under the interpretive paradigm of research that is described as providing a reflexive critique that ensures that interpretation of and judgments of the people involved in the research are accounts of truth and knowledge in a particular social setting. These truths can challenge theoretical claims (Winter, 1989). This is the type of truth this research sets out to investigate giving voices equally to both teachers and students while at the same time providing other evidences through observations, diaries and field notes. By

triangulating the data, the claims made in this research can be backed up by evidence.

3.2.4 Examples of action research in relevant contexts

Action research (AR) projects in contexts of Higher Education are relatively few. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) have elaborated on the position on AR in higher education as a “minority practice”, pointing to the fact that while there have been “a modest number”, the focus of AR projects has mainly been “community development, youth development, support for public schools” (pp. 409-410). There have been no published large-scale AR projects that aim to transform practices in higher education institutions. To my knowledge, there have been no AR projects in any Saudi university. This project will hopefully lead the way for more AR research in the field of teaching and learning in Saudi, but the lack of AR projects in higher education mean that literature is rather thin on how AR is implemented in this specific context. Nevertheless, some action research has been carried out in language teaching and learning, and in L2 writing. In this section, I discuss three action research projects conducted in Canada (McDonough and Neumann, 2015), Palestine (Dajani, 2015) and Columbia (Casallas and Castellanos, 2016). The purpose of presenting these examples is to reflect on action research projects and how they are carried out. Dajani’s (2015) project demonstrates a study on how to evaluate teacher action research projects, whereas McDonough and Neumann’s (2015), and Casallas and Castellanos’s (2016) studies are action research conducted in the field of L2 writing. In Canada, McDonough and Neumann (2015) study investigated interaction in collaborative writing during

prewriting tasks and the learners' final written texts in an English for Academic Purposes course. This study was based on the fact that communicative language teaching views collaborative learning as an essential dynamic to L2 classrooms by conducting collaborative activities. This study extracts its theory from the sociocultural theory, which views speech as a central part of the human cognitive development. Based on this, two studies were conducted by the authors. It examines the design of prewriting tasks by asking two research questions, the first is “What do English for academic purposes (EAP) students discuss during collaborative prewriting activities and (2) Is there a relationship between students’ collaborative prewriting discussions and their written tests?” (Neumann & McDonough, 2015, p. 86). The study focused on classroom discourse, and aimed to identify aspects of the students discussion that occurred while they were collaborating in various prewriting activities. It aimed to identify what learners discussed when they revised their pre-writing activities, and examines the relationship between the discussion, the learners and their definitive written texts. Participants were 19 students who were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate degree programmes in a range of fields from Engineering to Social Sciences. They had a variety of L1s including Chinese, Arabic, French, Farsi, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. Through video and audio-recordings over a period of 13 weeks, different types of collaborative activities were used in EAP classes ,and were identified. The data for the transcripts of the collaborating prewriting discussions were analysed in order to examine student talk in terms of content. The data was analysed focusing on student collaboration meaning the interactions among the students. The researcher defined these interactions as “content episodes” which is defined as “having one main idea along with any reasons or supporting details”

(Neumann & McDonough, 2015, p. 88). The transition between content episodes in these interactions occurred with students forming questions or suggestions, these were then categorised as “reflective”, or “non-reflective” episodes whereby the students either justified, evaluated or suggested alternatives to add to their discussions. The data of the study was analysed using descriptive statistics whereby demonstrated that content episodes dominated the students’ discussions specifically in non-reflective episodes possibly because of the “natural way to talk about the assigned topics” (McDonough & Neumann, 2015, p.89). Students did not reflect critically on their peers’ ideas unless strongly encouraged and prompted by the teacher. In terms of its qualitative findings, the researchers point out their non-reflective content episodes revolved around two types: the first is students nominating and acknowledging ideas without engaging in any discussion or evaluation, of the ideas proposed. The second is students sharing personal anecdotes wherein their peers would not engage or encourage the speaker to justify or explain how the experiences are related to the writing assignment. In answering the research questions, the structured prewriting tasks were found to be more effective than the natural flow of discussion among students. This led to more reflective content episodes wherein students reflected and give feedback to group members’ ideas. Findings suggest that structured collaborative prewriting tasks elicit student talk about both content and organization of their writing. The structured activities were not overwhelming challenging and were able to guide the students through their reflective thinking. In answering the second research question related to the relationship between prewriting pre-writing discussions and written text, found that more reflection during prewriting discussions did not necessarily lead to better pieces of writing. This could be because students writing

plans diverge from the original plan when they come to write (Neumann & McDonough, 2015, p. 99).

Dajani (2015) conducted an action research project in Palestine, which gathered together individual action research projects by 40 English language teachers in 30 Palestinian schools in Ramallah and Qabatya. The purpose of the research was to analyse the outcomes of the teachers' action research projects as part of a larger participatory action research project. An action research methodology was selected in this context because teachers in Palestine lack the opportunities for professional development, and since action research explicitly acknowledges the roles and responsibilities of teachers, it therefore is a valuable tool for teachers to improve and enhance the quality of both teaching and learning. Through a programme called "Leadership Teachers Development (LTD)", teachers were invited to attend face-to-face sessions every month and to participate in learning circles which lasted for six hours twice a month. The researcher in the study was actively involved in the professional development of the teachers-participants, and therefore played two roles, that of trainer and that of researcher. The researcher sought out to answer the following research questions:

1. What action research processes do Palestinian LTD teachers follow and how is reflection revealed in their action research?
2. How does action research enhance teacher professionalism?
3. What kind of changes took place as a result of reflection and action on the teachers' part?
4. How do teachers describe the changes, if any, in their teaching practices as related to their action research? (Dajani, 2015, pp. 120-121)

Teachers were encouraged to use the action research characteristics articulated by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988): action research is cyclical, participative, qualitative and reflective. These characteristics were translated into five steps in Dajani's study: fact finding, planning, taking action, evaluating and amending the plan before moving on to the next step. Types of data collected in the project included classroom observation, videos, audio tape interviews, surveys, focus group, field notes, talk aloud protocols, diaries, reports, students' portfolios, documents, artefacts, homework, and test scores.

The authors present six case studies as samples for the individual action research projects conducted in language classrooms. Five of them have reported success in reaching their goals, however one teacher reports that "not everything went according to plan" (Dajani, 2015, p. 123). The cases were entitled as follows, "Liking English: 'Facebook' in the Classroom", "Enhancing Understanding through Multiple Intelligences", "Classroom Dynamics", "Making Storytelling More Powerful", "Enhancing Students' Participation", and "Correcting Grammar" (Dajani, 2015, pp. 123-126). To give a clearer picture, I will discuss two of the cases conducted in this larger study starting with the case study titled "Enhancing Students' Participation", this action research project was applied in a girls' Secondary School In Kfur Nimeh, a village near Ramallah. The teacher taught the eighth grade class and her aim was to improve her students' participation when they were conducting group work. Initially, she collected data through observing her students to find the appropriate action plan. She concluded that she needed to change her teaching methods, so she took upon " a communicative approach" to her teaching (Dajani, 2015, p. 126). However, this deemed unsuccessful as the implementation was not clearly stated by the teacher, nor was evidence on how she

observed her students after her approach was documented. This unfortunately resulted in an unsuccessful action research project because of the lack of documentation that did not take place. On the other hand, the case “Classroom Dynamics” was conducted in a village called Dir Dibwan again near Ramallah. The teacher in this case was teaching fifth grade students, similar to the previous case, the teacher faced problems with students unwilling to participate in the language classroom. This teacher’s action plan was to implement a “play-based learning as to develop students’ social and cognitive skills and to enhance their self-esteem,” (Dajani, 2015, p. 125). The teacher started off her lesson with an activity called “Word Forest” (ibid) using flashcards and pictures of animals to match and spell the words. She then moved to another game called “hands on” to practice the present perfect. She used plastic balls along with two big baskets (one labelled present simple and the other past participle, while the balls had various verbs on them). The students had to throw the ball into the correct basket while at the same time provide a sentence with the verb on the ball. As the teacher reflected on the activities, she reports that they were “engaged and having fun”. She also notices that they are motivated and this could have been because of the “positive learning environment” (ibid). Both cases are good examples of both good and bad research projects, the first being a bad one, because of the lack of observation and documentation making the cause and effect blurry and unclear. The second, however, is well documented by the teacher as she was able to see a direct link between the action taken and its result. The observer and author of this larger research project advises teacher to observe further and evaluate more adequately to have more sustainable results. Even though action research in the Palestinian context is in its infancy, this study demonstrates that action research can develop

reflective skills, improve teaching skills and promote learning outcomes in an educational context in Palestinian schools. The results of the research indicated that even given the difficulties that Palestinian teachers face, nevertheless, action research was agreed to be a profound tool of inquiry that influenced classroom practices and professional development. Moreover, the findings also highlighted positive changes such as teacher cooperation and collaboration realised through the use of the action research, as it provided a fruitful environment for contacts, dialogue and support.

Casallas and Castellanos (2016) are two English as a Foreign Language teachers in a private non-profit English institution in Bogotá, Colombia. They identified that their adult students had difficulty in participating in classroom discussions and in elaborating on their ideas in spoken interaction. Their action research project, involving twelve English learners, focused on the use of argumentation outlines and peer assessment to enhance learners' argumentative abilities. The study was conducted over six months, during which learners participated in classroom activities and interviews conducted by the researchers. The study was designed according to four principles of action research: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Firstly, the problems were diagnosed through informal assessment exercises. In the planning stage, lesson plans were designed from a collaborative peer-learning perspective wherein the assessments were taken into consideration. The objective behind this type of planning “to empower learners to appraise the quality, value, and level of learning when they value their classmates’ interventions” (Casallas & Castellanos, 2016 , p. 116). It appeared from such assessments that learners did not feel confident with their oral skills. Learners were then invited to participate in an online survey on individual

language learning processes. They were asked to identify the most difficult aspects of answering questions, developing ideas, presenting examples, using grammar properly when interacting, and so forth. Results indicated that 50% of the participants reported serious concerns with their ability to develop their ideas aloud. In the next step, a pedagogical intervention was applied. The intervention involved the implementation of a set of activities geared towards promoting oral argumentation skills. Oral tasks were recorded, and learners were interviewed afterwards about their experience of the tasks. Following content analysis of the data, the authors found that peer assessment was fundamental in improving argumentation skills in the classroom. They used it as a strategy to reflect on their own learning practices by “suggesting and giving opinions so that action plans could be discussed and integrated into further actions” (Casallas & Castellanos, 2016, p. 120).

3.3 Summary

It in this chapter, I introduce action research as the methodology adopted for this research. I initially define what action research is and then go on to discuss the trustworthiness of action research and how it can be worthy approach to investigate particular phenomenon in particular contexts. I then discuss the ethics involved in action research. I provide a justification for the chosen research methodology. I then end the chapter by providing examples of action research projects conducted in relevant context. In the next chapter I describe the action research in the context of this study

Chapter 4: Action Research in Context

4.1 Introduction

I portray Saudi Arabia as a country, including its higher education system, and then move on to focus on specific aspects of English language instruction, including approaches, teacher training, and the English language curricula. I then describe the English Language Institute at King Abdul Aziz University, and how the action research project was designed. I provide a rationale for action research in this context. Subsequently, I present the three action research phases starting with the exploration phase (classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students) and the intervention phase (writing workshops and students' post intervention interviews), and finally, the reflection phase.

4.2 Context of this action research project

In this section, I present the specific context of this action research study. The aim of what follows is to provide a full portrayal of the setting since the organization of an action research project largely depends on the specifics of the study's location and situation. I start with a brief description of Saudi Arabia, its formal education, higher education, and specifically English language teaching. I then review some relevant studies on English language provision that have been conducted in Saudi Arabia, organised according to the following themes: efforts to modernize English language teaching in Saudi Arabia, reform of language education, teacher training,

language learning outcomes, and innovations that have been recently implemented in English language teaching.

4.2.1 Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is officially known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter known as the Kingdom). Founded by King Abdul Aziz Bin Saud, it occupies a large percentage of the Arabian Peninsula (Ministry of Culture & Information, 2013). The official religion is Islam and the official language is Arabic. The government is based on Islamic tenets, which guide its functions and policies. The population of the country was estimated at 30 million in 2013, with one of the fastest population growth rates in the world (Onsman, 2010). The majority of citizens are Arab. Some citizens have Asian and African origins. The Kingdom consists of thirteen administrative provinces with Riyadh, the capital, situated in the centre of the country. Jeddah is another important city, the main port on the Red Sea. Jeddah is a highly developed and populous region, with many large institutions were such as King Abdul Aziz University, a public university which is one of the largest third-level institutions in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a country that holds great importance from a religious perspective. It is the home to two of the holiest places for those of the Islamic faith: Almasjed Alharam in Mecca and Almasjid Alnabawi in Medina.

Islam is at the heart of all aspects of Saudi citizens' lives, culture, beliefs and customs, and remains at the core of the educational system from preschool to university. The education system in Saudi Arabia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the General

Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training. Islamic studies constitute a large portion of the country's curriculum. Formal education in Saudi Arabia began in mosques and Quran schools also known as the kuttab and madrassa (Tibi, 1998, cited in Alhaisoni et al., 2015; Elyas & Picard, 2010). The kuttab was originally attached to a mosque, and was restricted to the study of religion and the Arabic language – this was the only type of schooling in the country for many years. The madrassa is a form of modern religious schooling (Elyas & Picard, 2010). In both, students learned how to write and read in Arabic in order to recite the holy book of Islam, the Quran (Al-Liheibi, 2008; Alsharif, 2011, cited in Alrashidi & Phan, 2016, p. 34). Due to the Islamic and cultural beliefs of Saudi Arabia, the education system is segregated, including all schools and universities. In the 1960s, girls were able to formally attend school, though opposition remained present in parts of society for many years (Doumato, 2003, p. 249; Al-Zahara, 2008, cited in Alrashidi & Phan, 2016, p.33-34). I now turn to describe higher education in Saudi Arabia.

4.2.2 Higher education

Like many countries in the region, the Saudi Arabian Higher Education system is quite young, with most public universities only established in the past fifteen years. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for the planning and development of the Kingdom's Higher Education policies, public universities and colleges as well as private universities and colleges. According to the Ministry, the field of Saudi Higher Education has undergone three stages: the foundation stage, an expansion stage, and finally a “comprehensiveness” stage (Ministry of

Education, 2005). The foundation stage took place from 1949 until 1960 with the establishment of the first Higher Education institution, the College of Islamic law in Makkah, followed by the Teachers' College in 1952. King Saud University (still one of the Kingdom's premier universities) was established in 1957, with colleges of Arts, Sciences, Administration and Pharmacy. The expansion stage took place between 1961 until 1980, with the establishment of the Islamic University in Madinah, then King Abdul Aziz University in 1967, and four other universities. In the latest stage of growth, the government of Saudi Arabia has been setting up new Higher Education institutions throughout the Kingdom. By creating more than 80 institutions around the country, Saudis in small cities, villages and towns have been given the opportunity to pursue their education. In 2012, there were 33 universities in addition to many public and private colleges, adding to a total of 543 establishments (Ministry of Higher Education, 2014).

The number of third-level students has also increased dramatically over the years. For example, between 2000 and 2012 the number of total of students enrolled almost doubled from 404,094 to 1,116,230, and female students grew from 225,995 to 589,150. The increase in students has also meant an increase in faculty members. In 2000, there were merely 18,925 academic staff, but by 2012 this number had increased by 155% to 48,788 academic faculty to meet the needs of such expansion. As well as the expansion of admissions, the prestige of Saudi Higher Education has also grown, with the launch of King Abdullah Scholarship Programme, and the creation of research chairs and research excellence centres. According to the QS World University rankings in 2012, King Saud University was ranked at 197, King Fahd University was ranked at 208, and King Abdul Aziz University ranked at 334. All three universities were classified in the first category

of the highest world ranking that ranges from 1-400. Saudi higher education is facing great challenges given the growing population of students in the country (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010).

In the next section, I discuss the approaches to English language instruction in Saudi Arabia.

4.2.3 Approaches to English language instruction

From the 1950s, Western approaches to teaching and learning influenced the Saudi education system. However, education in the Kingdom remains located in Islamic values as well as in the promotion of nationalism both at a school and university level. This includes the teaching of English infused with religious and moral content (Elyas & Picard, 2013, pp. 32-36). After the events of 9/11, the Saudi educational system came under intense criticism, blamed for fostering Islamic extremism (Elyas, 2008, p. 8). Since, there are have been many calls for curricular and pedagogical modernization (AlHazimi, 2003; Elyas, 2008). Al-Hazmi (2003, p. 341) suggests that the current programs that train English language teachers in the Kingdom are inadequate. The challenge remains to find an acceptable balance between pedagogical practices that tend to be used in the West while retaining the Saudi identity and without marginalizing local trained teachers. Bhabha (1994, cited in Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 143) suggests that the only way to achieve this balance is by integrating Islamic traditional teaching approaches and relevant Western practices, to realize the best of both worlds. Barnawi and Le Ha (2015) examined two Saudi TESOL teachers' pedagogical practices in Saudi Arabia after the teachers had completed TESOL programs in the West. In a qualitative study,

the researchers gathered rich descriptive data about the teachers' "experiences, beliefs, attitudes and everyday teaching practices" (Barnawi & Le Ha, 2015, p. 260). The study examined how well their TESOL qualification had prepared them for the Saudi EFL context, in particular how the teachers focused on their adaptability in devising "context-sensitive and institution-specific classroom pedagogies" and developing their credibility (Barnawi & Le Ha, 2015, p. 264). Data suggested that the teachers strived to find a balance that best suited their context. Both subjects dealt with the English language-teaching context critically when adopting Western pedagogies. One of the teachers used a negotiating cycle with his students, involving his students from the beginning of term as to how the course would be run. He began by giving very clear instructions but slowly retired from that role to one as a facilitator. The other teacher believed he worked best with strategies that would be most familiar to his students. He employed pedagogies stemming from the traditional Islamic education system as a foundation to teaching reading, using a much more explicit approach to providing classroom instructions (Barnawi & Le Ha, 2015).

In the next section, I discuss teacher training in Saudi Arabia specifically to English language training.

4.2.4 English language teacher training

Training for Saudi English language teachers began in the early 1970s, with high school graduates who wished to become English teachers taking one academic year to study English and then take a final examination. Successful candidates were then offered funding to study abroad for two years in order to earn a teaching

certificate (Al-Seghayer, 2014). From the 1980s to the present day, English language teachers completed their training in Saudi Arabia through a four-year university English language degree, which awards a Bachelor of Arts in English. The degree programme consists of English language skills, English literature, linguistics, applied linguistics, and translation. Students take only one course in teaching methodology. Subjects such as educational psychology, evaluation and educational administration are taught through the Arabic language. The present teacher preparation programmes have been described as “non-systematic and inadequate” (Al-Hazimi, 2003, p. 341). Al-Hazmi (2003, pp. 343-344) goes on to describe the need for improvement in teacher development programmes:

Saudi Arabia urgently needs to improve its initial teacher education and its professional development programs for EFL teachers throughout their careers, and current weaknesses in pre- and in-service TEFL education programs should be dealt with. Ministry of Education administrators need to support teachers in their efforts to improve their skills and performance so that they can better contribute to their country. EFL teachers need to play a more active role in the reform process by initiating change and looking out, in this Internet-driven, information-technology age, for any chance for professional development.

Presently, the Ministry of Education is recruiting non-Saudi teachers from neighbouring Arab countries and Asia due to a lack of English language instructors. Given the increase in the number of undergraduates describe earlier in this chapter, teaching staff have been recruited from countries from the USA, the UK, Canada, India, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan and beyond (Habbash & Idapalapati, 2016, p. 14). These teachers when comparing with their academic experiences in teaching in their previous academic context have found great discrepancies between their previous experiences and the Saudi context:

[...] the expatriate teachers reveal that the most striking differences that most of the teachers said to have identified are the degrees of variation in the seriousness of the students towards learning (learning attitudes and motivation), in the attendance of the students to the classes (regularity and punctuality), and in the teachers' authority (systemic authority) in enforcing the classroom rules that are said to be in action purportedly. Teachers also mention that there is a significant discordance between what the departments propose in their meetings and the ground realities in the classrooms. Consequently the teachers feel that they are obliged to consume their valuable time in some unproductive activities and undesirable stresses that may deter their efficiency. However, there isn't any documented evidence in this regard.

The Ministry of Higher Education has implemented in-service teacher training programs in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy and the British Council to equip Saudi English teachers with modern teaching methods around the country (Al-Hazmi, 2003, p. 324). In the next section, I discuss the English language curriculum in Saudi Arabia.

4.2.5 English language curriculum

English is the only foreign language to be taught formally in schools in the Kingdom. The teaching of English began in the twentieth century when Saudi Arabia needed to keep pace with world developments. Historically, English language teaching started with the establishment of the Scholarship Preparation School (SPS) in Makkah city in 1936 (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p. 129). This program prepared Saudi students to travel abroad for scholarships in the United States of America or in the United Kingdom. As English began to have a high status in the world, English became the lingua franca in large multi-national oil and gas companies (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 142) in Saudi Arabia. In 1958 English became a core subject in intermediate and secondary schools (Mahboob &

Elyas, 2014, p. 129). The government excluded primary schools because they believed that learning English at such a young age would affect Arabic language learning. This belief slowly disintegrated with the growing importance of English. By 2010, English began to be taught from the fourth grade in primary schools at the age of ten years old, and is now taught twice for 45 minutes. In intermediate and secondary schools, the classes are increased to four times a week for 45 minutes (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 37). Knowing how to speak and write English fluently is a skill most valuable in Saudi Arabia for education and more importantly as a qualification when searching for a job. In fact, it has been indicated that 84.9% of Saudis learn English to get higher paid jobs:

Although Arabic is the only official language for Saudis, it is usual for English to be used alongside Arabic in road signs and names of shops. Printed materials in places such as banks, airports, travel agencies and post offices are usually in both English and Arabic (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996, p. 308)

In Higher Education, English is a compulsory course in the foundation year of all university instruction. English is a medium of instruction in Medicine and Engineering and in some Science faculties. The Humanities tend to use Arabic as a medium of instruction. In terms of English language instruction, there is a lack of Saudi teachers who hold Master's or Ph.D qualifications as an English language lecturer and therefore many foreign teachers from neighbouring countries are recruited such as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 38). University English language instructors have to work within a strict hierarchy that is shaped by religious and national identities. This hierarchy means any policy communication is passed from the Dean to the Head of the Department, then to the

university's English Committee, which finally reaches English language lecturers who in turn pass the policy to the students. The purpose of this type of hierarchical system comes from the Ministry of Education's mission to promote nationalism and Islamic values in order to produce "young, educated, proud Muslims who are patriotic and proud of their Islamic history" (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 140).

The English syllabus in Saudi Arabia is unified across the kingdom, and is in accordance with the religious beliefs, customs and traditional values of Saudi society (Almutairi, 2008). In fact, the name of the series of set textbooks used in schools is "English for Saudi Arabia". The syllabus integrates four language skills including reading, writing, listening and speaking alongside grammar and vocabulary activities (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 37). Teachers are provided with teachers' manuals, which set out how to teach to the curriculum, along with the student textbook and workbook (Al-Otaibi, 2002). Great pressure has been put on educational institutions to provide more effective English programmes and to enhance the student learning experience given low language learning outcomes. There have a number of reasons attributed to the learners' low performance, such as the use of teacher-centred approaches, the use of memorization as the main learning strategy, lack of motivation and lack of encouragement from teachers (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Lack of educational resources is another obstacle to language learning. For instance, language labs only function rarely, there are no educational films or audio/video players, and when these are available, they are often out of order because of lack of maintenance (Almutairi, 2008). A recent study highlights some of these problems. Tawalbeh (2016) investigated obstacles to teaching and learning in Saudi higher education by asking both students and instructors about the challenges they faced in the classroom while learning English

in a preparatory year programme. Among the 326 university students and 55 English language instructors survey, both students and instructors agreed that the physical learning environment was the biggest challenge. This was due to lack of equipment in class, lack of teaching aids, and seating was fixed so could not be moved around to suit pair and group activities. The study also noted dissatisfaction with English language course materials.

Despite efforts to improve in English language provision, language outcomes in all educational sectors remain weak in terms of communicative competence. Alrabai (2016) examined the factors attributed to Saudi students' low achievement levels in English language learning, including learner-related variables, socio-cultural variables, and variables of English instruction and other aspects related to the Saudi educational system. For the purpose of his discussion, Alrabai categorized the aspects affecting Saudi English language achievement into two broad classifications: internal factors which are related to the students' demographic characteristics, and external factors related to socio-cultural and instructional variables and problems with the educational system. These variables are intertwined with one another, for instance an enthusiastic teacher (an external factor) can positively affect the student motivation and attitudes to learning (an internal factor). For instance, he identifies the usage of Arabic as a medium of instruction as a socio-cultural factor, and argues that Arabic is used too much while teaching English, hindering the students' ability to develop metacognitive skills in English. The extensive use of Arabic in class limits the chances of learners being able to practice their English.

In the following section, I discuss the English language institute at King Abdul Aziz University.

4.2.6 English Language Institute at King Abdul Aziz University

I now turn to the site of this action research project. King Abdul Aziz University (KAU) is a national university established in 1967 in the western area of Saudi Arabia. In 1974 the university became a government university. Most of its students are of Saudi nationality, with a few students of other nationalities. All students are Arabic speakers, aged between 18 and 21 years old, who come with at least six years of English language instruction. Students who wish to enter the university must do so within three years of their graduation from high school.

After the foundation of the university, an English language program was established in 1975 by the British Council. The university's English Language Centre was created, teaching English courses in this period to some 500 male students in the colleges of Engineering and Medicine. Over the years, with the increasing number of students and the addition of women's courses, the program developed to provide 30 courses of English for Specific Purposes at nine colleges in the university. In 2006, with the introduction of the preparatory year program, the English course became a prerequisite credit-bearing course that all newly-admitted students had to successfully complete in order to gain admission to their major degree course. In 2008, the English Language Centre became recognized as a separate entity known as the English Language Institute. At the time of writing, the English language Institute (ELI) annually provides general English courses to over 12,000 male and female full-time KAU preparatory year students. There are over 600 faculty members in the ELI across the men's campus and the women's campus. A Dean, Vice-Deans and three guest faculty members supervise the ELI's administration who support its academic development across both campuses

(KAU, 2012). All students admitted to the university must take a placement test to assess their proficiency level. The test used is the Oxford Online Placement Test. The test is used because it has been validated that it correlates to the common European proficiency levels, International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and Test of English for International Communication (TOIEC) levels (KAU, 2011a). Students who present the university with a Initial Basic Training (iBT) TOEFL score of 57 or above, or IELTS band score of 4.5 or above are exempted from ELI courses (KAU, 2014).

The ELI sets out to achieve the following objectives:

- Help students to achieve an Intermediate Level of proficiency in the use of the English language, equivalent to the Common European Framework Reference of B1 Threshold Level (CEFR B1), KAU's defined minimum English language competency within one year.
- Provide appropriate pedagogical methods, including class size and environment (e.g. classrooms, equipment, resources, and technology), that will lead to student retention and success.
- Value faculty scholarship and service through greater support for, and participation in, professional development.
- Provide a progressive and structured curriculum, enabling students to graduate, having demonstrated achievement of essential learning outcomes in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (KAU, 2011b).

Most English language teachers are Arabic speakers, but there is a small minority who do not speak Arabic. Teachers at the English Language Institute come from a variety of backgrounds in addition to Saudi, including Tunisian, Jordanian, Sudanese, Egyptian, Indian, Pakistani, British and Americans. The English language programme in the preparatory year is designed into four levels, described as an integrated-skills programme, to help students achieve B1 Common European Framework of References (CEFR) level. ELI provide four levels 101, 102, 103,

and 104. Level 101 is aligned with the CEFR as level A1, level 102, is A2, level 103 is B1, and finally level 104 is B1+. The programme is delivered through four teaching modules, two in each academic semester. The duration of each module is seven academic weeks, providing 18 hours of class a week. The English language classes in the preparatory programme course are held daily in different locations on the university campus in two sessions: morning (from 8am to 11am) and afternoon (from 12pm to 4pm) with a one-hour break in each session. Many classes have two teachers, and responsibilities for teaching language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) are divided between teachers. Classes consist of 20-25 students per class; some classrooms just barely fit the number of students. Generally, most classrooms have a computer and internet connection. In some classrooms, chairs are fixed to the floor, while others are not. The furniture is arranged as a teacher-fronted classroom. The *New Headway Plus* textbook series provides the curriculum for the English language programme in the preparatory year. The course instructors are given a detailed Pacing Guide for each course which they are required to follow on a the day to day basis, including the number of units and the language items to be taught. Instructors must follow this lesson plan with no deviation in order to meet university accreditation standards.

I discuss the reasoning behind choosing action research as an approach worthy of investigation in King Abdul Aziz University.

4.3 Rationale for action research at King Abdul Aziz University

This section describes my action research project in a way that tries to build up a detailed and chronological understanding for the outsider of why and how the

research took place from the perspective of the insider (teacher/researcher). I adopt a discursive style for this section, which adapts to the objective of “telling a story”. After I completed my Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics in Australia, I went back to my job in Saudi Arabia in the English Language Institute at King Abdul Aziz University in which I had been previously teaching English as a foreign language for six years. I was very excited to get back into the classroom with all the knowledge I had gained from my degree. I was eager to apply many theories that I had read about, however, I came to realise that many of the aspects that I had learned were not immediately or easily applicable to my setting. Usually, I was given writing classes to deliver. I found my students very frustrated when being taught to write, and I realised the curriculum essentially failed in providing students the time and strategies to write. My students were moving up through the class English proficiency levels from 101 to 102 to 103, and finally to 104, yet not improving in their language proficiency in general and specifically in writing. Over time, I realised that I wanted to investigate ways to improve my students’ writing within the limitation of my teaching context, so that I could bring about positive changes to my students’ learning experiences. I wanted to learn how I could make practical changes that would have an impact on their language learning outcomes.

Gradually, through the process of articulating a PhD proposal, I realised that action research would be a very good vehicle for me to investigate this context deeply, and to come up with ways of making changes to the way that writing instruction is approached in the English Language Institute. Thus, I liked the idea of reflective cycles which would bring together teaching practice along with the students’ perceptions of such practices. The following quote from (Brookfield, 2017, p. 1) echoed my frustration as a teacher in this context:

Teaching innocently means thinking that we're always understanding exactly what it is that we're doing and what effect we're having. Teaching innocently means assuming that the meanings and significance we place in our actions are the ones that students take from them. At best, teaching this way is naive. At worst, it induces pessimism, guilt and lethargy. Since we rarely have full awareness of what we're doing, and since we frequently misread how others perceive our actions, an uncritical stance towards our practice sets us up for a lifetime of frustration. Nothing seems to work out as it should. Our inability to control what looks like chaos becomes, to our eyes, evidence of our incompetence.

Reflective practice or sometimes called “critically reflective practice” is a process that involves practitioners in the process of trying to discover and research the assumptions that shape how they their working practices (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). It is a constant research process that is seen through four lenses: the lens of the learners’ eyes, the lens of the colleagues’ perceptions, the lens of literature/theory, and the lens of the researcher/s’ own autobiographies as learners of reflective practice (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197) (see Figure 6):

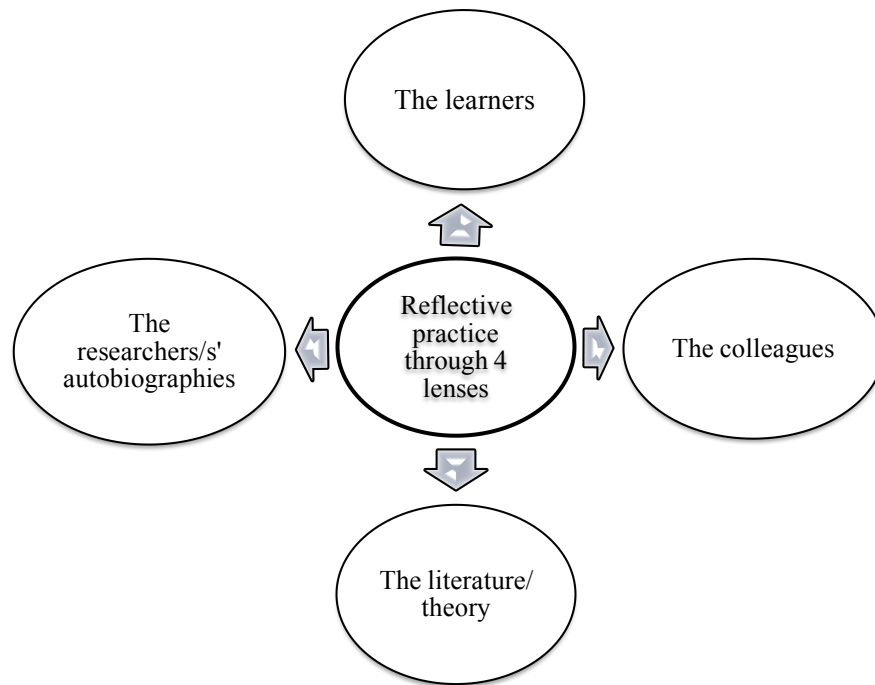


Figure 6: Reflective Practice in this Study

In this study, these lenses are deployed through various instruments: the learners’ lens through interviews and classroom diaries, the teachers’ lens through group and pair interviews, my own autobiography as a learner of reflective practice, and the literature which underpins theories in the area of teaching second language writing.

As I took upon the role of an action researcher, I set out to act as a facilitator in acquiring knowledge collectively with students in ELI as well as with the cooperation of colleagues there. As the review of the literature above has demonstrated, the role of the researcher in action research is different from other forms in that it he/she acts as means to deliver knowledge on the targeted phenomena. The focus of the researcher is to focus on the way things are done in the setting, and how the participants are responding (Stringer, 2014, p. 20). This

approach to research allowed me to improve my own teaching experience as well as to learn more about the writing processes and experiences of my Saudi students. Action research allowed me to question the teaching of writing in ELI, to understand the students' needs, and to reflect upon my own practice in a systematic manner since action research is a form of self-reflective inquiry "undertaken by participants, such as teachers and students" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 182).

An action research project is by definition an inductive process, so therefore the questions it asks are broad, exploratory and emergent. However, there is no denying that going into this research project, I had my own preconceptions of what was worth investigating in my context and I had a few ideas in my mind regarding how certain challenges could be addressed. I therefore had to firstly ascertain the status, nature and content of the writing classes from not only my perspective, but from that of the teachers and the students in a systematic manner. I asked the following questions as I designed the action research:

- How do ELI teachers perceive their writing classes?
- What challenges do they face when teaching L2 writing?
- How do ELI students perceive their writing classes?
- What challenges do they face when learning L2 English writing?

Here, I wanted to establish what happens not only in my writing classes but also in the other writing classes in ELI. In the initial exploration phase, I used semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers, and observed the writing classes to see the teaching approaches to use in teaching writing, and how the

students responded to those teaching approaches. I interviewed teachers from each of the four levels who taught writing at some point through the year, and observed writing classes from each of the four levels. In the main intervention phase of my research, I needed to teach and work directly with students at ELI in order to investigate the potential of different writing teaching approaches, collecting data through field notes and learner journals. I implemented a series of writing workshops that form the basis of the action research project. I asked the following questions:

- Did the workshops change the students' perceptions of writing for the better?
- What elements (if any) of the workshops were productive in addressing the challenges students face in learning to write in English?

In the third reflection phase of my research, I reflected on the process of change during the analysis of my dataset, with the aim of finding an answer to a final question:

- What suggestions can I make to help improve writing at ELI?

I present the design of these three phases below. Their implementation and the data generated are described in Chapters five and six. In the following section, I discuss the design of the action research and its phases.

4.4 Design of the action research phases

In this section, I present the design of my action research project. The implementation of each phase is considered in Chapter five. This action research project was organized into three main phases. The first phase was the exploration

phase, designed to help articulate questions and actions to undertake, and to help understand the environment and learning in the Saudi context. A total of nine classroom observations took place, seven interviews with learners, and a total of 11 teacher interviews. The second phase was the intervention phase, which contained 24 writing workshops with seven learners who were interviewed in the exploration phase. The workshops are organized into four main action research cycles. During this phase, the seven learners kept their classroom diaries, and I kept a record of my field notes. After the workshops were completed, I interviewed the seven learners again in a post-intervention interview session. The third phase was a reflection phase, designed to find answers to the questions posed during the beginning of the action research project, and to generate reflections on teaching and learning that took place. These three phases together form an action research loop of planning, observing, reflecting and then planning again.

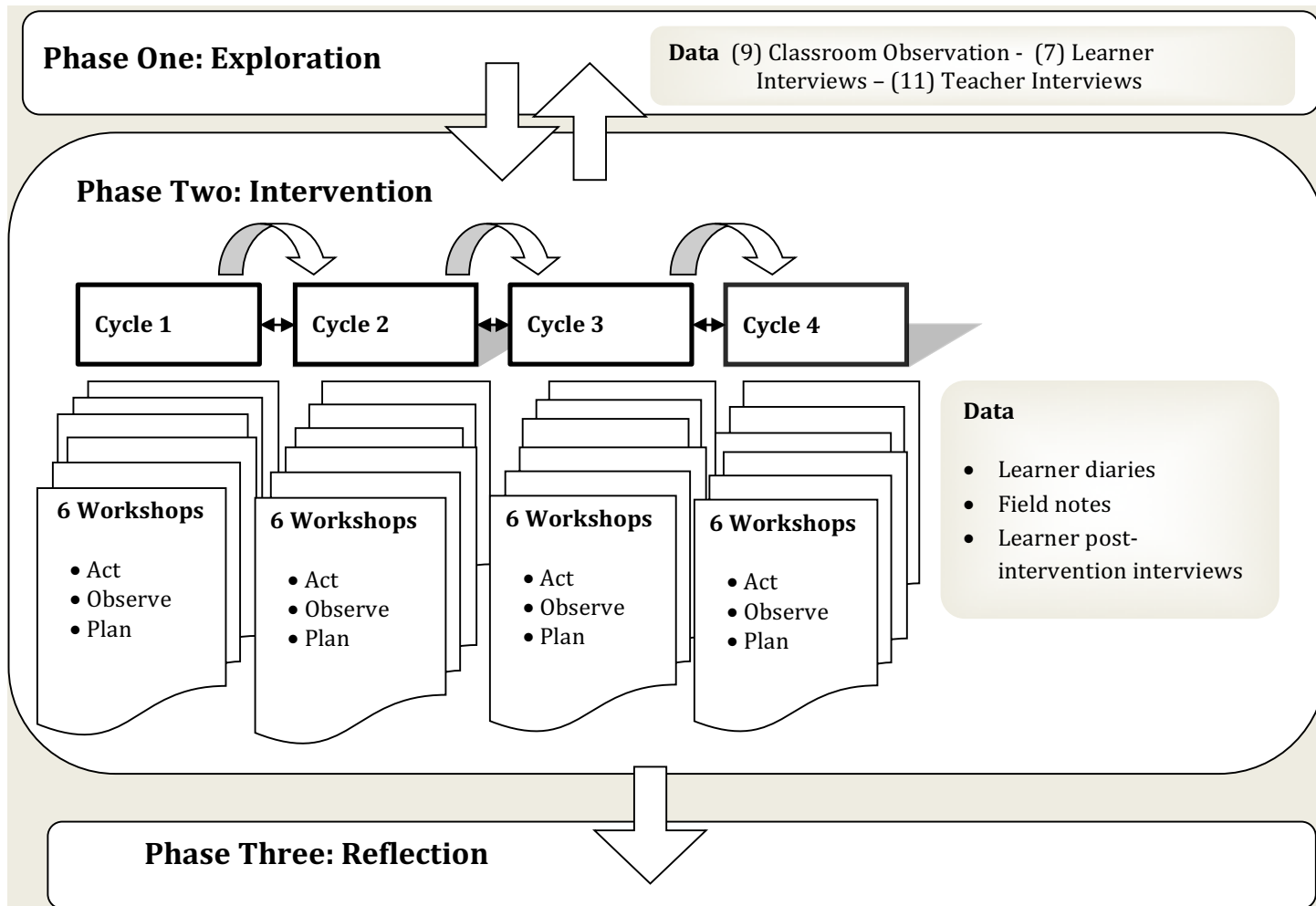


Figure 7: Action research phases employed in the study

4.4.1 Phase One Exploration

Although I tackle exploration phase as the first phase chronologically, this was in fact an ongoing phase throughout the action research project, as I continued to ask questions and to observe practices in this kind of inquiry mode throughout all my fieldwork at ELI.

Since ELI has a history of changing its curriculum, course design, times and location in the university, one of the aims of this phase was to investigate how my research design could fit into the ELI. I needed to familiarize myself with potential challenges that could occur during the second intervention phase of my study, the writing workshops I was planning. In this phase, my research questions were in their infancy. I wanted to investigate how I could improve my students' writing in my context, and so I needed to discover how ELI teachers were currently teaching writing in the foundation program and how students were responding to the approaches they used.

During the exploration phase, I applied for ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Linguistic, Speech, and Communication Sciences at Trinity College in 2012. Since I am a member of the academic faculty in King Abdul Aziz University and was awarded a scholarship from them for my PhD project, I was automatically granted access to conduct classroom research at the university. However, as a formality and also in order to ensure good collegial relationships, I informed the director of the English Language Institute in 2012 in person and by email about the nature of my planned project, and provided her with a detailed description of the proposed project (see appendix A).

In terms of recruitment, I sent out information leaflets by e-mail to invite teachers to participate in the classroom observations and interviews. This was not a successful means of contact. I sent out fifty-seven e-mails, but only received seven replies. I decided that I would instead send text messages to the teachers briefing them about my research and asking them if they would like to participate. For this phase, I received two responses from teachers who granted me access to observe their classes and interview them afterwards. Thus, this phase commenced with two classroom observations in levels 103 and 104. Further opportunities for observations opened up during the academic year. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the two teachers whom I observed in class. I realised the need to brief teachers clearly about the different teaching approaches to writing, as they initially seemed confused about what I was asking about. I noticed that teachers were not very outspoken about their opinions about their teaching, the context, and their classes and it appeared to be intimidating possibly because it was a one-on-one interview. Therefore, I decided to conduct the later interviews with small groups of teachers to create a more relaxed atmosphere in terms of them exchanging opinions, knowledge about teaching approaches. This approach created richer data for the study. Classroom observations and group interviews with teachers continued throughout the academic year. Because of the workloads of teachers, I was unable to schedule interviews and classroom observations in advance. In many cases, some observations were cancelled on the day. At other times, meetings were held so teachers could not attend group interviews. Giving these constraints, I adapted the schedule of observations and interviews while also starting the intervention phase. In the three following subsections, I provide details

of the design of the classroom observations, teacher interviews along with student interviews.

4.3.1.1 Classroom observations

One of the definitions of observation is that it is the process of “gathering impressions of the surrounding world through all relevant human faculties” (Alder & Alder, 1998, p. 80). Observation allows the observer to examine the behavior, find facts, and understand why events occur the way they do. It also allows researchers to gather physical description of the setting, and “the opportunity to gather “live” data from naturally occurring social situations” (Cohen, et al., 2007, p. 396). Observation is a non-interactionist method and does not manipulate or stimulate participants to react or answer in a certain way (Alder & Alder, 1994), nor does it interfere with the behavior or interaction. This can help create an in-depth description about the setting of a study.

There are three types of observations: structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Cohen, et al., 2007). In structured observations, the researcher normally would use pre-developed schemes with specifically detailed points as the focus is specified (Punch, 2009). In semi-structured observations, their focus is specified but is open to other data that may add depth to the understanding of the focus (Cohen, et al., 2007). Unstructured observations are a more natural means of making meaning of what is happening. In this case, the researcher enters the settings without a pre-set of observational focus, but merely observes and decides later on what is significant to the research (Grix, 2004). In this study, I conducted semi-structured observations, as I came to the classroom with a pre-set focus on

writing strategies, but open to seeing other relevant aspects of the L2 classroom. The objective of my classroom observations in the first phase of my project was to view Saudi L2 writing classes other than my own in their natural setting, observing teachers, students, and materials. Although observations can be perceived as subjective, as Nunan (1992, p. 96) notes, when observations are with other data collection techniques, they can be a reliable and valid tool. I took the following pointers the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) from the scheme, observation of the activity in class by providing a description, participant organization such as teacher-student, student-student, group work, or individual. Punch (2009, p. 154) describes this type of observation, “the logic here is that categories and concepts for describing and analysing the observational data will emerge later in the research, during the analysis, rather than be brought to the research, or imposed on the data, from the start”. Therefore, when I went into each class, I simply took notes as what was going on, rather than ticking boxes. This allowed be to gather richer data to analysis later.

The aim of the observation is to highlight the teaching approaches used in classes by different teachers at different levels. It also aims to see how students respond to the teaching materials and approaches used in class, the dynamics of teacher and students’ roles in the classroom. I asked the teachers when their writing classes would start, so that I attended only the writing sessions. When the teacher finished with the writing skill, I left the class. In total, I observed approximately five hours of writing classes at different levels with various teachers. After, I wrote up a summary of what happened in class, I presented it to the teacher, so that she could validate it and add if she wished any comments on what happened in class.

4.3.1.2 Interviews with teachers and students

Interviews can be defined as “specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee” (Kvale, 2007, p. Xvii). Interviews have been widely used in research in applied linguistics (Nunan, 1999, p.149). Interview types are distinguished by “their degree of explicitness and structure ranging from very open interviews to very structured ones” (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 167). Similar to observational research, interviews may be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured according to the degree of formality. I adopted semi-structured interviews, with a basic pre-set structure that allowed for flexibility and leniency (Gillham, 2005, p. 70). However, such interviews do have their shortcomings. The asymmetrical relationships (Nunan, 2013, p.150) between the interviewer and the interviewee can cause awkwardness. In the case of a teaching setting, it may be intimidating for a student to answer questions about her teacher, and for teachers to talk about their place of work or their own teaching strategies to a colleague (especially a junior colleague). Respondents may not be fully honest in the interview. Even though we state that the interviewee has the freedom to ask questions, they often do not do so (Nunan, 2000, p. 150). Rubin and Rubin (2005) stresses the importance of scaffolding to create the appropriate questions that fit both the study and context. McGill and Beatty (2001) provide a few effective techniques for interviews such as affective questions, (how do you feel about...?), probing questions (what elements of ... do you like?), checking questions, (is it true that...?) and reflective questions (how did... become easy?). Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 175) also suggest techniques to keep the flow of conversation while at the same time ensuring clarification, such as continuation signs, hand gestures, elaboration

probes, and signs that let the interviewee know that the researcher is paying close attention. I drew on the advice in the literature during the interviews.

In the exploration phase of this project, organizing times for interviews with teachers proved to be a difficult matter. Therefore, I arranged interviews with teachers from the observed classes along with other teachers who had an interest in writing. Each group consisted of two to four teachers and took approximately 40 to 50 minutes to complete the interview. The interview questions were designed in the same way the observation pointers were. There are many advantages of group and paired interviews. Firstly, they can provide the researcher with richer content and more depth as speakers often share more in a social context. Secondly, they allow the researcher to engage with more individuals (saving time) and provide these individuals, with a greater sense of security (safety in numbers) (Fotana & Frey, 2005; Wellington, 2000). Farrell (2001) points out the advantage of group discussion with peers is that it offers opportunities to expose themselves to different perspectives, however it is important that the atmosphere is trustworthy and supportive. The topics I introduced included perception of the teaching of writing, the students' needs and attitudes, materials, and suggested solutions. The student interviews focused on the same topics as the teachers. These topics included were: perceptions of how writing was taught, learner needs and attitudes, their perceptions of the materials used in class, and suggested solutions to any mentioned challenges. The interview questions were based on my research questions previously stated in section 4.3 and they were extracted to form questions to answer them (see table below as an example) (see appendix B for students' interview questions):

Table 1: Developing Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question for Teachers	Interview Question for Students
How do ELI teachers and students perceive their writing classes?	For undergraduate Saudi students in the foundation year, do you think teaching writing at this stage is important? and why?	Is writing important to you? And why? In general, how do you view the English courses given by ELI and especially in the area of writing? Do you enjoy the writing lesson? Why?
What challenges do teachers face when teaching L2 writing?	Do you enjoy teaching writing? Why?	-
How do ELI students perceive their writing classes?	-	Do you enjoy the writing lesson? Why? How do you perceive writing instruction in ELI?

I completed a total of 10 interviews with teachers. The teachers were those of whom I observed their class along with others who accepted the invitation to participate in the interview. The aim of the interview was to reach a better understanding as to how teachers perceived their writing classes in the English Language Institute, writing curriculum, their teaching approach/s towards writing, their students, and the English Language Institutes' role. However, this was an open-ended structured interview; therefore, other topics emerged as the dialogue between teachers developed throughout the interviews. I conducted two sets of learner interviews, firstly during the exploration phase, and then after the writing workshops were finished. I provide a more detailed account on the outcomes of the interviews in Chapter 5 in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.3.

4.4.2 Phase Two Intervention

In this section, I outline the design of the main intervention phase of the action research project, the writing workshops. The implementation of the workshops is described in more detail in the next chapter. The English writing workshops were implemented between September, 2013 and May, 2014, with the aim of trying to determine what was working and what was lacking in the various approaches to L2 writing in the ELI. Such workshops can be defined as a means of engaging learners in specific tasks within a certain amount of time and space (Wallace, 1991), as well as providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices (Richards & Farrell, 2005). A total of 24 workshops took place over the period of the academic year. They were divided according to four smaller action research cycles, with each cycle consisting of six writing workshops. Each workshop lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. After each workshop, I recorded my observations and plans for the subsequent workshop. Sometimes there was an opportunity to discuss the workshop immediately on finishing with the learners, but these discussions were fairly brief.

The basic design of the workshops was based on the action-oriented approach of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), where “language learning activities are based on the needs, motivations, and characteristics of learners” (Heyworth, 2004, p. 14). The CEFR asks curriculum designers to consider the following questions when building language-learning activities:

- What will learners need to do with the language?
- What will they need to learn in order to do what they want?
- What makes them want to learn?

- What sort of people are they?
- What knowledge, skill and experiences do their teacher possess?
- How much access do they have to resources?
- How much time can they afford to spend?

In designing the workshops, I used learner-centered approaches derived and informed from the work on learning styles, strategies and also on the work in the area of learner autonomy research (Nunan 2006; Kohonen, 1992). There can be a disparity between the intention and objective of the teacher as outcomes and what learners take out of tasks (Breen, 1984, 1987; Nunan, 2006). The outcome of a task is ultimately affected by how the learners perceive it. We as teachers assume that a task will be successful when in fact at times it turns to be not as successful as anticipated, due to learners' experiences, personality, proficiency and many other variables that are impossible to account for. However, in order to begin to understand the learners' needs, we need to involve them in learning practices. I therefore approached the writing workshops with a learner-focused mindset that corresponds to what is suggested in Kohonen's work (Kohonen, 1992), attempting to foster the transformation of knowledge within learners, rather than the transmission of knowledge from teacher to learner; encouraging active learning while collaborating in small groups. This approach is holistic in its approach to the subject matter; emphasizing processes in writing as well as product. I compiled notes after each workshop. Field notes are an instrument used regularly in AR, since AR is a "naturalistic" inquiry (McKernan, 2013, 2013, p. 93, original italics). They can provide clues to issues of importance that more structured instruments may lack. My field notes provided me with a way to reflect on my own teaching and to think about the content of each workshop and any changes that appeared in

learners' attitudes or behaviors. I kept these notes by hand and typed up later as a Word document.

All students in the study were given a portfolio in the form of an A4 ring bound file. Students were asked to write their name and bring it with them to every workshop. They were requested to keep all workshop materials in the file. Each file consisted of four sections: writing samples, a vocabulary log, and a classroom diary. In the exploration phase, during a discussion with students, they had requested that I help them expand their vocabulary. Therefore, I decided to incorporate a vocabulary log in the student portfolio to equip them with vocabulary learning strategies. Nation's (2001) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies includes establishing word knowledge through the process of noticing, retrieving and generating strategies. Noticing means seeing the lexical item to be learned and the strategy at this level includes putting the word in a vocabulary list or notebook or log and orally and visually repeating the word. The second strategy is retrieval, which includes recalling the items met before by recalling the stored vocabulary item. The third strategy is generating strategies. (Nation, 2001, p. 222) describes this strategy as "attaching new aspects of knowledge to what is known through instantiation (i.e., visualizing examples of words), word analysis, semantic mapping and using scales and grids". The vocabulary log was designed for learners to list and keep track of new vocabulary. The vocabulary log was presented according to five columns. The first column asked students to record new words, to be translated into Arabic in the second column. The third column asked them to record details about parts of speech. Column four asked for a sample sentence that would put the item in context, and the final column was reserved for synonyms. The following is an example:

Word	Translation	Part of speech	Sentence	Synonym
<i>Played</i>	لعبت	<i>Verb / past tense</i>	<i>Teacher I played football</i>	<i>Participate - perform</i>

Also in the portfolio, a classroom diary section was inserted. A classroom diary is defined as “a report written immediately after each class by a participant observer, and includes a collection of qualitative data about the teaching-learning process” (Sá, 2002, p. 151). It is an interpretive educational method that regards the classroom as a social and cultural environment (Erickson, 1986). This method of data collection views the teacher and student as two agents that join “in a process of team-teaching; therefore, the researcher must conduct him/herself in a way so as to become a member of the classroom community. The observer is not an external observer and his/her observations are more reliable and valid” (Sá, 2002, p. 151). The classroom diary needs to be written straight after the class (Fry, 1988, p. 161). I followed Craig’s (2009, p. 143) recommendation that the researcher provide the following information to the students:

- How the journals will be used throughout the study
- What information will be recorded in the journals
- What options a participant has if he or she does not agree to keep a field journal
- The procedure for sorting the journals after the study ends or the procedure for returning the journals to participants

The next part of the learner portfolio allowed learners to collect all their writing samples composed during the workshops. These consisted of simple sentences, paragraphs, letter writing, sentences copied from the blackboard, group and pair-writing samples. Students were constantly reminded to keep all materials in their

files. The classroom diary provided a space for students to reflect on their learning. These were designed to be read by me in discussion with the students, so that I could see their perceptions of the workshops and make changes according to their suggestions. I provided learners with a diary template. Students were asked to write in their classroom diaries after each workshop. In the following section, I explain how data from the exploration and intervention phase were analyzed.

In the following section, I discuss the third phase of this project; the reflection phase.

4.4.3 Phase Three Reflection

In the third phase of this project, I engaged in a sustained period of data organization, reflection and analysis in my quest for answers to the questions I posed about challenges in English language writing. I report on my findings in Chapter five and six. However in this section, I discuss the data analysis process, I define and describe thematic analysis, and the coding process

4.4.3.1 Data analysis

There are different processes involved in any data analysis phase. Dawson (2002, p. 124) identifies the first stage as thinking about the data while collecting the data. The second stage is related to judging the value of the data collected. In the third stage, the researcher interprets the data to understand what the data is conveying. The fourth and final stage is the “mechanical process” of analysis (ibid). I followed these four stages throughout my research. I kept notes of my research questions. The interventions, interviews, classroom observations and students’

portfolios were prepared on the basis of the research questions that represent teaching writing in my context. However, I am aware of the possibility that the data would point to findings outside these borders. Data analysis in action research can be defined as “the processes associated with surfacing meaning and understanding from the various data sets that may be collected during the action research project as a basis for further action and theory building” (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, ‘Data Analysis’, para. 1). The nature of AR impacts on data analysis in two risky ways (ibid.):

(1) it is difficult to divorce data collection from data analysis and (2) researchers focus their data analysis on generating plans for action and other inventions and there is a paucity of consideration of the approaches to data analysis that lead to theory making.

In the following section, I describe the thematic analysis I adopted in this research.

4.4.3.2 Thematic analysis

For this research a thematic analysis was adopted. Thematic analysis is a process of analysis used in qualitative research (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). A theme in this context refers to “a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 4). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to use various types of information in a systematic manner and it feeds into the accuracy and sensitivity in understanding and interpreting situations and people. In the case of this research, thematic analysis allowed me to describe students and teachers and allowed me to consider reasoning why participants behave the way that they do (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 5). Boyatzis (1998, pp. 9 -10) provides a guide on the stages

on how to conduct thematic analysis. The first stage is to sense the themes, and this aided by the researcher being well-knowledge in the field of the inquiry, and it aids if the material is recorded to help both hear and see the data. The researcher at this stage must be ready to “see” (original italics, p. 10). The second stage is a training stage wherein the research must train themselves to use the codes in a reliable fashion, meaning that when looking at the data tomorrow or next week, the researcher will be able to consistently “see” the same codes appearing throughout the data (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 10). The third stage of the research is a continuation of the second stage. The skill here is to before immersed in the data and the skill of coding is refined through practice and more practice. I adopted these three stages to this research by firstly reading through the data and sensing the possible themes that would emerge. I then started to train myself on how to code the data. I did this my reading it several times, and then began to code. I then left the data for a couple of weeks, I reread it again while also coding it to see if the codes matched from the previous week. In the third stage, I repeated the previous process.

4.4.3.3 Coding

In this section, I describe how I coded the data. All raw data from the interviews was transcribed for coding and analysis. The audio recordings of the students’ interviews were transcribed in their original Arabic, and then translated into English. Classroom diaries were first typed up in Arabic, then translated into English. Writing samples were scanned, and most were written up to be saved electronically in the data set. In such a large dataset, it was important to consider how to code my findings. This meant going through the data collected and

categorizing the elements that keep recurring to a particular theme. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest labelling the category with a word or phrase. There are different types of coding, for instance, Boeije (2010) identifies three types of coding; open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The first type refers to the data collected being carefully read and separated into parts to be compared to one another. It may then be grouped into groups that are pertinent to a specific theme and coded. The second type of coding is axial coding which mean the process of coding only classifications or axes. The third type of coding is selective coding means looking for associations between the categories to find out what is happening. This type of categorization can result in topics that can be organized

Table 2: Coding

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Code</i>
<i>Improving writing</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>Classroom Material</i>	<i>CM</i>
<i>Topic Choice</i>	<i>TC</i>	<i>Classroom Atmosphere</i>	<i>CA</i>
<i>Writing Objective</i>	<i>WO</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>T</i>
<i>Collaborative Learning</i>	<i>CL</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>TME</i>
<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>VOC</i>	<i>Writing Approach</i>	<i>WA</i>
<i>Independent vs. Dependence</i>	<i>IN vs DE</i>		

under research question headings to draw meaningful conclusions. For this project, I adopted an open coding technique. During my reflections on the data, I

read and re-read all the findings carefully, and then categorized them into main themes and sub-themes. Eleven subthemes emerged: improving writing, topic choice, writing objective, writing approach, collaborative learning, vocabulary, classroom material, classroom atmosphere, the teacher, time and independent vs dependence. I gave each of these themes a code (see the Table 2), when reading through the data. This allowed my analysis easier when re-reading through my data as I was able to find my themes easily (See appendix G for a sample of coding).

For instance, I put all the data related to students' perspectives on writing into one main theme, and all the data related to teachers' perspectives into a second main theme. After that, the main theme was then labelled with a code denoting to its places as following: the theme relevant to the teaching writing approaches was labelled as [Students' Perspectives], the theme related to teachers was coded as [Teachers' Perspectives], and so on. Using words or phrases referring to the intended themes resulted in the creation of meaningful themes that fitted together. There are many strategies of data analysis that aid in systematic analysis that aid in understanding what is under the surface level of the data. (Strauss & Corbin, 2008, pp. 69-72) suggest the following strategies. The first strategy is to ask questions about what the researchers reads even when not reading. This helps the researcher understand the data beyond the surface level. For example, asking sensitizing questions. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest asking question, such as what is happening?, who is saying what?, how can we explain the situation, etc. The other kind of questioning is theoretical in nature. Corbin and Strauss (2008, pp. 73-74) also suggest using a comparison technique, which revolves around two stages. The first is the constant comparison and the second is the theoretical comparison. The

first means comparing one incident to another by drawing an understating of the similarities and differences.

For this study, I described the phenomenon of writing by asking questions about what I read to understand what was going on under the surface level. For instance, I asked sensitizing questions like how do the students perceive writing in their context, and how is this different from the way teachers perceive their writing classes? I did this by reading the data several times to understand it. I then asked myself questions about what I read. For example, how can students enjoy learning writing? Do they enjoy writing? How do teachers teach writing, and how are the students responding to their teaching approaches? In the last stage, I asked theoretical questions, for example, how has their understanding of writing improved after the intervention? What are the underlying theories to the teaching methods used in the intervention and workshops? I also used the constant comparison technique to compare between the similarities and differences between teachers and students' perception of writing. Finally, I pulled together these questions to fit the interpretations together to come to up with a comprehensive account of teaching writing in the Saudi context.

Written data were collected via the students' portfolios. This consisted of classroom diaries, written work completed in the class, and their vocabulary log. The classroom diaries were used to understand the students' perceptions about the workshops. For this part, I read the whole data set and decided to go through each workshop and compare what had been implemented in class with the students' reflections on the same. I identified positive and negative reflections, and sometimes they did not reflect on the workshop, instead they just described or left it empty. To be able to analyze data more visually, I created tables wherein I

assigned the symbol (+) for positive comments, (-) for negative comments, and (NA) to indicate no reflection. In table 3 below, I provide examples of the in each students' log.

Table 3: A Sample of Students' Classroom Diaries Comments

Positive (+)	Negative (-)	NA
<i>This was an informative session. I was able to find out what the workshops are about. (Amani, Cycle 1, Workshop 1)</i>	<i>The idea was good and fun but the time was not sufficient (Maya, Cycle 3, Workshop 3)</i>	<i>We watched video clips words and sentences. (Amani, Cycle 2, Workshop 2)</i>
<i>The positive element about this workshop is that we were asked to write so that by the end of the year, we can see if we improved. (Banan, Cycle 1, Workshop 1)</i>	<i>I didn't enjoy this workshop much because it was just writing 'Draft 1' and correcting homework depending on myself but there has to be immense assistance from the teacher (Ola, Cycle 4, Workshop 5)</i>	<i>We wrote more sentences (Alaa, Cycle 1, Workshop 5)</i>
<i>For the most part, I enjoyed the workshop because the way the lesson was presented using videos was different from the usual boring writing practice in our classes. (Maya, Cycle 1, Workshop 3)</i>	<i>It was difficult to be honest because the words were new and the article was long. I feel if the article was short (Banan, Cycle 4, Workshop 2)</i>	<i>We were given pictures of different people, and we had to describe them to the other group so that they could guess the picture. (Banan, Cycle 2, Workshop 3)</i>
<i>I benefited from the mind map and writing about topics (Nawal, Cycle 3, Workshop 5)</i>	<i>Used the dictionary to look up words, but it was kind of boring. There wasn't much interaction (Banan, Cycle 1, Workshop 2)..</i>	<i>We heard audio clips and wrote sentences (Alaa, Cycle 2, Workshop 1)</i>

Finally, in the final stage of the analysis, I triangulated the many sources of data received from the instruments of the study. Triangulation is defined as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p. 112). Flick (2011, p. 186) explains triangulation as where “you take different perspectives on an issue you study or in answering your research questions. These perspectives can be substantiated through using several methods or several theoretical approaches”. This was helpful for me to utilize several data collection instruments as each one has its own characteristics and plays a functional role in the study. Furthermore, it opens different venues for participants of the study to demonstrate their opinions, perspectives in a variety of ways, and it is therefore characterized by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 113) as a “multi-method approach to problem in contrast to a single-method approach”. Specifically for AR, triangulation “must be considered as an instrumental method in building quality action research. The aim is to gather multiple perspectives on the educational situation being studied” (Schmuck, 2009, p. 2000). Moreover, triangulation in AR is defined by (Elliot, 1991, p. 82) as:

[...] not so much a technique for monitoring, as a more general method for bringing different kinds of evidence into some relationship with each other so that they can be compared and contrasted. The basic principle underlying the idea of triangulation is that of collecting observation/accounts of a situation (or some aspects of it) from a variety of angles or perspectives, and then comparing and contrasting them.

By using this approach to the data, the data can echo its conclusions from multiple sources, making the findings more reliable and valid.

4.5 Summary

In chapter four, I provide a thorough description of the context starting with Saudi Arabia, higher education, approaches to English language instruction, English language teacher training, English language curriculum , and English language institute at King Abdul Aziz University. I then provide a rationale for conducting action research phases outline of the design of my three action research phases, described as exploration, intervention and reflection. In the chapter that follows, I provide a detailed account of the first two phases and their implementation.

Chapter 5: Exploratory and intervention phases

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present how the project was implemented at the English Language Institute in King Abdul Aziz University. I outline the content of the exploration phase (learner and teacher interviews and classroom observations) and the intervention phase (series of workshops followed by post-intervention interviews). Below, I focus on exactly how two phases were planned and implemented, including the data collection techniques and the design of the workshop intervention.

5.2 Phase One: Exploration

The first phase sets the tone of the action research project in ELI. It provided me with essential background on how writing was taught at the time of investigation, teachers' perceptions on the curriculum and their attitudes towards their classes, and learners' perceptions. Through teacher interviews, classroom observations and learner interviews, I was able to obtain a clearer picture of the learning environment from various angles. I firstly discuss the teacher interviews.

5.2.1 *Teacher interviews*

Teacher interviews were conducted throughout the academic year 2013-2014.

During the first cycle, I conducted a group interview with three teachers. This was

during the first module in ELI. In the second module, during the second teaching cycle, two group interviews were conducted. In the third module, one group interview with two teachers was conducted. In the fourth module, teachers were overwhelmed with workload, and so, I was only able to conduct one interview face to face, and the other teacher offered to answer my questions via e-mail. Teachers who were interviewed were not the same teachers whose classes were observed. Initially, I had planned for interviews immediately following classroom observations, but this was not successful in terms of their schedules. Instead, I conducted interviews with teachers in ELI who were or at some point during their career in ELI were teaching writing. I conducted six interviews in total, however, one interview was conducted via email. The number of interviewees were 11 (see the table below for specifics):

Table 4: Teachers' Interviews Specifics

Level	Number of Interviews	Number of Interviewees	Duration	
Level 101	1	3	<i>59: 25 minutes</i>	
Level 102	2	4	<i>40: 22 minutes</i>	<i>19:05 minutes</i>
Level 103	1	2	<i>56: 45 minutes</i>	
Level 104	2	2	<i>51:45 minutes</i>	<i>E-mail</i>
Total	6	11	<i>4 hours, 50 minutes and 22 seconds</i>	

Some of the teacher interview participants were my peers, but many of them I did not know so well. There were a few teachers who were interested in talking about teaching and learning, however, they also communicated that researching this

context is useless given that change is a very slow process. There was also concern about criticizing the policies, curriculum and structure of the teaching in ELI in fear of jeopardizing their positions in the university. Furthermore, there had been a case of when a researcher/teacher from ELI who interviewed teachers with a subsequent breach of confidentiality. Therefore, to recruit teachers for this study, I personally spoke to my peers and asked them in turn to mention my research to their peers and so on, so the project spread by word of mouth.

I made the atmosphere as relaxed as possible when conducting the group interviews. It was often difficult and inconvenient for teachers to meet outside the workplace. Generally, teachers did not want to talk about work after working hours, so therefore, I had no other option other than to conduct the interviews in ELI. The teachers had offices with various numbers of teachers in one office, however, we chose times that non-participant teachers were occupied by teaching so that we could record and conduct the interviews. By means of preparation, I provided a brief presentation about my project and the type of questions I would be asking. I conducted five interviews and one email interview. The following are examples of some of the questions asked:

1. How do you think writing in English in EFL classrooms should be taught?
What approach?
2. Do you enjoy teaching writing? Why?
3. Are writing strategies incorporated in the curriculum and classroom instruction? If 'yes', what strategies are taught? If no, what writing strategies need to be taught? Why?
4. Are students given the opportunity to discuss the topics before they write?
5. Do students usually work individually/pairs/group in writing classes?
6. Do you believe all students learn writing the same way?

7. Do you think different types of materials should be used such as pictures, video clips, and various genres of articles to meet the needs' of different students?
8. Have you tried to use any of those materials? If 'yes', was it successful? If 'no', do you think it is worth experimenting?

The teacher interviews were informative and fed into my understanding about how teachers taught writing in their classes, the reasons behind some of the students' frustration and reluctance to participate in class. In general terms, the interviews with the teachers throughout the year kept me updated and fed into the way I conducted the writing workshops in the second phase of this study. In the following section, I go through the five interviews that I conducted pinpointing some of the important highlights during the interviews. The interview questions revolved around teaching writing in ELI, the methods of instruction, the students' needs, their strengths and weaknesses, resources and the materials used to deliver the lessons.

Teacher A and Teacher B were colleagues and one of them was a good friend of mine. She helped recruit the other teacher for the interview. This could be considered bias. Bias in research is defined as a means by which inclines prejudice that can affect the outcome of a research (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Bias is always present to some degree in every research (ibid). To avoid bias, in this research wherein a friend participated in the research, precautions were taken to minimize bias in response to research questions. There was no pre discussion about the research and my findings so far. The same information about the research was given to both teachers at the same time so that there was no influence on my opinions on the research. Both teachers shared the same office, so it was

arranged that we conduct the interview in the office, as the other teacher would not be present during the time of the interview. We started off with a friendly chat about family and work, and my research. I briefed them both about my research project. One of the teachers asked me before I started coding what kind of questions would be asked, so we discussed this for a while before we started the interview. However, the possible bias that could have occurred would be in terms of the teachers probably not discussing as much as they would like in fear of jeopardizing their jobs in the university, even anonymity was confirmed. In addition, my position as a teacher in ELI and as a researcher researching my work place can have its advantages and disadvantages. I was able to have full access to teachers and students, and know the workplace very well since I had been working there. On the other hand, I did come in with my own preconceptions of what is happening in this context. To avoid my opinions overlapping and affecting my data, I collected data for multiple sources and triangulated it in the data analysis, so that when reporting findings, I was able to present it through the voices.

Teacher A and Teacher B agreed that students were not placed in the correct levels in ELI even though students undertook placement tests. They pointed out that even at level 101 some students found it difficult:

Well, supposedly they are supposed to be a placement task and accordingly the students just put in the, you know, level that is useful for her. But sometimes you find that students are weaker than the level they are in and when that happens then of course the topics, the writing topics that they have are either not, they can't relate to or they're too difficult for them for their level, if the student is in the right level, sometimes yes. (Teacher A, C1, line 7)

The gap between the English taught in schools and English taught in ELI was a main issue. Teacher B explains:

I think this is because of the gap between the schools, I mean their English, they studied at the school and the English is weak here. So we should bridge the gap, I mean, we should have an idea of what they had in the school and then decide what to do, what to teach them. As you just said, yes we have, sometimes you find students who are not in the right level though they have done their placement test and they are in this, I mean, this level according to the results. But you find gaps. Sometimes you find students who are, their level is higher than the book they are doing and sometimes most of the time actually, you find students who are below the level we're teaching. (C1, Line 10)

Teacher A found that the students lack the basic ability to construct simple sentence that includes subject, verb and object, and that this would be the most important thing to start with. They considered the English course as important for the students, because some will use it in the Science and Medicine field. On the same note, they stressed the need to focus on aspects such as the title, indentation, and so on because they believed they need to fully comprehend these technical matters when they study in their specified field, and also because they are this level of proficiency. They suggested that they can express freely when they move on to higher levels of proficiency. Teacher B went into detail about her experience of free writing in an elementary school and how it was useful for students to use journals wherein they had the freedom to write about anything they wished. It allowed to students to write more freely knowing that they will not be graded. Teacher A highlighted that this method was suggested in the writing pack in the ELI curriculum, though Teacher A says that it can be used, the students would not know how or more importantly why to use it:

I don't know. I think you're familiar with. You saw the pack? There is a section like this. Where they have to freely write about, they have the topic? But they write about whatever comes to their mind and teachers will not check that writing, just free writing, free flow. Whatever ideas going you write your ideas down. Sometimes it could be points; it

doesn't have to be in a paragraph format. So, they just chalk down their ideas, what they think about that topic, what do they think about that topic, something like that. In the end, they can use these points in writing the paragraphs. So this is recently implemented here. (Teacher A, C1, line 42)

However, Teacher A used it and her observation was that it worked with the students even though some of them just wrote down words. Teacher B explained that for her, a process approach to writing was as outlined in the student books, and she listed process strategies such as “brainstorming, activities and then the first draft and then they have to make the final draft” (C1, line 58). Teachers A and B recalled incidents wherein students memorized their paragraphs for the exam or their friends' paragraphs for class work. The blame was put on the students though there was no reflection on why they resort to memorizing strategies to begin with. When I asked them how the students' attitude of writing can be altered, the teachers did not have any suggestion, they resorted back to talking about the students' memorization habits. They did know how their students learn, the ways to motivate them, because:

[A]t the end I think that they all use the same style, that they want to find out what's right and what's wrong in their writing and they have to pass. And even for us teachers, we've to follow what's in the writing booklet or writing packs. So whatever brainstorming activities we have we go through with the students. (C1, line 86).

It seemed that because of the teachers' apparent lack of interest in trying new methods, along with the limitations of time, there was no space to think about the students' needs. Teacher B pointed out that students who after the placement test were placed in level 104 could write independently because of their proficiency

level. Teacher A added that there were differences between girls who came from private and public school in terms of their proficiency level:

Also I find difference between students who graduated from public schools and those who graduated from private schools. I guess those who come from private schools, they are exposed to different, other curriculum. It's different from what they take in public schools. So I find the level of creativity in writing with those students a bit higher than the government schools. (C1, line 106)

The teachers informed me that vocabulary was taught to the students in a form of a decontextualized list. Students were equipped with various expressions in the textbook to use in their writing. When I asked the teachers if students pay too much attention to the writing mechanics when writing, Teacher B said they do not, and in fact says: “this is our dream actually” (C1, line 139). The general impression I got from this interview was that students were the problem if anything was wrong with the teaching, curriculum or the teacher herself. There was a tremendous emphasis throughout the interview on the students' lack of motivation to learn, seeing their motivation to pass and get a high grade as a negative element. Even though I tried to encourage the teachers to reflect on their own teaching and how perhaps new approaches could be embraced, there was somehow a resistance in doing so. This could perhaps be due to the culturally embedded message that they are the teachers, the experts, and any ‘blame’ should be placed on the students.

The interview with Teacher C and Teacher D was carried out in a very small office. The meeting was intimate and like the previous interview I briefed the teachers about my project. They had a few questions regarding my writing workshops, so we discussed this too before the recording of the interview started.

Teacher C listed why writing was important, in summary it was to check for grammar and spelling. Teacher C described writing for students as “a handicap” (C2, line 11) to portray their inability to write instead they memorized what was needed to be written for the exam. Like Teachers A and B, teachers C and D also emphasized the students’ inability to write and their unwillingness to learn to write as they resorted to memorization strategies as their safe strategy to gain marks in exam. The same pattern of thought from the previous interview was here also, teachers were teaching writing, but students were failing to write. Teacher C described the feelings of her students as “secure” (C2, line 21) because they knew what to write in their exams. Teacher D explained to me that she provided her students with a format to follow when writing but students failed to meet her expectations. Moreover, the students’ willingness and/or reluctance to learning was a point Teacher C makes when asked about her teaching. She said:

I think. However, we try even if they are reluctant, we try to make them love it and start to be interested and motivated but sometimes, yeah it's hard to make them really accept the idea of writing free paragraph. (C2, line 50).

However, Teacher D pointed out an important emotional aspect about students’ feeling towards making mistakes:

You know students, they feel ashamed when you ask them to write one sentence. That's why I always encourage them to write, write whatever you want write, forget about punctuation, forget about the spelling, forget about everything. (C2, line 55)

This was an important insight about students that teachers are aware of, but yet was not stressed enough as a significant note to take into consideration when teaching Saudi students. Teacher C and D described their students as lazy and

unwilling to do their work. Often contradiction notions about why the students were not doing so well in class, but the common pattern of occurrence was that the students were the problem and not their teaching methods, or curriculum. Teacher C pointed out the students' weakest points was their spelling, and Teacher D on the other hand, pointed out their vocabulary. Even though earlier in the interview, the students' lack of vocabulary was said to be the students' excuses of not being able to write, yet at another point, the Teacher admits that their vocabulary is lacking.

I followed the same pattern of introductions with teachers E and F. Teacher E identified writing as an important skill starting specifically writing at a sentence level. The point the importance of what Teacher F called "primitive rules" (C3, line 21) referring to writing mechanics. She believed that students were ought to be taught how to punctuate and then they could start to write. Both teachers believed that the most important aspects of writing that students should know is grammar and writing mechanics. Teacher F appeared irritable to the fact that students made mistakes in the area of writing. Teacher E gave her account of her teaching approach to writing, "I give them an idea how to write a paragraph by grammar, by mechanics, by everything. So they know the steps, then I start with them writing. This is what I usually do" (C3, line 129). There was a repeated pattern on putting the blame on the way students wrote, and the many mistakes they made, without much reflection on themselves. Throughout the interview both teacher complained about the lack of time given to students to write, writing being treated as a secondary skill yet students were marked on their writing. For the most part, teachers blamed the students referring to them as "careless" and "terrified" (C3, line 225), and rebellious by not wanting "to follow what they are saying" when they come to write (C3, line 230). The common cause of the students

weaknesses in writing were due to two reasons according to both teachers. The first was the lack of time allotted to writing in the pacing guide set by ELI, and the second was the students' lack of motivation to learn. The second was caused by the students' inability to see the importance of learning English in general caused by cultural factors such as the family and friends, and irrelevance and uselessness of learning a language wherein - to the students- they would not need to use it.

The interview with Teacher G was only with her because it was conducted towards the end of the term, and many teachers did not have time to participate in research. This was the first time I met Teacher G, so there was a sense formality between both of us when conducting the interview. The interview took place in an empty class, because there were many teachers in the office. Teacher G is a non-Saudi and does not speak the Arabic language. Therefore, classroom instruction would only be in English. Teacher G admitted that writing is a challenge; however, she stresses its importance:

I know it's a challenge but I definitely think it's important for them to be able to learn writing from their English teacher just so that it could help them in the future with their studies and even beyond their studies when and if they decide to get a job, they should be able to do some basic writing and even if they don't decide to get a job at least they can help their children when they do have them. So yeah I think for the overall development of any new language that a student is being taught, writing is an important skill. (C4, line 2)

Teacher G talked a lot about the curriculum used in ELI. She expressed very specific feedback on its content describing it as “very dry” and “very boring” (C4, line 6). She describes the students as having “brilliant ideas” (C4, line 8), but are unable to communicate it because of the language barrier. According to her observations, students used Google Translate to overcome this barrier by

translating the text from Arabic to English. She described the level as not making sense in terms of the students not being able to reach the objectives of the levels they gradually move up to. She gave an example of level 104 wherein she had no time to teach them how to construct a sentence. However, the problem lay in the placement test whereby when they passed it, they would be put into the next level. The essence of teaching was to pass the exam and not to actually learn the language and the skills outlined in the curriculum. Teacher G explained how she delivers writing lessons:

[..] You know. Like what should be the topic sentence, what should be the first sentence of the idea that I want to communicate. What should, what kind of details I should give the reader and what kind of details should I leave out because they are not important [..] (C4, line 22)

She explained how difficult it was to teach peer correcting because the students did not know what to look for, they did not understand what qualifies as a mistake. She says, “they would require a lot of spoon-feeding as in we would need to give them a list maybe, look for this, capitalization, look for punctuation, look for spellings” (C4, line 42). She went on to describe their “nature”: “I think, simply it’s in their nature to lack the patience to do that because actually correction requires a lot of patience” (C4, line 44). However, since students had very poor writing, then it is understandable that they would not know what to look for. Furthermore, Teacher G explained that her students lacked general knowledge of the world around them, “[t]hey’re not really very aware of what is happening beyond Saudi Arabia” (C4, line, 78). This could be true, however politics would be considered culturally sensitive in the Saudi culture, and the fact that their language proficiency is low would be another hurdle even if they did want to express their opinions. Teacher

H, I and J were the only group interview with three participants. This interview took place in a large office, and all three teachers work closely together. Before the recording began, we discussed teaching, policies and changes in the system in ELI, and questions and answers were exchanged about the study. Teacher H pointed out a possible reason why writing in English is difficult for the students was the major difference between Arabic and English rhetoric. She also drew attention to the fact the proficient language users benefit from the course in ELI while low proficient students did not and they resorted to memorizing the paragraph for exams. Teacher J, on the other hand, highlighted that language was not the only obstacle in their writing, students also struggled to come up with ideas. The fact the time was short during the modular system in ELI hindered their learning, but she admitted that especially writing is not given enough time in comparison to other skills. More importantly, for the student Teacher J highlighted the lack of English writing usage in their immediate future if the student were going to a science or medical field, English was not very useful.

For the first time in any of the teacher interviews the topic of writing was defined through the term “communication” rather than grammar, vocabulary or writing mechanics. Teacher J pointed this out briefly that grading writing should be shifted from counting grammar mistakes to grading on communicative purposes:

But then I don't know how, when you're pressed for time and you know and we need I think that's something we have to communicate to teachers to instructors more to, to shift their focus more away from you know just there, you know there are 5 grammar mistakes [indiscernible]. And more to what are they communicating and it's not; it's not [indiscernible] the change can't happen overnight [indiscernible].(C5, line 87)

However, the dominant approach and outlook to teaching writing was the building block approach wherein writing was viewed as a product (previously discussed in section 2.4.1):

Last year we had these ah building blocks, the older writing booklet, it was like building blocks of the like structure of sentences then we moved into a paragraph, all the sentences talks about the same thing. But now we have a genre approach for this year trying to give students models on the same genre to help them try to write something similar. (D5, line 97)

Like previously discussed, teachers viewed students' motivation of getting a high grade as a negative type of motivation:

They know all that matters is that you get a good grade that's all that matters to them. They want grades, even the parents I'm sure that students all they care about is their parents with their grades. It doesn't matter how well you are in writing or whatever but just you know get a good grade and that is that. (D5, line 137)

Teacher J explained that group and pair work would not always work because of the lack of time in the modular system for the students to get to know one another and bond as a group. This was one of the disadvantages of the modular system. She also believed that students would prefer the use of visual aids in class, especially in lower levels in ELI rather than reading from books. In that same line of thought, when materials were discussed, Teacher I drew attention to the culture specific materials that need to be used. For materials to be used from outside the curriculum they need to be appropriate, for instance, Teacher I gave an example:

Once I [indiscernible] something a song and I was so very excited and I prepared the worksheets and one of the students said it's *haram* (meaning it is Islamically prohibited) and she was really rude about it. "Excuse me teacher," uh, she, uh I remember her with her friend, they were really very [indiscernible] direct. "Teacher please we don't listen

to songs by her, if you are going to use the, the song, we will, can we, get out?" I told them okay, no songs, okay, you can keep your seats, we can do something else and it was like I spent a really long time, [cross talk] to find the right song, to find the, whatever (Line 255)

The teachers' interviews fed into the next phase of this study by understanding how the teachers were teaching writing along with their attitudes and understanding of their students allowed me to understand my students better. My own perceptions were gradually changing as I was receiving the feedback of my peers. The majority of teachers viewed writing as a product made up of words, grammar and writing rules. What the students wrote to communicate to the reader was not their main concern; in fact, in most cases it was not mentioned. Writing was considered as an exercise for the application of grammatical structures and writing mechanics. The teachers were generally adapting to the situation they were put in by the students and that was students with low proficiency needed to be able to write paragraphs and essays to gain admission to their fields for their undergraduate study. They could not to change the curriculum and therefore, they were preparing students for the exam by treating writing as a product. Even though they criticized students for their concerns with their grades and not actually learning, they too fed into this notion that passing is the most important aspect of the course. Looking at this vicious circle of blaming from a broader point of view, the course can be seen as a waste of time for both the teachers and the students due to the fact that learning taking place is short term, and it is useless after the exam. There was an obvious traditional asymmetrical relationship that took place in and out of the classroom between the teacher and student. From the teachers' descriptions of classroom interaction, the atmosphere was rigid and

communication between students and the teacher was not mentioned. This could have been due to the fact that teachers were changed for every module, or they over-worked schedules, or the fact that they simply believed that they did not need to form a relaxed environment where it was acceptable to take risks or make mistakes. Given the teachers' descriptions of their classes and the stress they placed on students to give and write correct answer, it was not a surprise that students consequently were afraid to participate for fear of making mistakes. These reflections on the teacher interviews were taken into consideration during the design of my series of workshops, where I attempted to create a relaxed atmosphere where making mistakes would be acceptable and in fact encouraged so that learning could take place. For this context, this aspect was an innovation in itself given the traditional approach to classroom organization. In the next section, I discuss the classroom observations conducted over the academic year, and explain how teaching took place and how students responded to the teaching methods.

5.2.2 Classroom observations

The table below identifies the number of observations conducted in each level in the English Language Institute, along with the date and duration of each observation. The time duration of the observation differed from 24 minutes to 60 minutes. This was due to the fact that the teacher would end her writing section of the lesson plan to move to another skill to teach. Since the agreement with the teacher was to observe the writing session, I left when she indicated that she was finished.

Table 5: Classroom Observation Specifics

Level	Number of Observations	Date	Duration
Level 101	3	10/09/2013	<i>60 minutes</i>
		11/09/2013	<i>55 minutes</i>
		19/09/2013	<i>45 minutes</i>
Level 102	2	04/12/2013	<i>24 minutes</i>
		04/12/2013	<i>45 minutes</i>
Level 103	2	12/02/2014	<i>35 minutes</i>
		06/03/2014	<i>50 minutes</i>
Level 104	2	13/04/2014	<i>60 minutes</i>
		14/04/2014	<i>25 minutes</i>
Total	9		<i>6 hours and 39 minutes</i>

My notes from the observation class were typed out in a Word document and printed for the next day so that the teacher could read them (See Appendix D for classroom observations). I asked the teachers to add any comments if they wish or explain why things happened the way they did. Most teachers did not have anything to say and simply read my notes and told me that it was fine. My notes included what exactly was done in class with no analysis or my comments. This was to avoid any sensitivity. The common attitude from teachers invited to participate in research is usually a negative one. This is because of the fear of criticism among teachers about their teaching, their worry that they are being judged and evaluated. Furthermore, ELI had newly introduced a supervision team that supervises and grades classes based on the teachers' teaching performance in class. Due to this authoritative culture of learning, classroom observation, even for

research purposes, was not liked by my peers. Therefore, I was careful when writing my observations to avoid anything that would appear to be an evaluation.

In this section, I will narrate the nine observations that took place in ELI. The aim, as previously stated, to get a comprehensive picture of the teaching and learning in ELI writing classes. It is not, however an evaluation, but rather a description of the learning and teaching environment. For confidentiality regarding my peers, teachers' names were coded as "Teacher 1", "Teacher 2", and so on, for all nine teachers. In the following description of the classroom observations, I firstly discuss the teaching approaches in the nine classes including the teaching materials used. Secondly, I discuss the students' behaviours and response in the observed classes. Thirdly, I discuss the teachers' behaviour and attitude in class. All three factors are intertwined and create a culture unique to its classroom.

For Level 101, I conducted two classroom observations. On the 10 September 2013, the first observation was conducted at 9:30 am. There were 20 students in the class, and the Teacher 3 introduced the topic of their paragraph writing which was "Family and Friends". The teacher started writing four points on the board: "1.space indentation, 2. the first sentence should include a topic sentence, 3. title – the first letter should be capitalized, 4. concluding sentence" (Appendix D3). Teacher 3 explains the meaning of the word topic, and then moves on to explain topic sentences, and then moves to explain the detail sentences. Abruptly, the teacher moves on to ask students to read their concluding sentences from their previous paragraph writing. One student raises her hand and is called upon by the teacher, and reads out her sentence. The teacher provides the ideas to the students by giving them what she called a list of "hints", "Name, age, job,

occupation, country, city, hobbies, likes, married or not” (Appendix D3). The class was strictly controlled by the teacher. There were no alterations to the materials provided by ELI.

On the 11 September 2013, the second observation took place in Teacher 1's class at 8:20 am (see appendix D1). Teacher 1 briefly introduces me to the students as a teacher/researcher and tell me to sit anywhere I want. I choose an empty chair among the students. I did this in every class I observed. The total numbers of students present were 21 in total. The lesson started with an Islamic greeting, and students were told to take their places and be quiet. The teacher gives no introduction to the lesson, but rather jumps into a “fill in the blanks” activity for writing practice. Students are quiet and passive and only respond when asked upon. The teacher gives no praise for correct answer, nor gives a chance for students who provide a wrong answer. The atmosphere is very authoritarian, with the teacher fully in control of the class activities. There was no apparent rapport with the students. Even though the Teacher 1 asked whether students had any questions, the atmosphere seemed to be intimidating and discouraged questions. The main objective seemed to be to give the correct answers and sit quietly. I noted: “Teacher moves to page 4, which is ‘Vocabulary in context’. Teacher asks students to read silently and match the picture with the character ‘Marisol’. Students discuss quietly” (Appendix D1). During the last part of the class, students were asked to write a paragraph. Even though they had already written a paragraph before, there was no revision of how to write a paragraph, and the preparation for paragraph writing were the previous activities: “fill in the blanks”, and “answering questions”.

On the 19th September, I conducted my second classroom observation at 8:15 am. There were 16 students in class, and like the previous observation, the teacher started her lesson by writing on the board. The teacher began giving a grammatical lesson on the present simple and contractions. Only five students participated, the rest of the class were sitting passively looking at the teacher:

Five students raise their hands to participate. Teacher demonstrates on the board how negative contraction forms should be written. Teacher uses different colour board pens to highlight the contractions on the board. Ss are writing what is on the board. T praises Students when they get their answers correct. Teacher asks the class if what she explained was clear. They reply positively. (Appendix D2).

The teacher then turns to the ELI material referred to as “the writing pack”, and the students are asked to write sentences in the negative and positive with simple verbs as a writing exercise. Like the previous class, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 follow the same controlled composition type of teaching writing approach wherein grammar is taught. When Teacher 2 calls upon students who do not raise their hands to answer, they seem embarrassed, uncomfortable with having to answer, because they do not know how to answer. This was an uncomfortable moment for me as an observer in the class because I felt the students were shy and ashamed of not knowing the correct answer. The teacher spoke in a loud voice too, which made the situation more uneasy for the students. At that point of the observation, I thanked the teacher and left the class. For the second observation in level 102, Teacher 4 had 26 students in her class. This class was different to the other three classes in terms of the seating. Students were seated in a U-Shape. Again, the class is quiet, and the teacher instead asks the students what are the different kinds of writing as an introduction to how to write according to the medium of writing. She

tackles this topic to draw their attention to the use of abbreviations and capitalization. Students, like in the other classes, were reluctant to participate. The teacher then “gives the students 5 minutes to write 6 things they did yesterday. Students start to take out papers and write, and the teacher reassures them that they don’t have to put it into sentences, or care for spelling, capitalization” (Appendix D4). This activity was not followed up with a discussion. In fact, there was an abrupt transition to a talk about sentence structure, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization, and then grammatical issues. This lesson though it ended with another free writing activity, it appeared like the teacher was struggling between the two approaches, free writing and teaching writing as a product focusing on grammar and writing mechanics. The students remained passive in the class.

The fifth observation there was a repetition of the type of writing teaching approaches viewing writing as a product focusing on grammar, answering the questions. Like the previous observation, Teacher 5’s class were seated in a U shape facing the teacher. There was a total of 18 students. Students had to answer questions, when the teacher would respond to their answers, she focused on grammatical aspects of the language. In this class, there was a chance for students to be creative and think for themselves in terms of thinking of a place they went to. One of the students suggests the sea, and the teacher answers her by saying that the sea is not a place. There is no group discussion or exchange of ideas. Students working on their own and not interacting with the teacher made the class extremely quiet. Again, like the previous observations, teachers are focusing on grammar and writing mechanics. The instruction is provided in a form of lecture wherein the teacher's opinion is the most important, and who is in full control of the class. There is not much to report on the students because they were neither

given the opportunity to discuss, nor were they made feel comfortable to ask, respond, interact with their peers or with the students. The atmosphere appeared to be stressed by the traditional view of teacher and student, wherein they were told exactly what to do and only teaching was taking place but not learning.

Teachers were not making the effort to make sure that the students were understanding. The general appearance including the students' facial expressions indicated that they were not interested or motivated but were simply in the class because they had to. This observation was apparent across all five observations. Two observations were conducted in level 103, the first was on the 12th February and the other on the 6th March, 2014. In Teacher 6's class, there were 26 students. Like previous observations, there are no greetings, or friendly rapport apparent when the teacher walks in, instead the teacher asks to open the writing pack exercise one, and asks what are they talking about. From my point of view, I did not understand what they were referring to because it was unclear at that point that they were referring to a previous lesson. The topic for writing was titled "An Awful Experience" (Appendix D5). Teacher 6 asked the students to brainstorm words that can describe this topic and writes them on the board. This activity ends abruptly and sheets of paper are distributed to the students to start writing. At this point, the students appear confused and are not sure what to do, and they started to talk in Arabic with one another. Teacher 6 does not offer any explanation of what they are doing, instead turns to write on the board a few questions; "What happened?" and "How did you feel?" (Appendix D6). Students are called upon to answer the questions. When a few answers are prompted, the teacher asks them to write at home. This class, though started to brainstorm words to describe the writing topic, the teacher did not continue with the writing approach. There did not

appear to be a logical sequence to the way the writing lesson unfolded causing confusion for the students.

The second observation for level 103, was on the 6th March, 2014 with 24 students in the class. This class seemed smaller than the other class. It was teacher fronted and the chairs were nailed to the floor. I sat at the back of the class. The teacher started the lesson by asking the students to put two A3 size papers on each wall. The exercise was to correct the sentences by discussing it with their peers. It appeared very awkward for the students to see the papers because of the chairs being in the way and because there were 12 students trying to read the paper, so some just stood but were not able to join in the discussion. The teacher offered help to both groups, and then asked them to be seated and gave them another five minutes to complete the exercise as she distributed the same exercise to the students. She then called two of the students to the board to write the sentence. One of the students writes the sentence correctly, and quickly rushes back to her seat, while the other as she is writing, the teacher immediately asks the class where is the mistake making the student embarrassed. The student is standing at the board, and the teacher keeps asking the class for the mistake made by her, finally one calls the answer and the student comes to the board to correct the mistake. The following exercise is again A3 size papers put up on the wall, but this time four papers, two at the front of the class and two at the back. It is less crowded and students are still finding it difficult to read the papers because of the chairs obscuring the way. The teacher asks for answers and the students jointly answer together. Some do not say anything, and then they are asked to be seated in their places. Then there is a sudden jump in topic, as the teacher asks the students to write a topic sentences for a topic entitled “A Scary Experience”, and nobody

seems to want to participate. The teacher then in an attempt to motivate them promises them one mark if they give a sentence. One student voluntarily raises her hand and is called upon to come up to the board and writes the sentence. The teacher briefly explains the characteristics of a topic sentence, and the lesson is finished. In both classes, in level 103, there does not seem any difference in the type of instruction provided to students, they are drilled into focusing on the writing mechanics and the grammatical structure. There is a hint of the use of writing process, but it is not followed through with more explanation, and the students do appear genuinely lost in terms of what to do. The materials in the writing pack are carried out as outlined in the lesson plan, so there is no deviation from their teaching when students appear lost or confused. In fact, the relationship between teacher and student seem robotic authoritative relationship in relation to the student and teacher roles in the classroom. There is much focus on the fact of making mistakes, just like in Teacher 6 's class, which would in turn result in students being discouraged or in fact avoid participating in fear of making mistakes. In the next section, I discuss the last two observations that were held in 104 level classes.

There were 25 students in Teacher 8's class, and the class was small in size. When I came in the students were already in groups of three. There were two trainee teachers in class rotating through the groups offering assistance. The teacher briefed me about the lesson that they were instructed to form an outline and the genre of the paragraph was reasoning specifically give reasons for what they like to do. The class was buzzing with communication among the students discussing the task. The worksheet entailed a format of an outline wherein they had to add their main and supporting ideas. I noticed with some groups, there was

a dominant person who was talking while others would just listen and copy the ideas. Another group was using a dictionary, but the teacher discouraged the use of a dictionary in case of choosing the wrong word. The teacher asks the students to nominate a person in their group who will read their outline. Six outlines are read aloud and Teacher 8 was praising students as they gave their answers.

Unfortunately, the teacher ended the writing lesson and I was informed that they will be teaching grammar.

On the 4th April 2014 Teacher 9's class was my last observation. The class had 22 students seated in a U shape. Again there was no introduction to the lesson as the teacher started writing on the board main ideas, body, and conclusion (Appendix D9). She then asks the students to open their writing pack on the sample of an essay. Questions are asked by the teacher to the students, such as “what is the topic about?” and students jointly answer together. The teacher went through the paragraph explaining, asking the meaning of different words, and goes through the whole paragraph word by word. She followed this by a fill in the blanks exercise to compose the body of an essay. Even though they are supposed to compose an essay, the teacher is still introducing “topic”, and “title”. There is a discussion among students in Arabic about the meaning of words and what they are supposed to do. An exercise is carried out to choose the main idea. In this class, most students were talking and laughing, and the teacher kept looking at them to stop, but it continued on throughout the lesson. This approach to teaching writing in this lesson started out like a genre approach wherein a model paragraph was given to follow the format, however, the focus was on lexical items, with a focus on main ideas, but again like the previous observations there seemed no

logic in the way the lesson was delivered. A controlled approach with fill in the blanks exercises seemed to be a trend with teaching writing.

In this section, I have presented the data from nine classroom observations. I described each one with reference to the writing approaches applied, student and teacher relationships, and the general atmosphere of the classroom. I now turn to the interviews I conducted with learners at ELI prior to the workshops.

5.2.3 Learner Interviews

In pre-workshop interviews, I used a semi-structured design based on questions about five themes related to the students' perceptions on writing, their needs, teaching approaches, the materials used in writing classes, and possible solutions to problems they face when writing. The interviews were conducted in the Arabic language and transcribed. I then translated all transcripts into the English language. This was to provide learners with the opportunity to express and give as much information as possible avoiding any language barriers. In the table below, I provide the interviews conducted before the pre-workshop interview with the timings of each interview followed by the timings for the post workshop interviews:

Table 6: Students' Interviews Specifics

Pre Workshop Interview							
Students' Names	<i>Alaa</i>	<i>Amani</i>	<i>Banan</i>	<i>Hana</i>	<i>Maya</i>	<i>Nawal</i>	<i>Ola</i>
Duration	<i>12:23</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>16:07</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>17:27</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>22:12</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>10:29</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>08:54</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>14:28</i> <i>minutes</i>
Post Workshop Interview							
Duration	<i>06:02</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>05:51</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>09:34</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>06:56</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>11:06</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>05:08</i> <i>minutes</i>	<i>06:34</i> <i>minutes</i>

Students were very shy, hesitant, not articulate, and appeared uneasy. With some students, there were spaces wherein nothing was said, and it created awkwardness.

For example, with the interview with Amani (Appendix B1, lines 7-15):

	Researcher	Okay [...] Amani [...] how do you perceive the English curriculum?
		<i>A look of astonishment signalling that she doesn't understand the question</i>
However, with other	Researcher	Is it motivating? Boring? What's your opinion?
interviews, there was	Amani	So so
	Researcher	Okay, it is difficult or easy?
a flow of ideas and	Amani	Easy[...] there are words I don't understand
question and	Researcher	Okay, does the teacher use different methods teaching?
	Amani	Yes, it changes
answers, as in the	Researcher	It changes?
	Amani	Emm

interview with Alaa (B2, lines 67-72):

	Researcher	What kind of change would you like to see?
	Alaa	That the content should be organized because currently it's not.
	Researcher	Explain what you mean by "organized".
	Alaa	The publications are not clear, the sheets and books are not alike. Some sheets include things that I can't understand like grammar. There's no explanation for Grammar, so I have to refer to the books to understand.
	Researcher	What changes and improvements in your writing would you like to see?

Alaa When the teacher gives us a class, I want her to encourage and provide us with new information everyday rather than to just read the contents of books then leaves.

A total of seven interviews were conducted with students. The first set of interviews were conducted at the beginning of cycle one. These interviews lasted between ten and twenty minutes per student. The students spoke very little, and there was an obvious case of the asymmetrical relationship between us. There was a sense of uneasiness, and although I tried to make the atmosphere as easy going as possible, students gave very brief answers to questions. This was due to the time constraints on their schedules and could possibly be because they were not used to be asked questions about their learning. The fact their opinions mattered was an issue they were not used to. In the following section I present the main content of the learner interviews.

Amani believed that writing in English was important to her but did not have much to say why she believed it was important. She received seven years of language instruction in school and also attended English courses. She could not articulate her opinion on the English curriculum used in ELI, nor the teaching methods used. She appeared to struggle answering the questions. Sometimes she stayed quiet, so I would rephrase the question or simply jump to the next question. She expressed that she enjoyed pair work, and did not experience group work. She could not provide any suggestions on how she could improve her writing. Amani found it difficult to self-reflect on her learning. She constantly wanted me to suggest examples or provide her with choices. As this interview was conducted during the first cycle, the negative element that she found in the workshops was

the lack of enthusiasm from the students in the class. The positive was the teaching methods used for instruction. Amani believed that it was the teacher who is responsible for her learning.

Alaa on the other hand was more articulate in comparison to Amani, when she was asked why learning to write in English was important, she gave a very detailed answer, which mirrored her objective. She says:

Let us take social media as an example, when someone asks me about Islam, I can only reply in Arabic, that's why no one would understand me. I must communicate in English so that they can understand what I'm saying [..] So, if someone disapproves of Islam in some way, I can discuss it with them in English. (B2, line 4)

Alaa believed writing was fun but not when she had to write for exams. She enjoys writing in English about herself. She recalled memorizing paragraphs in school, she explained it was the way they were taught to write for exams. Being in the university with the exposure of new teaching methods, she felt more independent. She saw the benefits of being able to be independent in her learning even when she found it difficult doing things on her own. She benefited from the writing process approach to writing as it gave her some structure on what to do when she writes. She liked working in pairs like Amani, but preferred group work. Amani liked the use of visual aids, such as pictures and videos. Unlike Amani, Alaa took partial responsibility for her learning. She believed the curriculum is not organized. Alaa believed that the teachers in ELI should be more innovated in their teaching approaches, and not simply stick with the traditional approach to teaching. She would like the teachers to be enthusiastic about learning and encourage her. She believed that she can better her writing by improving her vocabulary and grammar.

Banan enjoyed learning English. She saw the benefit of learning English for her immediate future, but in the long term, she viewed it as a beneficial skill for her future career. Like Alaa, Banan too believed that the teaching methods need improvement, however, thought the curriculum was good depending on the way it was delivered. She believed, like Alaa, that the teacher should be enthusiastic. There needed to be a break in the routine by delivering lessons using various teaching aids to attract their interventions and keep them interested. Banan like Alaa liked working in groups. Banan wants to be able to construct sentences. She believed she lacked vocabulary, and basic grammar knowledge, however it was important for Banan to be able to communicate her ideas, and express what is on her mind.

Hana believed it is important to learn English because she communicated with people from the UK. She enjoyed writing in English when it was simple meaning when she could do the task at hand. She saw the curriculum as a repetition of grammatical rules, so it was viewed as boring. Hana's writing strategy when she came to write in English was to write the sentences in Arabic and then translate them into English. Unlike Banan, Alaa and Amani, Hana liked to work alone. Like Amani, Hana believed the teacher held the responsibility for her learning, and her role was minor. Hana would like the lessons to be delivered more creatively using different mediums of instruction like videos and pictures.

Maya believed learning English is important for her Grade Point Average (GPA) and possibly her future career. She did not enjoy writing in English but believed it is essential nowadays to learn it. She explained ELI's stance towards writing in the classes as unimportant until the time came closer to the exam. Maya

liked to work with a friend like Amani, and thought group work was messy. She liked the use of visual aids. Maya took full responsibility for her learning. She believed she can improve her writing by understanding the use of punctuation better. She believed the workshops so far are beneficial in the sense of the enthusiasm in class and that there were choices of what they learnt and how they learnt it; however, she pointed out the lack of time that affects their learning in the writing workshops.

Nawal believed English and writing was essential. She found the materials used in ELI repetitious and uninteresting. Nawal liked group work because it was motivating. Like Hana she found visual aids useful for learning new vocabulary items and learning in general. When she came to write, she focused on the ideas she wanted to compose. When I asked Nawal who was responsible for her learning, she said herself and shrugged her shoulders, when I followed up on that point, she said she was responsible because teachers did not help her, though the responsibility should be on them. She believed her grammatical knowledge was her strong point, “ Maybe the grammar” (Nawal, B6, line 60). while her lack of vocabulary held her back on writing.

Ola believed learning English is important because she needed it when travelling abroad and writing was important for day-to-day interactions. She believed the university expected the students to have good writing proficiency when in fact most of them had not been, she felt ignored by the teachers because of her low proficiency level and the fact that she cannot keep with the teacher's teaching pace. She said “ I think they are expecting that we had good education. The truth is that we were not well taught in English. They just care for well-educated students and ignore those who are not” (Ola, B7, line 16). She felt that

the teachers did not care if she learnt or not. When she writes, she focused on her grammar and it was her main focus not her ideas or writing mechanics. Like Alaa and the others, Ola enjoyed group work. She found it difficult to memorise words, so she pictures and visual aids in general were useful to her and assisted her in memorizing vocabulary items. She needed help with sentence structure, but her main weakness she says was spelling. She disliked restrictions on what to write, she liked being given the choices on topics to write about.

5.3 Phase Two: Intervention

In this second phase of the project, I conducted 24 writing workshops as a form of intervention with seven students, Amani, Alaa, Banan, Hana, May Nawal and Ola. The workshops were divided into four cycles, each cycle consisting of six workshops. The first cycle was conducted when students were in level 101, the second during level 102, the third during level 103, and the last cycle during level 104. All seven students moved up a level according to the system in ELI. Below, I describe the design of the workshops in each cycle, and share the teaching reflections I noted during and after the intervention. I also share student feedback from their classroom diaries.

Turning firstly to the recruitment of students, I visited all the classes in ELI to describe the voluntary writing workshops and to invite students to sign up. I also asked teachers to mention the opportunity to their students. I started the project with 20 students interested in participating. However, by the time I put together a possible schedule, I was left with 15 students who had different timetables. It was impossible to get all 15 students to meet on the same day and time for the writing

workshops. I therefore had to divide them according to their availability, which meant three groups. One group consisted of five students, the other group with four, and the last with six students. I suggested to my students to form a WhatsApp group for each group to keep track of timings, and locations of the workshops and if they had any questions to ask, they would be able to contact via the application. They all loved the idea, and three WhatsApp groups were formed.

Unfortunately, some students found attending the workshops during the break stressful because of their heavy timetable and the fact that they have so much to do in their foundation year. By the third workshop, I was down to one group of seven students who continued on with me for the 24 workshops. I was very flexible regarding the time slot for the workshops, but my students still struggled to find a common time among them because they all had different schedules. Their English classes in ELI were at the same time, so they decided that they would come during their 40-minute break in the afternoon sessions. This was a sign of their dedication to the research, but it also meant that it could take 10 minutes for them to travel through the campus, which decreased my time with them in the workshop. This was one the constraints of the context, but also the only opportunity I had to get the students together at the same time. However, it is worth noting that all seven learners had a 100% attendance record at the workshops.

5.3.1 Student profiles

Below, I give an account of the seven students who participated in workshops:

Amani, Alaa, Banan, Hana, Maya, Nawal, and Ola (names have been changed).

These seven students were all Saudi nationals and Arabic L1 speakers. They were

all aged 18 years old at the time of the study. This cohort had already received six years of English language education at secondary level, and following the ELI placement test, they were registered in the foundation program's Level 101 English class (A1, common European proficiency level).

Amani was extremely shy, serious and reserved. She was aiming to study Islamic studies for her Bachelor degree. She was highly formal with me, extremely quiet in class, but would talk to me after class, ask questions, and show me her writing that she would have done at home. She did not interact much in class, and the rest of the students in turn did not interact with her either. Out of all of the seven students, Amani is the only one who is still in contact.

Alaa, on the other hand, had a bubbly personality. She was outspoken in comparison to the other students. She was friends with Bayan and Maya. She was ambitious and excited about being in the university. She complained a lot of not having much time to participate in the research, but thought it was a great opportunity.

Banan always made sure to sit next to Maya. She appeared to struggle with tasks at times and would not ask me directly; instead, she would get Maya to ask for her. Towards the end of the academic year, she started to ask herself. She spoke in Arabic a lot in class. She wanted to gain admission to home Economics.

Hana was a clever student. She was independent when there was a solo task, but did not appear to enjoy collaborative work. Like Amani, she used to revise the content of her writing before the workshops, and her dad used to help her. She was not close to any of the girls, but was sociable in general. She did not like writing in the classroom diary. She asked me once, what was the use of me knowing what she thought? She aimed to study Science in college. Maya was

quiet a lot of time in class, unless she was talking to Banan something which occurred regularly. She used to really try her best during tasks in class. She would not ask many questions, and like the others was very reserved.

Nawal, too, like Maya was quiet during class. She wanted to do Business studies. Like Amani, she did not like to talk much in class but she would come to me after class to ask questions, look at her work from her English course. She complained a lot about her schedule, and that she had no time to do anything.

Ola started the workshops very quiet and did not appear to be motivated or that interested. However, I noticed when the task or activity interested her, she would be very attentive and take many notes. She communicated with Maya and Nawal during and after class. They worked well together as a group. She often came in late, and was apologetic. She gave a warm hearted thanks when the workshops ended.

All seven students were generally quiet and reserved but this was because of the power relation that dictated how they behaved. Even though they knew they were not graded and their participation would not affect their course work, it was extremely difficult to get them to open up. When they felt uneasy that when asked personal questions, I would change the topic.

In terms of the topic and subject matter, the participants were asked at the beginning of each cycle what topics they would like to write about and their preferences regarding how the activities could be organized. Through classroom discussions, the topics and medium of instruction by which the writing workshops were designed were jointly agreed. For example, most of the participants expressed a desire to watch video clips so that they could write about what they see, in other words using visual examples as stimuli. They also preferred to work

in groups rather than individually. For the last cycle (cycle 4), participants expressed their desire to write paragraphs. They have asked to see models of paragraphs combined with some pictures and video clips to assist them in the process of writing. Therefore, for cycle 4, the genre approach was applied along with visual aids to deliver the writing instruction. The duration of the workshops differed but ranged between 30-40 minutes.

A portfolio approach to writing was also employed during the writing workshops (see Appendix F), with the aim of recording students' progress and showcasing their achievements. It presents the students with the opportunity to reflect on her learning via the diary section. This instrument not only helped me to get to know my students and what works for them, but it is also a form of practice that can act as an informant to the student herself on how she learns best. A vocabulary log was added to keep track of their vocabulary learning, motivated by the fact that students informed me that lack of vocabulary was one of their main hurdles in writing. The last two sections in their portfolio collate their writing samples. This part of the portfolio can give insight into the writing process and students' writing strategies. It is also motivating for students to see how much they have accomplished throughout the year. It is worth noting that this intervention, through basing the writing workshops on needs analysis, learner preferences, and learner portfolios, is a considerable departure for this educational context and entirely unlike the mainstream approach to English language provision. The data from the classroom diaries were not as rich as anticipated. Ideally, it would have been better to give some workshops on how to students' can reflect on their learning, and provide some practices. However, this was not an option for this study as time was a major limitation. Even though, the students' wrote their

reflection in Arabic, they were not used to critically think about their learning. To them, this appeared to be a foreign concept, and this was their first opportunity to actually think about their learning and write reflections. I divided students' responses to the workshops into four cycles. This is because in each cycle, students were expected to have reached a higher level in their proficiency according to the English Language Institute assessment. In each cycle, new objectives were outlined using different mediums of instruction

Learners were asked to write in Arabic about their experiences of each workshop immediately after each one, including what they learned, what they enjoyed most, what was most difficult, what they thought about the topic, and any writing strategies they found useful. This was a new notion for the students. They needed to be encouraged to write their reflections. Although they were reminded to write down what they thought of the workshop, they continued to write about what they did in the workshop, with minimum comments on how they felt about it (see Appendix F under Students' Diaries). They did at times write what they did not like or think useful, but gave very little explanation. Ideally, it would have been useful to train the students before their workshops on ways to reflect on their learning. Some students wrote in English at times. Due to time constraints, some students were not able to complete their diaries regularly. Some completed their diary on one workshop in the following workshop, while others did not. In the following section, I share my field notes taken throughout the project, and provide a narrative account of the four cycles of workshops.

5.3.1 Cycle One

This chief aim of this cycle was getting to know the students to create a relaxed learning atmosphere. The over-arching learning objective for this cycle, based on the CEFR A1 descriptor for written production, was to be able to write short notes. I started off the first workshops with giving the students the opportunity to write about anything thinking that this would be a stress free activity to set the tone of the upcoming workshops, however, this was not the case. Free writing was not successful for students as they kept asking me what to write about. Students were not used to deciding on a topic themselves. In the second workshop, I introduced the use of dictionaries monolingual English dictionaries since they wanted to enhance their vocabulary, this seemed to be appropriate. However this was not the case. They wanted to use online dictionaries rather than hard copy ones, and they wanted me to give them the meaning of the words rather than them looking up the words on their own. On a positive note, the workshops picked up pace when I introduced visual aids through video clips. This approach began to motivate students to write because the medium of instruction attracted their interest. In the first cycle, students gave a total of 33 positive comments in their diaries. These comments included, benefits from learning how to look up words in a dictionary, expression of enjoyment in watching video clips, and being able to compose simple sentences, using appropriate teaching methods. Students gave five negative observations including, time constraints, lack of enthusiasm in some of the workshops, some did not find it very beneficial, while others found it a little difficult. In this first cycle, it was more about getting to know each other. Students appeared very aloof not only to me, but also among each other. They were

extremely quiet and did not participate much. I tried to make the atmosphere more relaxed and less academic in terms of the formality between student and teacher.

In the first workshop, students were given the opportunity to write on whatever topic they wanted. However, they appeared to struggle with what to write rather than how to write it, or in fact maybe it was both together. They expressed that they wanted to learn vocabulary so a vocabulary log was added to their portfolios. As a result, I planned a lesson on how to look up words in a monolingual dictionary. However, in the second workshop, students appeared not to like the idea of searching words in a hard copy dictionary. It was difficult to find what is motivating for the students to work better in class. By the third workshop, I finally got them to start being active learners. They were able to look up words by themselves and in groups. This seemed to be a good strategy on getting the students to interact with one another. I can conclude through observation and reflections that group work was a successful classroom strategy to better the learning process of the students. In the fourth workshop, I introduced some video clips for them to watch. This was successful in terms of them wanting to learn. They appeared to enjoy it. They were involved in writing by themselves without my constant assistance. Here are their reflections on this workshop. Ola writes; "This was a nice enjoyable way of teaching, and it really helped me by watching video clips and describing what we see", and Nawal writes; " Many thanks for the fantastic approach in this workshop".

In the fifth workshop, I was faced with another hurdle. Even though I purposefully decided to continue with the same medium of instruction, the students did not find it interesting. Even though continuously asked what topics they liked, they were very reserved. For the Saudi teaching context, this concept of

involving the learner in their learning, allowing them to make choices and voice their opinions is an innovation that is alien to them. I did not anticipate that it would take this long to develop a comfortable dialogue with my students. In the final workshop in this cycle, I presented the group with a short movie to write notes describing what they see in groups using the words they had taken throughout the previous weeks and/or looking up new ones. This was really an enjoyable activity for both my students and I. They were active, and there was a good sense of humor in the classroom while learning. The atmosphere was relaxed, and learning was starting to become an enjoyable act. For instance Banan writes, " I watched clip for 5-6 minutes, and then composed sentences describing what I saw. I like this way and I think by looking up specific words I need is better than looking up random ones". Hana too expresses her likes; "I loved the presentation of videos and pictures in learning. It was really helpful" along with Maya: "We are finally able to compose sentences and a paragraph. This was one of my biggest problems I faced in the English language and finally I am able to do it".

Table 7: Cycle 1 Workshop Design

Cycle 1				
Workshop	CEFR Descriptor	Topic	Medium of Instruction	Writing Approach
Workshop 1	Students will be able to write simple notes	Students' choice	Writing	Writing as personal expression: Free writing
Workshop 2		Dictionary Use	Writing and reading	
Workshop 3			Visual aids	
Workshop 4		Describing peoples' appearances (facial - clothes)	Video Clips (Visual and auditory)	
Workshop 5			Video Clips Visual and Audio	
Workshop 6			Video Clips Visual and Audio	

5.3.2 Cycle Two

Even though students moved up a level according to the English Language Institute, they were still unable to compose correct sentences; therefore, we remained at an A1 level according to the CEFR descriptors in my writing workshops. My students told me that they wanted to learn the basic components of sentences in English. They also expressed the need to continue on with the methods of instruction as in cycle 1. As a result, we continued using the same medium of instruction, and changed around the writing instruction. I still used visual and audio and pictures, but I also tried to make their writing personal. Towards the end of the workshops, they had to be able to describe themselves so that their peers would be able to guess who they are. The best performance by their votes would win a prize. This appeared to be very motivating with the students.

Table 8: Cycle 2 Workshop Design

Cycle 2				
Workshop	CEFR Descriptor for	Topic	Medium of Instruction	Writing Approach
Workshop 1	Students will be able: - to write simple sentences -to describe	Basic Sentence Structure	Data show (Visual and audio)	Writing as a process
Workshop 2		Compose simple sentences	Video clip (Visual and audio)	
Workshop 3		Pronouns People Descriptions	Pictures (Visual aids)	
Workshop 4		Describing faces	Worksheet (Visual aids) Game	Writing and speaking
Workshop 5		Describing themselves	-	Writing as a process
Workshop 6		Revise Previous Activity	-	-

In this second cycle, students gave a total of 24 positive observations. The observations consisted of the use of pictures of the new vocabulary; games because it was interactive and enjoyable, workshops were motivating, and their ability to write sentences. The negatives overall were seven observations. Time constraints came up as a negative in this cycle; videos clips that were difficult were described as boring, and need to write more.

Students want to start learning more about sentences, and how to structure them. They expressed previously their desire to have more grammatical structured lessons so that they can compose sentences. Knowing that they have taken grammar for the previous six years at least in school, and were ongoing grammar lessons in ELI, this would not on my lesson plan agenda, but this was a plan-centered around the learner, so I opt to go with their needs. However, in the first

workshop in this cycle, I incorporated the grammar lesson, with vocabulary describing how people look (see Cycle Two, Workshop 1) with an audio recording for note taking practice. Instead of the students taking notes straight away, not being able to spell the words hindered their note taking. It appeared that their main concern when writing was not the meaning being communicated but rather the spelling of the words. I tried to divert their attention to the meaning being communicated and advised them to ignore the spelling for a later revision, but this approach was alien to them, and the fact that they could not spell the words hindered their writing process. By the end of the workshop, they expressed the need for practice with pronouns, and since the students' demonstrated interest in descriptions, I decided that it would be a good choice to continue on this topic. Workshop two was a continuation from the previous workshop, though students came with questions to class and the time was short so not much was covered.

The highlight in the third workshop in this cycle was the guessing game. Students were competitive and enjoyed looking for the right words for descriptions. They used the language without resorting to Arabic. This could have been due to four aspects of the class, the first that the students interacted with one another, the activity was interesting, met their needs, and was challenging. For instance Amani writes; "We learned new adjectives from pictures. The other team were more active than us, maybe they have better vocabulary. We identified adjectives for three personalities and we had a competition. There was enthusiasm among the other team but they didn't describe their pictures well enough". Alaa commented, "We were given pictures to describe. We were divided into two groups and each group had to describe so they can guess what we are describing. A new and fun way".

In the fourth, fifth and sixth workshops in this cycle, students were immersed in writing a detailed description of their appearance so that they could swap papers and their peer draw according to the given description. This was a successful activity in terms of their motivation to write, working on their own, communicating their description through detail, and the fact that friendly interactions stemmed from the activity.

5.3.3 Cycle Three

In the third cycle, the students chose fashion as a topic to write about. It was important to me to keep the task as simple as possible, so that they would remain motivated to write. This is why I suggested that they make a collage of their favorite fashion pieces. The task was that they choose cutting of fashion pieces in pairs, and tag them by writing a short description of the items. They were then asked to come up to the class and describe their choices. This seemed to be really an enjoyable activity for them to do. In workshop four, I introduced postcard writing. They were given handmade postcards with a picture of a country on it. The task was to write a short message to a friend of theirs from the place they saw on the card. At the end of Level 103, students presented their collage to the class and voted for the best work.

In cycle 3, students' positive comments summed up to 20 with only one negative comment, which was time constraint again. Positive comments included the workshops being described as “fun”, “helpful”, “enjoyable” and “beneficial”. The first workshop in this cycle was the introduction of writing process. This was supposedly introduced to students during the ELI writing course; however, as the

lesson was introduced starting with brainstorming, and drawing mind maps, students took time to process the information. Unfortunately, the duration of the workshop was only 30 minutes, but many were able to write down the short messages. In the second workshop, I introduced the topic of fashion. This was a topic of their choice, and I discussed some vocabulary related to the description of different pieces of clothing. I asked them to practice putting the words into complete sentences describing the clothes. I was pleased with the response to this activity as they all participated, actively writing with little help from me, and appeared to enjoy it too. Some students echoed the positive outcome in their diary, for instance Banan writes, “The topic today was about fashion and style. We needed to choose what our style composes of in a few words. The topic was really good and it caught our intention”. Amani too says, “We learned new words about fashion and clothes. It was great day. We drank coffee and had doughnuts”. Ola also echoes those thoughts, “It was a fun and helpful workshop”.

In the third workshop, I introduced the students to the concept of making a collage. I brought to class cut outs from magazines of various clothes and gave A3 sized poster for them to create their collages in pairs. The aim was for them to create their own fashion poster by demonstrating the pieces of fashion they like while describing it short notes. The best collage voted by the class will win a prize. They wanted to take their collages with them after class. Towards the end of the class, students expressed that they wanted to start writing paragraphs because of their English course requirements. The aims of the fourth workshop, was to give a brief discussion on English and Arabic rhetoric. The second aim was to write a short message on a postcard to a friend. Each postcard had a different picture of a location. They chose the one they preferred, and wrote a short message on it.

However, the time was very short, and would have been more beneficial if more time was allocated for the activity. Here are some of the students' responses: Ola writes; "It was a useful workshop. We learned how to draw a mind map on the topic, and then after that sentences and then a complete topic. I learned the difference between writing in Arabic and writing in English. In English, I start straightway with the topic whereas the opposite in Arabic", and Nawal says; "A really enjoyable and beneficial workshop".

At the beginning of the fifth workshop, students polished off their collages and then each pair came up in front of the class to talk about their collages many of them read their descriptive sentences and notes from the collage itself. Each pair voted for the best collage, and a winner was chosen. There was a great atmosphere in the class. Towards the end of the class, students expressed their desire to practice writing paragraphs because of their course requirements. In addition, they wanted to see examples of how paragraphs are constructed. In the sixth workshop, I decided to present paragraphs about Saudi women who run various fashion business. They were cut out from a magazine and since the topic was fashion I thought this would be a good idea to continue with. The aim of giving these paragraphs was for them to deconstruct it, by pointing out the various pieces of information I asked during the class. They were able to answer the questions, but they appeared to focus on finding the meaning of the words they did not understand.

Table 9: Cycle 3 Workshop Design

Cycle 3				
Workshop	CEFR Descriptor	Topic	Learning Style	Writing Approach
Workshop 1	Students will be able: -to write short notes on a topic of choice	Revision (Basic sentence structure)	Writing	Writing as a cognitive process
Workshop 2		Fashion		-
Workshop 3		Fashion Vocabulary	Kinaesthetic	-
Workshop 4	-to write a short simple postcard	Postcard Message	Writing	Reader oriented teaching -Writing as social interaction
Workshop 5		Fashion		Writing processes
Workshop 6		Fashion		

5.3.4 Cycle Four

At this level, I focused on writing as a cognitive process by practicing use of mind maps, outlines, and writing drafts. Time was an issue: it was the final term and the pressure on students to achieve a high GPA was intense. I gave them a short writing test, which had different types of writing for them to complete. I gave it to them to complete at home, so that they could practise extensive and untimed writing. They came to class and asked me a few questions about different activities. Many of them appeared to be struggling. They all needed guidance and explanation in Arabic.

Some criticism from students in the fourth cycle of workshops was accompanied by a general lack of enthusiasm and enjoyment, it seemed that the tasks were too challenging and students were under considerable time constraints. However, some themes also emerged in their classroom diaries in terms of positive points. The atmosphere of the classroom was a common factor mentioned by the participants. They described it as both relaxed and exciting. The fact that students had control of the topics they wrote about appeared to be an element they enjoyed. They stated that describing themselves, and writing about fashion were interesting. They also enjoyed playing games. The best medium of instruction was writing about video clips. They emphasized that visual aids and audio were helpful in their learning process. They mentioned that their vocabulary increased and that this assisted them to write better using their vocabulary log. The role of the teacher in terms of the style of teaching and demonstrating a friendly face were effective in their view.

In the first and the second workshops of this cycle, I continued the activity previously discussed in the last workshop in cycle 3. Since the students were focused on the words they did not know, I suggested that they underline them, and underline the information that informed them about the Saudi designer. They looked up some of the words on their online dictionary on their phones. I explained how to deconstruct the paragraph to a mind map on the board, and then went around individually to give them one to one assistance. Students appeared not sufficiently confident. Maya writes “Useful even though there is a lot of homework. Also, strengthens reading along with writing”, whereas Amani writes; “The teacher asked us about our exams and grades. We drew a mind map on a topic. It was a nice topic”. Banan writes how difficult it was for her, “It was

difficult to be honest because the words were new and the article was long. I feel if the article was short”, and Maya finds the workshop positive as she writes, “Completing our work and learning new words. I did not find any negatives”.

In the third, fourth and fifth workshops, time was extremely tight. The students were very much occupied with doing their university course work as the academic year was coming to an end. They wanted to finish the test and finish up with the workshops because of the time limitations in their schedules. Some wanted to attend extra statistics classes, others needed to meet their instructors in the offices, etc. Since the foundation year’s (previously discussed in section 3.3.6) GPA is the decider on the students' admission to their major field, it was understandably a critical time for them. In the last workshop, students wrote a paragraph on a topic of their choice and this was for them to compare their writings from the beginning of the year until that point. Afterwards, there was an informal discussion between us about writing and if their perceptions differed from before and after. They felt more positive towards their writing, and expressed that they had a sense of direction on how to write starting with brainstorming, organizing their ideas. In the next section, I discuss the post intervention interviews with students.

Table 10: Cycle 4 Workshop Design

Cycle 4					
Workshop	CEFR Descriptor	Topic	Learning Style	Writing Approach	
Workshop 1	Students will be able to write a paragraph	Paragraph Modelling	Reading and Writing	-Writing through reading -Genre	
Workshop 2		Drawing Mind Maps		Writing as a cognitive process	
Workshop 3		Writing an Outline			
Workshop 4		Complete paragraph writing			Writing as a cognitive process
Workshop 5		Complete paragraph writing			Writing as a cognitive process
Workshop 6		Free Writing	Writing	Writing as personal expression	

5.4 Students Post intervention interviews

This was my last and final meeting with students. All of my seven students were in a hurry to get it over with because of their anxiety and stress during exam time. Interviews only lasted about ten minutes each. However, students were much more relaxed and at ease answering the questions than before the workshops (see Appendix B).

Amani was one of the very reserved girls in the workshops. She was not as sociable as the rest of the class. However, she worked hard and was very attentive. Her participation was limited, but she would ask me many questions on a one to

one basis. Amani says she enjoyed writing in the workshops, and that she learned the basics of how to write. In the first interview she said she liked pair work, but having tried group work during the workshops, she now prefers working in groups because there is more of a collaborative way of learning by gathering and sharing information amongst the group. According to her preference, her favorite workshops were those wherein videos were presented and wherein fashion was discussed those were in cycles one and three. Amani views her areas of strength in writing as her knowledge of grammatical rules. She feels she needs improvement in the way she organizes her ideas and her knowledge of vocabulary needs to increase. She was using the vocabulary log, but only during the workshops. She used dictionaries throughout the workshop bilingual from Arabic to English.

Alaa showed great enthusiasm when conducting this interview. In general, she became outspoken during the workshops when she became familiar with me and the rest of the girls. She said that she really enjoyed the workshops. The best aspect of it was the fact that the topics were not compulsory like the ones in the curriculum. She explains how her writing has evolved, "My writing changed; I know now how to compose a sentence, I know how to look up words and construct them into a sentence like sentences to compose a paragraph/ I know more words than before"(P3, line 6). She enjoyed group work and saw the benefits of exchanging information with her peers. Her best activity in the workshops was the collage about fashion, which was in cycle three because the topic was relevant and of her interest. Her writing is better in terms of her ability to construct sentences, because she is able to look for words in a monolingual English dictionary, but she says her writing remains limited in the number of sentences she is able to write. However, her vocabulary has improved and the vocabulary log was used in both

the workshops and during the ELI classes. She distinguishes between the role of the teacher in ELI classes and the workshops, “The workshop, the teacher allows us to be more at ease than in the lectures. The subject teacher has to give us everything because she has to, but during the workshop like we can relax” (P2, line 44) .

Banan said that she really enjoyed the workshops. She explains the differences between the workshops and lectures in that in workshops she was able to learn “how to write” (P3, line 3). She goes on to say:

I originally didn't know grammatical rules or writing principles, so the workshops helped me in that way even in level one, they didn't used to tell us the organisation of the sentence like first subject and then verb. I never knew anything like that, so in the workshops you gave us rules in the beginning and we benefited a lot from it. Also the vocabulary, there are words in the books but we don't benefit from them in writing, even when you write, you don't think of using them, which is the opposite of the workshops, the words we take are varied and can use them in the writing, so it helps a lot. (P3, line 6)

Banan though she said she liked group work in the first interview (see section 5.6.3), she changed her mind of the course of the year. She prefers to work in pairs because she found group work chaotic and felt uncomfortable. She preferred the workshops wherein videos and pictures were presented because they were motivating and she enjoyed it. Banan says her writing has improved in terms of her being able to construct basic sentences, organizing ideas, and her vocabulary has increased. She realizes that she still needs to improve. She used the vocabulary log in the ELI classes as well as the workshops. More importantly, she was starting to write her ideas in English rather than Arabic. Banan highlights the difference of attitude with the teachers in the workshop and ELI classes:

I feel in the lecture she is obligated by the curriculum like I am going to give you this and that's it, it stops there, you have to write a paragraph, but in the workshop no we learn the rules and we learn the basics and after that we are asked about what we know, so here lies the difference that here there is care if you know or not but there she doesn't feel obligated to give you any more than what she is already giving you. (P3, line 40)

For Hana, the main thing she learnt was how to organize her ideas when writing. She found a difference between ELI classes and the workshops in terms of the content and the ways by which the lessons were delivered. In ELI, they taught from the book, whereas various mediums were used to deliver instruction in the workshops. Hana though expressed in the first interview that she preferred to work alone, her opinion changed to liking group work. She enjoyed listening to her peers' opinion and sees the benefit of group work in generating ideas. She does not view any weaknesses in her writing, her explains how her vocabulary has improved, and that she has used the vocabulary log in the workshops and sometimes in the ELI classes. She uses Arabic/English dictionaries when writing. Like Banan she pointed out the differences of the teacher's role in the workshop and the ELI classes. She says, "[I]ike when we came in level one and two we didn't know, like we would be given a topic and told to write with certain characteristics, but in the workshop I learnt how to write and how I learn" (P4, line 44). Maya expressed the difference between the workshops and ELI classes:

[..] In the workshops we brainstormed and outlined ideas in points and then arranged in a paragraph. In the lectures, we write up draft 1 and then draft 2, like in the workshop the ideas are organised different from the lectures. (P5, line 2)

She learnt how to organize her ideas from general to specific and she learnt how to write whereas in ELI classes, grammar lessons are taught but no writing instruction is given. Writing to her in the curriculum is a secondary skill whereas in the workshop writing was considered the main skill. Maya liked to work alone rather than a group and though she expressed in the first interview that she liked working with a peer, this view has changed. She found group work distracting especially in the cases wherein the girls in the group are not familiar with one another, and finds it better to do her work by herself. Maya liked the rest of her peers enjoys lessons wherein there is visual aids because it was both “motivating and entertaining” (P5, line 16). The workshop had changed Maya's perspectives, she says, “I’m motivated in terms of not being afraid of it the way I used to be. Now if someone asks me to write, I know what I am to do, it’s something normal” (P5, line 26). Maya used Arabic English dictionaries from her mobile when writing.

Nawal expressed her stress and work overload many times throughout the workshops. She found the foundation year stressful, but remained consistent in attending the workshops. She enjoyed the workshops and said that she learned more from the workshops than in the ELI classes. Nawal like Alaa, Amani, and Banan enjoyed group work because they were able to help one another, and also liked the use of visual aids in class. She also used the vocabulary log in ELI classes as well as in the workshops.

Ola did not seem as interested in writing and learning as the rest of the class. Even when conducting the interview, she answered my questions very quickly and was in an apparent rush to finish. Like the majority of students in the study, Ola enjoyed group work, and benefited from the writing workshops in

learning how to structure sentences, increase her vocabulary and organize her ideas to form a paragraph. In the same line, she also liked the use of visual aids and designing the collage. She explains it briefly saying, “[t]he videos because we see and hear even though in level one it was a bit difficult but it was nice, the collage because it has stuff that express ourselves” (P7, line 15). She used monolingual and bilingual dictionaries when writing, and used her vocabulary log sometimes in her ELI classes.

The interviews with the seven students gave insights into what benefitted them from the workshops, and it also highlights what writing teaching approaches were not successful. They did not like the typical usual way of teaching writing from books, they wanted hands-on tasks wherein they were actively writing in class. They enjoyed process approach to writing because it gave them some structure regarding how to start writing. Although process writing was mentioned by the teachers in the earlier interviews, it was not taught in any classes at ELI. The use of visual aids and different styles of presenting lessons was attractive to students. To them this effort from the teacher made a difference because it demonstrated that the teacher wanted them to learn. The students were sensitive towards the attitude of the teacher. Many of them claimed that the teacher just wanted to teach and leave the class. A perceived empathy in teachers towards their students was deeply rooted and apparent in the post-intervention interviews and affected the way the students perceived their classes and their English writing.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how the first two phases of my project were implemented, with the aims of exploring the context through observations and interviews, and then carrying out the series of writing workshops among a core group of seven students. In the next chapter, I present the third and final reflection phase of my action research project.

Chapter 6: Reflection Phase

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the final phase of this action research, the phase of reflection on the project's intervention and findings. It is organized thematically, and analyses the array of data collected in the first two phases. These data are analyzed thematically, and the following sections pinpoint the challenges perceived in the way English language writing instruction is organised, delivered and experienced by learners.

6.2 How writing is perceived by teachers and students at ELI

According to the teachers I interviewed, the perfection of writing mechanics in writing was viewed as the essence of good writing. Based on the classroom observations, the teachers' approach to writing is that of a building block approach or called the "grammar translation" method, whereby writing is viewed as a product. Hyland has also (2016, p. 4) describes this type of writing (as discussed in 2.4.1) as "disembodied" meaning from the context and personal experiences of the writer. This approach dates back to the 1960s (Raimes, 1991). This was evident in the classrooms whereby writing was thought as a practice for grammar and vocabulary. It was taught through exercises such as "fill in blanks" exercises and answering to "wh-" questions. This is in line with Lee (2013, p. 436) who describes traditional L2 writing classrooms as focusing on the formal aspects of language. The teachers' teaching appeared to be rigid as no alternations were made

to meet the students' needs. There was no diversion from the exercises in the book, and even though students lacked participation in class, there was apparent attempt made by the teachers to improve it. Teacher E thinks that the focus must start by composing sentences and not paragraphs, “ Teaching writing as sentences, not as writing a paragraph as making sentences” (D3, line 4). Teachers believe that this building block approach to writing is indeed a good one. Teacher I describes how writing is taught:

Last year we had these ah building blocks, the older writing booklet, it was like building blocks of the like structure of sentences then we moved into a paragraph, all the sentences talks about the same thing. But now we have a genre approach for this year trying to give students models on the same genre to help them try to write something similar. (D6, line 98).

Although the “free writing” approach is discussed in the teacher interviews as a useful approach to teaching writing, it nevertheless was not applied in the classrooms. However, she goes on to mention that the genre approach is also good, which is how she described in the writing curriculum:

Students are exposed to ah models and ideas talking about different yeah different topics within the same genre. But also we lack the building blocks factor here focusing; I think this is my point of view within the new writing pack. The building blocks is not like as focused on much. The focus is on like ah exposing students to different types of ideas, different types of models within the same genre. And then writing free writing, first paragraph, second which is the final paragraph, but within the same like ah low level students they need this bit. (D6, line 102)

Writing mechanics here means rules of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar, and this was the teachers’ focus while teaching, because students were tested on their application of writing mechanics in the exam. According to the

teachers, they view writing mechanics as a key component for students to be proficient writers. Teacher B expressed her frustration towards her students, “[...]No matter how many times you told them how to, they must indent their paragraphs, they must start with capital letters, they have to use” (D1, line 139). Teachers demonstrated focus on writing mechanics in their writing classes, such as indentation at the beginning of the paragraph, capitalization, and punctuation. In Teacher 1 and Teacher 5 classes, they taught writing from a grammatical perspective. She prepared sentences to create a paragraph by the means of “fill in the blanks” exercises. When the students answered, teachers focused on the form of the words. The same focus was in Teacher’s 5 class who also gave a grammar lesson in her writing class about contradictions in the present simple distinguishing between the positive and negative. Teacher 4’s class too stressed on writing mechanics, and exercises given were “fill in the blanks” and “answering “wh-” questions”. The ideas are given via the questions written on the board. Though Teacher 4’s class was different from the above as she differentiated between the types of writing, she did tackle writing mechanics and prepped the students with the ideas for writing; nevertheless, she gave them the opportunity to experience free writing so that they could express their ideas. Questions were later written on the board aiding them into providing their own ideas. Teacher 3, 4 and Teacher 5 were the same in terms of focus on grammar and writing mechanics, without any real guide on how to write on their own. This finding does not come as surprise, because when teachers were asked about the most important aspects of writing, many of them said that grammar and writing mechanics were the main elements of good writing. Teacher B says, “[s]entence structure, this is the main thing. And this is the thing they really lack and they don’t know how to construct a simple

sentence with verb, I mean, subject, verb and object” (D1, line 18). Teacher A also determined good writing my starting with a title, and indenting a paragraph:

[...] even though how many times you mentioned to them that you have to start with the title, you have to do the indentation, you have to, these things I think we have to focus on more maybe because they are useful for them. (D1, line 21).

Teacher B believes at level 101 before giving the students the freedom to write on topics of their interest, they must master writing mechanics and sentence structure:

At this level, yes. They have to know how to write a sentence, they have to know the mechanics of writing and after that when they master this we can give them the freedom to create and express themselves and talk about and write about different topics.(D1, line 25).

Teacher C is who also thinks that the important elements of writing are grammar and writing mechanics adding that students must be able to write a concluding sentence, “[...] Of course, they have to pay attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation. So these are generally the most and the concluding sentence at the end” (D2, line 31). When I asked her why she thinks that writing mechanics are important to the students' writing, she said, “[b]ecause when they master this, I think they can later write about any topic and express any ideas because they have the tools for that” (D2, line 36). The ideal approach to teach writing, according to Teacher C was to throw them into the deep end, meaning to let them depend on themselves to write freely, “[j]ust throwing them into the sea and ask them to swim. [cross talk] Yeah. It’s like they have to be shocked at the beginning” (D2, line 52). This approach however, may not work with the students, as Teacher D points out those students are reluctant to write because they feel ashamed of

making mistakes (see section 6.3.6). Furthermore, all mistakes pointed out were writing mechanics mistakes. The focus on writing mechanics could possibly be due to the exam at the end of each module. The rubric by which they assess the writing entails writing mechanics and sentence structure. Teacher A describes the writing in ELI:

[...] you could label our writing technique or style here and as focused writing. If you compare it little bit to the IELTS, when you take an IELTS course before the exam, they prepare you to take the exams so they don't teach you creative writing. So it's more like a focused writing than any other. (D1, line 152)

When Teacher A said “focused writing” she meant writing that focuses on achieving a high score in the ELI exam. Therefore, writing is taught to pass the exam. This could put students at a disadvantage when writing is taught for exam purposes and the exam stresses on other skills other than writing but under the heading of writing. Teacher J points this issue. “[...] I think that's the challenge to make students see the use of it and how you know without giving it a grade that is going to be really useful for them, if they can see that they are making progress” (D6, line 387).

The building-block approach to writing has proven to fail students in this context, given that they do not progress in their written competence. According to the literature, this approach fails to foster writing proficiency as “it is inconsistent with the nature of grammar and how the mind processes language” (Clark, 2011, p. 325), relying essentially on a grammar-translation method which advocates the formal teaching of grammar and students are expected to memorize the grammatical rules. More importantly, the teacher is not expected to highly

resourceful because they simply have to teach grammar (Clark, 2011) and expect good writing to emerge. Javid and Umer (2014) confirm the use of traditional teaching methods as a main cause for students' weak writing skills, and call for language instructors to employ modern teaching to enhance learning (see section 2.5.2). Al-Kairy (2013) also attributes Saudi writing problems to the teachers' lack of interest in assigning writing tasks, use of inapt teaching methods, lacking opportunities to practice writing in the classroom, audiovisual facilities. This has proven to be the case in this study where there was lack of interest on the teachers' part in terms of their teaching being successful. In the next section, I discuss how the students' perceive their classes in ELI.

6.2.1 Students' perceptions of writing

Writing, according to the students, is a secondary in comparison to how the other skills are taught such as reading and listening. The students view writing in ELI a subordinate skill that is used to practice vocabulary and grammar with limited attention put on the writing skill per se. It is used to reinforce vocabulary items taught in the reading, practice grammatical rules, and recompose correct sentence structure containing the topic assigned. Teachers expressed that writing is a sub skill. Teacher E says, "[i]t's a sub skill of course. It's a sub skill but they are marked on it" (D3, line172). Like teachers, students perceive writing in the same way, Banan observed that teachers do not give much importance to teaching writing:

I've noticed that there is not much concern for writing. In the first level, they used to give us paragraphs and then let us write, memorize and train ourselves. We never had a real training on writing. They just

let us write paragraphs thinking that they've taught us everything. In fact, no one was even there to correct for us. (F3, line 48)

Maya also agrees with Banan, “[a]ccording to the university curriculum, writing is a side skill but the teacher in the workshops focuses on writing so this is better” (P3, line 46). Maya says that the course needs improvement in the teaching/learning approaches:

Maybe following the same methods that are used in the workshops, that you divided it from the beginning, we watch a video clip, write sentences, and then in the end a paragraph like we really enjoyed it and after that we started organizing the words and doing a mind map so this helped. (P5, line 38).

Nawal also expressed the need to improve the teaching methods in ELI. She claimed that teachers do not teach but just read from the curriculum, “[b]ecause they don't teach us well, they just read the books for us” (F6, line 48). Others believe the content and curriculum in general is good, but the teaching approach is where the fault lies, “[y]es, the content itself is good, so it will eventually benefit you, but it depends on the method of conveying it. I think the curriculum is useful” (Banan, F3, line 8). Students noticed a difference between the workshops’ teaching approaches to writing, and their regular classes. Banan describes the rigid teaching method practised by teachers saying; “They tell us a topic and you have to write in a certain way, but here we learn how to write and we learn the basics of writing” (Banan, P3, line 4). Banan describes how learning is applied in the workshops whereas in their ELI classes, learning takes place at a minimum. For instance, even though the students take vocabulary in their classes, they lack the skills to use the words in their writing:

I originally didn't know grammatical rules or writing principles, so the workshops helped me in that way even in level one, they didn't used to tell us the organization of the sentence like first subject and then verb. I never knew anything like that, so in the workshops you gave us rules in the beginning and benefited a lot from it. Also the vocabulary, there are words in the books but we don't benefit from them in writing, even when you write, you don't think of using them, which is the opposite of the workshops, the words we take are varied and can use them in the writing, so it helps a lot. (Banan, P3, line 6)

From the quote above, there appears to be a lack in meeting the students' needs in ELI classes. Nawal describes this saying, “[l]ike now, she doesn't give us words, gives us a topic and tells us to write about it” (Nawal, C6, line 24). Ola too expressed how teachers want them to write while ignoring the fact that they do not know “how to write”. According to Ola, most teachers do not teach, “[s]ome teachers want us to just write, not teach us, but in the workshop we learn and then apply” (Ola, P7, line 37).

From the above data, we can conclude that there is a need for improvement in teaching methods in ELI according to students' perceptions. Writing is not taught as a main skill in ELI yet students are asked to write paragraphs and essays. The majority of students move up to levels within one academic year, yet they are not reaching the benchmarks outlined in the CEFR. Teachers also highlight that the students have low proficiency levels. Teachers teach so that they cover the curriculum providing students with the writing topics that will come in the exam. Therefore, the teaching methods do not aid in the student becoming independent writers. The students are below A1 level yet are asked to write about a topic in a form of a paragraph. They lack a range of vocabulary, they lack the knowledge of how to compose a sentence, yet teachers do not pay attention to their needs.

Teachers need to pay more attention to what students need instead of simply following the curriculum plan. Teaching writing as a main skill rather than a secondary skill could aid their teaching. This could be due to the fact of the limited time allotted to teachers in class and the institutional pressures, which is discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Teachers' perception of writing

One of the objectives behind this research is to find out what is working in ELI classrooms, and what is not. In order to get a clear visualization on this issue, teachers were asked if they used different mediums to teach writing. Some teachers hold the perception that students only want to pass the subject, and therefore according to their outlook for the teacher to know what learning style is preferred, is no longer a worthy element to investigate. One of the teachers explains her perspective saying:

I think if we have given them the chance to use different styles, I think pictures would help. Pictures or videos - I don't know because we haven't experienced this with them we haven't tried this. But at the end I think that they all use the same style that they want to find out what's right and what's wrong in their writing and they have to pass. And even for us teachers we've to follow what's in the writing booklet or writing packs. (Teacher A, D1, line 86)

More blame is attributed to the students:

For teachers we have many websites and links where we can find different activities. But the students, you know the students, whatever you give them extra they will concentrate on the book. because they, as we said before they know this is what is going to come in the exam, this is what I get more marks, if I study this, if I practice this I will get more in exams. If I do that that is an extra thing. (Teacher B, D1, line 181)

According to teachers, students ask if the subject taught is coming in the exam, if the teacher answers negatively, they will not pay attention, “Teacher will that come in the exam? If you say no, nobody will pay attention to what you’re saying” (Teacher B, D1, line 182). However, everything that is taught in the classroom should be related to the learning objectives and therefore included in the exam. Even though teachers were asked about their teaching specifically if they used extra materials in their writing classes or if they know what learning styles their students favoured, they appeared to resort back to talking about students and their motivation to pass the ELI examination as a negative factor. As a result, finding out what way students learn best is an insignificant element to their teaching practice. Teacher A views the use of different classroom materials as “creativity”:

Well there is no space for creativity I guess. So the students are focused, the packs are focused, so we have to, even for the teacher, we have to go by the writing booklet or pack and the students have to also (D1, line 144).

Teachers were asked specifically about the use of visual aids in their classes. Many teachers believe that indeed their students are visual learners; however, even though they know their learning style, this insight did not alter their teaching approach. Some blamed this on not having enough time, “I do agree and I do encourage, but I actually don’t practice this with my students because of the time issue” (Teacher F, C3, line 324). Some did not see the connection to their teaching practice, “[...] they are more into visual I think yeah with the new social media and like Twittering and commenting, all about whatever they see” (Teacher I, C6, line 238). While others believed that, the use of visual aids would be helpful for the

students, but again did not relate it to their own teaching practice, “It's very helpful, yes, it's very helpful for them to use pictures” (Teacher C, C2, line 154). Some teachers believe that they need to be shown or trained on how to use visual aids:

[...] But maybe we need to be shown like some way; maybe we need to have some like selected videos that would help students, maybe something that is culture appropriate you know... (Teacher H, D4, line 251)

On another note, some teachers, who did try out different materials away from the curriculum, faced obstacles because of their inappropriateness according to the Saudi culture. Culture appropriate materials are certainly an element that needs to be taken into serious consideration when choosing materials for students. For instance, music as well as any images that may come across as culturally inapt in the Saudi context needs to be taken seriously as one's job may be at stake if they present something in class that proved to be unsuitable:

[...] they were really very [Inaudible] direct. “Teacher’s please we don’t listen to songs her if you are going to use the, the song, we will, can we, get out?” I told them okay, no songs, okay, can, keep your seats, we can do something else. (Teacher I, D6, line 255)

As a whole, from the data above, teachers do not materials to their classes. They follow the curriculum in a rigid approach, and learning is not as important as long as they teach. Classroom observations proved this point as most of the exercises and material presented to students were grammar exercises from the curriculum e.g. A1: Sandy, A2: Deema, A5: Dania, A7: Nina. Not in any of the lessons observed was there any use of any visual materials. This can cause students to be

at a disadvantage as visual aids play a prominent role in their learning as we will see in the following section.

6.2.3 Why do we write: Students and teachers perceptions

Teachers were asked about the students' objective of learning to write English. The majority of teachers believe that students learn to gain grades and pass the exam.

This was verbalized through a negative connotation. Teachers believe that students who are driven by gaining a good grade or simply passing the exam are not motivated. Teacher D imitates what students say to her, “What paragraph do you want us to remember so I can I write it in the exam?” (Teacher D, C2 ,line 10).

Teacher D supposes that students do not care much about learning the process of writing; rather they prefer to memorize the paragraph to reproduce it for the exam to get it over and done with. Teacher H agrees with her too:

They know all that matters is that you get a good grade that's all that matters to them. They want grades even the parents I'm sure that students all they care about is their parents with their grades. It doesn't matter how well you are in writing or whatever but just you know get a good grade and that is that. (Teacher H, D4, line 137)

In the quotation above, Teacher H says that it does not matter to students if they write well or not, their main goal is to achieve a good grade, however, it is worth noting here that in order for the student to get a good grade, she should be able to write well. The objectives of the course and testing should correspond with successful learning processes. For example, students should not know what topic they might get in the exam, so that they need to learn to write by themselves. If the course implies the topics, then students will opt for the easy way out. This is worth

noting as teachers seem to focus on the negativity towards what they view as students' lack of motivation when indeed they are motivated by wanting to achieve high grades. Teacher B highlights the point made above that, those students learn what will come in the exam only, with no extras. From the students' perspective, this is only fair that they study what they will be tested in.

The teachers' attitude towards the student is significant in terms of them seeing the students' goal as a negative one and this will ultimately affect how teachers deal with their students. The fact that some students may not be interested in writing does not take away from the fact they need to learn to write to pass, and they do want to pass and achieve high grades as this will affect their GPA. Moreover, there is no mention by teachers' attempt to make their classes interesting for students.

The lack of interest on the students' part is blamed on the students themselves while the teacher takes no responsibility towards her students' attitude and outlook on the course, “[...] because they are not interested I do not know what plans they have, so like they just only want to pass and that’s it” (Teacher I, C6, line 296). “In our context, if students are motivated to write it is because they stand to gain marks from their writing not because they enjoy writing per se” (Teacher K, C5, line 41-42). Some teachers acknowledge that the students can relate their goal of learning to write in English to any immediate aspiration. In any case, the material given in ELI is not designed for their specialization in university. It is general everyday English, and therefore, being in a country wherein English is not a foreign language, it appears only logical that their goals are solely placed on passing the exam as there is no immediate use for learning to write:

[...] I, I sometimes wonder though in their immediate future for those especially who are not going on to science or medicine or something

like that. I don't know how much they need to write English in their immediate short term. Yes, maybe a lot of them will go on later but that I mean that's what after four years. (Teacher J, C6, line 30)

Exactly, this is something we are lacking now, big time now when its especially now that they, we don't, we can't even separate arts and science. Let alone business or medicine, you know pharmacy that we used to have a long time ago. So now everything is general, everything seems watered down. And so, you don't have, you don't have that motivation like I can see the connection between this and what I might do next year in my studies. (Teacher J, C6, line 48)

From the above data, we can see that there is an obvious gap in the way students perceive their writing objectives and in the way the teachers view their students' writing objectives. There appears to be a lack of understanding from the teachers towards their role as teachers. The students' are blamed for not having the appropriate objectives towards learning, while teachers take a back seat and criticize this attitude without making any attempts to make the material interesting. As observed in classes, all classes follow the curriculum step by step with no alterations or even enthusiasm from teachers. Teachers' attitude can be summed up in the following quote by Teacher I, "It sounds terrible and cynical but when I was teaching I mean my main thing is to get what's we are supposed to do" (Teacher I, D6, line 419). Indeed, the teachers who criticize students for having one sole goal towards learning are the same teachers whose objective is to simply finish their curriculum as the ELI administration asks them to do adding no effort to make their classes interesting or making sure learning is actually achieved.

6.2.4 Writing material used in ELI

The photocopied writing pack used in ELI classrooms was not liked by students, because it was unclear and unattractive, and the content was a repetition of what was taken previously. According to the classroom observations, much attention is given to giving exactly what is in the writing pack, with no alterations in terms of making the material more attractive, interesting to the students. Javid (2011 in Al-Nasser, 2015, p. 1613) suggests the use of modern teaching aids along with modern teaching techniques to tackle some of the problems in language teaching. Merely focusing on the writing pack is not sufficient enough to attract the students' attention.

Classroom material is one the themes that emerged in the data that played a prominent insight into improving students' writing by understanding the types of materials that had a positive impact on their learning process. In this section, I review the perspectives' of both teachers and students on the classroom materials used in ELI and the writing workshops with some emphasis on visual materials the role of topic choice. Teachers are asked to strictly follow the curriculum given by ELI. Students in general believed that the materials used were good, but there is a repetition of the materials used, “[...] I feel they teach us repeated information that we already know, so I feel it's kind of silly”. (Alaa, F2, line 6). “The curriculum is fine, but there's some repetition of levels like the first and the second and that's boring” (Hana, F4, line 14). “The lectures have long hours and they are all the same, but the workshops contain better things and were more fun” (Amani, Cycle 3 ,Workshop 6). Some elements of the material are repeated from high school, “It's not bad, but there are some unimportant things such as "is" and "she" because

we already know such thing” (Hana, F4, line 6). Others believed the materials are not challenging enough. “No, it's just easy, almost the same” (Nawal, F6, line 8) But then as they move up the levels, there is a leap in the expectations from students in terms of their writing. “I feel it's good, but they don't give us much time in levels, the first one was easy but the second one is heavy and requires a great deal of words” (Maya, F5, line 8). The material seemed to be unclear and of bad quality. The writing pack is photocopied and distributed from ELI. Some mentioned that the information is too difficult to understand: “The publications are not clear, the sheets and books are not alike. Some sheets include things that I can't understand like grammar. There's no explanation for Grammar, so I have to refer to the books to understand” (Alaa, F2, line 70). From the data above, materials used in ELI classes appear not to meet the students' needs. There is repetition of material at the lower levels while too much is expected in the upper levels.

6.3 Challenges faced by teachers and students

Following the exploration and reflection phases of this action research, some key challenges became clear regarding English language writing instruction. In the following reflection, I divide these challenges by themes that arose from the data. The first is the role of the teacher in writing class, the concept of fairness among teachers, teachers' perspectives on collaborative learning in writing classes, teachers' beliefs about students' writing objectives, students' fears of making mistakes, and the impact of the context.

6.3.1 The role of the teacher in writing classes

During the interviews, teachers expressed that they expected that their students come to KAU equipped with the skills to be independent learners. Even though teachers realize the fact that their students are dependent on them, they make no effort in teaching them the necessary skills, “They are not ready or maybe they were not taught how they can rely on themselves to write complete sentences or complete paragraph relying on their own abilities. So it's like a handicap for them” (Teacher C, D2, line 11). Teacher J admits that one of the objectives of the course is that learners become independent throughout their learning process, but this was put aside because of the lack of time:

Well they are supposed to be those you know in the, at the end of the pacing [Inaudible] thing you know like dictionaries skills and independent learning I mean these kind of things. But I really think they just kind of fall of the wagon because nobody has time to even do what, you know the stuff that's going to be on the exam and I think.
(Teacher J, C6, line 323)

Teacher G points to the students' lack of independence and that they require spoon-feeding while at the same time not making any suggestions as to how to teach them to rely on themselves. “They don't even know what to look for, you know. Again they would require a lot of spoon-feeding as in we would need to give them a list maybe, look for this, capitalization, look for punctuation, look for spellings” (Teacher G, C4, line 42). Teacher G also characterises students as lacking in patience, and does not blame them because - in her opinion- she realises that students do not view the skill of writing as beneficial:

I think, I think, simply it's in their nature to lack the patience to do that because actually correction requires a lot of patience. You need to read, you need to figure out what the other person is trying to say. It

requires a lot of patience and the students don't have so much patience. I mean who's going to read one hundred and fifty words and correct and it is something that they probably view as not something beneficial for them. Even though the teacher tells them that this is going to benefit them. (Teacher G, C4, line 44).

It appears from interviewing the teachers that they blame the students and hold them solely responsible for their lack of self-help and self-study skills. However, from the classroom observations A3, A4 and A9, students were given the ideas to construct sentences instead of allowing them to think of their own ideas. Not allowing the students to think for themselves fosters dependency on their teacher. Apparently, teachers do this because they lack the time to give the chance to students to think for themselves. If students are not given the opportunity to depend on themselves, then they have no other choice but to depend on their teacher. In addition, students may lack the confidence to believe that they can rely on themselves because they have never being self-reliant.

In Teacher 7's class, students were made to feel guilty about their mistakes, causing them to feel inadequate towards their writing capabilities, and embarrassment. In Teacher 9's class, the teacher does not wait for the students to generate ideas. The teacher, in these cases, are playing an important role as to how the students mould their study skills to either be independent or not. In a society, like Saudi Arabia, wherein the teacher is viewed as the "knowledge knower", it is essential that teacher aids in building the students confidence and assists them becoming more independent on themselves.

For the teacher to "know" their students, to find out "how they learn", and what interests them deemed as unimportant aspects for the teachers to investigate.

This is due to the fact - according to the teachers' perspective- that the student who aims to achieve a high grade is not motivated to learn. In fact, it is perceived as a negative factor that hinders their learning. The teachers do not offer any alternative motivational factors that may influence the students' eagerness to learn. Even though some believed that visual aids such as pictures would be helpful to their teaching, they did not utilize this information to aid their teaching use it. They either said that they do not have time, or that they need help on how to use teaching aids in the classroom.

In general, teachers do not take responsibility for their students' outlook on learning English. They blame the students solely on their failure to learn. Teachers' perception of students, their opinions and attitudes towards them have a negative tendency in the overall tone of the data. This can ultimately reflect in the way they deal and teach students. In turn, the students may realise this, and they too have negative feelings towards their teachers. One of the main causes of this, could be the time constraint, which is a repeated theme appearing in the interviews. In addition, a lot of the teachers' focus is on the problems with no mention of solutions, or brainstorming ideas on how to resolve these issues. The teachers, like the students, are passive in the way they view their practice. Some teachers are oblivious to the existence of problems in their classrooms. Teachers also do not recognize that achieving a high grade can be a motivation factor to motivate students to learn. Wanting a high grade is in fact a motivation for them to learn. The problem lies in the way writing is approached in class. This is something that nobody seemed to pick up upon in the teachers' interviews.

6.3.2 The concept of fairness among teachers

The teachers stressed the pressures of the workplace, and how everything should be “standardized”, so that all students are assessed equally, “what we are saying that we try to move away from focusing on grammar and I kind of see mechanics and more into the communication that’s going on”, Teacher I says (C6, line 84).

She continues on by saying:

But then I don’t know how, when you’re pressed for time and you know and we need I think that’s something we have to communicate to teachers to instructors more to, to shift their focus more away from you know just there, you know there are five grammar mistakes [Inaudible]. And more to what are they communicating and it’s not; it’s not [Inaudible] the change can’t happen overnight. (C6, line 87).

Since the GPA in the foundation year is the decider for the students’ majors, they choose for their future career, there is a conception of fairness among teachers.

Teachers have expressed that all teachers must teach and give the same material because of the need to be fair to all students in all four levels. The material is prepared by ELI, and teachers hold the opinion that they must not divert from the manual, then there is not much innovation on the teachers' part. Teacher J says:

I think well another thing I kind of feel that limits us is that you know this being foundation year and the student’s marks do count in their GPA. You know we have to be so careful about everything being the same. Everything is going to be the same, there’s a same there, and um you know to be fair to everybody, so you don’t have this and so and I think people kind of get in [Inaudible] everything is prepared for the teachers there is really nothing that the teachers need to do. (C6, line 91)

This notion that all classes be taught in the same manner is highly unlikely because each teacher has his/her personality and own teaching style. Therefore, to assume

that all classes can be taught in the same way is far fetched. It appears that teachers are diverting from the fundamental objective of teaching, which is “learning”.

Each group of students has different needs and various learning styles. In order to achieve the curriculum objectives, “learning” must take place. If this rigid outlook of teaching and idea of sameness is applied, then learning can be obscured by this perspective. Teacher E explains the unfairness of one teacher using a method while the other uses a different one, “[w]e have to think of a way that all teachers can use any...it’s not fair that one teacher uses a way in writing and the other teacher don’t know how to use that technique” C3,line 333). Teacher F was asked too if she shared this same belief:

- Researcher So do you think it’s important that all the teachers follow the same technique?
- Teacher F Yeah.
- Teacher E Yeah, it’s fair.
- Researcher For the students?
- Teacher F Yes, of course for the students. And it’s very manageable. It should be done from the very beginning by the ELI. This should be used by the ELI. This we follow everything the ELI actually give us. Why don’t we do this? I think, I think more [...] more focus. This actually should be done. If our coordinators actually, they have [laughs] an eye on everything we do, this is really good. I like it. I’m with it. (C3, lines 339-343)

Later in the conversation, Teacher F commented:

- Teacher F But yeah, putting myself in the administration shoes, I will look at all the foundation of the students. If I leave the students to every teacher with her own way of thinking, with her own background, the students will be different. I need them to get out of the foundation year with this amount of English, with these outcomes, all of them have to begin with the same thing. So I guess, it’s still ... under all these constructions, under all these limitations that the administration actually have on teachers, still teachers have their own way to give her...her talent, her touch to her

students. And because students move through different levels, they [inaudible] 8 different teachers.

Researcher Is that positive?

Teacher F Yeah, of course it is.

Researcher Teacher E do you agree that's a positive?

Teacher E Yeah, it's a positive way. It's a positive way.
(C3, lines 488-492)

There appears to be a misconception about fairness among teachers. It is impossible for all teachers to teach the same way, and even if this was attempted, it would be unfair on the students who do not learn through a certain teaching method. The concept of fairness among teachers needs to be revisited by highlighting that fairness can only be achieved when all students are learning and this can be achieved by open communication between students and teachers about how the group can achieve their learning outcomes.

6.3.3 Collaborative learning in writing classes

Collaborative learning means a group of more than one person learn together depending on one another as a resource for learning. In this part, I discuss the teachers and students' perspective on collaborative learning in writing classes. Teachers hold different opinions on collaborative learning in writing classes. Some believe that collaborative learning as in group or pair work cannot be achieved in writing classes, especially during the first process of writing, such as brainstorming ideas. Teacher C believes that peer correction can be done in the later stages of writing but, whereas Teacher E believes that writing should be learned individually, "Peer correction. Yeah. But as a first step? I prefer to make them write individually" (Teacher C, C2, lines 141). Teacher E says, "In writing, in

my opinion, on my experience, individually...” (C3, line 298). This outlook could be caused by many reasons, one by which Teacher H mentioned that some students do not participate in group work leaving the work to be done by one or two students, “And like one or two does all the work you know the rest are just watching” (Teacher H, C6, line 218). However, this could be avoided by assigning roles to each member of the group, so that each one has a role rather than the students deciding for themselves. Teacher H does mention that monitoring the group can bring about success in group-work. “So it does in fact, it does have good, positive effect on students but as long as you make sure and you monitor that each student is doing their own part” (Teacher H, C6, line 223).

Another aspect that may hinder collaborative learning is the fact that students do not know one another causing the group to lack harmony and homogeneous. This is caused by the module system applied in ELI resulting in short spaces of time wherein the group is not been given a chance to create to bond:

They don't always know each other, this is another you know [cross talk] this module is the late, you know after the first I mean they may only be really in class four to five weeks in total and then they're all mixed up again next month so [cross talk] don't even know each other [cross talk] (Teacher J, C6, line 219)

On the other hand, Teachers G and K recognize the benefits of group and pair work in writing classes:

I think group work, I think group work helps a lot because then they get to talk to each other and take each other's help and run their ideas through each other. And I tried my, in my classes I tried to pair them up or group them so that they can discuss ideas with each other. That helps a lot because individually it's hard for them. It's hard for them to kind of yeah [...] (Teacher G, C4, line 140)

Pair-work or group work is the preferred method to teach writing where students can share their ideas (Teacher K, C5, line 26-27)

However, out of nine observed classes, only two classes practiced collaborative learning (Teacher 8 and Teacher 9's classes), and only one out of two seemed to be successful in terms of students collaborating together. The fact that many teachers hold the perception that group and pair work in writing class are not as useful as working alone can cause a disadvantage because most students appeared to enjoy collaborative work, as we will see in the following section.

Collaborative learning can aid especially shy students by creating less intermediating opportunities of language practice. This proved to be the case with this group of students who participated in the writing workshops. Some students enjoyed working in groups, and others in pairs. It allowed shy students to become more confident. Towards the end of the academic year, all students were participating in the writing workshops. It is important to note here that the students expressed that what made collaborative learning succeed was the fact that the students knew one another. This was not the case at the beginning of the year. Their relationships built over the course of the academic year, so that they were able to know one another more and therefore became comfortable working together. However, teachers believe that collaborative learning such as pair and group work are not fit for writing classes. One of the reasons is that students do not know how to work in a group. They believe that only one student will do all the work. Another reason is that the skill of writing should be learned solely and that students cannot work on one piece of writing. This could be due to the teachers' lack of training and to the fact that students do not spend a full academic

year with one teacher or with the same group of students. Even though training is provided for teachers as discussed in section 4.2.4, however it is lacking in some areas especially as we witness here wherein the skill to implement collaborative learning in classrooms is lacking among teachers.

6.3.4 Writing objectives

The students who participated in the workshops had a variety of objectives in learning to write successfully in English. Some had immediate objectives, such as improving their reading as a by-product, “[...] because if I read books or stuff like that” (Amani, F1, line 4) or their speaking skills, “It seems that English is related to many things in general. I also think of knowing how to write a word and that will help me pronounce it correctly” (Ola, F7, line 12).

Let us take social media as an example, when someone asks me about Islam, I can only reply in Arabic, that's why no one would understand me. I must communicate in English so that they can understand what I'm saying[...] So, if someone disapproves of Islam in some way, I can discuss it with them in English. (Alaa, F2, line 4)

And to earn good grades, I need English to earn my scores, and I may need it for my career in the future” (Maya, F5, line 4). On the other hand, some students did not have clear set objectives in mind. Hanan believes she has to learn, because everything revolves around English, and learning it to her seems significant, “In fact, everything has become in English, so I have to” (Hanan, F4, line 53). Others have long term objectives, which are not clear cut ones. Students say it might become useful in the future. Banan and Nawal suggest, for their career, learning English can be an advantageous skill: “Yes, I may make use of it in the future and

it's just a good thing to learn" (Nawal, F6, line 38). "Not much for now. I don't use it frequently. Maybe, in the future for I may need it for my career" (Banan, F3, line 2). From the sample of students, we can see that many of them have different objectives towards learning to write in English. Therefore, we cannot make any generalizations as to why they want to learn, but we can confirm that their objectives differ to what their teachers think as we will see in the following section

Teachers were asked about the students' objective on learning to write English. The majority of teachers believe that students learn to gain grades and pass the exam. This was verbalized through a negative connotation. Teachers believe that students who are driven by gaining a good grade or simply passing the exam are not motivated. Teacher D imitates what students say to her, "What paragraph do you want us to remember so I can I write it in the exam? Yeah" (Teacher D, D2, line 10). Teacher D supposes that students do not care much about learning the process of writing; rather they prefer to memorize the paragraph to reproduce it for the exam to get it over and done with. Teacher H agrees with her too:

They know all that matters is that you get a good grade that's all that matters to them. They want grades even the parents I'm sure that students all they care about is their parents with their grades. It doesn't matter how well you are in writing or whatever but just you know get a good grade and that is that. (C6, line 137)

In the above quotation, Teacher H says that it does not matter to students if they write well or not, their main goal is to achieve a good grade, however, it is worth noting here that in order for the student to get a good grade, she should be able to write well. The objectives of the course and testing should correspond with successful learning processes. For example, students should not know what topic

they may get in the exam, so that they need to learn to write by themselves. If the course implies the topics, then students will opt for the easy way out. This is worth noting as teachers seem to focus on the negativity towards what they view as students' lack of motivation when indeed they are motivated by wanting to achieve high grades. Teacher B highlights the point made above that those students learn what will come in the exam only, with no extras. From the students' perspective, this is only fair that they study what they will be tested in. The attitude of the teachers towards the students appears to be unfair:

For teachers we have many websites and links where we can find different activities. But the students, you know the students, whatever you give them extra they will concentrate on the book, because they, as we said before they know this is what is going to come in the exam, this is what I get more marks, if I study this, if I practice this I will get more in exams. If I do that that is an extra thing. "Teacher will that come in the exam?" If you say no, nobody will pay attention to what you're saying. (Teacher B, C1, line 182)

The teachers' attitude towards the student is significant in terms of them seeing the students' goal as a negative one and this will ultimately affect how teachers deal with their students. The fact that some students may not be interested in writing does not take away from the fact they need to learn to write to pass, and they do want to pass and achieve high grades as this will affect their GPA. Also, there is no mention by teachers' attempt to make their classes interesting for students. The lack of interest on the students' part is blamed on the students themselves while the teacher takes no responsibility towards her students' attitude and outlook on the course, "[...] because they are not interested I do not know what plans they have, so like they just only want to pass and that's it" (Teacher I, C6, line 296). Teacher K asserts this concept, "In our context, if students are motivated to write it is

because they stand to gain marks from their writing not because they enjoy writing per se” (C5, lines 41-42).

Some teachers acknowledge that the students can relate their goal of learning to write in English to any immediate aspiration. In any case, the material given in ELI is not designed for their specialization in university. It is general everyday English, and therefore, being in a country wherein English is not a foreign language, it appears only logical that their goals are solely placed on passing the exam as there is no immediate use for learning to write:

[...] I, I sometimes wonder though in their immediate future for those especially who are not going on to science or medicine or something like that. I don't know how much they need to write English in their immediate short term. Yes, maybe a lot of them will go on later but that I mean that's what after four years. (Teacher J, C6, line 30)

Exactly, this is something we are lacking now, big time now when its especially now that they, we don't, we can't even separate arts and science. Let alone business or medicine, you know pharmacy that we used to have a long time ago. So now everything is general, everything seems watered down. And so, you don't have, you don't have that motivation like I can see the connection between this and what I might do next year in my studies. (Teacher J, C6, line 48)

From the above data, we can see that there is an obvious gap in the way students perceive their writing objectives and in the way the teachers view their students' writing objectives. There appears to be a lack of understanding from the teachers towards their role as teachers. The students are blamed for not having the appropriate objectives towards learning, while teachers take a back seat and criticize this attitude without attempting to make the material interesting. As observed in classes, all classes follow the curriculum systematically with no alterations or even enthusiasm from teachers. Teacher I can sum up teachers' attitude in the following quote, “[i]t sounds terrible and cynical but when I was

teaching I mean my main thing is to get what's we are supposed to do” (C6, line 419). Indeed, the teachers who criticize students for having one sole goal towards learning are the same teachers whose objective is to simply finish their curriculum as the ELI administration asks them to do adding no effort to make their classes interesting or making sure learning is actually achieved.

6.3.5 Students' coping strategies

There appears to be two common strategies used when students write: translating and memorizing. Both strategies; translating and memorizing have been criticized by teachers as these strategies are useless and in fact hinder the students' writing. However, students use translating and memorizing because they are unable and do not possess any skills to write: “Some translate; others just study hard and write. For me, I translate” (Hanan, F4, line 42). “That I need to practice more [...] emm [...] like memorize more words and practice” (Amani, F1, line 61). While students use memorization and translation as the two main strategies to write, they do focus on writing mechanics, “Emm [...] maybe the capital and stuff” (Amani, F1, line 75). Punctuation (Hanan, F4, line 98). Students believe that their weaknesses in writing are writing mechanics and their focus when writing is on mechanics and grammar:

Sentence construction. I can form a sentence, but I am not good at punctuations. I just write words as I pronounce them. So I use incorrect punctuations, and I can't use correct conjunctions. I start the sentence with “my name is Alaa” and then I can't put my thoughts in order. (Alaa, F2, line 44).

Maya characterizes the writing session in ELI as a grammar lesson,

In the lectures we take a lesson like the grammar rules we don't just focus on writing, so they don't explain to us how to write but she may help us with the vocabulary. In the workshop there is an explanation given for these things (Maya, P5, line 10).

Also, when Ola writes, her initial focus is on grammar too, "Like now, she doesn't give us words, gives us a topic and tells us to write about it" (Ola, P7, line 29). The students' focus does not come as a surprise, like the teachers, the students' focus is on writing mechanics and grammar. Since, teachers grade the students according to their correct use of writing mechanics and grammatical structure; students too are focusing on both of these elements. However, since both aspects of writing do not teach students how to write, therefore, students resort to translating and memorizing paragraphs in order to achieve their grade. Students use translation and memorization as strategies to learn vocabulary and to recall a piece of writing. They use translation skills to learn the meaning of new words and also to understand a piece of writing. Since the students know the topics that will come in the exam, and their ultimate goal in learning English writing is to achieve a good grade, they memorize the paragraphs written in class with their teachers. They use translation to aid them in memorizing. Both of these strategies are criticized by the students' teachers. However, some of the teachers' teaching strategies can encourage the use of these compensation strategies. Vocabulary items are taught out of context, leaving the students unsure on how to use the words in their writing. In addition, the topics that will come in the exam are the same taught in class. Therefore, it is more convenient for the students to memorize their paragraph rather than to write from scratch. Furthermore, the teachers do not teach students how to come up with their own ideas for their writing. They are given

questions to answer, fill in the blanks exercises, and the ideas are already given in order for them to write. The writing process, according to teachers, is to rewrite their paragraphs to correct the writing mechanics and then write up it again error free. The focus is on the end product rather than the process itself. Students know that and since what motivates them is to achieve a high grade, they find these compensation strategies useful in meeting their ends means. This finding is in line with Oxford & Anderson (1995, p. 207) who concluded that Arabic-speaking cultures encourage a concrete-sequential learning style which entails strategies such as memorisation (see section 1.1).

6.3.5.1 “The teacher, of course”: Students’ learning dependency

Learning dependency appeared to be a common theme. In this section, I discuss how the role of the teachers aids students into becoming dependent on them, and how the teachers' decisions affect the students' learning skills. I then discuss the students' perspective on the role of their teachers and why they view them as their primary source of knowledge. Students view their teacher as the primary knowledge provider. More responsibility is upon the teacher rather than the student. According to the students, they realise that the teachers foster their dependency on them. Amani recognizes that the teacher is the one who gives her the ideas to construct sentences (Amani, F1, line 25). Most of students believe that it is the teacher who is responsible for their learning process (Amani, F1, lines 88-89, Nawal, F6, line 52, Hanan, F4, lines 59-61, Maya, P5, line 38). Banan states:

The teacher, of course. Her responsibility ends when she has completed all explanations. But I think she should give us more than that. If she does, I will be able to follow up and improve. So we're interrelated. I mean she should review with us. If the teacher uses such

methodology, I will use it as well. I want the learning to go on, but if she kept using such ways, none of us will benefit. (Banan, F3, line44)

It appears that the role of both teacher and student in terms of dependency seems to be in a vicious circle, wherein teachers believe that students should be more independent, yet do nothing to aid the process. In turn, the students believe that it is the teachers' role to be the primary source of knowledge holding her solely as the one responsible for their learning.

6.3.6 Students' fear of making mistakes

Students seemed to be reluctant to write because of their lack of confidence and a general fear of making mistakes. From the moment they started writing in class, the emphasis lies on the rules, therefore, moulding the student to understand writing as a set of grammar and punctuation rules rather than a string of ideas aimed at communication. Teachers in ELI view proficient writers as writers who do not make mistakes in writing mechanics. They define good writing as writing that is error free in terms of structure and writing mechanics, "You know student they feel ashamed when you ask them to write one sentence. That's why I always encourage them to write, write whatever you want write, forget about punctuation, forget about the spelling, forget about everything" (C2, line 55). Whenever students made a mistake, the mistake is usually pointed out due to a grammatical or punctuation error causing the students to view writing as grammar and spelling and generally writing mechanics.

In Teacher 7's class, students were brought up to the board to write, and the moment the student made a mistake, the teacher asked the class what was her

mistake not allowing the student who was writing and standing in front of the class to point out her own mistake. I could feel how embarrassed the student felt. By the teacher demonstrating such attitude, it can discourage the student not to write in fear of making a mistake (A7). In turn, students are in fear of making mistakes which as a result, can hinder their writing ability. The data demonstrates that writing is viewed as a set of grammatical and punctuation rules. We can see from the data that whenever a student made a mistake, it was pointed out and was definitely in the area of writing mechanics. Teachers affirm that the students' fear of making mistakes holds them back from writing, however, they neither suggest any solutions, nor look for reasons as to why they have this fear. All students said that they mainly focus on the writing mechanics when they come to write, so the fear is in making mistakes in that area. The fear could be due to the teachers over stressing about the loss of grades if they were to make a mistake. The very thing that the teachers complain about is the students' fixation on grades, yet the teachers themselves stress it in their teaching practice.

6.3.7 Impact of the context

The context of ELI serves as an outward shell that governs what is happening inside the classrooms and the interactions between teachers and students. The context makes most of the rules and it can constrain and limit us depending on how it functions. Since teachers demonstrated a dependency on the writing pack provided, the curriculum itself seems to be one of the obstacles that hinders writing instruction in ELI as it does not appear to equip students with the necessary skills. In this section, I discuss the two aspects that are related to the

contextual constraints mentioned by students and teachers. These are the modular system and time constraints.

The shortage of time was a common theme brought up by both the teachers and students alike. The time constraints affect the quality of teaching. Stress was placed on delivering the curriculum to the students in any form as long as it is merely articulated in class while ignoring the fact that the students themselves were not learning. The teachers' main objectives were to teach and dictate the syllabus. Teaching was one sided as students sat back taking the role of a passive learner. Teachers blamed their lack of innovation in their classrooms to the limitations of time, and due to the pressure of finishing the curriculum in time for the exams at the end of each module. Teacher I asserts that more time needs to be allotted so that writing progresses, “[w]riting is a process as you see initially even when we focus on different ideas or whatever genres after all it’s a process that needs time to whatever flourish and it takes time” (C6, line 96). Because of time being viewed as a hurdle, the teachers lack innovation in their teaching methods, and instead they teach writing that meet the assessment rubrics:

but pretty much you know once it’s standardized there is no room for one student to become you know, ah so creative in writing I mean it’s pretty is all standardized for all the students. They have to follow specific guidelines, rubrics that they shouldn’t, you know stray away from so the rubrics do guide them. (Teacher I, C6, line 90)

Time is a main drawback in the teaching in ELI as teachers seem to rush through the curriculum in order to finish the assigned materials for each level paying very little attention to the students’ learning. Teachers believe that students should be prepped for the exam. They teach the way they do for the students to achieve their best in the exam. However, as seen from the results of the proficiency test at the

beginning of the academic year and the end of the year, there is not much difference in the proficiency levels, yet students are passing the exams and were moved up four levels. We can conclude here that there appears to be a gap in the system. In the next section, I discuss the modular system in ELI. The time limitation is an aspect that has been concluded by Javid and Umer (2014) who assert that not enough time is allotted to writing courses (see section 2.5.2). In also is in line with Rajab et.al (2016, p. 126) who also identifies time as a downfall of writing classes along with heavy workloads that are placed upon teachers. The authors highlight that these issues are not noticed in the context of Saudi Arabian higher education setting (see section 2.5.3).

The modular system does not seem to fit the objectives ELI is attempting to achieve and this is to achieve fluency within one academic year. Most students start not knowing how to construct a correct sentence, they lack vocabulary, and their listening and speaking skills are weak. Most students' strength lies in the knowledge of grammatical rules, which does not serve much purpose when they are unable to put them into practice in communication. The modular system appears to fail students' learning as they are unable to achieve any level of proficiency. They are moving up vastly from one level to another with no real learning outcomes to show for it other than the exam score at the end of each level. This exam is catered for the students to pass to prove that the modular system works. However, realistically the students are not achieving the outcomes outlined in the curriculum. Apart from the lack of proficiency the modular system causes, it also causes the lack of bonding in relationships between teacher/student and student/student. As discussed in sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.4 the students needed time

to feel comfortable in the classroom with both the teacher and their peers. The lack of bonding can impede the creation of a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. A relaxed atmosphere wherein shy students or ones reluctant to participate, which are many as seen by the data through the observations and witnessed at the beginning of the start of the workshops, is essential for learning to take place.

There is a vivid increase in the expectations from students that increases from level to level. There is a substantial discrepancy to be achieved in a very short duration of time. Students begin the academic year at below A1 level. This is why students are placed in ELI at level 1, and by the end of the academic year, students are expected to reach at a B2 level. It can be safe to conclude that it is an unrealistic goal to achieve this level of proficiency in writing in such a short period of time given the way the writing was taught in the classrooms and the lack of meeting the students' need. By the end of the academic year, it was evident, from the students' writing that they did not reach the acquired level. Teachers were rushing through the curriculum in terms of teaching yet not much learning was occurring. It was not occurring because the students' needs were not met. As a result, curriculum objectives were also not being met either. The teachers completely depend on the writing pack, which is the writing material given by ELI to the students. They follow it word by word, and avoid making any alterations to meet the needs of the students. The students' low proficiency levels could play a possible role for their lack of motivation. Students are moved up to levels while their language basics are not being set. In level three, the students are not actually at level B1, so how are they are unable to perform the tasks given for B1 level. Students are unable to compose sentences yet they are asked to write a paragraph

and essay. Again even the teachers did not pay much emphasis on that fact. The fact that their proficiency levels do not match the material taught in classes.

6.4 Did the workshops change students' perceptions of writing for the better?

There seemed to be four main elements of the intervention that had a positive effect on the seven students' learning, the first is their learning journey that took place during the twenty four writing workshops as they started with a passive demeanor not willing to participate to gradually becoming more active. The second aspect was asserting the teaching approach the students' preferred. The third was the role of topic choice on the students' learning process. Lastly, is the effect of collaborative learning in the classroom.

6.4.1 A collaborative journey

The seven students Amani, Alaa, Bana, Hana, Maya, Nawal, and Ola started off the academic year as being very passive towards their learning. When I began the intervention, they were very reluctant to speak, hesitant to participate, and no opinions were voiced. They did not voice what interested them, such as what topics interested them. They appeared unwilling to communicate in neither Arabic nor English. This could have been due to many reasons, such as anxiety, lack of motivation, and/or fear of making a mistake, and/or being unfamiliar with this type of teaching approach wherein their views and opinions were valued. Culturally, many Saudi students in KAU will not express their opinions on topics such as religion and politics and generally controversial topics that may be culturally inapt.

This is simply the way things are in KAU. Their schooling prepped them to be that way. Their upbringing also played a major role in the way they think and how they perceive their teacher. Understanding and pinpointing these issues allow us to understand why they behave that way. This gives us a sense of direction on how to provide opportunities for students to start to voice their opinions and views. By the teachers giving importance to their students' opinions, it may boost their confidence levels, and thus increase their participation and engagement in the language classroom. The student reluctance to participate and voice their opinions very slowly began to change over the course of the workshops, students began to voice their preferred topics, they started to participate in class, and displayed enjoyment towards the workshops. Amani, remained quiet for the most part, but was working harder and would ask me questions on a one to one basis. In general, the other six students Alaa, Banan, Hana, Maya, Nawal and Ola appeared more confident about what they were doing in class, more relaxed to ask questions, and make mistakes.

In the following section, I discuss the students' preferred pedagogical approach to learning writing, the choice of teaching aids, the role of topic choice in their learning, and the choice of teaching aids that assisted and motivated their learning. The discussion is led by the voices of the seven students.

6.4.2 “The method was really fun”: The writing process approach

The writing process approach appeared to be the most favorable approach among students. Maya, points out that learning about writing processes benefited her in

that she was able to organize her ideas, whereas in her ELI classes, there was a lack of learning in this area, “[...] we brainstormed and outlined ideas in points and then arranged in a paragraph. In the lectures, we write up draft 1 and then draft 2 like in the workshop the ideas are organized different from the lectures” (Maya, P5, line 2). Not only did Maya benefit from learning about writing processes, but she also believed it was fun. She writes in her classroom diary, “The ideas were organized and the method was really fun” (Cycle 4, Workshop, 4). Nawal too, enjoyed the approach used in the workshops, “Many thanks for the fantastic approach in this workshop” (Cycle 1, Workshop, 3). It gave Hana a sense on how to approach writing, “I know now how to start with the main idea and then the ideas and I don’t just write fast and stuff, I have to organize my ideas and after that I write” (P4, line 10). Alaa saw a change in how she writes, she says, “My writing changed; I know now how to compose a sentence, I know how to look up words and construct them into a sentence like sentences to compose a paragraph. I know more words than before” (P2, line 2). Maya's case, she benefited from the workshop as she was able to prioritize the most important elements in writing when she started to write, “[...] prioritizing like first I organize the ideas and then I focus on the grammatical rules and then the coma and full stop and stuff” (Maya, P5, line 30). Students felt that they gained skills to write, they were able to look up words, learn how to record their vocabulary so that they can use it in their writing. They were able to brainstorm ideas, organize their ideas, and compose very basic sentences. This intervention, however, does not claim that the writing workshops achieved all those goals successfully, students needed more practice and time to master the above mentioned writing skills, however, they were beginning to become more independent towards their learning and this was a major successful

element of this context in this study. Throughout the course of the intervention through the students' feedback, many visual materials were used. I used pictures, videos, and audio clips. Many students found the use of visual aids useful, Alaa (F1, line 37) says:

[...] it's useful to use such tools. Very useful, usually I can't link words to imagination. But, when I see a picture, let's say of a Doctor wearing [...] the [...] you know as doctors wear, it will be easier to imagine how he lives and the colour of his clothes, and stuff like that.

Maya (F5, line 28) finds watching videos aid her learning vocabulary, "I think videos are important since they help us find more words. When I know a word and I see something related to it, I can clearly see the meaning rather than to just listen or write" (Maya, B5 , line 28). Ola like Maya found visual materials to be helpful vocabulary:

I want to gain more vocabularies every day. And since I can't memorize easily, I like to link words to pictures in order to record them in my mind. Each person their speed and that's why listening can't help me as much as pictures. (Ola, B7, line 53)

Amani perceives watching videos and playing games in class as a fun way to learn, "The best presentation was watching the videos. I feel it is was exciting, and the game where we had to organize/match the words with the pieces of clothing (listening and seeing)" (Amani, Cycle 4, Workshop, 6). Hana (F4, line 45), "I listen and watch new things in order to be able to form sentences". This corresponds with Reid (1987) who found that Arabic speaking language learners were visual learners.

At the end of each workshop, students were asked about the materials and the exercises that they found most appealing. They seemed to enjoy the use of

pictures, video clips and the collage exercises appeared to be a success. Making a collage about fashion was a hit with the students, “The best was the collage”, says Alaa (P2, line 10), “Because I’m the type that likes fashion, I love to look for things I like to collect them” (Alaa, P2, line 12). Using pictures and videos were popular teaching aids among students, “I liked the videos and pictures, I felt it was enjoyable and motivating to learn by seeing something. It is nice” (Banan, P3, line 12). Presenting students with videos and then asking them to write appeared to motivate them according to Hana (P4, line 16) justifies this by saying “[...] because it contains a lot of information, I can write a lot”. Maya (P5, line 16) also agrees with Hana saying, “In the video clips I hear everything, and then I write, I know the words; I know everything because I heard and saw it and this way is motivating and entreating too”. Maya sums it up in her diary writing, “For the most part, I enjoyed the workshop because the way the lesson was presented using videos was different from the usual boring writing practice in our classes” (Cycle 1, Workshop, 4).

Other materials were used to teach writing such as reading. Students were given articles wherein they had to compose an outline and summary extracted from a magazine article. The articles chosen were carefully selected in terms of cultural appropriateness, and the topic chosen was fashion since it appeared to be a hit with the group. In addition, in the case that there were auditory learners, audio recordings were played in order for them to write notes. The reason behind trying out these approaches is to see if they were of benefit to the students. Therefore, at the end of the workshops, students were asked what the best way they learnt writing, "The most are films and pictures" (Nawal, P6, line 16). “Two things the videos and collage” (Ola, P7, line 13). “[...]The best way to learn is through visual

and audio together. My writing changed of course after the workshops and it helped me with my vocabulary” (Alaa, Cycle 4, Workshop, 6). “This is one of the best workshops so far. I love the fact that we watch movies and write what we see” (Maya, Cycle1, Workshop, 5). “[...]After several workshops, I noticed a difference in the way I write a paragraph. It became easy. (Nawal, Cycle 4, Workshop 6). “In my opinion the best way to learn writing is via visual aids and audio together” (Ola, Cycle 4, Workshop 6). We can conclude from the above data that visual aids play an important role in attracting the attention of students, motivating them, and thus enhancing their learning experience in the area of writing. This is in line with another study that students' participation and engagement increased from watching movies (Kabooha, 2016, p. 255). In fact Kabooha (2016, p.354) found that (80%) of the participants in her study believed that movies were effective in terms of improving their vocabulary.

6.4.3 “I want to write what interests me”: Topic choice

Even though students were reluctant to voice their preferences as to what topics they would like to write about By the end of the year, they articulated their preferences. The notion of them thinking for themselves, to come up with their own topics appeared to be a new concept to them. This was an innovation in itself because they were not accustomed to be given the choice of what they wanted to learn. This type of reflection on their own preferences and needs was a new aspect of learning in the classroom. Students suggested topics including Fashion, Islam, Vacations, Stories, Films, and Themselves. Mostly, they seemed to like to write about themselves. Banan says, “In general, I like to write about myself, my

feelings and personality. I don't like politics. But I may like writing about nature” (Banan, F3, line 54). Nawal like Banan says, “Topics? Um. About myself I guess” (Nawal, F6, line 32). All the topics chosen in the workshops were the students’ choice. The most participation and enthusiasm in class was during the discussion of the topic of fashion. Many of them enjoyed the idea of the collage and creating their own fashion designs. This sparked motivation in the group, and it encouraged them to get to know one another more as a group.

The main ELI writing classes impose compulsory topics on students. Teachers had different perspectives on the idea of providing choices for the students. Some of them do not see the point of providing students with choices since they memorize the paragraphs for the exam. However, this is the problem with the curriculum and the fact that they test writing based on a topic that was pre-written in class. It is not surprising that students will memorize the paragraph if they have the choice to do so, so that they may achieve a good grade:

Funny thing is that even if they have, like for instance I remember whenever the topics when talk about vacation and when something went wrong and we went through the brainstorming activities step by step, then word generation activities and we did all that. And then at the end like half of the class have the same story - they went to Egypt and they lost their family and then they went to some security guy and they took them to the embassy. So I think because they know that they’re going to be marked on it in their exams, so they just want to have a one perfect paragraph to write. (Teacher A, C1, line 64)

This is an academic problem and not the students' problem. In fact, teachers have admitted that some topics are too difficult for students and do not match their level of proficiency, “[...] the writing topics that they have are either not, they can’t relate to or they’re too difficult for them for their level [...]” (Teacher A, C1, line

7). There seems to be a gap in terms of what the students think and the way their teacher perceives them. Topic choice plays a part in the students' writing. It is an element that motivates them if the topic is interesting, and if they have something to say about it. The teachers perceive topic choice as an unimportant factor because the students memorize paragraphs for writing. While this may be true, it does not eliminate the fact that learning to write on a topic of interest can improve the students writing skills.

Topic choice was one of the factors that appeared to determine the students' willingness to write during the intervention. It appeared that the topics that seemed interesting to students made them work more on their writing. Students expressed that they like to write about themselves. The topic of fashion seemed to be a success with students as all students agreed that they enjoyed writing about it as well as making their own collage about fashion. However, the freedom of topic choice was confined to the writing workshops. In ELI, the topics are compulsory and students are not given the opportunity to choose and express their interests. Some students expressed that some topics were difficult to write because of their limited knowledge on the topic, and because they lacked interest. On the other hand, teachers see topic choice as an unimportant element because students memorize their writing for the exams. There appears to be a gap in the teachers' perception of students' attitude towards their writing. This can hinder learning as both teacher and students are on two different lines of thought.

6.4.4 “I feel comfortable”: Collaborative learning

Most of the participants preferred group work as long as they know one another and the group members know one another, Alaa (F2, line 86) describes collaborate work, “it's different when I am with people I know and feel comfortable with, people I enjoy their company and talk to freely”. Banan (F3, line 22) agrees with Alaa, “It's better to be part of a group, with people I know”. On the other hand, not knowing one another, can be an obstacle to the learning process:

I feel comfortable because they know me as much as I know them. I know how to communicate with them. On the other hand, it's highly formal when I deal with people I don't know, because I still have to know them and get along with. (Banan, F2, line 24)

Others found collaborative learning within a group motivating, as each one shares a role and gives opportunities to ask and exchange information without the pressure of asking the teacher, Nawal describes it as “motivating” (F6, line 20). It also provides opportunity for the ones who are shy or reserved to ask questions to their peers, Ola describes her stance, “When I am alone, I don't dare ask a question, but within the team we can help each other and exchange ideas” (F7, line 47). Others find collaborative learning a good resource for information, “Because each one of us can share and gather information” (Amani, P1, line 8). “Because we help each other if there is something we don't know” (Nawal, C6, line 14), “Because we can benefit each other, sometimes someone can say something new we didn't know about” (Ola, P7, line 11), “Because everyone has an opinion so we hear opinion we have more ideas and we can write more” (Hanan, P4, line 14). Hanan, Banan along with Maya are the only participants who preferred pair work mainly because, in their opinion, in pair work, the work is divided between both

partners whereas in a group it can be a messy process. Banan describes her feelings, “I feel like I know what I’m doing and what she should be doing, which is the opposite in a group, I feel it’s a little chaotic and I don’t feel very comfortable” (Banan, P3, line 10). Hanan has another opinion why she shies away from group work, “Because the group members may disagree and each one claims the right for themselves” (Hanan, F4, line 39). Maya too sees the discussion in a group as unfruitful, “Our thoughts may get mixed up in a group. But when we're just two, we can put everything in order together. And it's just hard to study alone. I need someone to help me” (F5, line 24). She goes on to say:

[W]hen we are group we get distracted, because each one has an idea, so we don’t organize especially if you don’t know the girls in the group, we are unable to organize our ideas because each one has her own way of thinking, but if I knew them, we could organize better. (Maya, P5, line 12)

From the findings above, it is evident that students prefer to work in a group or with a partner rather than working alone. This is different to what the teachers believe should be happening in writing classes. Apart from the observed classes, students themselves have pointed out that they work alone in ELI writing classes. Hanan explains this difference, “They’re different in the way of presentation. In sessions, everyone works alone. While in workshops, we work in groups” (Hana, F4, line 80). Collaborative learning can enhance the classroom atmosphere, and assist the weak students who are shy to ask. Teachers appear to have not received enough training to put collaborative learning in action in their classrooms, and this can cause a negative impact upon the students' learning process in their classes.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the writing approaches utilized by teachers in writing classes in ELI, and explored the perceptions of teachers and students regarding these approaches and the challenges they experience in respectively teaching and learning English language writing. I then analyzed the challenges in the ELI by classifying my findings thematically: the teachers' role in writing classes, their concept of fairness, perspectives on collaborative learning, writing objectives, and students' fears making mistakes, and the challenge of the context itself. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on the positive outcomes from the intervention, sharing the journey together, favored writing approaches, topic choice played a role in motivating students, and finally how students perceived collaborative learning as a positive element in writing classes. In the next and final chapter, I sum up this action research project and share some possible recommendations in second language writing instruction.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter pulls together the three phases of this project, and summarizes my reflections on teacher/student perceptions of writing and the challenges that both groups articulated during my fieldwork at ELI. I also consider the contribution of the study to research in the field of teaching and learning writing in English and implications for Saudi higher education system specifically to the preparatory program in KAU. This chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations and challenges of the study, and finally some suggestions for further research.

7.2 Reflections on conducting action research

In this section, I discuss my role as a teacher researcher during the intervention phase. Though I had planned to try out different teaching approaches to writing with my students, the implementation did not go as planned. My priority when teaching was that the students' were learning and enjoying the process of learning and more importantly, they directed the stream of learning through an experimental learning approach (Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2). Since the workshops were not more than 40 minutes, time did not give me the opportunity to explore various approaches. However, the intervention offered insights into the elements of teaching writing that can be motivating and enjoyable to students. The first of these elements was the students' preferred teaching approach to writing which was the process approach to writing (cf. Chapter 6, Section 6.4.2). When teaching, I

initially focused on generating ideas, though this may seem like a straightforward phenomenon in contemporary EFL teaching, however in this Saudi context, this exerted a lot of effort from the students to come up with ideas. As I previously mentioned in the previous section, teachers were giving students the ideas to write their piece of writing, allowing no opportunities for the students to think for themselves. Though the process model of writing, stressed on the role of the teacher as a guide and facilitator (cf. Chapter 2, section 2.7.3), this could not be achieved straight away in the workshop. I had to provide a lot of support to students and I noticed the more I praised and encouraged their small successes in class, the more they appeared to be motivated, and relied on themselves. I was consciously continuously praising them, because they appeared to lack in confidence, and were afraid of giving the wrong answers when discussing. This barrier seemed metaphorically like a wall between my students and I, and it needed to be broken down, so that the classroom would a more relaxed positive environment.

Conducting this intervention (Chapter 5, sections 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, and 5.3.4), affected the way I perceived my students and it made me reflect on my own teaching more specifically. I kept asking myself, how can I make the workshops more enjoyable, how can I make it more interesting, what can I do to boost their confidence, how can I attract their attention? These were often the questions I asked myself when reflecting on my own teaching. As a researcher researching the area of teaching writing, it did not appear as straightforward when applying these writing strategies in the classroom. Each strategy would take long duration of time until the students were able to do it alone. Brainstorming was one of the strategies that were new to the students, and they enjoyed drawing mind maps, although they

did need support from myself and their peers. It was a process that they were able to partially begin to do by themselves towards the end of the workshop, and it was enjoyable.

I kept corrections to a minimum, and this was due to two reasons: the first was that students were already overly self-critical of themselves and they did not like making mistakes. The second is that there was already much stress on form in their writing classes and students were conscious of making grammatical mistakes that I wanted to shift their attention to simply write with no fear or anxiety on producing correct sentences. However, the students asked me several times to provide them with a grammar lesson on sentence structure, because they did not know how to compose sentences, and so to meet their needs, I did. Even though they overly produced the same simple sentence structure in class, it nevertheless broke down the barrier that kept them from writing. I often had to use Arabic in class when they struggled to understand what I was saying. Even though using Arabic in ELI classes is frowned upon, but since I was on leave for study, I did use Arabic when I needed. In hindsight, I probably could have used Arabic more to save time, but this was my habit as a teacher in terms of only talking in English in class that it was hard for me to break from.

The differences between my role and the role of the other teachers observed is that where I had the freedom to teach what I wanted (cf. Chapter 5, Sections 5.4.1, 5.4.2, 5.4.3 and 5.4.4), the teachers in ELI, on the other hand, had a set curriculum to finish. My priority lay in that the students were learning. This was my priority and often came before my aims for my research. Learning revolved around the student and therefore the student was the focus, whereas in

other classes, it was teacher-centered and the decisions and the students were not involved in any decision making.

Looking back upon my own role as a teacher researcher I was ultimately observing myself and the students' reactions in more detail than I would have when I was teaching at ELI the course prescribed. This was because I was performing research and needed to observe and take notes. Due to this research process, I will use this reflection process, to my everyday teaching in a systematic manner. By doing so I can enable better my own teaching practice.

7.3 Reflections on teaching second language writing at ELI

Firstly, the exploration phase that lasted a full academic year was insightful in terms of finding out the teachers' understandings and perspectives on how teaching should take place in the classroom. The verbal communication in interviews along with classroom observations allowed me to portray a colorful picture of teaching in this Saudi context starting with the type of writing instruction provided to students in writing classes. The controlled "guided composition method" (Ferris, 2016, p. 146) was used in the 1940s and 1950s (cf. Chapter 2, Section, 2.7.1), but is still used in ELI by teachers. This was evident through the observation that parts of this method were used through the use of questions and answers, and fill in the blanks exercises. The paragraph- patters method was also used which is also a controlled approach to learning whereby learners is taught to write through a focus on grammar and emphasis on controlled composition (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2). The teachers' perceptions also echoed the same belief on how they view writing in their interviews. Writing, to the teachers in ELI, is a means of displaying

correct grammatical rules, displaying knowledge of punctuation rules and writing mechanics. Writing was not seen as a means of communication to the reader, or a way of expressing ideas. In this case, the teacher's focus is on accuracy rather than fluency, looking at writing at the surface level as Hyland (2016, p. 4) describes this type of view of writing as "disembodied" (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.7.2), and is an extension of grammar instruction.

In the same line of thought, teachers complain that students are not writing, they rely on the teacher for guidance, and are motivated by merely passing the exam. However, the teachers teach the students the aspects of writing that they will be graded on, and that is grammar, punctuation, capitalization. Therefore, both teachers and students have the same overall objective and that is students are motivated to achieve high grades, and teachers teach for the exam, which is not openly discussed in the interviews, but implied by the teachers as they describe the curriculum that they need to cover over a short space of time.

The teacher is in full control of the class and the students are guided by her instructions without any deviation from the planned prescribed by ELI. Even though at times, students struggled to complete tasks in the classrooms, they lacked participation, they appeared de-motivated and bored, there was no alterations made in an attempt to change the students' responses, nor was there an acknowledgment in the interviews that classes lacked in some areas such as participation, or motivation.

In the classrooms there were abrupt transition between activities, the goal behind the activities were not clear, and not communicated to the students. Even though topics could be made relevant and interesting to the students, such as "An Awful Experience" in class A5, or "Family and Friends" in A3's class, there was to

attempt to involve students in brainstorming their own ideas, teaching them how to generate their own ideas in simple words. The ideas were given to the students and it therefore hindered their learning process and their ability to become independent learners. However, teachers criticize students for not being dependent on them, but at the same time, they are not equipping students with the necessary tools to work alone. There is a gap between the way the teachers want the student to behave and think, and the way their teaching practice takes place. This occurs in many classes in various contexts, but what is significant in this context is that all teachers interviewed and observed had the same perspectives on how teaching should occur in their classrooms, and their perception of their own roles as language instructors in KAU. This could be culturally rooted in their belief systems on the dynamics of teacher and student roles.

7.4 Reflections on learning second language writing at ELI

This section discusses the students' role from two perspectives. The first types are the learners who I observed in the writing classes in ELI, and the second is that the learners I taught in the phase two. I discuss the first type in light on the writing classes and the way they responded in class. To get a deeper understanding of the learners, I discuss the students I interacted over the course of the intervention.

7.4.1 Learners in ELI writing classes

The students appeared passive in their learning environment. Not in any of the observations did the students ask their teachers any questions. Furthermore, their

participation was minimalistic. They did not display in any of the classes observed any enjoyment towards their writing lesson classes. In the same line, the teachers did not try to make their lessons more interesting and did not teach them any tools to be more independent. They appeared to struggle when writing and found it difficult. This is in line with Aldera's (2016) study (Chapter 2, Section 2.12.2) that asserts the difficulty that Saudi students' face when writing as they continue to reach higher level of education. The power relation between student and teacher in the classroom was evident.

Students used compensational strategies to make up for their lack of learning, such as memorizing paragraphs for their exams, and they translate them to make it easier to memorize (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.2.1). Even though teachers criticized their use of these strategies, they did not offer alternative strategies for them to apply. This finding corresponds with Mohammad and Hazarika's (2016) study (Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2) who confirm that memorization is used as a successful tool to achieve a high grade in examinations.

7.4.2 My students in the intervention

In this part, I discuss the students' role that my seven students took during the intervention. I previously provided an overview of the students' learning journey (cf. Chapter 6, Section, 6.4.1), however in this section, I tie the findings with the literature and compare both sets of students observed. In the writing workshops, the students started as passive learners unable to voice their opinions on what they wanted to write about. Like the students observed in classes, their participation was very little and had to be prompted a lot in order for them to give opinions and

participate. However, as time went on, students became more involved in the learning process. There are many variables that play a role in this transition. Some of the ones have been highlighted in (cf. Chapter 6; Section 6.4), however, there could have been other variables not accounted for in the study. Students demonstrated that they enjoyed the classes. They became able to voice their preferences, became more independent in their writing. This could be due to the fact that they were in a more relaxed atmosphere. The pressure of achieving a high grade did not exist. They were choosing the writing topics, and they were given the opportunity to express their needs. However, the reality of the teaching classes in ELI is that these strategies cannot be applied in order to achieve some of the positive outcomes that were resulted from the intervention, however, the way writing is taught can be changed using the same materials.

Hamouda (2011) concludes that 83% of students were motivated because of the grade they receive (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.12.3), and the teachers in this study observed the same type of motivation. However, like in Hamouda's study, concerns were expressed about the grade being a negative motivation factor, but what is not articulated is that the environment and setting of this type of learning in university leads for the students to want to achieve high grades, since the use of English in general and specifically in the area of writing is not a short-term. The challenge is not change the students' motivation, but to change how they are assessed. All teaching avenues in ELI are targeting the students to pass their exams, so that they can move up the level. The system put in place by ELI is for accreditation purposes and it is therefore, in their best interest to make the system work for their benefit rather than the benefit of the students. This is witnessed in this study as the seven students passed their proficiency exams after each level;

however, their proficiency was not changing. The focus of Hamouda's (2011) study as well as Mohammad and Hazarika (2016), who both emphasizes that the students' should not use memorization as a learning strategy to pass exams, suggest that students should be asked to write about different topics that they took in class so that memorization would not be a useful strategy, however, this can be misleading. While this is a valid recommendation, it nevertheless does not tackle if indeed students are taught to write. In this study, students observed in classes were not taught to write autonomously. The teaching approach to writing in ELI is outdated and does not foster learning. Hyland (2004) outlines that it is the teachers' responsibility to hand over the responsibility to the student in an attempt to achieve autonomy in the writing classroom (cf. Chapter 2, Section 2.4.3). This is much needed in this context and can be achieved by building the students' confidence in their language abilities, teachers' positive outlook on writing classes that transpires to students, assigning students with achievable tasks to demonstrate their ability that they can achieve on their own, and through this process the teacher gradually lessens the spoon-feeding approach to allow the students to be independent.

7.5 Strengths and limitations of the action research project

Action research in its own right is a quick fix for teachers who want to find solutions to the problems they face in their classrooms. This study aimed to investigate the challenges faced by Arabic L1 learners in a Saudi higher education setting, and to intervene to see how some variables can affect the way the students' view their classes, and reflect on my own practice and decision-making. By doing

so, I was able to shed light on how teaching takes place in my workplace, the dynamics between teacher and students in class, the students' perception of their learning as well as the teachers' perception of how learning and teaching should take place and is taking place and at the same time view their actions in the classroom. The construction of knowledge is created by the learners and teachers' culture, beliefs and experiences that creates its own reality. This constructivism approach is how this study functions (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.2). Through this approach, I was therefore able to draw on some conclusions and recommendations to better the learning environment in this Saudi context. I was able to investigate an educational setting that has long been ignored in the literature. It gave voice to those who have not been heard, the students' voices had finally been heard and articulated. The teachers too, were given the opportunity to provide insights into how they view learning, their expectations of students, and their views on the context and how learning should occur to better achieve learning outcomes.

However, these recommendations may not be transferable to other contexts only similar contexts that hold similar characteristics.

Action research aims to allow the minority or sometimes called oppressed to "tell their story" so that awareness can be raised. Questions can be asked about the relevance of any findings beyond the immediate context, but the aim of action research is not to generalise findings, but to find solutions for problems arising in a context. In this study, there were many limitations that I address throughout the thesis as the research was carried out. Firstly, time allotted for the workshops were short and inconsistent. Even though all seven students came to all twenty-four workshops, some would sometimes come in late, so that sections of the workshop would have to be repeated. Secondly, the students themselves were stressed with

their other courses in the university and essentially were anxious to achieve the needed grade to gain admission to their degree courses. Thirdly, it would have been ideal to teach students how to reflect on their own learning, and be introduced to critical thinking, which might seem mainstream in western educational systems, but is quite a new notion for the Saudi educational system (see Allamnahrah, 2013; Alwehaibi, 2012). This would have resulted in creating richer data from the classroom diaries. Fourthly, the asymmetrical relationship between the students and I, even though this was fading gradually through the intervention, remained an obstacle that hindered the data collection. Fifthly, in terms of the intervention design, it would have been more beneficial if the design was based on innovative attempts to the curriculum itself. It would have produced more immediate recommendations for teachers to follow if the innovation was successful. The results are therefore considered as initial suggestions to improve writing classes, further research in this area is needed. Sixthly, for me as a researcher and teacher, this action research approach to this study was new to me, there are many lessons that I have learnt. Firstly, was finding my voice in this type of research wherein my evaluations were valued, for me was a challenge to find. Even though previous experiences in research was effective, nevertheless my voice which needed to be dominant was difficult to articulate at times, because of previous cultural beliefs in my mind-set. The second lesson is the expectations of tidy research is not possible for this type of research paradigm ,because of the many variables, such as motivation and context constraints that play a role, mostly which are out of my control.

Furthermore, the results of this research should be researched further, such as the teaching approaches that suit PYP students when teaching writing. Further

research needs to be carried out to investigate innovations in teaching writing within the constraints of the context to better learning. Finally, the amount of data this type of research generates is immense and rich, and can be analysed in different ways to answer various research questions. This research only touches upon a very specific area in language learning and that is writing, however, the data could be analysed in many different ways. There is a bias concern that can be evident in action research, especially when the researcher is also the teacher and is the sole researcher of the project. The researcher's own ideas and preconceptions are whether directly or indirectly are present in the research. To minimise such bias in research, more than one researcher could possibly work on a project. In this research, bias was acknowledged and recognized and measures were taken such as the use of triangulation when analysing the data from different sources. This aided in supplying and backing claims the researcher might have made t

7.6 Future directions

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first type of action research that deals with the English language instruction in higher education. Thus there is plenty of scope for further work in this arena. Further research should be conducted to improve and support learning in ELI, more classroom research should be conducted in ELI using a collaborative approach wherein more than one researcher can feed into the knowledge of ELI classrooms. More longitudinal studies that provide rich qualitative results on Saudi learners needed to in various higher education settings wherein we can gain deeper understanding at how to improve the language learning system and improve the quality of teaching and learning in

the Saudi language classroom to minimise the challenges. This type of research could have implications that could positively affect the English curricula, and educational policy making within the higher education system in Saudi Arabia.

Even though ELI provides contemporary seminars and workshops based in the area of teaching and learning and testing, there is still a need for more training. Furthermore, the training needed is not merely for theoretical and knowledge background, but methods of application in real life classrooms that would benefit our students. A more hands-on approach to training that deals with real-life language classroom challenges should be conducted as in this study demonstrates there is a need for better teacher preparation programs. On an administrative level, teachers are mostly hired on the basis of their GPA and not on personality qualities or teaching ideology as a language educator. A closer look at the criteria of hiring teachers in ELI needs to be looked into as many teachers demonstrated a disconnect/opposition towards their students.

7.7 Summary

The context of this study contains many elements that impacted on teachers and learners. Time constraints were one of those elements that appeared to have a direct effect on learning how to write. Both teachers and students complained about the lack of time and the pressures of finishing the curriculum within a designated timeframe set by ELI. The students' language proficiency is poor. In this context, students graduate from the English preparatory programme after a full year of writing instruction, yet still possess an extremely low proficiency level in writing (A1 proficiency level).

Another constraint is the restrictions of topic choice in the classroom.

Students explained that they engaged more in writing when the topics were of interest to them. The students thrived in the topics they chose to write about. They showed very little interest in the topics that were designated to them by ELI. While again this may seem like an obvious conclusion, it is a minor but important teaching decision that can make a difference to how students perceive their learning. Materials can be adjusted according to the students' topic of interest while keeping the same objectives in set.

In Chapter Two, I provided an array of definitions for writing ranging from Coulmas (1999) definition of writing as visible and tactile signs to Daniels and Bright (1996) who view writing as marks representing utterances (Chapter 2, Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2). Olson (1996), on the other hand, argues that writing is not a representation of speech, but a means for communicating information (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3). In this study at ELI, writing is not only perceived as a secondary skill, but also is taught as a secondary skill. Writing, according to both teachers and learners, is perceived merely as a representation of grammatical rules and structure. It does not act as an authentic means of communication. This is the key finding in this research study, and its implications have a ripple effect on how writing classes are implemented and experienced. In this approach, the future reader is disregarded, and writing is seen as an activity without any purpose other than to support other language skills and to pass the examination. As a result, the main communicative purpose of writing is completely ignored.

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