

A Case Study of the Practices and Views of the Providers and Consumers of EFL Writing Classes in the English Language Institute of Saudi Western University

By

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Dedication

To my father and mother;

To my beloved husband and best friend,

Ahmed Kateb;

To my brothers Mohammed, Mohannad and Ahmad;

To my sisters-in-law Aliaa and Renad

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations and acronyms are used in this thesis

AL	Academic Literacies
CEAP	Critical English for Academic Purposes
CEFR	Council of Europe Framework of Reference for Languages
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
ELE	English Language Education
ELI	English Language Institute
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IELTS	International English Language Test System
LI	First Language
L2	Second Language
LE	Linguistic Ethnography
LSP	Language for Specific Purposes
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NS	Native Speakers of English
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NNS	Non-Native Speakers of English
OOPT	Oxford Online Placement Test
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

Abstract

Writing is considered a key element in knowledge creation and production in higher education (Gimenez, 2012; Lillis, 2001; Matoti and Shumba, 2011). Students at university level are expected to handle writing tasks that require literacy practices such as critical thinking and be able to use the appropriate writing conventions in order to demonstrate their knowledge (Mitchell, 2000; Ramoroka, 2012; Wingate, 2006). Therefore, writing can be a challenging task for most learners at tertiary level. In the Saudi EFL context, where the current research was conducted, students experience slow progress at university level due to their poor academic writing skills (Al-Khairy, 2013). This is a common situation in many EFL contexts (e.g. Fareh, 2010; Grami, 2010; Hujailan, 2004).

This ethnographic study examines student English writing practices at Saudi Western University[1]. It investigates the understandings of the objectives and purposes of student writing in higher education of representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, the directors of the English Language Institute, and the teaching staff and students. Participants in this study were divided into three levels: macro/meso/micro. The theoretical framework of the study is the Academic Literacies critique of the Study Skills approach as a construct (Lea and Street, 2000), while the methodological framework is drawn from Linguistic Ethnography (Rampton et al., 2004) and Bakhtin's concept of the voice of the other in the utterances of individuals, where relevant (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). The data were derived from primary sources: interviews and classroom observation and secondary sources: institutional documents and students' written essays. The qualitative data were analysed using analytical tools from Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtinian concepts of the institutional voice within utterances to investigate in greater depth the data and relationships between the different levels of organisation and their understandings of the role of writing in English at tertiary level.

[1] To ensure the confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability of the institution, a pseudonym – Saudi Western University (SWU) – has been used.

The findings of the study reveal that English writing practices at classroom level are built upon institutional concerns and cultural beliefs. These concerns and beliefs have wider implications for the institution and country than just the development of individual writing capabilities. The thesis argues that student writing pedagogy in higher education needs to take account of students' writing needs at a functional level. It also suggests that communication between the macro-level (the representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education), the meso-level (the directors of the English Language Institution) and micro-level (the staff and students of the English Language Institute) has to be established to improve the organisational structure as well as the culture of courses so that information exchanges about writing practices and student needs can flow from the bottom up to inform decision-makers at the top.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the study, including the researcher's reasons for undertaking it. The chapter presents a brief background to the study and states the research problem, the rationale for the study and for choosing the theoretical and methodological frameworks, aims and research questions. It also outlines the structure of the thesis and provides the outline of each chapter.

1.2 Background of the study

The ability to write in English is an essential requirement for enrolling in academic education in Saudi Arabia to ensure a successful learning outcome. Writing is a key skill that has to be mastered in higher education because most work is assessed through writing, whether examinations, essays, dissertations or theses (Alexander et al., 2008; Andrews, 2003). Furthermore, writing in higher education involves cognitive processes which reflect the writers' identities and their own particular purposes and goals during the act of composing (Lillis, 2003). It requires a complex interplay between selecting and acquiring information, critical thinking, communicating with others and constructing knowledge (Jones, 2009; Lillis, 2003; Wingate, 2006). Students are expected to plan, write and edit their writing as well as pay attention to its structure, accuracy and fluency (Silva, 1993). They also have to be able to produce grammatically and logically connected sentences (White, 1980). However, academic staff often claim that students at university level no longer write appropriately (Lea and Street, 1998). This suggests that the quality of student literacy seems to be lower today than it used to be (Lea and Street, 1998).

A large number of studies have investigated literacy practices and student writing in higher education. While some studies have focused on postgraduate and doctoral writing practices (e.g. Kamler and Thomson, 2006), others have concentrated on undergraduate student writing (e.g. Jones, et al., 1999; Lea and Stierer, 2000). Most Academic Literacies studies, and particularly Lea and Street's studies, have been

conducted in the context of mother tongue English. In this ethnographic study, I argue that limited attention has been given to student writing practices in higher education in the Saudi EFL context. I decided to focus on a particular university in Saudi Arabia to examine the nature of student writing practices. I also suggest that the Academic Literacies (AL) approach is an important tool because it considers the contextual and cultural elements of student writing in higher education to be central to an understanding of how students learn. Lea and Street (1998) argue that it is essential to examine how both students and tutors interpret the parameters of their written literacy practices to recognise the nature of student learning. They also suggest that to identify the useful and the not so useful practices, it is important to examine the interpretations, expectations and goals of each of these three groups regarding student writing practices and production. Therefore, in this study I used the Academic Literacies approach as a theoretical framework to look at the interpretations, perceptions and practices surrounding student writing in English and to examine the nature of student writing practices within higher education in Saudi Arabia (e.g. Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2004).

Furthermore, Linguistic Ethnography as the methodological framework (e.g. Rampton et al., 2004) contributed to the research design – the methodology of macro-, meso- and micro-level data collection. The research considers the macro-level as where the philosophy underpinning the system is to be found, and the meso-level as responsible for framing the delivery of that system as this is where most "changes actually take place, and a good theoretical understanding of how and why this happens – or does not happen – is therefore necessary" (Trowler et al., 2005, p. 435). The micro-level consists of the implementers of the system at classroom level - the teachers - together with the receivers or consumers - the students - and their aims and critiques. Interviews are one of the primary data collection tools in this research: at the macro-level, with two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education; at the meso-level with the two directors of the English language Institute in Saudi Western University; and at the micro-level, with the EFL teaching staff and EFL students. Therefore, Linguistic Ethnography gave me the opportunity to identify both the official and personal voices from the interview and documentary data, to help give voice to what is often not heard. Both the theoretical and methodological framework conceptualise

language and writing in particular, as a social practice – that is, as a dialogue between the writer and reader – rooted in a particular context.

A large number of studies have been conducted in various Arabic-speaking EFL contexts such as Jordan, Sudan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia to investigate the learning/teaching of English writing and its challenges. Studies such as those by Abdul Haq (1982), Al-Fadda, (2012), Rabab'ah (2003) and Zughoul and Taminian (1984) argue that writing is one of the main challenges experienced by students. These studies will be discussed in depth in chapter three. These authors also focused on a number of L2 writing issues which may influence learner's proficiency in writing in the target language and hinder them from reaching an appropriate level of writing proficiency to support their learning experience in higher education. Most of these studies looked at writing in English as a problem located within the students themselves (e.g. Al-Fadda, 2012; Grami, 2010) while other studies relate the problems to teaching approaches and traditional methods (e.g. Al-Khairy, 2013; Khan, 2011). They do not consider writing as a complex and/or a contested process within a relationship of authority and power. Although writing practices at university level involve issues of identity and power, students are examined by their tutors and the university authorities, which makes for an asymmetric power relationship. Cognitive skills such as critical thinking, constructing an argument, the understanding of writing conventions and how to communicate in writing are crucial for university studies (Lea and Street, 1998) and can only be developed by each individual student within a context of co-operation and mutual respect (rather than a power-basis) with their tutors.

1.3 Rationale for the study

The research was motivated by my personal learning experiences as a postgraduate student at the University of Nottingham. Through my master's studies, I was interested in learning more about writing topics. Furthermore, the teachers who taught me gave me a prominent voice, a freedom of choice and valued my contribution through the interaction encouraged in class. I learned how to become more capable in order to depend on myself and make my own decisions in the learning environment. Therefore, I became more active in managing the learning process and developed the confidence to take charge of my learning. This learning experience encouraged me to

become an active learner who is reliable and can independently manage broader essays topics, time management, and finding the relevant references. However, this experience was totally different from my previous learning as an undergraduate student in a university in Saudi Arabia, where it was highly controlled and did not encourage individual development, as there were many constraints on teachers' as well as students' time. As young students, we were guided and controlled by the tutors through the learning process. They told us what to do, how to do it and when to do it. Their main focus was to pass the final content based examination. Teachers did not have time to promote more appropriate learning strategies that could enhance and promote our learning process. Therefore, students became more passive and reluctant in the learning process. This experience as an undergraduate student did not empower me with the appropriate language functions and skills or writing practices to function to my full potential in higher education. It also made me think that I had to be more independent.

Furthermore, as an English language teacher in a university in Saudi Arabia, I was aware of the significance of writing in English for students in the higher education context and the challenges and constraints experienced by Saudi EFL students when writing in English.

I therefore planned to investigate student writing at university level. I was highly motivated to learn and understand more about student writing in higher education in the Western as well as the Saudi EFL context. This ethnographic study has fostered my knowledge of the field of student writing practices and will allow me to help my future students to improve their own writing practices. My goal is to identify the barriers to and develop ways of teaching and learning academic writing in Saudi higher education. As the research at three levels (macro, meso and micro) progressed, it became increasingly clear that change is necessary within the education culture in Saudi Arabia in order to improve practice at classroom level.

1.4 Statement of the problem

English is a foreign and international language, knowledge of which can promote success for students in a developing country, such as Saudi Arabia (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Al-Samadani and Ibnian, 2015). It is regarded as the language of modernity, business and education, and needs to be acquired for various reasons, such as

communicating within global networks and gaining an academic degree. Moreover, proficiency in written English is valued as one of the key necessary factors for a brilliant future, including an excellent education, successful progress in learning in higher education and an ideal career (Yamani, 2000). If learners can master and utilise the functional aspects of writing in the English language, this opens up countless avenues of opportunity for them in various fields, such as education, business and healthcare (Yamani, 2000).

The Saudi educational system still seems to pay little attention to the process of writing in English (Elyas, 2008). Although the English curriculum is meant to provide students with the knowledge necessary to empower them, they finish their higher education without being able to write in English (Hujailan, 2004). Learners who pursue university studies do not have the necessary skills to communicate using the functional aspects of writing in the English language (Al-Khairy, 2013; El-Sayed, 1992). Their low level of English writing may be due to the English language curriculums, methods or approaches to teaching writing in English or the amount of learning time dedicated to it (Al-Asmari, 2013; Al-Khairy, 2013; Prokop, 2003; Schmitt, 2005), either at school or later.

Furthermore, the content of the school curriculum and textbooks, from primary to secondary level, are standardised throughout the Kingdom and controlled by the Ministry of Education (Al-Zaid, 1982; Rugh, 2002). Though extensive formal education has spread throughout the Kingdom, Al-Mashary (2006) remains sceptical with respect to the outcomes of the common teaching style. He claims that the teaching methods commonly used are culturally bound and encourage the passive memorisation of class material rather than requiring more engagement in factual analysis. The tutors who teach writing to students are also constrained by factors such as time, culturally modified teaching materials and teaching approaches. Another problem faced by most students in Saudi Arabia is their teachers' exam-oriented approach to teaching English (Al-Oadi, 2000). On the other hand, Al-Shammary (1984) argued that the Kingdom actually possesses a fiercely competitive academic system, which can put intimidating pressure on Saudi students.

Without doubt, one of the most critical stages in a learner's life is the shift from school to university life (Askham, 2008). This transition may require a major

adjustment; students have to become more independent and responsible for their learning needs (Lowe and Cook, 2003). This increases the number of challenges faced by students as they encounter a new era in their academic lives. They might also be unaware of, and unfamiliar with the type of language and academic literacy required for their university courses (Schmitt, 2005). Consequently, learners may face new challenges in learning the target language, especially when they have to compose written texts.

Furthermore, at university level students are expected to communicate effectively in English and meet the writing requirements of their faculties and departments which are part of their academic assessment. Students are expected to produce essays and long summaries that increasingly approximate the norms and conventions of their future disciplines as they progress through higher education. However, Saudi students' level of proficiency in English is still below the academic study requirement levels for their disciplines (Khan, 2011). Student writing standards are falling in higher education in Saudi Arabia – Saudi students demonstrate poor English writing proficiency in higher education (Al-Khairy, 2013; Hujailan, 2004; Rugh, 2002). They experience challenges in expressing their meaning in writing in English, communicating ideas and thoughts and organising paragraphs (Al-Fadda, 2012; Grami, 2010). The majority of students start to learn English at school and can only produce a limited number of sentences and short paragraphs (Rugh, 2002). This situation of limited English writing proficiency creates a challenge for students who are expected to make the huge leap to communicate effectively before they begin their academic subject studies (Al-Fadda, 2012). Some preparatory English courses at university aim to bridge the gap between school level English writing and course entry requirements, while in other courses, the ability to write basic English is a course completion requirement. Thus the ability to write in English has two different academic aims which, combined with the varied skill levels with which students start their pre-course writing in English and the different goals they need to attain at the end (one to pass a test and the other to operate functionally through written English), makes appropriate course delivery challenging.

Presently, only a small number of studies (Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Samadani, 2010) have been conducted in the field of English writing at university level in Saudi Arabia,

therefore, there is not enough information or research to inform the development of good academic writing practices in higher education (Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Samadani, 2010). Krieger (2007) claims that the lack of research in Saudi Arabia is one of the main reasons for the lack of improvement in the standard of education in Saudi Arabia. Hence, Saudi Arabia needs to start funding Saudi researchers and research projects to investigate the Saudi English writing experience in order to understand it (Rugh, 2002).

To address this gap, the study examined student writing practices in the higher education system in Saudi Arabia to explore the claim made by Academic Literacy researchers that it is necessary to examine both teachers' and students' understandings of their literacy practices and how they should develop, an aspect which has so far been ignored in Saudi studies such as those by Al-Fadda (2012), Al-Khairy (2013), Grami, (2010) and Hujailan (2004). The significance of the present study is that it is the first investigation of student writing practices through the use of a conceptual theoretical framework taking the Academic Literacies approach at Saudi Western University.

1.5 Rationale for choosing the theoretical and methodological frameworks

When I began my research journey, I wanted to discover why Saudi students appeared to make little progress with their writing in English when they attended English classes to improve their general skills in English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and their knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary at Saudi Western University. The Academic Literacies area of interest is specifically writing at university level in English, so seemed to offer a benchmark for the discussion of how the process of writing could be acquired by students and alternative possible models as well as the direction for improving the teaching and learning of writing in English in Saudi Western University might take.

However, the AL approach considers writing as practised by native speakers in countries like the UK or US, where English is the mother tongue, and does not take account of learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language nor of the socio-cultural context of different societies where English is learned, such as that of Saudi Arabia.

As a teacher in Saudi Arabia, I was aware that my research had to operate within and take account of the norms of Saudi culture and society - for instance, the separate teaching of the sexes in their English courses and the strict hierarchical chain of command within the university. This situation is quite different from the learning context of English mother-tongue students in the UK, where both sexes are taught together and while still hierarchical, the lines between the different levels are fudged and open to challenge.

Given this situation, I needed a research framework to manage the structure of my research into the teaching and learning of writing in English to help me organise and access the opinions of interviewees with different levels of control over the syllabus and teaching of writing in Saudi Western University in a way acceptable to Saudi culture. The concept of the micro meso and macro levels of power and control within Linguistic Ethnography thus offered a framework for accessing different groups within their socio-cultural contexts which allowed them, particularly the micro level, to give their views freely, without the constraint of the presence of those with higher authority. It also offered a way to compare the views of the interviewees at each level and what they were based upon, as well as those of the individuals within each level of the hierarchy.

At a deeper level, Linguistic Ethnography (LE) and related theories (e.g. Bakhtin's work on hidden voices) offered a method to analyse the data I was going to collect (mainly from interviews, but also documentary and from observation) in more detail, to see the hierarchical power influences and different voices present in the utterances of individual speakers, influenced by the culture of the society they live in. Some individual voices are rarely heard, even at higher levels of the hierarchy.

A highly structured hierarchical society is a given in Saudi Arabia, and I was going to have to work within it, so Linguistic Ethnography offered both a practical, organising framework as well as an analytical tool for investigating how far writing practices at tertiary level - the status quo - approached the ideals of Academic Literacies as a target to suggest future directions and requirements for the teaching of writing at Saudi Western University.

1.6 Originality of the study

One significant feature of this study, which is different from most other research in the field of academic literacy, is the context of the study, Saudi Arabia, and the conceptual theoretical framework, the Academic Literacies approach, which considers writing as a social practice rooted in a specific social context. Therefore, any features of the context identified through the lens of Academic Literacies that might have an impact on student writing were carefully examined.

Most studies conducted in the area of Academic Literacy have focused their attention on English speaking countries, such as the USA, UK and Australia, largely neglecting other EFL contexts, such as the Middle East/Arab world. Translating the contributions of these studies to the Middle East/Arab context is difficult. Therefore, this thesis takes the Academic Literacies framework to try to shed light on the operation and delivery of student writing in higher education in the Saudi Arabian context. This model considers the conflicting understandings of student writing which may exist at university and thus the aim is to clarify some of the reasons for the poor quality of student writing in higher education. I will also use the model to identify the problems student writers encounter and suggest how to promote more effective writing practices in higher education. It is also interesting to see how the conceptual framework of the Academic Literacies model may help to highlight or illuminate barriers, within the Saudi context, to the promotion of good English writing practices.

1.7 Aims of the study

The study seeks to identify the reasons for the low levels of English writing in Saudi tertiary education generally. It does this by investigating undergraduate student writing practices in English at Saudi Western University, seeking:

- To understand the status of writing in English as a general entry level qualification for higher level study;
- To understand the status of writing in English where English is the medium of instruction for academic courses;
- To understand the status of writing in English as a means to a better job;
- To suggest the way forward for the future planning of the teaching and learning of writing in English at tertiary level, with possible implications for the teaching of English at primary and secondary levels.

1.8 Research questions

In order to investigate the perceptions of the different actors at different levels within the hierarchical structure of Saudi higher education, the following questions were asked:

a) At the micro-level (teachers and students):

- Question 1: What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English language institute in Saudi Western University?

b) At the meso-level (middle management):

- Question 2: What role does the English Language Institute play in framing student writing practices?

c) At the macro-level (top of the hierarchy):

- Question 3: What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role in supporting student writing in higher education?
- Question 4: To what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context?

The concept of a deficit model (from Academic Literacies' critique of the study skills approach) i.e. the students were the problem to be remedied due to their lack of proficiency, seemed to resonate with the mindset of many of the interviewees responsible for shaping the teaching and learning of English (and writing in English in particular) at tertiary level in Saudi Arabia, and so coloured the aims and methods used to deliver instruction. The deficit model described by Academic Literacies also highlighted how far the current writing in English situation reflects such a model (rather than approaching the Academic Literacies ideals of the co-construction of knowledge within an equable social environment) and so could help to explain why the current system fails to deliver the ability to write well in English so necessary for individual academic or work success, and for the development of the country as a whole. The content and structure of the thesis, chapter by chapter, are outlined below.

1.9 Structure of the thesis

Chapter One presents the rationale for carrying out the study, the background to the study and the problem investigated. Background here refers to the context of this problem, i.e. situation or environment in which this problem can be observed. The chapter outlines the rationale for choosing the theoretical and methodological frameworks, the significance and aims of the study and the research question and sub-questions. The main aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of what the thesis is all about.

Chapter Two provides a clear picture of the characteristics of the educational system, of its national, cultural and religious traits, all of which are deeply conservative. It also presents a snapshot of Saudi Arabia's education system, with a particular focus on ELT/EFL education, and outlines the challenges of teaching and learning English and its current status in light of all education having come under one Ministry umbrella in 2015. The chapter also presents a general profile of Saudi Western University, the site of the study.

Chapter Three reviews the literature related to the study, beginning with an overview of the field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), highlighting its theoretical and practical aspects. The chapter also presents the core concepts of the Academic Literacies approach, the theory underpinning this study. It also reviews the Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtin's concept and provides some background information on culture and its impact on student writing in higher education in Saudi Arabia. The last section reviews key studies in the field of EFL academic writing in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world more generally.

Chapter Four provides a detailed description of the research including ontological and epistemological considerations, research methodology, research design, and the rationale for selecting the procedures and research tools. It also discusses research questions, ethical considerations and the pilot study. The chapter also provides a brief description of Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtin's concept, the analytical framework of this study. It offers a detailed account of the process of data collection and analysis. While Nvivo was used to identify key categories, Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtin's concept were used to further examine the meanings and voices embedded in the interview responses, observation and documentary sources.

Chapter Five reports the data relevant to the first research question, concerning the micro-level (i.e. teachers and students). The chapter presents findings from the interviews, the classroom observation and institutional documents, and students' written essays.

Chapter Six discusses the data related to the second research question, concerning the middle or meso-level of influence (i.e. the directors of the English Language Institute), and interrogating the related documentary evidence, i.e. institutional documents such as writing guides. The chapter presents key findings from interviews and documentary sources and discusses them.

Chapter Seven considers the data related to the top or macro-level of influence. The chapter also discusses the key findings and corroborative or contradictory findings from documentary sources or observation.

Chapter Eight discusses the role of the English Language Institute. It investigates whether the Academic Literacies approach is or could be applicable in the Saudi Western and broader Saudi Arabian cultural context. The chapter also considers how the curriculum is understood in ELI and presents a number of relevant recommendations which take into consideration the contextual factors identified.

Chapter Nine summarises all the findings, the agreements and contrasts between the attitudes and concerns of the actors at the three levels of influence. It also presents the contribution of the study, its limitations and recommendations for future work, the pedagogical implications for ELT at Saudi Western University and the researcher's reflections on the process of the research and her development as a researcher: what, in hindsight, she might have done differently, and the difficulties she faced as a researcher.

Chapter Two – The Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of the physical setting of this study and to shed light on various writing practices in Saudi higher education. A picture of Saudi Arabia, the context of the study, is presented through its national, religious and cultural characteristics. In addition, a picture of the Saudi educational system and the role of ELT at school and at university are presented along with an overview of Saudi Western University, the site of the study.

2.2 The national and political context of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab state bordering the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, north of Yemen. The state is bordered to the north by Iraq, Jordan and Kuwait; to the east by Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab of Emirates (UAE); to the west by the Red Sea; and to the south by Yemen (see figure 2.1). The total Saudi population is about 27,345,986 according to the Central Intelligence Agency (2014-15, p. 646). It is the second largest country in the Middle East, with a total area of 2,250,000 square kilometres (868,739 square miles).



Figure 2.1: Map of Saudi Arabia (Einstein, 2006)

Saudi Arabia's system of governance is that of a monarchy. On 23 September 1932, King Abdul Aziz Al Saud unified the Kingdom of Hijaz with the Sultanate of Nejd and this unified structure became Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was declared an Islamic state, ruled by the royal family of Al Saud. The members of this honorable family are the state's political leaders, with the King at the top of the constitutional system. He is the prime minister and commander of the military.

Since the establishment of the kingdom, Saudi Arabia has considered the Holy Book "Quran" as its constitution. Saudi Arabia is a homogeneous society, Arabic its official and only national language and Islam is its official and sole religion. Islam is considered to be the key driving force of the kingdom and controls and guides spiritual matters as well as the functions and policies of the country. Every king must ensure the application of "Shari'ah law" in all the aspects of the Saudi judicial system. In this sense, "Shari'ah" means Islamic law, which is considered to be the guideline for most of the religious and legal matters in the country. It also applies to all the aspects of society, secular as well as sacred. Saudi Arabia's Basic System of Government (BSG) defines the nature of the country such as its goals, responsibilities, the rights of citizens and relationship between its rulers and citizens. The Kingdom is a highly conservative country governed on the basis of Islam, with its constitution generated from two main sources: the Holy Book or "Quran" and the teaching of the Prophet Mohammad (Rugh, 2002).

2.3 Religion and culture in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is regarded as the birthplace of Islam and called "the Land of the two Holy Mosques", the Masjid al-Haram mosque in Mecca and the Masjid an-Nabawi mosque in Medina. Islam therefore is the basis of Saudi culture (Elyas, 2008). Religion has a significant impact on all aspects of life including the education system – all education comes under the Islamic umbrella (Al-Salloom, 1989; Elyas, 2008; Yamani, 2000). The religion of Islam consequently plays a large role in the consideration of educational issues, as it determines most of its aspects. Rugh (2002, p. 46) points out that the Saudi Arabian "curriculum has traditionally been heavily focused on religion and Arabic". Arabic is the main language spoken by native Saudis and Sunni Islam is the sole religion of the theocratic Islamic monarchy (Elyas, 2008).

Non-Muslims cannot hold Saudi citizenship. It can be thus seen that external cultural, social and political influence has been minimal.

English is, however, the main foreign and second language in Saudi Arabia and as an international language, especially for business, English is vital in education, medicine, international trade, communication and telecommunication (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Pakir, 1999). A considerable number of Saudi people speak English fluently; however, teaching and learning English has not been considered a priority (Karmani, 2005). Khan (2011, p. 1248) argues that English "does not enjoy as important a part in the curriculum as in many other developing countries".

In addition, Saudi Arabia is a masculine society, not only highly influenced by Islam but also by its cultural traditions. This affects all areas of life including, the learning environment; for instance, boys and girls are taught separately at all levels of education. Segregation according to gender is mandatory in Saudi Arabian culture, values and norms (Alamri, 2011), so that educational institutions have separate buildings for each sex and each is taught by tutors of the same sex. There is little or no communication between male and female students outside the domestic sphere.

2.4 Education system in Saudi Arabia

This section aims to provide background knowledge of the education system in Saudi Arabia to shed light on a series of important events which influenced the teaching of writing in English. Before 1930, the Kingdom had no formal national education system or common class organisation and curricula (Al-Zaid, 1982), and the presentation of lectures concerning the Qur'an and Arabic texts in mosques to young people was the Kingdom's main method of education. Education was accessible to only a minority of people because it was founded on religion, and in some cases, depended on the ability to pay. As a consequence, by 1932 there were only 12 schools educating 700 students.

In 1938, oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia, and English was introduced but used only for business purposes (Al-Johani, 2009). The discovery of oil greatly increasing the Kingdom's revenues (Khan, 2014), the situation changed, and the number of schools increased dramatically. In 1954, the Ministry of Education was established to oversee education at all levels. Education was offered exclusively to male students –

there was no education for females. The first university was founded in the Kingdom in 1957, when the need for education at a higher level was realized (Alamri, 2011). Subsequently other universities were set up and today, the Kingdom has 25 universities (Ministry of Education, 2014). In 1959, King Saud recognised the need to start offering education to females, and in 1960, the first school for girls was opened in Riyadh (Al-Rawaf and Simmons, 1991).

In 1963, the Saudi government initiated and launched a new universal education system as a national priority. Establishing the Ministry of Education as part of the process, the government provided a legislative framework to develop and realise the organisation of its academic school system. The Ministry of Education drew up plans for the content and implementation of its school and higher education programmes (Al-Mashary, 2006). The Ministry of Education took charge of general education, namely, primary, intermediate, secondary and special education, which are all outside the scope of this research.

General education is free for all Saudi and non-Saudi students (Alamri, 2011). Education is obligatory for all children aged 6 to 15 years old. The Saudi government organises and sets out the academic system of education for all students aged 4 to 22 (Alansari, 1995). The early stages of education are as follows (see table 2.1): the pre-school level (kindergarten) serves children before the age of six. It aims to care for children before school entry, and is non-compulsory. The primary level serves children from 6 to 12 years. The intermediate level serves adolescents from 12 to 15 years of age. The secondary level is for those aged 15 to 18 years of age, and is non-compulsory. Students from 18 to 22 years of age attend higher education.

Table 2.1: Education divisions in Saudi Arabia

Education level	Stage of study	Age	Grade level (No. of Years students are expected to spend at each level)
Pre-school level – Kindergarten	Kindergarten	4-6	1 2
General education	Primary levels	6-12	1 2 3 4 5 6
	Intermediate level	12-15	1 2 3
	Secondary level	15-18	1 2 3
University level	Higher education level	18-22+	1 2 3 4+

The secondary level of education is the main stage of the education system. It aims to prepare students for university studies, promote their ability to cope with various academic tasks and to develop their thinking skills (see figure 2.2). All secondary students follow the same track in the first year (there is only one subject pathway in the first year and it is compulsory), but in the 2nd and 3rd years (subject pathway in the 2nd and 3rd years are optional), boys choose their pathway from the following areas: Natural Science, Islamic and Arabic studies, Science and Technology, or Management and Social Science. However, only Natural Science and Islamic and Arabic studies are available to female students. To achieve a Secondary School Certificate, students need to pass all their examinations. They also need to gain a high score if they want to enrol in any university.

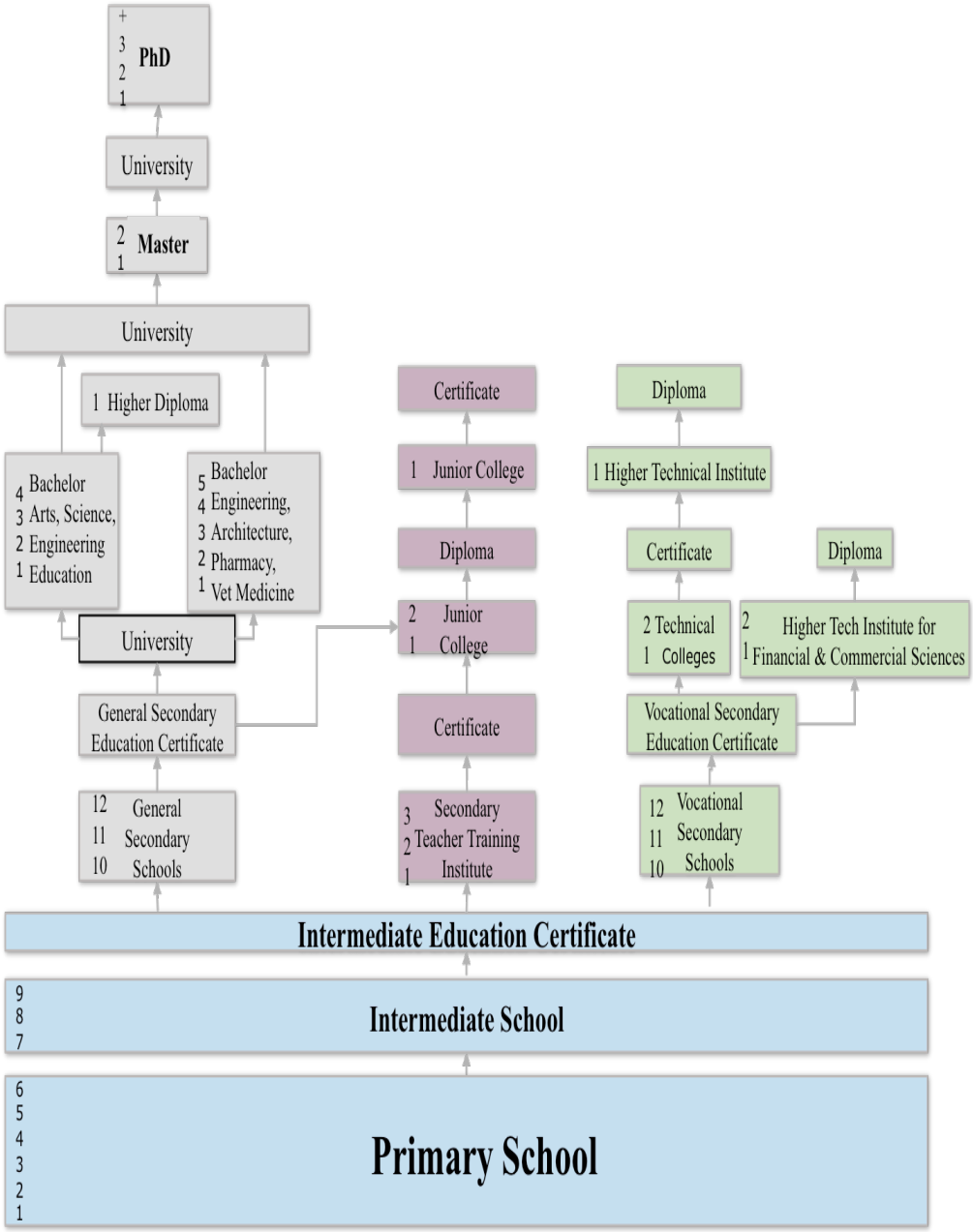


Figure 2.2: Education ladder in Saudi Arabia

By 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established to manage, formulate and co-ordinate the country's needs in terms of higher education; for instance, by setting up educational institutions such as colleges and universities (Rugh, 2002). This may also reflect the fact that any area of tertiary education in Saudi Arabia is contextualised by a strongly hierarchical socio-cultural structure (Hofstede, n.d.). It is also responsible for managing the development of university education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels by promoting joint studies and research, and framing the Ministry's regulations and policies which all universities of higher

education are obliged to follow (Alamri, 2011). The Ministry of Higher Education also aims to promote high levels of communication between itself and the academic institutions in terms of their shared interests and concerns for higher education (Alamri, 2011).

Since February 2015, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have merged. The administration of education in Saudi Arabia is now under one umbrella, the Ministry of Education. The objective of the merger is to promote the smooth transition of students throughout the whole education system and to improve education standards in Saudi Arabia.

The higher education level is exclusively open to Saudi students who are over 18 years of age (Alansari, 1995). Undergraduate students spend around four years to obtain a Bachelor's degree in the social sciences or the humanities, while they spend five years to gain a Bachelor's degree in medical pharmacy or engineering. The current study focuses on undergraduate student writing practices in English at university level, in particular, in their foundation/preparatory year before going on to degree studies. The entry requirement to the preparatory year is discussed below in section 2.5.2. It is useful to pay more attention here to the role of English in the school/university curriculum since it is critical to the present study.

2.5 ELT and the Saudi education system

In the late 1950s, English was introduced as an educational subject (Al-Shammary, 1984). However, opinions were split and there were views opposing the desirability of the introduction of English into the education system. Those in favour not only supported the national initiative for introducing English, but considered it a necessity, in the sense of benefitting the Saudi community overall by, for example, extending global trade through the use of English (Al-Sudais, 2004). As Saudi demographics have changed, the need for English language proficiency has arisen in order to produce a cadre of skilled, productive citizens who can operate in international markets and the global economy in English in various fields, such as science, business, technology and health (Elyas, 2008; Yamani, 2000).

On the other hand, opponents of learning English argue strongly that learning English can threaten an individual's moral and the nation's cultural values (Ur Rahman and

Alhaisoni (2013). Al-Dameg (2011) and Elyas and Picard (2010) claim that learning English language may cause changes to Saudi customs and culture, especially if learned at an early age. They also argue that Arabic is important to ensure and preserve Saudi Arabian identity and culture. However, according to Islamic teaching, learning English or learning any other foreign language is perceived as an uplifting activity that would develop a society's moral, ethical and social values (Al-Shammary, 1984). Fortunately, this controversial disagreement was resolved and the government included English lessons in its school curriculum.

The Saudi government realises the significant role the teaching and learning of English has, and considers how it can foster and promote steady progress for the entire country. According to Liton (2012), English came to be considered as the main foreign language in Saudi Arabia to be taught in schools, universities and colleges. It is the medium of communication that offers the opportunity to discover and watch up-to-date developments in every field of study, not just science. The acquisition of a foreign language should not be considered only a tool, i.e., as a means to aid the comprehension of its associated foreign cultures; it should also be regarded as an essential facilitator through which to view the understanding of Saudi culture and customs by the outside world (Alqahtani, 2011).

According to Alansari (1995), Saudi Arabia's education system aims to develop students' basic and key understandings of the advanced, open and globalised world through the subjects in its school curriculum, which include – but are not limited to – social sciences, world history, science, geography, ethics and foreign languages. Therefore, considerable effort by the Ministry of Higher Education has been exerted to revise the entire educational system, to raise the standards of the English educational programmes, to allocate endowment funds to promote academic English research, and to send students to study abroad and acquire English as a foreign language (Krieger, 2007; Prokop, 2003; Yamani, 2000).

2.5.1 ELT in schools

English language remains the only second language taught in schools in Saudi Arabia. Crystal (2003) asserts that the reasons for this choice are abundant because, in a global context, English is the main and most frequently used international language.

English language is a compulsory subject in intermediate and secondary school classes (Elyas, 2008). In 2003, however, the government acknowledged the necessity of acquiring English from a younger age and made renewed efforts to introduce the language as compulsory subject for students aged ten, in their fourth year of primary school (Almeniei, 2005; Elyas, 2008).

English as a subject is taught in public (state run) schools four times a week, in separate sessions of 45 minutes each. The Ministry of Education, particularly in the Department of Curriculum Design, chose the English language textbook *English for Saudi Arabia*, and the grade-level books to be used throughout the kingdom (Almutairi, 2008). The materials were developed to meet specific standards, such as Saudi students' studies needing to focus on the proper presentation of Saudi customs, culture and Saudi students' appropriate attitudes. The English language textbooks combine the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Currently, teaching focuses on grammar and vocabulary acquisition, which is imposed by the examination-centric education system in Saudi Arabia (Al-Oadi, 2000).

The core objective of teaching writing in English at school is to support the students' capacity to communicate through producing the correct grammar structures and appropriate textual organisation. These limited aims relating to accuracy can, however, slow down and even demotivate students. In public schools, English language teachers instruct their students through Arabic because, for them, English is a foreign language and their proficiency is limited. It could be argued that this has an effect on their ability to teach English and hinders the development of English proficiency in the Arab community at school level (Rabab'ah, 2003). Therefore, the mastery of English is often very minimal in public school graduates (Al-Mashary, 2006; Al-Oadi, 2000; Al-Tuwaijri, 1982; Khafaji, 2004).

English Language teaching in private schools has received more emphasis than in public schools (Elyas, 2008). Although both types of school come under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Rugh, 2002; Yamani, 2000), the quality and standards of teaching English in the different schools varies. According to Prokop (2003), each type of school seems to tackle the process of teaching and learning writing in English differently. Private schools aim to enhance learners' English language skills to improve their learning for both present (i.e. to pass exams) and

future (i.e. study or work) needs. Therefore, they employ various teaching strategies, such as focus group and pair work. Private students receive English education from kindergarten and use western-based course books. They tend to be more successful at meeting academic learning targets. Therefore, depending on which system learners go through, they demonstrate different linguistic competence in the target language, and employ different learning strategies. This impacts greatly on their production and achievement in the target language at school level and later on.

One of the most critical stages in a learners' life is the shift from school life to university life. Saudi students demonstrate varied levels of communicative competence in the target language and writing proficiency because of their previous learning experience in secondary school (Rugh, 2002). The majority of students start to learn English at school and are used to producing a limited number of sentences and short paragraphs in written English (Rugh, 2002). However, at university level, they are expected to write academic essays in English. They have to 'mind the proficiency gap' as they are expected to be able to write effectively in English before they enrol on university courses. Students therefore experienced challenges in writing in English and organising their texts. They might be also unaware and unfamiliar with the type of language and academic literacy used in their university courses. Consequently, learners may face a number of challenges in learning the target language, especially when they have to compose written texts.

2.5.2 ELT in higher education

English has received more attention in the higher education system in Saudi Arabia. It is the medium of instruction for most *Science departments*, such as engineering and medicine in the state universities (Rugh, 2002; Shah et al., 2013). On the other hand, Arabic is used in *Arts departments*, such as humanities. Most Saudi universities have created new institutions or centres to deliver a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) concentrating on developing English language skills. The preparatory programme at Saudi Universities is designed to fill the gap between the student's school level of English language and the level of language required for their university studies.

Saudi University students are exposed to general English as well as particular aspects of English language which come within the remit of EAP (English for Academic

Purposes) because English is taught within an academic setting with the objective of preparing the students for academic study. While the topics of lessons are not necessarily academic or only generally academic, the academic processes - the how and why skills the students need to develop - are, to some extent, an aspect of their ELI (English Language Institute - within Saudi Western University) learning. Students are required to read and write through the medium of English.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education (pre 2015) looked into developing and promoting education standards by modifying and creating new academic objectives, including considering English as one of the main subjects of study at university level in Saudi Arabia; for instance, most of the educational curricula at university level are presented mainly through English, because most key texts are in English. Reformists therefore have attempted to choose curriculum models which aim to develop cognitive skills, independent thinking and creativity in the target language of English in contrast to the rote memorisation considered a key feature of the Saudi education system in the past (Rugh, 2002).

According to Rugh (2002), memorising does not inspire creativity nor independent thinking, which is important for the production of writing. Within the new curricula, learners have to learn, think, argue, support, and also produce effective and communicative pieces of writing (Alexander et al., 2008). Krieger (2007) argues that universities in Saudi Arabia suffer from employing traditional teaching approaches and models which can hinder acquisition of the target language (English) learning processes. Yamani (2000) claims that teachers tend to employ more traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation methods, and their main focus is on teaching the theory of English rather than giving students the opportunity to use and practice the language. Students therefore do not have sufficient opportunities to learn the functional aspects of writing in the English language. Consideration of *what* to teach and *how* is needed to develop learners' proficiency in the target language, aid and facilitate their education progression and hence raise the standards of university education in Saudi Arabia.

2.5.3 Writing and EAP issues in Saudi Arabia

This section is going to discuss a number of issues regarding writing and EAP in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is a very exam-oriented society, with writing at the heart of assessment. Writing is one of the main methods used to assess students in higher education. Students, therefore, seek to produce grammatically accurate pieces of writing to pass their exams – accuracy is the focus and requirement – rather than learning to write for any communicative or practical functional purpose.

Krieger (2007) argues that Saudi Arabian reformers need not only to reform what is taught in English, but also how it is taught. As Prokop (2003) and Rugh (2002) suggest, teachers need to use up to date teaching methods and techniques to teach English in order to create a knowledge-based society whose members have the potential to research and write in the target language. The significance and use of new innovative teaching strategies, theories, and methods, and employing skilled international academic staff to foster the teaching of English in the target context has been the focus of great concern (Myles, 2002).

The use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in English classes affects the student's proficiency and fluency in the target language since they hear little English and get little or no chance to practice it, which limits their opportunities to think in the target language. The limited exposure to the actual use of English, whether inside or outside the classroom, can be considered as an obstacle to learning. Al-Khasawneh (2010) argues that learners of English have to be exposed to the target language inside and outside the classroom to provide formal, informal and sufficient experience – otherwise their fluency and accuracy, and ultimately their writing skills will not be able to develop adequately. Rabab'ah (2003) claims that second language learners who are surrounded by the target language will be able to master it more successfully. In the context of this study, English is a foreign language and so Saudi students may rarely have the opportunity to practice or use English outside their classrooms, which limits their English learning experience.

Though English is taught, its relevance to everyday life is still largely ignored. Arabic remains the government's sole official language, and Saudis actively only use their native language (Arabic) among themselves every day. Only non-natives who lack

Arabic proficiency, use English – although a few non-Arabic expatriates strive to learn Arabic for the purpose of communicating with local Saudis (Al-Mashary, 2006; Al-Shammary, 1984). Therefore, contextual factors cause students to assume that English is an unimportant side of their educational life, especially when they cannot foresee any opportunity of studying at an English-medium university. Further issues regarding writing and EAP issues in Saudi Arabia will be discussed in the literature chapter.

2.6 The site of the study: Saudi Western University

Saudi Western University, a well-known university in Saudi Arabia, offers a useful example of how teaching and learning writing of English are handled in higher education in this context. This is due to the practices of ELT at Saudi Western University, which are similar to those at other universities in the regions of the country. Saudi Western University was created as a private university in 1967 in Jeddah by a group of local businessmen, and then converted into a state university in 1971 (Alamri, 2011; Rugh, 2002). Saudi Western University offers a wide range of academic programmes in various fields, such as foreign languages (e.g. English), social sciences, medicine, science and business. It grants bachelor degrees, and also offers postgraduate programmes, leading to Master's and PhD degrees. Saudi Western University has separate buildings for each sex, so males and females still study in separated buildings today.

Saudi Western University has a number of academic goals, such as preparing skilled employees with the appropriate skills and qualifications to find good jobs (Rugh, 2002). These could be achieved through developing their abilities, such as creativity and critical thinking (Krieger, 2007). Saudi Western University also seeks to promote scientific research, which requires good writing practices and skills for international publication. Thus, the ability to communicate well in written English can be seen as relevant to these other academic goals.

Furthermore, Saudi Western University has been working hard to raise the quality of its education, and has started to employ a number of international experts to develop its education system, including for choosing suitable curricula, employing skilled local and international academic staff, and applying suitable teaching methods (Krieger, 2007). Recently, most of the curricula in most fields, for instance, foreign

language (English), science and medicine, have been and are taught through the medium of English.

2.6.1 English Language Institute

The significance of English in the university gained emphasis in 2009, primarily because students could not register for degrees directly after secondary school but had to successfully complete a foundation year. The English Language Institute runs a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) for around 6000-7000 foundation students to foster their English language skills and help them to prepare for their academic studies. The English language course is an intensive course, a critical part of the foundation year for students. They will be denied entry to the university's undergraduate programme if they fail to complete the course successfully.

Moreover, all the other courses in the foundation year, except for Islamic and Arabic studies, are taught in English. Therefore, by the first year of university, students are able to realise the importance of English in their academic lives. They also have to master various language skills, especially writing, to complete their university studies. Kroll (1990) argues that writing in English is regarded as one of the primary skills required at university level in order to share knowledge, to socialise within the academic community, and to gain a degree. The English Language Institute now comprises about 200 English language teachers who come from different countries around the world, such as Egypt, Sudan and the USA. Teachers, therefore, come from diverse backgrounds and have different teaching/learning experiences. Teachers implement and teach foundation year students within the allocated timescale, develop their English language skills and support their academic development. Students change teachers when they move to a higher level class, as the teacher does not move with them.

Before the start of the foundation course, all students have to take an entrance test, the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT). When students enrol in the university foundation course they are assigned to different course levels: ELI 101, ELI 102, ELI 103 or ELI 104, according to their proficiency and scores (see table 2.2), based on the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)[2]. The goal is to have "reliable and accurate proficiency standards by correlating [course] levels to internationally accepted proficiency benchmarks" (ELI, 2014). Students who demonstrate an English proficiency level higher than B1 CEFR are exempt from following the English course.

Table 2.2: Modules and corresponding CEFR levels (ELI, 2014)

English Language Module	CEFR Level		Description
ELI 101	Beginner	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others. Can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
ELI 102	Elementary level	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
ELI 103	Pre-intermediate level	A2	
ELI 104	Intermediate level	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, and leisure. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

Currently, intensive English is an elaborate skill-integrating course with content designed to guide students from beginner (A1) level to intermediate (B1) level, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. ELI 101 is a beginners' course, which aims to take students with low levels of English to an overall English language proficiency of a Basic User. Successful completion of this

[2] It is an international standard for describing language ability where it relates to classifications used in Saudi Arabia.

course is required to take ELI 102 (elementary level), then ELI 103 (pre-intermediate level), and finally ELI 104 (intermediate level). The three levels (ELI 102, ELI 103 and ELI 104) aim to improve students' language proficiency at each level. All students must pass ELI 104 in order to begin their course of subject study, whether through English or not. If a student is at level ELI 104 at the start of the year, she does not have to keep repeating the same course in the following semesters. However, she must provide documentary evidence, such as a satisfactory TOEFL, iBT or IELTS score, in order to receive official exemption.

2.6.2 ELI teaching and learning space

The photographs in figure 2.3 give an idea of the physical layout of a classroom in the English Language Institute. They illustrate classroom size which allows for 30 students plus a teacher, seated, and the available technologies such as projectors and white boards.

During classroom observation, I noticed most classes lacked technical facilities such as a computer and that work was pen and paper based. In their classroom, teachers have the power to rearrange the furniture to suit their teaching needs.





Figure 2.3: Pictures of a classroom in the English Language Institute

2.6.3 Procedures followed before conducting the research

In this section I give a brief account of the procedures I followed to obtain permission to carry out my research. Initially I was granted ethical permission from the University of Nottingham, then I received a letter from my supervisor indicating his approval to carry out research in Saudi Arabia and field work plans were sent to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in London. I obtained permission from the English Language Institute at Saudi Western University to access institutional documents and classrooms as a researcher, and to invite teachers and students, the directors of the English Language Institute, the representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education to participate in the study. Further information about restrictions, requirements and ethical considerations in relation to my research will be discussed in Section 4.3.4.

2.7 Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the context of the study to provide a better understanding of student writing practices of English at a higher education level in Saudi Arabia. The chapter provided a brief overview of the national context and its religious and cultural characteristics. Then the education system in Saudi Arabia was discussed and the role of ELT in schools and higher education, together with a

number of writing and EAP issues. Finally, Saudi Western University and its English Language Institute were examined with the focus on learning and writing in English.

Chapter Three – Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of the literature relevant to the present study divided into four major themes or parts. Part one outlines the history and development of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) from English for Special Purposes (ESP) as a response to the global use of English for communication. Part two discusses the important theoretical and practical implications of Academic Literacies and related theories, including the underpinning theories, principles and teaching approaches. Part three reviews Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtin's views and presents some background information to culture with reference to the first and second research questions. Part four reviews previous studies in the field of academic writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia and parts of the Arab world to show how writing is conceptualised and approached in these areas.

More specifically, the review begins with a consideration of the field of EAP, its theoretical stance and practices, to provide the basis for a full understanding of the nature and reality of EAP and how it relates to Academic Literacies, which is the theoretical framework for the present study and considers reading and writing as a social practice in a specific context, involving certain ways of making meaning, building arguments and deciding what counts as knowledge (McKenna, 2003; Stierer, 2000). Recognising literacy as a social practice allow us to view new students as being unfamiliar with their new academic fields rather than being deficient because they cannot access "insider" knowledge. It then presents the main research methods and discusses the similarities and differences between the main tenets of Academic Literacies and EAP. The review concludes with a discussion of studies in the field of EAP writing: their concepts of writing, teaching approaches, and strengths and weaknesses to provide the background for a clear understanding of the way writing can be approached and is approached in the Arab world (e.g. Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Khan, 2011; Rabab'ah, 2003; Umer et al., 2015).

3.2 The development of EAP

This section presents the origins and development of ESP-EAP. It then offers a critical review and summarises some of the concepts, trends and concerns about EAP. These issues will be further discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1 The development of ESP

The term *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) is a branch of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), which focuses on particular uses of language for purposeful ends (Huckin, 2003; Pradhan, 2013). A practical definition suggests that ESP is a language teaching approach "in which all decisions as to content and teaching methods are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 19). ESP is an umbrella term covering a wide range of interests and approaches to student-centred learning and is generally used to refer to a sub-area of the teaching and learning of ESL/EFL where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular field (Ahmed, 2014).

In the mid to late 1960s, ESP established itself as a strong and viable movement and grew to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Swales, 1985). From its development in the early 1960s to the 1970s and 1980s, ESP became a worldwide phenomenon (de Chazal, 2014): in the UK, mainly in the development of testing, while in several European countries, the USA North Africa and Asian countries such as India and the Middle East, it was particularly because of their very rapidly growing oil industries. In those early decades, the ESP movement flourished, which might in part be attributable to the general improvement in the world economy (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998).

Traditionally, the aim of English language teaching had often been broad in focus with long-term goals in certain timeframes based on general language proficiency and skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking together with knowledge of general vocabulary and language (grammar) rules (de Chazal, 2014; Orr, 2001). Increasingly, the need for learning English expanded to cater for various areas of language use. Thus, language learners have become more interested in acquiring the necessary language skills to satisfy specific communicative functions in order to perform well in their respective fields (Jordan, 1997). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) expanded the

idea to the possibility of identifying the specific language needs of particular students. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 8) added the link to needs analysis in order to develop the curriculum and learning material; "[t]ell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need".

Over the past four decades ESP has shown rapid growth, which could be attributed to many factors (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) give three main reasons that could have led to the birth and growth of ESP courses worldwide: (a) the demand for a Brave New World; (b) the revolution in linguistics; and (c) focus on the learner. Considering the first reason, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) refer to two key historical periods that gave life to ESP: the end of the Second World War in 1945 and the oil crises of the early 1970s. They suggest that these two events had a major impact on the world economy and led to the global expansion in the scientific, technical and economic fields, which generated demand for an international language. "For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role [of an international language] fell to English" (p. 6).

The second reason, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), is that the revolution in linguistics in the late 1960s and the early 1970s attempted to pay more attention to the ways in which language was used in real communication, rather than its underlying structure and rules. The final key reason cited as giving the emergence of ESP a tremendous push is related to psychology and the move to focus on the learners' needs. There was a switch of focus from the teaching methods and teachers' practice to the informal learning of L1 and then the ways learners acquire their second and third languages, as distinct from mother tongue, at different ages. Since language learners use different skills and apply different strategies, and these are triggered by various interests and needs, learners' needs became as important as the methods used to expand linguistic knowledge (Zhu and Lui, 2014). Therefore, designing specific language courses aimed at particular needs was the next logical step in this movement. Many higher educational institutions and businesses began to design ESP syllabuses and materials taking into account both their work or subject of study demands and the learning needs and wishes of the students. The goal of such courses

was to help learners perform effectively in their academic learning and professional work (Hyland, 2006).

More recently, approaches to ESP teaching and learning have undergone profound changes in both the methodology and content of the language taught and how it is described (Belcher, 2009; Bhatia et al., 2011; Brindley, 1989; Hutchinson and Waters, 1987; Hyland, 2006; Johns, 2013; Robinson, 1980). As discussed above, the original focus of ESP was on the need to communicate in specific areas such as technology and commerce, where speakers of different mother tongues worked or studied together. The following section will present a review of the historical background to EAP.

3.2.2 The growth and importance of EAP

The term *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP) is commonly used by many ELT specialists and applied linguists (Jordan, 1997). It emerged from ESP to become a significant pedagogical approach to language teaching. EAP is a broad term that covers all areas of academic communicative practices (Hyland and Shaw, 2016). These are (a) pre-tertiary, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching (from the design of materials to lectures and classroom tasks); (b) classroom interaction (from teacher feedback to tutorials, seminars and discussions); (c) research genres (from journal articles to conference papers and grant proposals); (d) student writing (from essays to exam papers and graduate theses); and (e) administrative practices (from course documents to doctoral oral defences) (Hyland, 2006, p. 1). Dudley-Evans (2001) argues that it is necessary to understand these areas within their local contexts (place and subject of study) and in light of the needs of particular students.

Before discussing the growth and importance of EAP, it is worth providing some definitions of the term. Gillett (2004, p. 11) defines EAP as "language and associated skills that students need to undertake study in higher education through the medium of English". With regard to skills, EAP certainly includes the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing – sometimes integrated, rather than taught separately. There are also further competencies and skills, such as study skills, which involve referencing and citation, critical thinking skills, and practice in preparation for familiarization with the academic culture (de Chazal, 2014). Hyland (2006, p. 1) also

defines EAP as "teaching English with the aim of assisting learners' study or research in that language". Students whose mother tongue is not English may need help in learning the language of academic disciplines and the study skills which are needed for their academic courses (Evans and Green, 2007; Jordan, 1997).

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002) define EAP as research into English language instruction that pays more attention to the particular communicative needs and practices of specific groups in academic situations. This means that the focus of language instruction is on "an understanding of the cognitive, social and linguistic demands of specific academic disciplines" (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, EAP is not about learning English per se, rather it should support language learners, usually at higher education levels, by furnishing them with the necessary skills to communicate in particular academic and cultural situations (Hyland, 2006; Turner, 2004). Furthermore, Benesch (2001) states that the teaching and designing of EAP developed as a response to the needs of educational institutions' content courses. The EAP movement has generated a great deal of attention and has been widely written about (Blue, 1993; Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Gillett, 2004; Hewings and Dudley-Evans, 1996). In the UK, for instance, an increasing amount of EAP work has been carried out by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)[3] in "describing the needs of international students and courses designed to meet those needs" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998, p. 36). According to Hyland (2006), this is to

> offer systematic, locally managed, solution-oriented approaches that address the pervasive and endemic challenges posed by academic study to a diverse student body by focusing on student needs and discipline-specific communication skills (p. 4).

The term EAP was first used by Tim Johns in the mid 1970s (Hyland and Shaw, 2016; Jordan, 2002; Smith, 2013). In the early 1980s, EAP developed to become an important area in English language teaching and research around the world (Hyland, 2006; Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). EAP grew rapidly between the 1980s and the 1990s. The development of EAP grew from increasing numbers of non-native speakers studying other subjects through English, at first in UK and other English-

[3] The global forum for EAP professionals

speaking countries and then in their home countries (Sachrajda and Pennington, 2013; Schmitt and Hamp-Lyons, 2015). (By contrast, Study Skills are applicable in any language or context).

EAP students are ordinarily non-native speakers of English who can benefit from EAP classes for a number of reasons: (a) they may need to study English to operate effectively in their chosen academic courses; (b) they may think English is essential for getting better grades; (c) they may be interested in learning it for its intrinsic value (Gillett, 1996); and (d) a large number of students want to study in English, particularly at university. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, n.d.), in 2000, two million students were enrolled in tertiary education worldwide, compared with at least 3.6 million students in 2010.

Most EAP teachers work in higher educational institutions where English is the medium of instruction (Gillett and Wray, 2006). EAP teachers in UK universities are professionally-trained practitioners, usually with postgraduate academic as well as teaching qualifications and a broad range of experience; they usually work in separate support units at institutions or departments, which may also carry out action or linguistically-based research, because EAP discourse is wide in scope (de Chazal, 2014). EAP practitioners are closely associated with the English language teaching community (ELT) (King, 2012) and EAP professional courses aim (a) to help their students learn some of the cultural and linguistic institutional practices required in studying and working in English; (b) to help their students overcome language difficulties in studying through English; (c) to discover what international students have to do and assist them to do it better; and (d) to increase their students' English to the level that is required before starting an academic course (Gillett, 1996, 2011). Furthermore, EAP courses focus on providing students of different disciplines with instruction on common features of academic discourse (Dudley-Evans, 1998). The following section will present EAP subareas (i.e. EGAP and ESAP).

3.2.2.1 EAP (EGAP, ESAP) and Study Skills

EAP is subdivided into two sub-strands, namely, English for General Academic purposes (EGAP) and English for Specific Academic purposes (ESAP) (Blue, 1988; Jordan, 1997). The former division covers a large component of *Study Skills* features,

for instance, note-taking, referencing skills and academic writing. EGAP programmes are designed to provide students with strategies for reading, listening, writing and speaking for all academic disciplines at tertiary level (Shing and Sim, 2011). The aim is to empower students with the requisite skills for handling tasks in general academic situations (Coffey, 1984; Jordan, 1997). ESAP mainly focuses on teaching the language required for particular disciplines, for instance, economics, which involves the structure, vocabulary, proper academic conventions and certain skills required for a particular subject (Coffey, 1984; Jordan, 1997; Shing and Sim, 2011).

For a number of years, EAP and Study Skills were linked together (Jordan, 1997) and viewed as synonymous (Robinson, 1991). Robinson (1980, p. 7) uses the terms synonymously and describes them as "how to study through the medium of English, regardless of the subject matter of the studies". According to Richards et al. (1985), the term *Study Skills* refers to:

> abilities, techniques and strategies which are used when reading, writing, or listening for study purposes. For example, [the] study skills needed by university students studying from English-language textbooks include: adjusting reading speeds according to the type of material being read, using the dictionary, guessing word meanings from context, interpreting graphs, diagrams and symbols, note–taking and summarising (p.277).

Hyland (2006, p. 18) argues that Study Skills are the "common reasoning and interpreting processes underlying communication which help us to understand discourse". According to Coffey (1984, p. 3), the purpose of EAP is to fulfil the student's need for "quick and economical use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study". Study Skills are regarded as one of the main elements of EAP courses (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) but are also appropriate for native-speakers (as the focus is on learning skills, not learning English) as well as non-native speakers of English.

Furthermore, it is useful to distinguish between "general study skills" that do not focus on language and "language study skills" which are considered as one of the main aspects of EAP courses. There are a large number of study skills books concerned with matters such as time management, using a library catalogue and developing study habits. The general skills used by university students are not

considered one of the main components of EAP courses because they are not interested in features such as planning essays (Gillett, 1996). Rather, the language of study skills is regarded as one of the key aspects of EAP courses. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), a typical EAP course must contain language Study Skills features as well as aspects of language such as style and genre.

3.2.2.2 Different contexts of EAP courses

EAP takes place in different contexts and circumstances (Alexander, 2012), from English-speaking countries, to learners' own countries, with native or non-native speaker tutors (Jordan, 1997). Two different contexts are commonly cited in the EAP literature. The first context is where EAP courses are taught in English-speaking countries (ESL), for example in the US, UK and Australia, while in the second context, EAP is offered in the students' own non-English speaking countries, where English is considered a foreign language (EFL), for example in Germany, China and France, and in the context of the present study, Saudi Arabia, where English is a second/official language or medium of instruction in schools or/and universities, for example in India and Africa (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Jordan, 1997). When EAP courses are taught in EFL/ESL contexts, students may typically need to attend these courses for many reasons, for instance, to read and write academic texts in their higher education courses; to accomplish their higher education tasks; to learn all the needed skills; or to take EAP as pre-departure courses in their own countries to travel to study abroad (Jordan, 1997).

There are differences between the needs of EAP students in English-speaking contexts and those in non-English speaking contexts. In English-speaking countries, EAP courses are designed for international students who speak English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). Students will attend EGAP courses rather than ESAP courses. This is because the diversity of students from different academic disciplines means numbers are too high for the institution to conduct ESAP courses for the students according to their academic disciplines (Liyanage and Birch, 2001; Shing and Sim, 2011). On the other hand, in non-English speaking countries, EAP courses are needed by all students who study at tertiary level. They may come from different academic disciplines, but if they follow the same

course, they will attend ESAP courses because of the needs of particular academic departments and their students (Liyanage and Birch, 2001).

Most universities in the UK offer EAP courses (Gillett, 1996). There are two types of EAP course: pre-sessional and in-sessional. Pre-sessional course are run before an academic course starts, and are normally full-time. They aim to prepare students for their future studies and focus on academic language and "study skills" (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). In-sessional courses are run during the academic term or semester, and are normally short-term, running in parallel with the subject courses and therefore may provide an opportunity to integrate subject-language teaching and key skills, e.g. listening, speaking, reading and writing (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998; Jordan, 1997). Additionally, there are longer courses (i.e. 6-12 months) and short courses (i.e. 4-12 weeks). Teachers who run EAP courses can be native speakers of English (NS) or non-native speakers of English (NNS) (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997).

3.2.2.3 Needs analysis

One of the key features of EAP is needs analysis. Hyland's (2006, p. 73) definition of needs analysis is "the techniques for collecting and assessing information relevant to course design". According to Brown (1995, p. 35), it refers to "the activities involved in gathering information that will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the learning needs of a particular group of students". It is also the method of establishing the how and what of a course (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998). Jones and Schmitt (2010) argue that needs analysis can offer useful information about what a learner needs to know to handle their academic situations. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 126) emphasise, as they see it, that needs analysis has three key features:

> First, needs analysis aims to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners. Second, needs analysis study also aims to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximized for a given learner group. Third, needs analysis study aims to know the target situations and learning environment so that data can appropriately be interpreted.

Hamp-Lyons (2001) claims that needs analysis is central to EAP course design as any EAP courses require identifying the different language needs of the students and their personal and social expectations (Chambers, 1980; Hyland, 2006; Shing and Sim, 2011). Students' needs vary according to the learning environment, and therefore students need to develop their language proficiency and their "study skills" to an appropriate level for their course subject. This variation in language learners' needs can also be attributed to their level of education, for instance, undergraduate, post-graduate and researchers (Jordan, 1997). Some learners may have already acquired study skills in their first language so they only need to be encouraged to transfer these skills and adjust them to meet the demands of different academic contexts (Jordan, 1997). However, EFL learners who have not experienced learning these skills in their native language need to learn these study skills for effective language learning. Therefore, needs analysis is important in identifying the features of language that are important for a certain area of teaching (West, 1994).

Identifying students' language needs and providing the appropriate support creates a strong foundation for establishing the effectiveness of the course. This may also help raise the quality of the course when it is designed to enable students to achieve their learning expectations (Shing and Sim, 2011). However, Benesch (2001) argues that needs analysis within EAP courses pays more attention to the curriculum and instruction than theory and research. She argues that EAP courses have to push for changes in education and the empowerment of students to be more effective. Hyland (2006) argues that EAP courses rarely devote adequate time to meeting all the needs identified, or enough time for gathering and analysing needs data. This suggests that teachers may design their courses based on incomplete information. This situation emphasised the need for different methods, for instance, a 'communicative curriculum' whereby the course is developed jointly between teachers and students (Hyland, 2006). There are four roles of needs analysis in language curriculum design in EAP: (a) to raise the tutors' awareness of the requirements of the course; (b) to find out how students will use English in their field of study; (c) to provide tutors with insights concerning students' current level of language proficiency; and (d) to create the chance to collect samples of authentic texts and use them afterwards (Shing and Sim, 2011). In this sense, needs analysis is a useful technique to help tutors identify

the students' language needs, and transform them into linguistic and pedagogical concerns to develop effective course designs for EAP courses.

However, in practice, the findings of needs analysis might be more varied and complex, whereas university students are often grouped together according to their language level rather than a specific discipline. However, the range of disciplines which students may be planning to study is extremely wide and therefore placing students by language level as well as discipline might be very difficult, requiring a large institute of higher education to be economically practical.

3.2.2.4 Critical EAP

Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) is a critical pedagogy and a sub-type of EAP. The concept of 'CEAP' is most associated with Benesch in the USA, and Pennycook in Australia. According to Benesch (2012, p.1), CEAP "sees students as active agents, rather than novices or subordinates, who can be encouraged to question unreasonable requirements and collaborate with their instructors in developing appropriate curricula". Benesch's argument sees learners as challengers and collaborators in their educational context.

According to her, critical pedagogy is concerned with institutional power relations and therefore is capable of acknowledging both tutors' and students' subject positions. This pedagoy would also empower students to select their goals and more easily reach them (Benesch, 2009). The key goal of CEAP "is to help students perform well in their academic courses while encouraging them to question and shape the education they are being offered" (Benesch, 2001, p. xvii). Furthermore, instructors who use CEAP practices to promote reasonable engagement with their students have to innovatively create links between the subjects in any EAP mandated textbooks they use and the historical backgrounds of their students (Cotton, 2009; Gray, 2002; Scollon and Scollon, 2004). Critical EAP is a shift towards a language approach based on 'needs analysis' (Hyland, 2014). Benesch (2001, p.53) states that:

> Critical EAP allows ESL teachers and students to examine externally imposed demands and negotiate their responses to them, by addressing the following questions: Who formulated these requirements and why? Should they be fulfilled? Should they be modified? What are the consequences of trying to

> change current conditions? What is gained by obeying, and what is lost? (p.53)

One of the aims of CEAP classroom practices is to allow students to have the opportunity to engage with the academic community (Haque, 2007). It is not possible to join an academic community without a sound knowledge of how power and language discourse overlap. Students need to understand academic discourse and to bring their own experiences and practices to the classroom. According to (Janks and Ivanic, 1992), introducing critical language awareness helps students to be more conscious of the power of their own discourses practices. Thus, it may help them to understand how academic discourse can be operated within its own power base.

3.2.2.5 Criticisms of EAP

EAP has been widely developed and continues to be described as a "growth area of language teaching" (Alexander, 2012, p. 99). As discussed earlier, EAP grew rapidly between the 1980s and the 1990s for a number of reasons, including economic ones. EAP took on, in Turner's view, the task of providing an economic as well as an intellectual fast track (Turner, 2004). The conceptual framework of EAP is criticised as being the "maximum throughput of [international] students with minimum attainment levels in the language in the shortest possible time" (Turner, 2004, p. 97). Coffey (1984, p. 3) claims "the student's needs may be the quick and economical use of the English language to pursue a course of academic study, in which case we have English for academic purposes", so these needs are addressed rather than those of a general English course. As well as EAP general academic courses, there are also courses tailored to particular areas of academic study, for instance, English for Legal studies, Engineering, Medicine, Mathematics and Town and Country Planning and so on.

In practice, in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, EAP *pre-sessional* courses are provided to students before they start their academic studies. They are delivered to the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate students by academic university staff. EAP aims to promote general academic skills, competences and the language proficiency students are required to possess in order to study their future subjects effectively through the medium of English (de Chazal, 2014). Hyland (2006) suggests that general EAP appears to equate to a deficit approach as students are taught with

little or no reference to any particular academic context. EAP, is not concerned with teaching any particular subject content or any particular academic practices and cultural values, though as mentioned above, there are also EAP courses for particular subject areas which are more specific and can include general cultural or local values like the notation for decimal places in English

EAP views language as an instrument for academic study, which Zamel conceives as a "deficit" view in the sense that the learners are non-native speakers and don't have the relevant language skills for study purposes. The general EAP approach is criticised as being decontextualised and isolated from the disciplines in which it is to be used (Zamel, 1998). It seems to be divorced from any specific subject content, so content complexity within the academic context does not seem to be acknowledged (de Chazal, 2014). However, this interpretation sees subjects from a very isolationsist perspective, with tight boundaries and few overlaps, which seems to challenge the academic habit of grouping disciplines with some commonalities such as Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences and Engineering together for practical purposes. Indeed, many subject areas within these groupings share courses in common. Distinctions, where they exist, are fuzzy rather than sharp, though EAP and pre-sessional courses often offer modules for those studying in areas like Law, General Science, Humanities and so on, as pointed out above, and such courses are a step closer to the students' future academic subjects. Ulltimately, students have limited time to acquire new skills to make the most of their ability in their academic studies through English and may benefit from the support EAP classes can offer in terms of specific learning strategies and conventions to support their future disciplinary studies which general English courses cannot provide.

One of the reasons behind the belief that language can be acquired in a relatively short period of time is due to the widespread use of international screening tests such as the "International English Language Testing System" (IELTS) and "Test of English as a Foreign Language" (TOEFL), both of which suggest the time required in an intensive presessional course (or similar) to move to a higher grade from the initial test result. The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, the British Council and IDP Education Australia jointly manage IELTS (Gillett, 1996; IELTS, n.d.) which has widespread use in UK and Australia. TOEFL is managed by the Educational Testing

Service and more widely used in US (de Chazal, 2014). These two major tests are designed for students in higher education. They aim to test their academic skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, and report the level of each skill on a band from 1 to 9 (IELTS) and with a maximum score of 120 (TOEFL). In many circumstances, these tests are prerequisites for both undergraduate and postgraduate students to enrol in most educational programmes at university level (Gillett 1996; Turner, 2004). They need to gain the required entrance band level to get onto their courses, to get university acceptance or to gain offers conditional on reaching a specific level of English rather than learn the language for itself. High IELTS (7+) or TOEFL (over 96) scores do not guarantee ultimate academic course success. Native English speakers can score highly on IELTS and fail their academic courses, so language skills alone are not enough – motivation may also be a factor (Cotton and Conrow, 1998). Research into the ability of IELTS scores to predict academic success are inconclusive, especially concerning students with scores around 6, who often do better than their peers with higher bands, perhaps due to their greater motivation. However, many results suggest the reading module is the best predictor of ultimate academic success (Cotton and Conrow, 1998; Dooey and Oliver, 2002).

IELTS has a non-subject specific format. According to Brindley and Ross (2001) and Clapham (1996), it is difficult to find texts of equal difficulty in different subjects or assess the nature of skills within different subjects, whereas general academic ability can be assessed, for example, the ability to write using formal language and being objective. Listening, speaking, reading and writing features refer to a single context in IELTS, but there are no thematic links between the skill tests (de Chazal, 2014). Furthermore, the writing test might not detect the learners' awareness in writing, for instance, the ability to produce a "socio-literate" perspective which focuses on the social purpose of written texts, reader and writer relationships and the contexts in which these relationships are embedded (Johns, 1997). What the writing test does do is assess the writer's ability to develop ideas and comunicate them to an acaademic audience. However, it should be remembered these are developing skills, to be supported in a pressional or EAP course and developed during academic studies, and that TOEFL and IELTS are proficiency assessment tests, not prediction tests perse except to indicate that a student with language proficiency below a certain level (e.g. 5) is unlikely to successfully follow an academic course in their chosen subject

without tuition. EAP courses also allow students to acclimatise to academic life, familiarise themselves with library procedures, attend public lectures and seminars in their subjects (or watch them on video) to experience academic life in a more relaxed atmosphere and begin their subject studies later already familiar with procedures.

3.3 Academic Literacies

This section discusses the important theoretical and practical implications of Academic Literacies and related theories, including the underpinning theories, principles and teaching approaches.

3.3.1 Defining Academic Literacies

A number of researchers have focused their attention on exploring 'academic literacy' and have attempted to develop an appropriate definition (e.g. Ivanic, 2004; Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2003b). According to Spack (1997), academic literacy is the capacity to read and write various texts at tertiary level. This suggests that academic literacy "encompasses ways of knowing particular content and strategies for understanding, discussing, organising, and producing texts" (Johns 1997, p.15). Taking a different view, Street (2003b, p.79) refers to the term literacy in the plural (Academic Literacies) to "refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts". Lea and Street (2006) suggest that one of the key aspects of academic literacy is the learners' ability to manage a wide range of social meanings and identities according to a particular context and to choose an appropriate style and genre. The term "literacies" refers not only to academic reading and writing as multiple and embedded in particular settings, but also as ideologically formed, reflecting the broader institutional discourse and social relations (Lillis and Tuck, 2016; Street, 2003b). This ideology pays attention to individual essayists, academic practices and the diverse relations of power in which they are all situated.

It is significant to point out that there seems to be a debate over the definition of the term 'literacy'. This could be attributed to the disagreement about what should be included or considered as literacy in the academic writing context. While Spack (1997) sees literacy as learning the linguistic features of academia, Lea and Street (2006) go beyond the learners' cognitive ability, to include their potential to

encompass a range of skills competences and attributes situated in a language system, and to utilise this knowledge and practice in tertiary learning.

Literacies are varied and people utilise written language differently, depending on two main factors, namely process and practices. While process is internal to the individual, such as people's awareness of literacy, construction and discourse, practices are a social factor that link to people's interactions and shared cognition, such as values, attitudes, and social relationships (Barton and Tusting, 2005). A product is the main outcome of the integration of these two factors (i.e. process and practices).

3.3.2 Historical background

The initial stage in the history of Academic literacy approach is associated with Pierre Bourdieu's seminal work, translated from the French: Academic Discourse: Linguistics Misunderstanding and Professorial Power (1965). Bourdieu points out that education (part of cultural capital) largely takes place through linguistic exchanges between students and teachers and the habitus or social background of a student, can influence their ability to acquire knowledge through linguistic means. He and his colleagues identified three main pillars of academic literacy:

a) the role of academic discourse in higher education;

b) the linguistic reality revealed by students' behaviour, as they might misunderstand the messages of their teachers due to the diversity of possible frames of reference or lack of familiarity with them;

c) the concept of power located in both the tutors and students (Bourdieu et al., 1994).

These researchers tried to find the gaps between what was taught and what students understood and whether their potential to understand was affected by their social background. Bourdieu et al.'s (1994) findings have been referred to in recent research focusing on managing issues of apprenticeship, gaining entry into and becoming members of communities of practice, for instance, Jacobs (2005) and Northege (2003).

The concept of 'Academic Literacies', which is used to cover the skills needed for tertiary level education, was first used in the 1990s (de Chazal, 2014). Academic Literacies is most associated with Lea and Street (1998, 2000) in the UK, in particular, writing, while Ann Johns (1997) in the USA developed a wider view of literacies focusing on more than the skills of reading and writing and extending into areas such as language use, content, practices and text production, thus the broader experiences of the writer are contextualized (de Chazal, 2014). Her research draws mainly on ethnographic case studies.

It is important to note that the primary concern of Academic Literacies is not international students, but local (British) students who share a common language through which they have been educated to date, i.e. English, the official language of their country of residence, although they make speak other languages at home. Their general literacy practices are assumed to be already in place. Academic Literacies does not philosophise about basic literacy, as its roots are in tertiary education, hence it assumes basic literacy skills have been acquired, and is not concerned with second or foreign language learners.

In the UK, there has been a critical change in the higher education system, as has been the case in many parts of the world, for a number of reasons (Lea, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Wingate, 2006). These are: (a) the significant increase in the number of students (Wingate, 2006), and (b) the diversity of the student population, culturally, socially and linguistically (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Lea, 2006; Lillis, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Wingate, 2006). Lea (2006) and Lillis (2001) report a number of studies in the USA and UK contexts which emphasise the need to conceptualise writing as a social practice rather than a study skill. According to these scholars, conceptualising writing as a generic skill may limit our understanding about the nature of language and communication. Lillis (2001) argues that writing is a social practice that takes place in a Higher Education (HE) institution. This institution has a particular socio-cultural history and specific practices. Different cultures operate in different disciplines in the same institution and there are differences between the same disciplines in different institutions. Furthermore, such practices have historically informed HE as a strong social institution and they impose on students a particular way of participating (Lea, 2006; Street, 2010). For instance, the way tutors and students interact in the classroom

is a social practice that influences the type of literacy being acquired, the knowledge of literacy held by all the participants (i.e. tutors and students), particularly novice learners, and their identity within the power relations that operate. It is unrealistic to suggest that academic literacy is neutral and available to all and its social influences are merely discovered afterwards, according to AL. However, it can be assumed that there is some common ground between the academics in one institution and between subject specialists in different institutions or there would be no institution-wide or inter-institutional collaboration, topic journals and so on. Different disciplines in different universities have their own specific versions or aspects of academic literacy, but there are many common features, knowledge of which acts as a springboard to acquiring the specific social context knowledge of a particular subject within a particular institution – and then this in turn aids understanding and participation in the wider national or international context of the subject area. Without such common features, there would be little communication or exchange of ideas.

Lea and Street (1998) see what they refer to as *deficit* notions of student writing and *default* learning and teaching practices/approaches (i.e. such as monologues and lectures as ways of transferring knowledge 'top down') as no longer appropriate for students at university level (Lillis and Tuck, 2016). Many younger university teachers would agree with that; seminars and presentation-style learning with time for interaction with students and feedback are more usual nowadays. Certainly, the top-down pedagogy does not seem to respond to or suit the expansion of the higher education system or the student population in modern institutes of learning in many countries.

3.3.3 The influence of New Literacy Studies

New Literacy studies (NLS) emerged in the 1980s. This movement was influenced by sociocultural theory and post-structural approaches. It shifted away from cognitivism and behaviourism towards an investigation of individual people within their environment communicating with each other and creating their society (Haggis, 2009). NLS challenges the assumption that literacy is a set of cognitive skills that, once developed, can be easily transferred to another context (The New London Group, 1996). NLS offers a new way to consider the nature of literacy and sees literacy as a social practice rather than skills to be acquired (Street, 1984). This

involves the recognition of multiple literacies as social practices that vary within time, contexts and issues of power. NLS turned the gaze from specific literacy skills acquired to literacy in a particular social context, drawing on ethnographic and anthropological research into how literacies are taught, learned and used in different social contexts (Lillis and Tuck, 2016).

Researchers in NLS who use the 'ideological' model of literacy have suggested there is a difficulty in using the term 'literacy' as the unit of their studies because the term 'literacy' is loaded with ideological and political preconceptions. In practice, it is difficult to apply the term literacy to ethnographic studies because of the multiplicities of literacies across different contexts (Street, 2003b). Therefore, NLS researchers suggest two terms 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices' which could be used as units of study. The key focus of the ideological model of literacy is to understand how institutions form people and develop their particular literacy practices. The key criticism of the ideological model is that it focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of the context that are imposed on the students/learners; it doesn't focus on empowering them (Mckenna, 2004).

The Academic Literacies framework was developed from NLS (Barton, 1994; Gee 1996; Lillis and Tuck, 2016). Literacy researchers are interested in developing the theoretical and methodological frameworks explored by the NLS movement through working in a particular academic context (e.g. Jones et al., 1999; Lea and Street, 1998). Drawing on NLS, academic literacies researchers reframe the student-writing problem by turning the gaze to social institutions such as disciplines and universities and focusing on the perspectives and experiences of individual writers (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Tuck, 2016; Street, 2010).

Literacy researchers have attempted ethnographically to explore the notion of multiple literacies, differentiating between 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy, for example, Street (1984). He also makes the distinction between 'literacy events' and 'literacy practice' (Street, 1988). Street states that the 'autonomous' model of literacy views literacy as neutral and universal and so this model disguises the ideological and culture beliefs that underpin it (2003b). In practice, the 'autonomous' model of literacy sees literacy as being a technical and neutral skill. It considers the development of academic literacy as being connected to language

proficiency (Street, 2003b). For example, students acquire academic literacy as soon as they engage in the process of developing their language proficiency, indicating that meaning and knowledge reside in language proficiency. Literacy is viewed as independent of values, norms and attitudes and open to all students. Students are considered to be responsible for all the challenges they may encounter in order to grasp meaning in their learning environment (Mckenna, 2004). Academic texts are considered as de-contextualised to be understood by readers as intended by their writers. The 'autonomous' model pays more attention to skill acquisition and seems to ignore the social and cultural nature upon which literacy rests, and so, this model is associated with the bolt-on writing pedagogies such as the 'Study Skills' model. The autonomous model fails to consider the link between the notions of literacy and the power structure within a particular society. It sees literacy as a technical capacity to decode and encode written academic texts; therefore, academic literacy is viewed as being a technical literacy skill. This notion of literacy seems to be narrow and impractical considering the renewed demands of higher education, which could be attributed to 21st century world-wide changes in the economic, cultural and education sectors.

On the other hand, the 'ideological' model sees literacy as a social practice rooted in social and cultural contexts. Literacy practices vary from one context to another (Lea, 2004). Literacy is concerned with knowledge and the way in which people manage reading and writing are embedded in perceptions of knowledge and identity (Besnier and Street, 1994). Literacy is contested in its meaning and practices and these are embedded in a certain world-view and an ambition for that view of literacy to prevail and to marginalize others (Besnier and Street, 1994). The key argument of social literacies according to Street (1995) is that literacy is a social practice, situated in a social and cultural context, and in that sense is open to negotiation and challenge by students.

This led to the development of Lea and Street's (1998) three models of student writing in higher education, as namely Study Skills, Academic Socialisation and Academic Literacies. These approaches have their own distinctive conceptualisations regarding academic writing literacy; they also have the power to clarify the writing

learning process, present more productive feedback and promote effective academic writing practices. The three models will be discussed in the following sections.

3.3.4 Academic Literacies approach

Lea and Street (1998) developed the Academic Literacies approach through theorising various approaches to student writing in higher education. They considered the different premises and ideologies underpinning academic practices. According to Lea and Street (1998), there are three different approaches to student writing in higher education. These are: (a) the Study Skills model based on the key assumption that students have a deficit in their writing practices that can be developed through learning a number of writing skills; (b) the Academic Socialisation model based on the premise that the process of learning to write is a process of acculturation whereby students are introduced into the intended culture of academy; and (c) the Academic Literacies model, which views literacies as multiple and diverging social practices. This model encompasses both the other models for a deeper understanding of student writing practices in universities, and issues of power and identity (de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2006; Lea and Street, 2000).

3.3.4.1 Study Skills approach: support provision

As discussed earlier, the 'Study Skills' approach can be included within an EAP course. Study skills focus is on how knowledge can be acquired (Ivanic, 2004; Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 1998; Lea and Street, 2006; Turner, 2004) or on how knowledge is communicated as a general principle rather than knowledge of any specific subject. In this thesis, Study Skills and EAP are discussed in terms of the Academic Literacies critique of the Study Skills approach and to illustrate how EAP/Study Skills aims differ from those of general English programmes of the type carried out in ELI. The question is whether such general English programmes can bring students up to a proficiency level suitable – for those who need it – for academic studies through English, particularly writing, or whether other approaches could make a useful contribution. The *one size fits all* general English course using a single text book in ELI appears to fall well short of the mark.

The origins of the Study Skills approach come from behavioural psychology and training programmes. The Study Skills approach sees learning how to write in an

academic context as an individual cognitive skill. According to Street, it views student writing as instrumental and technical and the academic staff as problem solvers (Street, 2010). It also places more emphasis on surface language features, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar and the correctness and accuracy of the structural and linguistic patterns are highly emphasised by teachers. The focus is on the text, rather than the writer. This approach, as Street argues, suggests that once students acquire a set of atomised skills and competences, they are likely to be able to transfer them to different disciplinary contexts (Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010). This is a dominant view in many parts of the world, and it is evident in English for General Academic purposes (EGAP) curricula's focus on generic language skills (e.g. speaking, listening, writing and reading) and sub-skills (e.g. summarising, note-taking, presentation) (Wingate, 2006) which could be supported by a number of non-linguistic skills (e.g. time management and critical thinking). Lea and Street (1998) have addressed and refined the meaning of 'skills' to address broader issues of learning and social context. As a result of their enquiry, they have identified the 'academic socialisation' approach.

It is important to state that 'Study Skills' are for both native and non-native speakers of English and do not focus on language teaching/learning per se. The 'Study Skills' approach is based on the premise that students have a 'deficit' in their writing practices that can be addressed through acquiring a set of skills, (Creaton, 2008; Street, 2010). Or, the deficit could be considered as a gap between where they are now and where they want to be, which, is exactly the same concept as in learning any subject. However, this approach attempts to 'fix' students' skill gaps, hence the focus on basic training programmes. Writing, language skills and competences are addressed separately from the mainstream curriculum, for instance, in a literacy course or an autonomous course for improving language use. The 'transferability' aspect is based on the premise that students are expected to master the 'generic skills' and competences during a course and then apply these to all disciplines and subjects as well as the field of work after graduation.

It is easy to expect skills to be 'transferable'. Researchers have placed more emphasis on 'transferable' and 'generic skills' to find out which can be acquired in one context and easily transferred to another (Yorke, 2006). Additionally, some employers for

instance, may value 'generic skills' such as communication, team-working and time-management more than discipline-based skills and strategies (Yorke, 2006). However, in some circumstances, general values and attributes may appear to be insufficient to manage certain specific situations. Therefore, it is not always easy to directly and wholesale transfer skills from one context to another; it also requires consideration of how the change of situation/context can impact on the skills/knowledge required. Bridges (1993, p.50) defines 'transferable skills' as skills that empower the person to "select, adapt, adjust and apply other skills to different situations, across different social contexts and perhaps similarly across different cognitive domains". Yorke (2006) points out that the practice of 'transferring skills' requires metacognition incorporating students being self-aware of the process of their learning, the ability to reflect on, and in performance, the ability to self-regulate.

The emphasis is on attempts to 'remediate' problems within the students' learning/literacy, 'which is considered as a type of pathology', (Cottrell, 2001; Street, 2010); for instance, 'remedial class' instruction located in a tertiary 'English as a second or foreign language context'. Although insensitive and crude, it remains a popular approach in university strategies to support student writing (Creaton, 2008) for four main reasons: (a) the challenges of the 'embedded' teaching approach, in which skills are learned "as an integral part of the study programme" (Wingate, 2006, p.459) and the institutional and managerial difficulties in managing skills learning development within degree courses (Drummond et al., 1999); (b) the hesitancy of tutors to involve themselves in their students learning process (Biggs, 1996) or with promoting work-field skills (Bennett et al*.,* 2000); (c) the conception of 'Study Skills' within the universities' skills framework as being "separate from skills needed for students' long-term development" (Wingate, 2006. p.459); and (d) a misreading of the complex nature of the skills required to handle academic tasks by researchers who think that students can learn by themselves outside their subject of study (Turner, 2004; Wingate, 2006).

There are a number of criticisms that have been made of the 'Study Skills' model. The first is that learning how to study successfully at tertiary levels cannot be divorced from knowledge of subject content and the learning process (Turner, 2004; Wingate, 2006). This segregation makes the difference between studying effectively

and learning. For instance, if students learn particular strategies, they might not need to engage deeply with their subject. According to Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986, p.459), certain skills "degenerate into techniques for passing examinations, for coping with the system rather than developing the skills of learning''. They argue that teaching skills isolated from the subject content appear to inspire the epistemological value that knowledge is a separate entity of facts which can be learned with particular strategies and techniques (Gamache, 2002). The provision of Study Skills as external objects is detrimental to students' learning. It promotes a surface approach to learning in which Study Skills are only essential for the purpose of succeeding at tertiary level.

Literacies research assumes that the 'built-in' or 'embedded' approach is more effective in learning skills in higher education, through the skills which are promoted and assessed as an internal aspect of the degree course (Cottrell, 2001; Drummond et al., 1998) compared to the 'bolt-on' approach, such as Study Skills courses, where learning is separate from subject content. The origin of the 'bolt-on' approach is in the era when students were expected to enrol at academia already empowered with skills to learn successfully (Wingate, 2006), an educated elite. The 'embedded' approach appears to consider the complexity of skills in a more holistic manner by giving students opportunities to learn effectively throughout their degree courses.

From this perspective, their writing is devoid of context. It ignores the significance of individual disciplines and the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The fundamental assumption underpinning this approach is that there is a "homogenous set of requirements" Gimenez (2008, p.152) which are similar across disciplines and learners can adapt to them from their learning inside their writing classes. For institutions where study skills are not separated from the subject of study, the impression is that they are assumed to be useful not only for academic progress but are essentials for learners' personal and career development.

The second argument is that universities adhere to practices based on a 'remedial approach' (Cottrell, 2001, p.40), to support weak students (Wingate, 2006). As Lillis (2001) claims, if students who are not classified as being weak need instruction in the skills, for instance, academic writing, they might not be highly engaged and this may entail severe challenges to their learning process and influence their progress across mainstream programmes. In addition to this, students who need to learn skills may not

regularly attend extra-curricular courses. They may fail to realise their importance in comparison to those attached to their subject course. As Drummond et al. (1998) argue, students may fail to consider generic courses as having any relationship to their subject. According to Blythman and Orr (2002, p.46), students from diverse backgrounds need educational support "for successful achievement and progression within the education system and beyond" so a one size fits all course may have little impact.

The third criticism of the 'Study Skills' approach is that the conception of advice in the provision of instructional learning conflicts with experiential learning frameworks (Wingate, 2006). According to Kolb and Fry (1975), efficient learning occurs when students face a problem and take action. Then, they reflect on that action and make use of their experience in new situations. In practice, students need to be engaged with writing tasks and given feedback on their performance in order to support their reflective capacity. After reflection on past experiences, students can acquire conventions and strategies to effectively handle similar tasks. In comparison to instructional learning, there is little reflection or experimentation (Wingate, 2006).

Lea and Street (1998) further suggest that tutors might not be aware that student challenges with academic tasks could be attributed to epistemological assumptions rather than from a lack of strategies. This entails the importance of increasing the students' deeper conceptualising of knowledge by providing them with the opportunity for experiences and then reflecting on their performance.

Another limitation of the concept of Study Skills is that universities, departments and faculties have settled their own agendas, values and emphasis on different skills; for instance, communication, handling individual learning and problem-solving in their specific contexts. Educational institutions show a wide diversity of practices at tertiary level (Murphy, 2001).

The last argument is that certain skills might be more valued than others, depending on how they are labelled. For example, in most universities, 'key skills' is the preferred label followed by 'transferable skills', 'graduate skills' and 'employability skills'. 'Key skills' are often attached to the subject of study and the learning process, while 'study skills' are seen to be separate from their subject matter (Wingate, 2006).

Wingate (2006, p.461) states that "this view neglects the complexity of learning at university".

However, while the Academic Literacies approach focuses on student writing within a subject context, and the associated socio-cultural practices within this environment, it could be seen as a reduced (writing) approach. Furthermore, while it regards study skills as being de-contextualized, this narrow view diminishes the learning, for example, by critiquing reading texts in students' future subject areas, often part of learning by doing – group meaning creation, reaction, discussion, research, peer feedback and presentation – in study skills courses.

Ivanic (2004) and Lea and Street (1998) critique study skills courses from a very generalised perspective and do not offer much in the way of alternative pedagogical guidance. There is a tension between individual needs and learning as a group in any situation. But peer learning is fostered in many study skills courses. Creaton (2008) refers to writing crafting, or a community of writers. For instance, students collaborate on writing up the results of their joint experiments in subject groups and keep learner diaries. These two activities can be seen as a process of 'apprenticeship' to independent writing and polished, individual writing can develop from diary notes.

What any study skills or support course will always lack is the focus on individual needs for each student in their specific pieces of work – unless they have tutorial support (Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). It will try to provide an understanding of the basic academic requirements common to all the subjects (e.g. referencing conventions, how to avoid plagiarism, how paragraphs and headings work and how to make a plan) (Wingate, 2006). These might be considered as basic conceptual blocks underpinning academic subject and person specific writing.

Surely, the main issue here is communicating the message. For example, while 'we' is generally acceptable in spoken language in seminars, a token of belonging to a group, care needs to be taken in all writing if collaboration is not the intended message to the reader. This is not an assault on personal freedom but it is about conveying the right message. Because the audience is not present in person, writing needs to anticipate possible questions and understandings (Hyland, 2007; Johns, 1997; Lillis, 2001). This is why planning or even writing 'to do' lists can help students to envisage all they

need in a holistic way. Indeed, there is an interconnectedness that seems to be missing in the various approaches reported here.

To sum up, according to Lea and Street (1998), the Study Skills approach is an unhelpful deficit model based on the assumption that difficulties with literacy are due to the students' difficulties in expressing themselves, rather than due to the way they are taught. Hence the focus can be on mending the students rather than improving the teaching/learning relationship. This view led to the development of the 'Academic Socialisation' model that considers the 'Study Skills' model but includes it in the wider context of the acculturation process. This model seeks to induct students into the academy and institutional culture, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.4.2 Academic Socialization approach: acculturation provision

With its roots in anthropology, social psychology, and constructivism, the 'Academic Socialisation' approach views the process of learning and writing at tertiary levels as a process of acculturation in which students are inducted into the norms, conventions, strategies and culture of the academy (Creaton, 2008; Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 1998). Therefore, the role of the teacher is to inculcate learners into the new culture, which is academic. The emphasis is on the student's orientation to learning and understanding the learning tasks (Hounsell, 1988). According to Ballard and Clancy (1988, p.8), becoming literate in the university is the process by which a student learns "to 'read' the culture, learning to come to terms with its distinctive rituals, values, styles of language and behavior".

Haneda (2009) further differentiates between the 'acculturation' and 'enculturation' in terms of the 'Academic Socialization' model. She defines enculturation as "a process of cultural learning in which [students] learn to act as productive members of their disciplinary communities and locally of their […] departments" (2009, p.65). In the context of graduate studies, for instance, it was assumed that students (i.e. first year undergraduates) are not strangers to the academy; however, they need to learn the requirements of a particular culture to be empowered with the tools to meet the higher education demands at universities (Haneda, 2009). However, the term 'acculturation" is used to refer to the process which novice students undergo as they enrol in a new social and cultural community in which they have decided to locate themselves.

Lillis (2003) makes a distinction between the implicit and explicit stances of the Academic Socialisation model. The 'implicit' approach assumes that writing practices can be learned through interaction with other students, tutors and written texts. Seloni (2012) conducted an ethnographical study to investigate the application of the 'academic socialisation' model on multilingual students in their first year of doctoral study in the field of education. The study found that engaging with the academic discourse is a complicated and multi-layered practice. Out-of-class interactions are key spaces for Academic Socialization in which the students collaboratively participated in dialogue outside the learning environment for meaning production. The important point would seem to be that much learning goes on outside the classroom as informal peer learning, so the kinds of interaction where learning actually takes place may need broader consideration in terms of Academic Literacies and for practical teaching. Students have the opportunity to learn how to write and to act out their identity as new members of the academy as much informally as formally.

Furthermore, Academic Socialization is based on the belief that students enrol in academy with the prerequisite literacy skills already in place (Creaton, 2008). Students are expected to transfer these literacy skills to university study and to develop them by socially building upon them the required literacies throughout their programmes of study. However, viewing student literacy as a pre-requisite is a misconception by the 'Academic Socialisation' model, as it seems to exclude those students who have not previously acquired the social and cultural norms of the academy. Therefore, this approach has been criticized as being inadequate for supporting student writing for two reasons: the expansion of higher education and the diversity of student population to include non-traditional students, and the modifications in school based assessment. A number of institutions have employed an 'explicit' approach to socialising students into the academy through orientation, study skills programmes and the use of clear assessment criteria. One reason for this is that 'metacognition', learning about norms, strategies and conventions can empower students to develop their writing (Nightingale, 1988). According to Bock (1988), this might lead in to the '*pygmalion syndrome'* whereby students acquire the more superficial features of a disciplinary discourse while lacking the comprehensive theoretical understandings that underpin these notions (Bock, 1988; Creaton, 2008).

The belief behind the 'pygmalion syndrome' is the higher the expectation placed on people (e.g. students), the better they perform in their writing and learning.

Nevertheless, the 'Academic Socialisation' approach has been criticised on certain grounds: it assumes that the academy is a homogeneous culture, whose norms, conventions and practices have to be acquired to give the students access to the entire learning institution (Lea and Street, 1998). This approach suggests that disciplinary discourse and genres are constant, and that once learners master the ground rules, they will be able to reproduce them. Although, the cultural approach may help to provide a deeper understanding of writing as culturally contextualised within a particular academic context, it may fail to recognize the extent to which conceptions about appropriate academic writing practices vary across disciplines, institutions and even academic staff (Creaton, 2008). For example, in a modular framework in which subjects are integrated with other disciplines, there is the possibility of a conflict of conventions and expectations.

The second argument is that this approach appears to focus on the importance of contextual factors for student writing (Hounsell, 1988), as it deals with writing as a transparent medium of perspectives, while failing to address a number of deeper issues, such as the literacy and discourse involved in the institution's socio-cultural and meaning construction (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010). For instance, study skills courses often guide students to use the passive form and to write in the third person, and to avoid personal experiences. However, these norms and conventions are aspects of a particular form of essay literacy which is institutionally, historically and culturally situated (Lillis and Turner, 2001). Through teaching these norms and strategies, tutors are themselves engaged in knowledge production, power structures in institutions and dismissive of the individual identity and experience of students (Kramer-Dahl, 1995).

A third criticism suggests that norms and practices of the academy could be introduced explicitly. However, while the genre approach attempts to use explicit means to present some linguistic and structural aspects of student writing, it seems to have difficulty clearly negotiating the deeper epistemological aspects of discourse (Creaton, 2008). As Eraut (2000) suggests, it is hard to decode the tacit knowledge underpinning much of the learning activity. For example, although academic staff

themselves may implicitly acquire the norms of academic writing, they may find it difficult to articulate or even identify these norms. It is argued that teachers struggle to explain the meaning of particular terms such as 'critically analyse', 'evaluate' and 'structure' which are part of essay title instruction terms and thus part of assessment criteria and referred to as successful or not in students' feedback (Norton, 1990). Therefore, most tutors provide examples (with permission) of previous students' writing that was well received (or not) so new students can learn from real written samples in their subject areas and at the level they are aiming for - by assessing them - not by being given rules or definitions alone. According to Sambell and McDowell (1998), in addition to the formal curriculum, there is also a 'hidden curriculum' where knowledge is tacit and hidden in unspoken practices and processes.

The final criticism is that the 'Academic Socialisation' approach fails to acknowledge a number of wider issues of power, identity and inequality in academic writing (Creaton, 2008). For example, tutors usually set the writing tasks and assign a position to student writers. They also decide what is defined as good writing and how it should be written (Starfield, 2004). The inequality of power between students and tutors makes it hard for students to present an evaluation of the dominant discourse. According to Ivanic (1998), the power relations between writer and reader are essential in order to understand student writing. Indeed, it is not easy to adopt the appropriate conventions and practices of the disciplinary discourse that provides access to the institutional culture of the academy. As Ivanic (1998) points out, discourse practices, at the institution level, may offer certain ideological structures which may eliminate certain groups of students from becoming members.

The 'Academic Socialization' model represents a deeper understanding of student writing than that presented by the conventional 'Study Skill' model, by considering the social and cultural aspects which students may have to encounter. However, according to Lea and Street, this approach is inadequate for supporting student writing because "the institutional practices, including processes of change and the exercise of power do not seem to be sufficiently theorised" (1998, p.159). Lea and Street (1998) draw on the Academic Literacies model in which literacies are conceptualised as diverse and contested social practices. This approach will be presented in the next section.

3.3.4.3 Academic Literacies approach: integrative perspective

As discussed above, the Academic Literacies model arose from the New Literacy Studies movement, and has moved beyond the Study Skills and the Academic Socialisation models. This model views literacies as conflicting social practices (Gee, 1990; Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010). It expands the frame of reference from the individual or institutional or disciplinary culture to the construction of knowledge and the practices of academy. It argues that writing is a social practice situated in the beliefs, power relationships and institutional discourses of the academy, and has an effect on identity.

An "Academic Literacies" model sees institutions (e.g. universities) as the sites of discourse and power, and considers writing and learning as reflecting issues of epistemology, identity and power rather than simply issues of skills and socialisation (Creaton, 2008). It not only differs from the 'Study Skills' and 'Academic Socialisation' approaches, but, also rejects the genre approach, which mainly focuses on texts types. Street (2010) also suggests that the focus on social meanings and identities has placed more emphasis on deeply efficient and ideological encounters in switching and deploying linguistic practices. For instance, students in higher education are supposed to articulate their voices – what experience they bring to the writing task - and this act may empower their individual identities and promote their self-assurance as they learn to engage with the learning process. Additionally, students are required to make their voices convincing in writing up their research literature in theses and dissertations to give their work more reliability, validity and credibility. This may entail issues of identity and power conflict (Street, 2010). Additionally, the 'Academic Literacies' model views the literacy requirements of the subject and learning process as including a range of communicative practices (i.e. disciplines and genres) (Street, 2010). From the student perspective, the key aspect of academic literacy practice is the ability to switch practices from one site to another, to select and apply the appropriate linguistic practices to each context and to manage the social meaning and identity that each negotiates (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010).

Furthermore, it is argued that the students' identity (i.e. who am I) could be challenged by the style of writing demanded in several disciplines (Lea and Street, 1998). Students may struggle to either use the passive forms (impersonal) or active

forms (in the first person). According to Lea (2004), this may threaten students' identity; they may argue that 'this is not me'. The concept of the deep level of involvement with student writing evolves from the social and ideological provision of the 'New Literacy Studies'. These studies view students' writing as being associated with the production of knowledge and the contestation is around meaning rather than deficits or skills (Lea and Street, 1998).

On the basis of the research into literacy in higher education, one possible reason why students have writing problems could be the difference between what the tutors expect the students to already know and how much they actually understand about how to go about academic writing (Lea, 2004; Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 1995). Lea and Street's conception of the Academic Literacies framework provides insights in to how people practice literacies (e.g. language skills involving reading, writing, listening and speaking and the competence to use them appropriately) in universities.

The 'Academic Literacies' model considers 'literacy' as multiple, heterogeneous and plural, particularly in higher education, while, 'literacy' is singular and atomised and linked to schools rather than university (de Chazal, 2014; Street, 2010). There is a belief held by many university academic staff that literacy is expected to be learned by students before they enrol in higher education (Wingate, 2006). Therefore, the 'Academic Literacies' approach attempts to change that concept of literacy by viewing the 'social practices' approach of plural and multiple literacies which relate to 'new literacy studies' in real practice in higher education (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995, 2010), thus providing a more practical alternative to the so-called Study Skills 'deficit' approach to writing and learning that comes from autonomous models of literacy (Street, 2010). Street gives an example of what he calls genre shifting – a process of developing ideas and sharing them, carried out in a workshop; however, this type of workshop is a standard process which most EAP tutors would use in their classes. Street seems to refer to an audience of general educationalists, not applied linguist EAP tutors familiar with such practices.

It can be that the so-called Study Skills approach critiqued by Lea and Street (2006) is a very narrow caricature and most pre-sessional courses take on board many Academic Literacies ideas and most are project-based - not rote or lecture-based - with students researching topics of their choice and reading together, checking each

others' drafts of work and using skills in the round, whereas the Academic Literacies model focuses mainly on writing and does not see the interconnectedness of reading and other language skills as being linked to meaning-making with subject matter. Moreover, Lea and Street (2006) take a very narrow and critical approach to the so-called Study Skills approach due to: (a) Lea and Street do not actually investigate study skills programmes in practice, because their agenda seems to be more political than practical; and (b) study skills serve their purpose as offering a contrast with Academic Literacies approach discussed, though in practice, study skills can include several elements of the other approaches and encourage students to share with their peers what they bring to their studies.

Table 3.1 below illustrates that the three models are not mutually exclusive and can be viewed as hierarchical steps in relationships rather than a linear time dimension favouring the 'Academic Literacies' approach (de Chazal, 2014). Lea and Street (1998) have noted that each model effectively compresses the other, for instance, the 'Academic Socialisation' model considers the 'Study Skills' model but includes it within the wider context of the acculturation process, and similarly, the 'Academic Socialisation' approach is subsumed in part into the 'Academic Literacies' model, as well as taking account of 'Study Skills' perceptions. Lea and Street (2000) identified three significant themes in their study. These are: (1) learners' lack of skills cannot be fixed through a learning support unit (at least, theoretically), as this approach believes that knowledge can be transferred. Rather, they are interested in an approach which is based on a belief that learners' knowledge is constructed through writing practices; (2) they are interested in students' identity rather than the acquisition of a set of skills; and (3) they focus on the nature of university courses and the implications for students writing.

According to Hyland (2006) and Lea and Street (2000), the main characteristics of the Academic Literacies approach are: it was developed from selected methodologies taken from the Study Skills approach and the Academic Socialisation approach, but is placed at the top of the hierarchy. It takes a broader view of skills and language than the Study Skills approach. It is wider in scope than the Academic Socialisation approach, which views the role of the teacher is to introduce students to the new culture, which is academic. It views literacies as social practices, what people do and

how they act as part of their daily lives rather than an abstract process created in people's minds (Hyland, 2006). It sees student writing in higher education as having issues of epistemology, identity and meaning rather than skills alone, and focuses on how knowledge is constructed in specific disciplines. It considers that the students need to participate within their disciplines to learn about meanings, academic discourses and practices. Therefore, the 3 models come together to construct a robust Academic Literacies model.

Table 3. 1: Models of academic writing (adapted and as perceived by Lea and Street, 2006)

Model of writing	Focus Level	Perception	Significance	Limitations	Comments and Reflections
Study Skills	Surface language features (i.e. grammar, spelling and punctuation).	Learn body of knowledge then, transfer it to all academic contexts. Sources: Behavioural Psychology	Gaining knowledge and learning skills.	a) Changeability of context is ignored. b) In practice, surface language features (i.e. grammar, punctuation and spelling) may not be sufficient to construct a good piece of writing. Students have to pay attention to more complex issues, for instance, epistomology, identity and meaning-making.	a) Literacy is transferable. b) Writing is seen as a technical instrument.
Academic Socialisation	a) Deep-surface b) Strategic-learning	a) Subject– based discourse b) Uses various genres and discourses according to the academic topic. Sources: Constructivism Anthropology Social-psychology	Presumes that students have to learn the rules and genre of a specific discourse, which is generalisable to all academic contexts.	a) Lack of recognition of institutional-practices. b) Change and power. c) It seems to be more convenient for students.	a) Autonomy. b) Explicit teaching of aspects of academic genres.
Academic Literacies	Epistemology, power, meaning-making and identity	Views writing as a social practice. Sources: New literacy studies Cultural-anthropology	Focuses on meanings, identities and knowledge production.	a) Literacies are heterogeneous. b) They are more pragmatic and capable of promoting effective learning experiences.	a) This approach is a combination of the Study Skills and Socialisation models. b) It develops the learners' capacity to handle a number of social meanings and identities.

A signifcant contribution of the 'Academic Literacies' movement is the development of the 'Academic Literacies' approach, a theoretical framework which has influenced the related work on literacy (Lea and Street, 1998, 2000). However, although the framework has a number of ways of including Academic Literacies in mainstream curricula, it has not been able to promote an explict pedagogical model (de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2006; Lea, 2004; Street, 2010). This could be attributed to the fact that the main proponents of Academic Literacies, Lea and Street (1998), have not worked in the EAP field, which might limit their practical development of the Academic Literacies approach (Hyland, 2006, p.118). Tribble and Wingate (2011) claim that the main researchers of Academic Literacies were "… not fully aware of the theoretical and pedagogical contribution that Genre/EAP has made to the field". They also suggest that research in Academic Literacies draws on ethnographic and small-scale case studies with non-traditional students, who come from backgrounds where family members have rarely enrolled in university in the past.

In the recent literature, there has been some criticism of the Academic Literacies model of only seeing literacy as practised within a social context. The theoretical framework has also been criticised for its limitations (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003). However, the key criticism levelled against the academic literacy model is its limitations as an applied pedagogy - in other words, its practicality. Lillis (2003) based her work on the academic literacy critique and used Bakhtin's work as a theoretical framework. She argued for the transformation of pedagogic practices, and that the main need was to move away from monological approaches, where the tutor is dominant within an institutional or social context, towards dialogic approaches that involve various discourses and voices. Lillis (2003) is interested in the way in which the Bakhtin notion of *dialogue* can assist in shaping the design of space. For her, 'dialogic pedagogic practices' include; (a) to make visible official and unofficial discourse, and (b) to provide students the chance of participating in and challenging them in academic contexts.

For example, this approach considers that 'talkback' typically is "an attempt to open up space where the student-writer can say what she likes and does not like about her writing" instead of feedback on students' written essays, (Lillis 2003, p.204). Although this technique could be used with any teaching approach, it illustrates a

practical aspect of the Academic Literacies model as a pedagogical framework for practice. Lea (2004) also responded to this criticism in her work (i.e. a case study of online postgraduate course). She examined how the Academic Literacies model could be used as the basis for course design. Lea (2004) found a number of principles, for instance, addressing students' previous literacy experiences, being more explicit and offering more detail about particular textual forms and practices and providing more detail about the assessment criteria which could be applied in an academic context and would help the students be more active in the construction of their knowledge. Lea (2004) acknowledged that texts developed using these principles presented no differences from those which had been addressed in other postgraduate courses. These principles reflected on issues of power between teachers and students and made them more visible. However, the importance of these principles seems to be more associated with the Academic Socialisation model rather than the Academic Literacies model. Later on, Lea and Street (2006) used the academic literacy model to develop a design frame, called 'Genre mode switching'. This design emphasises the value of the explictness in identifying the link between various genres and their social practices. Lea and Street (2006, p.231) claim that "students had not always been made explicitly aware of these qualities associated with different genres as they moved between different genres in their school work".

The second criticism is that the Academic Literacies model does not clarify the role of teachers in constructing students' literacy practices. The role of the academic staff in this model is hidden. Academic staff have their own personal conceptions and practices concerning student writing. These conceptions reflect the way that teachers perceive good student writing. However, these views are often associated with a particular institution or discipline where tutors are located. Lea and Street (1998) investigated academic staff's perceptions and their feedback on student writing. They recognised that the teachers' impact on their students included: (a) introducing assessment; (b) providing assessment criteria; and (c) giving feedback on assessed texts. Lea and Street (1998) acknowledged that students and teachers have different understandings of what the writing process involves because of the different levels of epistemology, power, and authority over knowledge. They also suggested that to overcome these challenges, more attention has to be paid to students, the interaction between teacher and students and institutional literary practices.

The final limitation of the Academic Literacies model is that its emphasis has been placed on the contextualisation of particular literary practices in particular academic contexts. It seems to disregard the broader sociological views. For example, the Academic Literacies model has the capacity to acknowledge and show how specific literary practices are used and fostered in a specific institute or discipline; however, it may fail to identify why these particular literary forms are developed within the academy. As Street (2003a) acknowledges, together with these situated approaches which romanticise the local context, there is a huge movement to focus on the wider social concepts from a poststructuralist framework. Moreover, some current academic work in the field of Academic Literacies seems to investigate the poststructuralist notion of identity and power in a way which focuses on literary practices within global contexts (Collins and Blot, 2003).

3.3.5 Academic Literacies and EAP

It is important to recognise the similarities and differences between EAP and Academic Literacies to understand their orientation and pedagogy, and identify the convergences between them. As discussed previously, the Academic Literacies movement emerged in the USA, the UK and Australia (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Similarly, EAP developed in Western contexts (e.g. UK, USA and Australia) as a field of inquiry and teaching practices (de Chazal, 2014; Hyland, 2006). Promoters of the two fields share the common goal of offering appropriate and efficient education at tertiary level (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). They aim to support students to succeed as communicators and writers in English at academic level. Researchers in both fields argue for the significance of investigating academic literacy as social practice.

Nevertheless, there are a number of differences between EAP and Academic Literacies. The Academic Literacies Approach and EAP arose from different socio-political contexts. Academic literacy has its origins in educational Marxism, critical linguistics and critical education; however, EAP is influenced by linguistics and educational research (de Chazal, 2014). The Academic literacies approach arose as a response to the well-known Study Skills approach to EAP (Hyland, 2006). Academic Literacies attempts to avoid the view that students first have to learn the basics and

then they can be involved in pedagogy which offers space for negotiation (Lillis and Tuck, 2016).

Furthermore, the main object under investigation in EAP tends to be the text, while in Academic Literacies, it tends to be the meaning-maker or producer (Lillis and Tuck, 2016). In EAP contexts, language is the main area of focus while an Academic Literacies approach is concerned with academic practices in the disciplines rather than the language with which to carry them out (de Chazal, 2014; Gillett, 2011). For example, in some EAP courses in universities, content ranges from more generic, transferable skills to discipline-specific and job-related skills. Other education institutions concentrate on teaching basic language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking in a more general way. Therefore, two types of approaches are used, namely, the 'wide-angle' approach (e.g. the 'Study Skills' model) or the 'narrow-angle' (e.g. writing in the disciplines) (Hyland, 2000). Interestingly, EAP students are neither expected to deliver disciplinary knowledge nor display knowledge of the English language (de Chazal, 2014). EAP students are expected to develop the ability to process the information within texts in English, to communicate in English and to function appropriately in an academic setting. EAP is interested in developing the skills and competencies which influence the academic practices in academic disciplines.

The main aim of Academic Literacies research, on the other hand, is to change the concept of writing from a generic skill and deficit model to a model of writing which recognises the complexity of the students' task in writing at university (de Chazal, 2014; Lea, 2004; McKenna 2003; Stierer, 2000; Street, 2010). Academic literacy research concentrates on broader institutional affairs in which writing seems to incorporate issues of epistemology, identity and power (Creaton, 2008). The Academic Literacy Approach mainly concentrates on academic reading and writing rather than the other language skills (Turner, 2012; Wingate, 2006). It considers reading and writing as social practices embedded in a certain cultural context involving particular ways of making meaning and building arguments (McKenna 2003; Street, 2010).

It is important to mention that EAP and Academic Literacies differ in the focus of their ideological orientation. EAP usually operates from the view that once genres,

conventions and discourse are identified, students can be inducted into them. However, in Academic Literacies, this is the responsibility of academic communities as well as students.

3.3.6 The theoretical framework: Academic Literacies

Academic Literacies is a theoretical and empirical field that seeks to investigate reading and writing in higher education as a social practice, drawing on ethnographic and small-scale case studies (Lillis and Tuck, 2016). The aim of Academic Literacies is to problematise the way in which student writing is defined and operates in universities as a 'critical field of enquiry' investigating literacy as social practice, and addressing issues of power in social relations (Lillis and Scott, 2007; Street, 1984). As Coffin and Donohue (2012, p.64) point out, Academic Literacies is:

> a research paradigm [which] has maintained a strong commitment to ethnographic investigation and to critiquing dominant academic and institutional practices; methods have concentrated on identifying practices, student identities, and conflicts that individual language users experience in university writing.

The main unit of Academic Literacies research is literacy practices, which include "both individual behaviours that participants display in a literacy event and complex and abstract social phenomena which include the larger social and cultural meanings that participants bring to, and deploy, in their participation in a literacy event" (Coffin and Donohue, 2012, p.65). Most academic writing research focuses on student texts rather than literacy practices (Lillis and Scott, 2007). This may lead to the perception that student's writing problems are textually-based, consequently, pedagogies which are mainly textual in nature, tend to be used. Lillis and Scott (2007) suggest this situation is problematic. Crucially, the Academic Literacies' lens: (a) focuses on the experience of students as they participate in academic meaning making; (b) focuses on literacy practices, power and issues of identity, and what these issues mean for both students and teachers at tertiary level (Lillis and Scott, 2007); and (c) concentrates on the quality of good texts from the teachers' perception. Academic Literacies as a research framework is designed to improve and extend the understanding of how context is perceived and thus to clarify the link between text and context (Coffin and Donohue, 2012).

The primary questions posed in Academic Literacies research are: (a) what does academic writing mean to students in different academic contexts? (b) what is the nature of disciplinary academic writing, to what extent are disciplines related in higher education, and how far do disciplines vary in terms of institutions, departments and teachers? (c) how do academic writing approaches reflect and achieve the broader goals of higher education?

The Academic Literacies framework has been employed to explore issues of teaching, learning and assessment. For example, Lillis (2001) conducted a study employing the Academic Literacies model to investigate the experience of black and minority ethnic students within a social context. Lillis found that institutional and social contexts do influence writers' intended meaning and their identities. The Academic Literacies approach is also used as a theoretical framework in a number of academic contexts including distance-learning (Lea, 2004), nursing students (Baynham, 2000) and postgraduate students (Stierer, 2000). These studies investigated the students' writing difficulties. They focused on the production of knowledge rather than the difficulty located in individual people. They provided insights into higher education levels as sites of discourse and power.

Recently, most researchers have adopted an Academic Literacies approach which has situated students writing within an explicitly institutional, social and political framework (e.g. Baynham, 2000; Thesen, 2001). One reason for this could be that the Academic Literacies approach presents a solid critique of current writing practices and pedagogies concerning student writing (Lillis, 2003). However, while the Academic Literacies approach has become the preferred theoretical framework in the field of academic writing, the Study Skills model persists as the preferred approach in institutional plans for improving student writing (Creaton, 2008). This could be attributed to the academic literacy approach having limited pedagogical practice within academia (Lillis, 2003).

The Academic Literacies approach was adopted as the theoretical framework for the present ethnographic study. The overarching theoretical framework is the ideals of Academic Literacies and its critique of the Study Skills approach as a construct. The Academic Literacies approach claims that the basis of the logic that students can be taught good writing skills outside the subject of their study is wrong. However, this

view is useful to me as the overarching concept because its ideals - including the student-centered approach and its critique of the Study Skills approach as focusing only the surface features of language - helped me to identify the general themes I observed from the NVivo codes that emerged (see chapter 4, the methodology chapter for further information). The Academic Literacies approach's identification of the basic principles and concepts it perceives as underlying the Study Skills and Academic Socialisation approaches provided me with the scaffolding for a critical framework from which to develop my research. I used it to develop categories from the literature, which then gave me the basic thematic framework for data collection. So, the present study bases its theoretical stance on the Academic Literacies critique explained above.

This framework provides a full understanding of what happened in the target institution and formed the dominant discourse (i.e. writing). The framework enabled a deeper exploration of writing at Saudi Western University because it expanded the conceptualisation of writing practices beyond marks on a page to the socio-cultural and educational context. It helped me (a) to describe student writing practices at a tertiary institution more fully; (b) to trace the historical origins of academic writing norms, conventions and links to academic literacy practices; and (c) to discover whether the current practices constrain or motivate meaning-making within the university. The theoretical framework offered a deeper understanding of the student writing experience at university, and aids consideration of the need for more active writing experiences, along with research into academic writing practices in various contexts - Saudi Arabia in particular. It also helped to shape and answer the current research questions of this thesis, namely:

- Question 1: What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English Language Institute (ELI) in Saudi Western University?
- Question 2: What role does the English Language Institute play in framing student writing practices?
- Question 3: What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role in supporting student writing in higher education?

- Question 4: To what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context?

3.4 Key research methods

This section presents an overview of the main research methods, Linguistic Ethnography, discourse analysis, Bakhtin's views and Ethnography. These methodological approaches will be further discussed in chapter 4, the methodology chapter.

3.4.1 Linguistic Ethnography

Academic Literacies model suggests that writing is embedded in certain contexts and produced through interaction, hence researchers in the academic literacies movement have attempted to rely on methodological approaches which combine linguistic analysis with ethnographic accounts of particular context (Lillis and Tuck, 2016). The investigation of this type of experience (i.e. text oriented ethnography) is associated with the methodological approach of "Linguistic Ethnography''. Rampton et al. (2004, p.2) define Linguistic Ethnography as "language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity". Hence, this approach tends to connect the study of culture, typical of ethnographical focus, with emphasis on the discourse functions of talk and text.

As noted earlier, the Academic Literacies approach is the present overarching research framework, while an ethnographic approach was used for its potential to encompass multiple data sources. In this study, the ethnographic data collected (interview, observation, documentary sources and samples of student writing) had the capacity to facilitate the exploration of student writing practices in the English language institution in Saudi Western University from various perspectives. I used Linguistic Ethnography/Fairclough to structure the interviews into macro/meso/micro levels (i.e. representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, directors of the English language Institutions and teachers and students) to produce data so I could consider in more detail the reasons underlying the responses to the interview questions. Linguistic Ethnography is also concerned with the underlying influences behind utterances - social-cultural norms and power hierarchies. For a more detailed

analysis of relationships, I used Linguistic Ethnography (discourse analysis), and Bakhtin's concept of the voice within the voice, when people repeat the voice of authority in their utterances, to deepen the analysis of the interviews and the formal documents to discover why things are they way they are (for a critical review of Linguistic Ethnography, Ethnography, discourse analysis and Bakhtin's concept see chapter 4, the methodology chapter).

Linguistic Ethnography is the appropriate analytical framework for the analysis of the data collected for this research because of the hierarchical socio-cultural structure of the Saudi context. Linguistic Ethnography also contributed to the research design – the methodology of identifying the macro-, meso- and micro-level interview and documentary data collection as well as data analysis.

This more people-centred Linguistic Ethnography approach to the analysis of discourse has the following aims: (a) to ensure the voices of those at the lower levels of the education hierarchy are heard as well as those at the upper levels. The LE approach aims to give voice to all levels of the hierarchy, and students within the socio-cultural context of Saudi Western may have no formal channels or other opportunities to give feedback on their teaching and learning, so this was an opportunity to collect their experiences; (b) To understand what was really going on behind the things people say - and to what extent these utterances reflect the social, cultural and/or contextual role constructions, or the official discourse (Rampton et al., 2004). In this sense, their comments are very valuable, but it is necessary to be aware that participants' comments may be so acculturated to the educational norms, the requirements of their positions of authority and the expectations of the English Language Institute that they merely repeat these attitudes in their responses. (c) To discover what academic writing means to each level and what they perceive students' needs to be and to see how far these perceptions are reflected in the Academic Literacies model. For example, I looked beneath the surface of the actual phrases or choice of words to look for the deeper assumptions and relationships they contain.

3.5 Writing in the context of Saudi Culture

Writing as a social practice views writing as indivisible from its context, in this case, the wider Saudi cultural context, rather than the effect that particular subjects of study contexts might have.

This section starts by defining the term 'culture', and then presents a general discussion of culture. Williams (1976, p.87, as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p.9), defines culture as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" used in a wide range of intellectual disciplines to signify an ideal, a documentary or a social understanding of culture (Williams, 1965, pp.57-58);

a) The ideal concept of culture refers to particular global and universal values. It is a process of human completion.

b) The documentary aspect of culture indicates recorded human experiences and endeavours, their intellectual and imaginative work.

c) The social understanding of culture presents a certain way of life in art, learning and ordinary life.

In this thesis, I adopt the social definition of culture which focuses on ordinary human behaviour in lived realities, in particular, to Saudi Arabia.

Culture can be classified as Culture with a capital 'C' and culture with a small 'c'. Culture with a capital 'C' refers to great moments in cultural history such as music, drama or literature. It represents the outstanding artistic life of a community, including famous writers and artists. On the other hand, culture with a small 'c' indicates features of human daily life such as the beliefs, norms and customs that govern human practices (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). The present study subscribes to culture with a small 'c' because it focuses on the participants' perspectives of the role of culture at the local, Saudi level, on the learners' academic writing experiences in Saudi Western University.

There is another aspect of culture in the literature, the influence of modernist versus post-modernist perspectives on the understanding of social realities. Modernists place greater emphasis on the geographically-bound methods of defining human society,

while post-modernists emphasise the social groupings which exist inside a particular nation or region, (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

According to Geertz (1973), there are two possible ways of understanding culture: the essentialist and the non-essentialist. The former describes culture as stable, fixed and homogenous in nature and the latter understands it as unstable, flexible and a dynamic in nature. Essentialist culture is used to refer to huge groupings of people in geographical locations, (Rich, 2011). Hofstede (2001, p.9, cited in Holliday, 2011, p.6) defines culture as "a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". In this view, culture is used to include people who share the same common features within a particular nation or culture and exclude those who do not.

The essentialist concept of nationalism, the constructed society, developed in Europe in the nineteenth century. In developing countries, governments have recognised the need for unity in their citizens, including support for common education and health programmes (Holliday, 2011). In the context of Saudi Arabia, groups from different backgrounds but who share the same Saudi national identity also share the same language, religion and norms and can freely talk as they share an overarching identity.

On the other hand, the non-essentialist idea of culture sees it as a mobile notion that can refer to any group of people who are distinguished from other groups in terms of their needs and purposes at a particular time and occasion (Holliday, 2011). In this view, people can create their own cultural community based on their interests. For instance, someone from Saudi Arabia can admire the same American singer and enjoy listening to his/her songs in the same way as someone in another part of the world, so they can share a common perspective.

Hofstede's original work aimed to help people from different cultural backgrounds understand each other – what they value, how they think and react – in order to develop mutual understanding and respect in business debates. This means having an understanding of what is significant to each side, how things are settled, what is available for discussion and negotiation, and what is not or could cause offence. One criticism of Hofstede's research is that it was designed to help business negotiators appreciate the socio-cultural organisation of different countries and thus avoid

inappropriate behaviour while having an appreciation of what a particular culture sees as of paramount importance. In multicultural settings like universities, it can be very useful for avoiding misunderstandings between students and staff with different backgrounds. It also has a clear influence on areas of education/marketing – for instance, text books like *New Headway,* which have a particular cultural target audience and are guided by awareness brought about by Hofstede. However, the value of Hofstede's work is its examination of many countries and cultures - including Saudi Arabia – and inculcating a better understanding, albeit general, of how other cultures operate and how that affects their values (Hofstede, 2011). In the context of this study, it helps illuminate the distinctive constructs of Saudi culture (modernist, essentialist), which are important to the understanding of teaching and learning in general, and writing in English in particular in ELI. It is outside the focus of this study, but Hofstede's work might also help clarify some of the concerns confronting non-Saudi teachers working in the new context for them, of ELI.

3.5.1 Studies in EFL academic writing

This section reviews a number of studies in the field of academic writing in English, their concepts of writing, teaching approaches, and strengths and weaknesses, to provide the background for a clear understanding of the way writing in English is approached in the Arab world (e.g. Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Khan, 2011; Rabab'ah, 2003). Writing in a foreign language, such as English, is regarded as a complex and challenging process for foreign language learners. According to Langan and Winstanley (2005), difficulties arise from the complexity of the writing process, which includes understanding the writing task in the target language and supporting it effectively, as learners have to manage writing tasks in English, the target language (Al-Samadani, 2010). There are also issues of writer identity in English academic writing. For example, Ivanic (1998), Hyland (2001), suggest there are problems relating to the attitude to plagiarism in different cultures and other formal concerns which are outside the scope of this research, but which suggest a rich vein of useful research within the cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

With regard to second language writing pedagogy, Grami (2010) states that all L2 teaching writing approaches have their own weaknesses and strengths; however they can complement each other. Silva (1990) describes four main teaching approaches:

"controlled composition, current-tradition rhetoric, the process approach and English for academic purposes" (EAP) (p.12). It is also important to mention that the primary emphasis of 'controlled composition' and the 'current-tradition rhetoric' writing teaching approaches is to shape the final written product while the 'process approach' and 'content approach' place more emphasis on the cognitive learning writing process of the writer than the accuracy of the final product (Yiu, 2009). Although there are a number of L2 teaching writing approaches, the product and process approaches are the main ones along with the new genre approach (Badger and White, 2000), which is concerned with teaching writers how to communicate with readers by using language patterns meaningfully.

With regard to the main teaching approaches, the product approach is considered to be the main traditional approach, focusing on the final product, the written text rather than the writer. It places more emphasis on the students' capacity to produce grammatically correct and appropriately constructed essays (Grami, 2010). On the other hand, the process approach's major concern is the learners' cognitive development process, i.e. the learning that takes place by doing the writing task, so it focuses on the learner. This approach has been criticized for not paying attention to the academic and social context in which the text is produced (Yiu, 2009). The genre approach developed from the process approach; its main feature is the addition of the social aspects of written texts (Hyland, 2007).

With reference to Arab learners, they are mainly taught through a product-based pedagogy, but producing error-free pieces of writing in English can be challenging (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2003). Therefore, a number of researchers such as Abdul Haq (1982), Al-Fadda (2012), Al-Khasawneh (2010), Khan (2011), Rabab'ah (2003), and Zughoul and Taminian (1984) have investigated English learning/teaching writing difficulties in the Arab world, for instance, in Jordan, Sudan and Yemen and the context of the study, Saudi Arabia (see table 3.2). These studies have provided remarkable insights into the difficulties which may hinder Arab learners from acquiring the target language, especially writing practices. For instance, Al-Khasawneh (2010) highlights that employing the target language as the medium of instruction is challenging for foreign language learners, while Khan (2011) attributes learner weakness to various factors, including lack of exposure to the target language

and the traditional teaching methodology, which may not be appropriate to approach the complexity of writing skills. These studies cite the lack of natural exposure and inappropriate teaching methodologies in the Arab world and have concentrated on the kind of difficulties students face in their writing experiences.

Table 3. 2: Significant studies of writing in the Arab world (adapted from Rabab'ah, 2003; Al-Khasawneh, 2010)

Arab Researchers	Year of the study	Country of the Study	The Problem area
Kambal	1980	Sudan	Syntactic errors, for example, incorrect use of the verb 'to be', subject- verb agreement, and tense system
Abdul Haq	1982	Jordan	Writing skill is a challenging task
Zoghoul and Taminian	1984	Jordan	Lexical errors in communication: they commit gross lexical errors
Abbad	1988	Yemen	General weakness in the English language and especially in writing practice.
Al Fadda	2012	Saudi Arabia	Struggle to distinguish between formal and informal lexis Difficulties in identifying the appropriate skills for successful writing.

Al Fadda's study (2012) aimed to discover the challenges that Saudi students may face and which can hinder their learning progress in academic writing. He discovered that the students had limited understanding of the writing process and the writing process skills, such as brain-storming, planning and editing, perhaps reflecting the product-based teaching of writing in English. For example, learners would write an essay without planning what they were going to write about or who they were writing for. Additionally, he found students struggled to distinguish between formal and informal vocabulary. Furthermore, Grami (2010) conducted a study and identified

three types of learning challenges in the Saudi context: socio-cultural, pedagogical and legislative and administrative policy problems.

The challenges encountered by Saudi students in the learning of writing in English are documented in other similar Arab contexts such as Jordan. The next study considers the challenges that Arab EFL learners encounter when they write in English. For example, Rabab'ah and Melhem (2015) conducted a study in Amman, Jordan, which examined the strategies employed in creative writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It concentrated on examining the barriers that face EFL learners in the development of their creativity in writing. The sample population was ten EAP teachers and eight secondary students. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation. The results of this study categorized the data according to issues such as inadequate vocabulary, lack of unity and coherence, lack of encouragement, feedback, and motivation.

As can be seen from the review of the most relevant studies above, some focused on the challenges facing EFL university students in their learning of the English language. Most studies seem to have reached the same conclusion, that writing is the main challenge faced by students, even though these studies were carried out in various EFL contexts. The challenges EFL students face could have a number of causal links. For example, Al-Khairy (2013) conducted a study to examine the academic writing challenges of Saudi English major undergraduate students. He found that Saudi students demonstrated poor language proficiency, which could be an indication of an inappropriate English Language Teaching approach, which did not seem to foster student language proficiency, in particular, in writing. Students were very weak in writing, and committed many errors, concerning lexical items and irregular verbs. Their writing experiences seemed to be limited. Similarly, Grami (2010) conducted a study and found that to write an error-free piece of writing, Saudi students have to consider the several components of writing, such as grammar, appropriate vocabulary, punctuation and writing conventions; they need to know and use conventions that are familiar within a particular learning community which may be foreign to them (Hyland, 2009).

Current studies such as those of Al-Khairy (2013) and Grami (2010) have examined writing from the surface, product level of the English language. As a result, they fail

to mention that writing is a complex process that involves more than manipulating the structural patterns of the language. It involves issues of identity, epistemology and power, and cognitive skills such as critical thinking and the ability to construct an argument and using the writing conventions which are crucial for university studies (Lea and Street, 1998). In both studies, the results are similar in that approaching writing as a generic skill cannot promote effective learning experiences at tertiary level, as evidenced in the literature (Lillis, 2001).

However, in this study, I investigated the writing experiences of the respondents from an academic literacy point of view, examining writing as a situated experience in the target academic context.

Hujailan (2004) also conducted a study to evaluate English language proficiency. The study sample comprised of college students from 18 colleges in Saudi Arabia. Based on the results, college students were revealed to have low proficiency in all the language skills, and particularly so in writing. The study suggests that there is a need for instant remedial programmes combined with a brief review of teaching practicies and learning process in all the colleges in Saudi Arabia.

Shah et al. (2013) conducted an exploratory study to examine the EFL teachers' perceptions and experiences in a university in Saudi Arabia to show how these factors affect the classroom practices and environment. To gain a greater understanding of these phenomena, semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. The study utilised open-ended questions which were developed on the basis of the literature review of the target topic. The study sample comprised five English language instructors from English and non-English speeking countries. Participants had been selected by the purposive sampling stategy to access more qualified teachers who held recognised teaching qualifications. Based on the results of this study, there were three factors that affected classroom instruction negatively and hindered learning outcomes; namely, social, cultural and religious sensitivities, learners' negative attitude towards English language learning and institutional policies and procedures. Whereas, the fourth factor, the teachers' competence, had a mainly positive impact on classroom practices. The study noted that there was a need for appropriate training and qualification to promote teachers' ability to handle these factors in the Saudi context.

It is hoped that the knowledge drawn from the present study will not only help to improve learners' academic writing experiences, but will also reveal some of the gaps in earlier studies which the current research study hopes to fill, thus enriching the significance of this research.

3.6 Summary

The domination of American economic and technical developments after World War II, led to English becoming the de facto international language of communication in areas like, air traffic control and sea navigation as well as international businesses. Many technical and scientific publications are in English and the Social Science citation index, which counts the number of references to academic works, important for academic recognition, was developed in America. Consequently, for individual and country access to global markets many students now study through English, not only in English-speaking countries; several countries have English as the language of instruction in many postgraduate courses.

These developments brought the need for teaching pedagogies in response to both national and learners' needs, and for rigorous assessment procedures at tertiary level, to ensure students achieved proficiency in the skills required to successfully operate in their chosen fields. Writing is of particular importance in this context as the main university assessment tool, particularly for postgraduates, is through written work, the essay, dissertation or thesis.

This thesis is concerned with academic writing as socially constructed, drawing on Academic Literacies as its underlying theoretical construct. Linguistic Ethnography ideas of hierarchy reveal how the interviewees fit into the macro/meso/micro hierarchical system of Saudi Arabia and interviewing them within these separate cultural domains allowed them to speak as freely as possible within the formal structure and also give their views of the other levels (to investigate Bakhtin's concept of the inner voice of authority). The literature review considered the developments in teaching/learning English at tertiary level, from EFL to ESP, EAP, and the Study Skills approach, to then critically examining their contribution to and impact on the development of the more recent Academic Literacies approach. Insightful theoretical conceptualizations of writing (the main area of interest of Academic Literacies, rather than the multi skill concerns of the other approaches) were also examined, such as

Bourdieu's social perspective, along with research into academic writing practices as experienced and practiced in various contexts, including in Saudi Arabia, to show how they informed the present research.

Chapter Four – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the methodological considerations involved in planning and implementing this ethnographic study. It starts with a detailed discussion of the underlying theoretical, ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations of the research design and the rationale for selecting them. It discusses the objectives, the research questions, the ethical considerations of the research and the adaptations made to the research procedures and tools informed by the pilot study.

A detailed description of the ethnographic study methods used to investigate student academic writing practices is provided. This includes the multiple data collection methods involved and procedures used together with a description of the research participants and the rationale for selecting this sample. The chapter also presents the Linguistic Ethnographic analytical framework adopted for the analysis of data. The key findings are presented in chapter 5.

4.2 Methodological considerations

The methodology used in a research study takes into consideration "the theory of how research should be undertaken, including the theoretical and philosophical assumptions upon which research is based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.595). In this respect, it indicates a set of conventions, processes and the epistemological, ontological and ethical considerations that are interwoven into the conduct of the study (Cohen et al., 2000). This enquiry is based upon a particular ontological and epistemological stance, which is described in 4.2.1.

There are two general approaches to research in social science: deductive (positivist) and inductive (interpretive) (Saunders et al., 2009). In the deductive approach, the researcher does not get involved with the participants of the research, but takes the position of an observer of behaviour; the aim is to find patterns and regularities in the social world. The deductive approach is used to establish theories and

hypotheses. Research techniques are designed to gather quantitative data to examine hypotheses. The inductive approach, by contrast, is interpretivist; researchers are aware they may influence or be influenced by the data they collect and the participants they interview or observe. Scholars adopting this research approach collect qualitative, descriptive and in-depth data, and they hope to provide insights to develop new theories (Bryman, 2004; Ivankova and Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). This study uses an inductive interpretivist approach in the form of a qualitative ethnographic case study within an Academic Literacies framework, which helped to generate the topic, themes and research questions inductively. The data analysis is interpreted using the Linguistic Ethnographic analysis framework (Rampton, 2007, 2009).

There are three main types of methodological research paradigm or approach (Calderhead, 1996). Firstly, the positivist paradigm posits that there is only one objective reality; the observer is detached from it and does not influence it. Her purpose is to explore, discover, and analyse human behaviour, then generalise from the data to define future social occurrences. This is not the position taken in this research. Secondly, an interpretive paradigm presumes that reality is subjective according to the experience the observer brings to and takes away from the research, and the experience of the research participants. It is interested in interrogating an individual's interpretation of reality in order to understand human behaviour within its social context. This study aims to understand students' academic writing practices within an academic institution of a particular kind. This requires an interpretive approach to investigate each individual's interpretation of reality in order to understand human behaviour within the context of English language writing classes at Saudi Western University. From this perspective, meaning is socially constructed and knowledge is the creation of the researcher and the participants who co-create understandings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Thirdly, a critical paradigm is connected to emancipation through understanding. It focuses on informing people with unequal power relations in a particular context about the impact of their own actions. This study also aligns with the three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework of Fairclough (1992; 1995; 2001) and critical discourse analyst Van Dijk (2001), who both focus on revealing patterns of oppression, power and identity in discourse.

4.2.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

In social science, research design is highly influenced by the researcher's personal and social values (BERA, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Saunders et al. (2009) point out that researchers have to consider the ontology, epistemology, and methodology appropriate to their research. According to Crotty (1998), researchers need to first define their philosophical paradigm to decide their methodology. The design of the current research was influenced by the literature of social science studies where the main aim was to comprehend behaviour in a social context (Cohen et al., 2000; Crotty, 1998). This study is not interested in looking for statistical reliability through quantitative data and so qualitative research is appropriate to answer my research questions. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.8) point out, qualitative researchers "stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry".

This research is informed by the Academic Literacies model which challenges the normative approach to students' academic writing in higher education (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010). It also argues that writing practices represent a specific type of dominant discourse which has become the established neutral discourse of interaction and for the exchange of ideas in social institution contexts because of the exercise of its hegemonic power over the creation of knowledge (Lillis, 2001). This privileged discourse appears to eliminate other forms of experience and knowledge in higher education, which can lead to disregarding specific groups of students. In this sense, institutional discourses may perceive a deficit within individual learners and sustain the privileged-dominant discourse. The Academic Literacies model also argues that writing in English should be approached as a social practice associated with individual communication as well as interaction with others, which implies a constructivist and interpretive ontological and epistemological framework (Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006).

Ontology is a branch of philosophy which seeks to explain the nature of being, reality, its organisation and how it works (Bryman, 2004; Saunders et al., 2009). On the other hand, epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p.8). According to Blaikie (2000, p.8),

epistemology is associated with "what can be counted as knowledge, what can be known, and what criteria such knowledge must satisfy in order to be called knowledge rather than belief". It relates to ontology; for example, an ontological position indicates a certain epistemological position and vice versa (Crotty, 1998).

There are two epistemological positions: objectivism and constructivism (Crotty, 1998). From the objectivist point of view, knowledge is independent of the researcher's beliefs. Knowledge is assumed to be objective, therefore, the role of the researcher is to stand back from the study and look for (numerical) evidence and so employ quantitative methods in order to discover the 'truth' (Wellington, 2000). It is assumed that there is such a thing as the truth independent of social constructs and human perception. This is not the position taken in this research. Interpretivists and constructivists view knowledge as multiple and subjective. The fundamental assumption underpinning their belief is that knowledge is socially constructed and interpreted by individuals (Saunders et al., 2012). Constructivists also assert that: each participant has his/her own description of their experiences in the social world; therefore, a diversity of meanings is expected, the meanings are constructed by the individual's historical and cultural norms and interaction with others (Cresswell, 2009; Potter, 1996), and there are no social truths until they are shaped and constructed by the individual's interactions with others and the world (Hartas, 2010). The researcher then interprets the findings of the study in relation to his/her personal, cultural and, historical experiences (Cresswell, 2009).

In other words, adopting the constructivist epistemological position means that knowledge is subjective and based on human perception, which changes and develops according to the context. There is no absolute truth waiting to be revealed (Opie, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.207) note that in constructivist research, the "investigator and the object of investigation are interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds". The constructivist position requires qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews in order to discover the underlying information, and questions and hypotheses can emerge along with the research and data production. Constructivist and interpretivist positions are closely linked and assert that "social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman, 2004, p.17).

From the constructivist's point of view, social actors are important within social phenomena. Social reality is created by individuals and shifts constantly (Bryman, 2004). Within this view, reality is multiple and subjective; knowledge is socially constructed within a context (Blaikie, 2007). As Schwandt (2000) explains, researchers view the world from the participants' perspective rather than their own historical level. For instance, different researchers may adopt a constructivist approach to the same data but come to different conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009).

In the light of this discussion, I see constructivism and interpretivism as relevant to my stance and my research questions and methods which investigate how individuals develop meaning as well as how meaning is developed through common interpretations, shared practices and language within a social and cultural context. I am interested in the participants' understanding from their points of view. I am also concerned about how the student's different academic writing experiences may be socially constructed. This position influenced the research framework of the study. I am aware that as a member of the socio-cultural group under investigation, I may influence the way in which I interpret participants' experiences about student writing in higher education. The main focus of the research is to discover the participants' own understanding of their particular experiences.

Accepting knowledge as socially constructed raises a question about the researcher's identity. Stanley and Wise (1983, p.150) suggest that "the presence of the researcher, with the usual complement of human attributes can't be avoided". It is necessary, therefore, for the researcher to locate herself/himself within the process of knowledge production and to reflect on her/his role in the data collection and data analysis processes. Reflexivity is a way of carrying this out in doctoral research. Bourdieu (1988, p.1) argues that there are "special difficulties involved first in breaking with inside experience and then in reconstituting the knowledge which has been obtained by means of this break". This suggests the need to attempt to make the insider an outsider, to problematise dominant practices and to theorize new practices.

Approaches such as new literacies, ethnography and poststructuralism challenge realism as an underlying philosophy. They reject the notion of writing as a "natural means for the expression of truth and knowledge" (Scollon and Scollon, 1981, p.44)

and situate 'essay literacy' and writing (Trimbur, 1990) as specific form of social and cultural practice (Scollon and Scollon, 1981). The constructivist position is evident in poststructuralism, which has particular relevance to writing. According to poststructuralist theory, discourse is located and performative. Foucault (1972) suggests that discourse illustrates specific systems of knowledge and power that are open to deconstruction by readers or listeners and are contested. Derrida (1976) suggests that there are a number of representations - discourse is not restricted to language - and justifications which can be interpreted by interlocutors or viewers to make meanings.

Furthermore, from a constructionist perspective, replication is difficult because no two sets of circumstances are the same. Contexts and time are all evolving and dynamic, so one set of circumstances or viewpoint will not be the same in every way as another. The way round the problem is to see if there are any constants – things common to both or generally in common, like age, nationality, number of years in education, teaching experience (part of the context in this study) – and then look at the differences between the participants and their experiences (the variables) in the analysis.

4.3 Research methodology

This section aims to present the main methodological approaches - Academic Literacies – the theoretical framework, Linguistic Ethnography – the methodological framework, and Ethnography – the research method (see figure 4.1). The two theoretical notions provide a broad framework for gathering and analysing the data in the research and help to interpret the data analysis results which are linked to the present research questions.

While the AL approach provided the theoretical benchmark of an ideal writing situation in tertiary education where students had as much input into learning as teachers, to discover the reasons behind current practices in the Saudi Western University (the pseudonym of the university studied) required further investigative tools. LE's view of the hierarchies within discourse which reflect the socio-cultural context made it appropriate as the main analytical tool to discover the influences on course delivery and how teaching and learning were perceived in Saudi Western

University. Discourse was analysed from an LE perspective -which also supplied the concept of the hierarchical framework of the study - and related views of the impact of socio-cultural context on learning and education policy. The intersection of Academic Literacies and Linguistic Ethnography will be discussed in the following section.

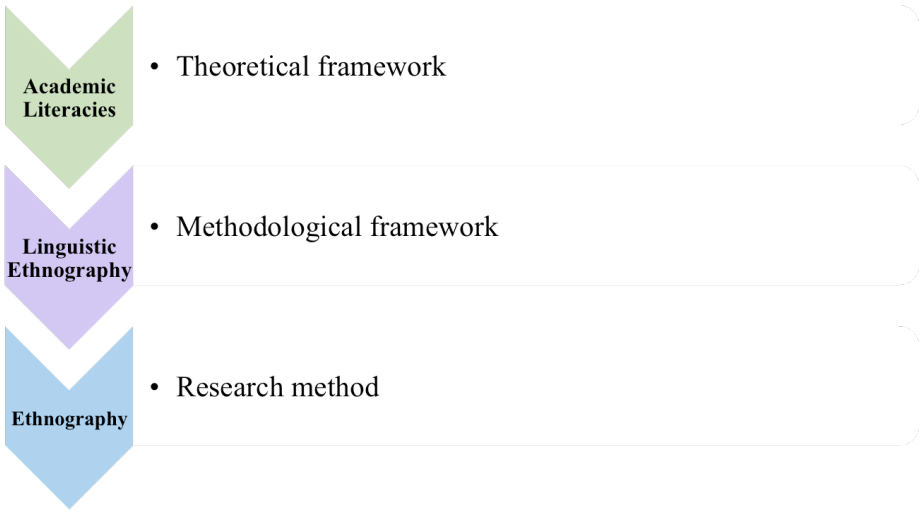


Figure 4. 1: The different approaches to data collection and analysis with information on key elements of each.

4.3.1 The methodological framework: Linguistic Ethnography

As noted in chapter 3, review of the literature, the Academic Literacies approach was adopted as the theoretical framework for the current ethnographic study. The overarching theoretical framework is the ideals of Academic Literacies and its critique of the Study Skills approach as a construct. The Academic Literacies approach argues that the view that students can be taught good writing skills outside the subject of their study is wrong. This view provides the overarching concept from which to consider how far writing practice in Saudi Western reflects Academic Literacies' student-centered approach or the critique of the Study Skills approach as focusing only the surface features of language. The Academic Literacies approach's identification of the basic principles and concepts it perceives as underlying the Study Skills and Academic Socialisation approaches provided me with the scaffolding for a critical framework from which to develop my research.

The Academic Literacies model claims that writing is rooted in particular settings and produced and regulated through interactions at the micro-level and situated

within broader social processes at the meso and macro levels (Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010). There was a need for a methodological approach which connected the study of culture, typical of ethnographic focus, with an emphasis on the discourse functions of talk and text. Therefore, I adopted the Linguistic Ethnography approach as the methodological framework for the present study as it attempts to connect Ethnography which "chops up every object into microscopic parts that are very often extraordinarily relevant for understanding the dynamics of the social value of these practices" (Blommaert et al., 2007, p.142) with linguistic analysis which "seeks to generalise about language structure and use, and typically only looks beyond what is actually said/signed/written when implied meaning is highly conventionalized" (Rampton et al., 2004, p.4).

Creese (2008, p.229) defines Linguistic Ethnography as a "theoretical and methodological development orientated towards particular, established traditions but defining itself in the new intellectual climate of late modernity and poststructuralism". Linguistic Ethnography, with roots in anthropology, linguistics and ethnography, falls within the wider area of qualitative case study research and what that implies for the methodology/methods and tools (instruments) employed (Rampton et al., 2004). It also has antecedents in the New Literacies Studies movement (Coffin and Donohue, 2012), which also underpins the underlying philosophical ideas of Academic Literacies – the theoretical framework of this research. Researchers in this movement adopt ethnographic approaches to examine the literacy practices situated in a particular context and network of power (e.g. Street et al., 2006).

As discussed earlier, I was interested in investigating student writing practices in English through the lens of the Academic Literacies model and the related Linguistic Ethnography framework both of which see writing as being embedded in particular settings and produced and regulated through interactions at the micro-level and situated within broader social processes at the meso and macro levels (Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010). The Linguistic Ethnography approach therefore was adopted as the methodological framework for the present ethnographic study. It *contributed to the research design – the methodology of identifying the macro-,*

meso- and micro-level interview, documentary data collection as well as data analysis. The relevance of Linguistic Ethnography to this study is:

a) It helped to locate the interviewees within the macro/meso/micro levels of hierarchy and guided the questions and data analysis.
b) It allowed me to draw on elements of ethnography to examine the context of communication. The use of ethnographic approaches can capture and understand the meaning within (certain social relations, institutional routines and interactional histories, produced and framed by agents with expectations at the different societal levels: the micro-level (teachers and students), meso-level (middle management) and macro-level (top of the hierarchy) interview, the documentary data collection as well as the data analysis. The integration of contextual resources also enabled me as a discourse analyst to present a reading of the data based on the insights of people who participated in the particular experience and my own interpretation and reflection as a researcher.
c) It gives voice to individuals and might suggest that individuals within the micro/meso/macro level groups are not as homogeneous as the structure of society suggests, though most will probably confirm to Hofstede's model of Saudi cultural typography (see chapter 2 for more detail). This works with Academic Literacies, whose aim is to give voice to alternative literacies and not accept the dominant entrenched discourse (hegemony).
d) The analysis of language is needed to understand its importance and position in the world. It also offers "both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity" (Rampton et al., 2004, p.2). The analysis of text to find deeper meanings than the surface use of words alone underlies the concepts of Linguistic Ethnography.
e) LE is a very flexible approach which picks out features which illustrate hierarchical patterns in utterances, hence it fits this research interview framework, observation, documentary data and student essays, but can also suggest evidence of freer expression or the context in which it can occur (Rampton et al., 2004).

f) It allows the hidden voice in a speaker's utterances to be revealed (Bakhtin, 1981). In this study, I used Bakhtin's (1981) hybrid construction concept to analyse the responses at the meso and macro levels - see research questions two and three for further information. This concept will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.1.1 Bakhtin's concept

Bakhtin's (1981) hybrid construction refers to how an utterance from a single speaker in terms of its grammatical (syntactic) and creational markers, can have within it two utterances, in terms of values, styles and manner. A speaker seems to have a double-voiced utterance when the views of another, usually the official discourse rather than his/her own views, appears in his/her discourse, although they may not be aware this.

I used Bakhtin's hybrid construction to analyse the responses of the meso and macro level (see chapters 6 and 7 for further information). It allows the hidden voice in a speaker's utterances to be revealed. For instance, standard responses which echoed the official view may include utterances concerning traditions, beliefs and the accepted system or way of performing things. This can happen for a number of reasons such as the interviewee's wish to avoid responsibility, or to maintain group solidarity and group responsibility or they may simply be unaware of repeating an official stance. Speakers may consciously repeat the official view to maintain their social position in the hierarchy, maintain face and avoid being critical of the current situation. The concept of the inner voice of authority reflects the hierarchical socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia. This will be further discussed in chapter four.

Furthermore, how this filtered down into classroom practices and assessment was described and analysed using Bakhtin's indicators to detect the official or professional voice within those of the interviewees - or equally, the voice of a higher authority in the teaching document 'guidelines', like the pacing and assessment procedures, is fixed and cannot be negotiated. (This lack of negotiation is a strong criticism by Academic Literacies, as an indication of power imbalance.)

4.3.2 Influence of Ethnography

Ethnography is defined as a research methodology which pays attention to describing and interpreting social experiences through field study (Saunders et al., 2009). Blommaert (2006) states that ethnography is a qualitative method which endeavours to examine broader social and cultural phenomena or experiences so has the potential to present a holistic understanding of a particular phenomenon or experience. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.3) give a comprehensive definition in relation to data collection:

> Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.

Furthermore, Blommaert (2007) points out that scientific approaches can minimise the complexity of certain phenomena, while ethnography makes the analysis and description of social phenomena possible. Ethnographic research is more practical for researchers who seek to investigate the intensity and complexity of social events, by immersing themselves in the culture and the participant's everyday lives to understand the participant's social world and their individual perspectives.

As discussed in the literature review, ethnographic approaches are frequently used in Academic Literacies studies (Lillis and Scott, 2007; Seloni, 2012) because ethnographic methodology encompasses multiple data sources and a number of methods of analysis – the 'holistic pull' as Lillis (2008, p.356) describes it – key aspects of ethnographic research. Ethnographic methodology is consistent with the Academic Literacies approach – the theoretical framework of this study.

I was interested in understanding student writing practices within a specific social setting. The relevance of the ethnographic approach to this research is: (a) its practicality and potential for exploring complex social experiences or phenomena (Blommaert, 2007); (b) its multiple data collection methods in order to understand a particular phenomenon and to detail the macro-, meso-, and micro- contexts of this phenomena (Blommaert et al., 2007); (c) its in-depth consideration of social

phenomena or experiences (Coffin and Donohue, 2012; Hammersley, 1990); and (d) its focus on exploring the principles, practices and agents' interactions which constitute and reflect the particular social context in which the study occurs.

The interviews and observation research instruments were piloted over two weeks – before the main study was conducted (see section 4.3.5) – with EFL teachers and students from the same institute as the participants of the main study in order to identify any ethical or other concerns that might emerge before the main study and to give the researcher the time to reflect. In this study, the ethnographic data collection (interview, observation, documentary sources and samples of student writing) took approximately three months in order to explore student writing practices in the English Language Institute of Saudi Western University.

There are seven key criteria of ethnographic research used in the study of education settings: (a) the focus on the study of cultural formation and maintenance; (b) the use of multiple methods and thus the generation of rich and diverse forms of data; (c) the direct involvement and long-term engagement of the researcher; (d) the recognition that the researcher is the main research instrument; (e) the high status given to the accounts of participants' perspectives and understandings; (f) the engagement in a spiral of data collection, hypothesis building and theory testing-leading to further data collection; and (g) the focus on a particular case in depth, but providing the basis for theoretical generalization (Troman et al., 2006, p.1). The key criteria such as the use of multiple methods, the high status given to the accounts of participants' perspectives and understanding and the focus on a particular case in depth were kept in mind in the design and processes involved in the present study and are discussed in the next sections.

According to Hammersley (1990, p.10), ethnography has been criticised for not meeting the characteristics of science as "ethnographic data is peculiarly subject to bias" and ethnographical results cannot be replicated. Likewise, (Foley, 2002) argues that traditional ethnographers might be considered unscientific and subjective. In this study, however, human behaviour and actions differ so radically from the behaviour of physical objects, making a scientific approach inappropriate. I examined staff and student behaviours in their daily learning environment (not under experimental

conditions or restrictions) allowing the ethnographic nature of the research to reveal knowledge of academic writing practices.

Another criticism concerns how ethnographic work is written and presented, which can privilege the ethnographer's readings and interpretations (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). In the way the research is written up, the narrative conventions used should foster reflection on the practice of ethnography and power relations between researcher and the researched (Van Maanen, 1988). I drew therefore on narrative strategies and techniques to represent the work such as the transcription of interviews and observation notes. This allows for greater objectivity, and mitigates any influence of the researcher on the phenomena being studied or the participants.

Ethnographers need substantial time and effort to create a good relationship with participants to build trust, which could be considered one of its drawbacks (Lillis, 2008). Time is needed to encourage participants to reflect on practices to discover the connection between context and text. Participants have the opportunity to present their own insights, interpretations and perspectives to consolidate the study. Sarangi (2007) also notes that the combination of multiple sources of data (interview, observation, documentary sources and samples of student writing, as in this qualitative ethnographic case study) can create a 'thick description', which facilitates the examination of a particular social phenomena.

4.3.3 Research questions

As discussed in chapter 1 (introduction) the study seeks to investigate the causes of the low levels of English writing ability in Saudi Western University. In order to investigate the perceptions of the different actors at different levels within the hierarchical structure of Saudi higher education (see figure 4.2), the following personnel were interviewed.

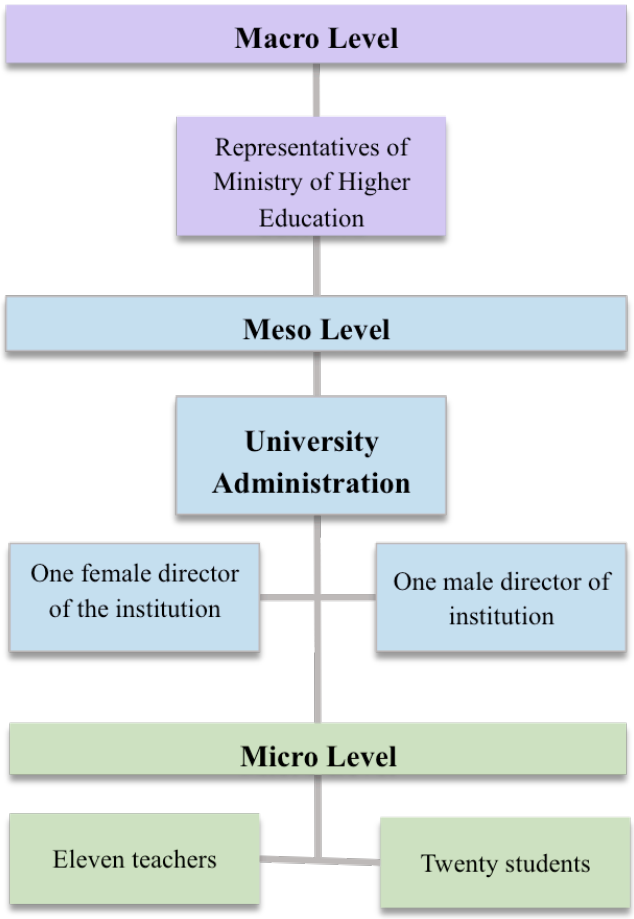


Figure 4. 2: The current organisational culture

A. Micro-level (teachers and students) question:

- Question 1: What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English language institute in Saudi Western University?

This question aimed to gain insights into how students and staff understand and interpret writing practices at higher education level. Data to answer this question was collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven English staff and twenty undergraduate students (all female), my classroom observations and 12 assignments written by students.

B. At the meso-level (middle management):

- Question 2: What role does the English Language Institute play in framing student writing practices?

To explore further the key institutional discourses which shape student writing practices, assessment and feedback given on it, I also gathered meso level data

through semi-structured interviews with two directors of the ELI as well as some institutional documentation relating to the organisation and planning of courses, the lesson targets and course books set by the ELI.

C. At the macro-level (top of the hierarchy):

- Question 3: What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role in supporting student writing in higher education?

To answer this question, I collected macro level data on the top power structure through semi-structured interviews with two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education. They were in-depth interviews which took around one hour and a half.

- Question 4: To what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context?

This question explores whether and how far the Academic Literacies framework/approach is applicable to the ELI context, with particular focus on the language proficiency of the students.

4.3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethics is an important concept in conducting research in the social sciences. It involves the way in which a researcher plans his/her research, contacts the target institutions and participants, conducts, collects, analyses and presents data (Saunders et al., 2009). Cooper and Schindler (2008, p.34) describe ethics as the "norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others".

In the field of social science, The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) offers ethical guidelines that highlight the need for well-versed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. The University of Nottingham's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics (University of Nottingham, 2013) also presents the ethical norms for researchers in social science. This research considered several ethical issues during the entire research process based around BERA (2011)

guidelines and the University of Nottingham's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics documentation.

The central ethical issue was obtaining both the institution's and the participants' consent to their involvement in this ethnographical research (BERA, 2011). After, ethics permission from the University of Nottingham was granted, a letter from my supervisor indicating his support for the conduct of my research in Saudi Arabia and field work plans were sent to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in London. After that, permission was obtained from the English Language Institute in Saudi Western university, which allowed me access to institute documents and classrooms and to invite representatives of the Ministry of Saudi Higher Education, the directors of the ELI, academic staff and students to participate in this ethnographical study.

Obtaining the participants' formal consent was necessary for the present study. Participating in this study was voluntary and some subjects might not have been interested in co-operating. I provided the participants with consent forms to sign before the research began (see appendix 1). I informed them through an oral and written description of all the steps and the aspects of this research in order to gain their trust and interest in taking part in it. I also answered all of their questions concerning their role in this research. Once the participants had agreed to take part in this study, they were asked to sign consent forms. The consent process was also designed to protect their right to participate without coercion. As was made clear to the subjects, they had the right to refuse to participate in this study or to withdraw from it at any point during the period of the research, which was over three months.

With regard to the interviews, all the subjects agreed to their interviews being audio-recorded. They were also told that all personal information would be erased from the transcripts and their names would be replaced with pseudonyms throughout the transcription process.

With regard to selecting participants from the Ministry of the Higher Education, the aim was to gain a broad perspective of the academic writing aims, beliefs, ideology and experience. Then, invitations were sent to 7 male representatives. Only two representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education agreed to participate. Two subjects expressed their interest in participating in the study but were overwhelmed

with work and excused themselves. Two subjects did not reply to emails, while another expressed his lack of interest in participating in this study. The current research is limited to the reported conceptions of two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education. It is useful to consider a range of perspectives on academic writing policy and this is a significant area for further research.

With reference to (BERA, 2011) guidelines and confidentiality of the data are a significant aspect of any social research. It is important to ensure that the institution's name and participants' information are not disclosed under any circumstances, are accessible only to the researcher and will not be made public for any reason. Therefore, to protect the anonymity, confidentiality and non-traceability of the institution and the participants in this study, pseudonyms have been used.

Since the current research involved observation sessions, it was important not to interrupt the tutors and their students during classes. As a result, I remained a passive observer and sat at the back of the classroom in order to note everything concerning the writing experience. Teachers were also told that my attendance was not to evaluate them but to gather data that might answer the research questions, to encourage teachers and students to act naturally in their classrooms.

An interesting ethical issue relevant to the participants of research is incentive, what might encourage participants to engage in the study. Silverman (2001) remarks that incentives might be related to the social contribution of the study and moral values. For example, in the case of the present study, participants such as teachers (11), the two directors of the English language institution (2) and the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher education (2) might feel that exchanging thoughts about writing could enhance their knowledge and experience. Students may have thought their writing practices would be promoted and enhanced through participating in the study or they could be seen as trouble-makers. However, all the students (20) were informed that their participation would not affect their university grades. It was important for me to ensure the students understood their role in this research and its impact on them.

It was a primary concern for me to give something back to the research participants for co-operating. Although, all the participants, for instance, students, teachers,

directors of English language institution and representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education did not know beforehand that they would get a gift for participating, they were all thanked and offered small gifts. They received a letter of appreciation, expressing my gratitude for their participation in the current research. Moreover, participants were given a copy of a book about writing in English to keep for themselves.

4.3.5 Pilot study

I conducted the study in two stages. The first stage was a small-scale pilot study with 4 subjects in September 2012 and the second stage was the main study in February 2013. I first describe the pilot study and its outcome and how it affected the research procedure. The main purposes of carrying out a small-scale study was because "it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated" (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002, p.33). In this study, however, I conducted the pilot study to identify any confusion or ambiguity in the interview questions and to test the amount of time necessary for them to be answered. I was also interested in checking the observation reliability and validity of the answers to the research questions. Thomas (1998) identifies five main requirements which need to be considered in order to pilot a study. The subjects must share common characteristic with those who will participate in the main study; pilot subjects have to be informed that their contribution will help modify the main research procedures, tools and materials and the research methods must be clarified to the pilot subjects. It is necessary to collect information about issues that pilot subjects may face with piloting procedures, tools and materials, and use the pilot study results to modify the main research procedures, tools and instruments.

The small-scale study was conducted in the ELI with two EFL foundation students and two EFL teachers because they shared similar characteristics with those who would participate in the main study. The pilot subjects were then randomly chosen from a possible sample of 20 students and 24 teachers within the above parameters for two reasons: (a) to avoid sampling bias; and (b) to guarantee that the selected participants accurately represented the entire population. For instance, the students

who participated in the pilot study shared the same age, gender and number of years of education as the main subjects and the teachers had similar teaching experience. Though a pilot study is conducted with a limited number of participants, it is still able to trigger useful insights for the main study. The pilot subjects were interviewed individually. The interview schedules had 10 questions that encouraged participants (2 students) and (2 teachers) to discuss the practices of writing in English when engaged in the writing process and to give their opinions about the clarity and relevance of the questions to avoid any misunderstandings in the main research. The length of interviews varied from 45 minutes to an hour. Interviews were recorded in Arabic with the subject's permission. For ethical consideration, the pilot subjects were informed that their feedback would help revise the research procedures, materials and instruments. After I had conducted the interviews, I analysed the data, which had been transcribed and translated into English before being coded using Nvivo, which helps to manage and organise qualitative data.

Teacher interview questions

The outcomes of the pilot study provided insights to revise the interviews and make them more efficient. For example, two teaching staff interview questions from the interview list were identified as being too broad to elicit a straightforward response:

- What is the main criticism you would make of the English writing curriculum?
- Have you found good ways to help your students?

These questions were revised to be clearer and more direct to elicit accurate information from the participants. The pilot study participants' feedback therefore was useful for improving the form and clarity of these questions. The two questions directed at the teaching staff were revised to become:

- Do you think the English writing curriculum promotes good writing experiences? Why do you think this?
- How do you perceive your relationship with your students?

Furthermore, new and pertinent issues were also identified such as the students' previous academic writing experiences. This suggested that further questions were required, for instance:

Student interview questions

- Could you outline your previous writing experiences at school?
- How do think your previous writing experiences affected your current writing practices?

It was also necessary to pilot the time the participants of the study would need to answer the ten research questions on the interview checklist. The length of interviews varied from 45 minutes to an hour, which was not sufficient to cover all the questions in some cases. I therefore decided to allocate an hour and half for the interviews in the main study.

The pilot study for observations took place in a writing classroom in the same context as in the main study. I observed a writing class and practiced taking notes. I also observed the class to familiarise myself with observation procedures. I used an observation schedule to help me focus on particularly important issues to answer the research questions. I also took field notes about the undergraduate student writing practices in English I observed. The data collected was transcribed and coded using Nvivo. The small-scale study revealed two key issues that had not been considered. Firstly, new issues about student writing practices were identified to include in the observation schedule. Secondly, it was difficult for me to observe everything that happened in the classroom. I made clear notes in the classroom, but, these notes could not capture everything because multiple acts took place simultaneously. It was also impossible to recall later everything that had happened. As Walliman (2001, p.242) remarks, "so much happens at once that it is impossible to observe it all and record it". I therefore decided to use an 'audio recorder' to record everything that occurred in the classroom concerning student writing experiences. In the pilot observation study, visiting a classroom was also beneficial to practice making recordings with minimal environmental background distortion.

4.4 Research design: main study

4.4.1 Research context

This ethnographic study was carried out in one of the government universities in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Western University, which follows the programmes designed by the Ministry of the Higher Education (see chapter two for a detailed description of Saudi Arabia's higher education system). The target university offers a wide range of

academic programmes in various fields, such as foreign languages, including English and French, social science, medicine, science and business for students. It grants bachelor degrees, and also offers postgraduate programmes leading to Master's and PhD degrees. The English Language Institute, where this research was conducted, is the main and the only language centre at Saudi Western University. As illustrated in table 4.1, all students have to complete four compulsory English language foundation courses before they can enrol in their future academic disciplines.

Table 4. 1: Four language courses

Course title and code	Description
English language level one - ELI 101	Beginners' course
English language level two - ELI 102	Elementary level course
English language level three - ELI 103	Pre-intermediate level course
English language level four - ELI 104	Intermediate level course

4.4.2 Research participants

Eleven English language instructors from English and non-English speaking countries participated in this study (see table 4.2), as well as twenty Saudi Arabian female students in their foundation year at Saudi Western University who shared certain common features like age, gender, years of education (see table 4.3). In addition, two directors of the English Language institution of Saudi Western University and two representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education were interviewed. For further information, see table 4.4 and table 4.5.

Table 4. 2: Profile of English language instructors (all women)

#	Pseudonym	Nationality	Qualifications	Teaching experiences	Teaching classes
1	Teacher_1	Egyptian	BA	18 years	ELI 102
2	Teacher_2	Saudi	BA	10 years	ELI 101
3	Teacher_3	Egyptian	BA, MA, CELTA, Diploma	30 years	ELI 104
4	Teacher_4	Sudanese	BA, MA, PhD	20 years	ELI 104
5	Teacher_5	Saudi	BA	18 years	ELI 102
6	Teacher_6	British	BA, MA, PhD	20 years	ELI 103
7	Teacher_7	Saudi	BA	17 years	ELI 103
8	Teacher_8	Saudi	BA, MA	6 years	ELI 104
9	Teacher_9	Jordanian	BA, MA, PhD	6 years	ELI 103
10	Teacher_10	Tunisian	BA, Diploma	25 years	ELI 104
11	Teacher_11	American	BA, MA	20 years	ELI 103

Table 4. 3: Profile of undergraduate students (all women)

#	Pseudonym	Age	English level[4]	Hours of classes per week	Future subject
1	Student_1	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Engineering
2	Student_2	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Medicine
3	Student_3	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Science-Nutrition
4	Student_4	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Art- English language
5	Student_5	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Business
6	Student_6	20	ELI 103	18 hours	Medicine
7	Student_7	18	ELI 104	18 hours	Science- dentist
8	Student_8	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Mathematics
9	Student_9	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Engineering
10	Student_10	20	ELI 103	18 hours	Medicine
11	Student_11	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Science- surgeon
12	Student_12	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Medicine
13	Student_13	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Art- English language
14	Student_14	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Science- surgeon
15	Student_15	20	ELI 103	18 hours	Genome and Biotechnology
16	Student_16	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Science
17	Student_17	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Business
18	Student_18	20	ELI 103	18 hours	Science-Nutrition
19	Student_19	19	ELI 104	18 hours	Science-Nutrition
20	Student_20	19	ELI 103	18 hours	Art- English language

The staff and undergraduate students from the micro (classroom) level were all female and provided information to answer research question one. They presented their own interpretations of student writing practices in the ELI in Saudi Western University. The background of single gender teaching at university level which has a cultural aspect is discussed in chapter two – context of the study.

[4] The English for Academic Purposes course comes first, and subject study later.

Table 4. 4: Profile of the directors of the English Language Institute (one man one woman)

#	Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Qualifications	Experience of supervising
1	Director_1	Saudi	F	BA, MA, PHD	25 years
2	Director_2	Saudi	M	BA, MA, PHD	20 years

Table 4. 5: Profile of the representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education (all men)

#	Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Qualifications	Years of working in the Ministry of Higher Education
1	Representative_1	Saudi	M	BA, MA, PHD	18 years
2	Representative_2	Saudi	M	BA, MA, PHD	30 years

4.4.3 Sampling procedures

Although researchers in the social science can often collect data from a target population by using two main types of sample design – probability design (or random sampling) and purposive design (or non-random or non-probability sampling) – there are actually four taxonomies of sampling, as shown in table 4.6: probability, purposive, convenience and mixed methods sampling. The four categories are not discussed in detail as the focus was probability and purposive sampling in this study.

Table 4. 6: Taxonomy of sampling in the social and behavioural sciences (Teddlie and Yu, 2007)

1.	Probability Sampling A. Random sampling B. Stratified sampling C. Cluster sampling D. Sampling using multiple probability techniques
11.	Purposive Sampling A. Sampling to achieve representativeness or comparability B. Sampling special or unique cases C. Sequential Sampling D. Sampling using multiple purposive techniques
111.	Convenience Sampling A. Captive Sample B. Volunteer sample

IV.	Mixed Methods Sampling A. Basic mixed methods sampling B. Sequential mixed methods sampling C. Concurrent mixed methods sampling D. Multilevel mixed methods sampling E. Combination of mixed methods Sampling strategies

Probability design involves "selecting a relatively large number of units from a population, or from specific subgroups (strata) of a population, in a random manner where the probability of inclusion for every member of the population is determinable" (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, p.713). The advantage of probability sampling is that it minimises sampling bias and every member of the wider population has an equal probability of being selected from a population as the selection is completely outside the researcher's control. Its key aim is to achieve 'representativeness' so that the selected sample accurately represents the entire population (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). Saunders et al. (2009, p.212) point out the significance of random sampling techniques in certain circumstances. These are: (a) It would be impracticable to survey the entire population; (b) budget constraints prevent surveying the entire population; (C) time constraints prevent surveying the entire population; and (d) the collection of data needs fast outcomes.

In comparison with non-probability sampling, using a random or probability sampling method is more difficult and costly but the outcome can be generalised from the sample being studied to the population of interest (Bryman, 2008, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007). In non-probability sampling, the researcher does not attempt to select a random sample from the target population, but s/he utilises a subjective approach to decide which members to include in the sample. Maxwell (1997) defines purposive sampling as when specific settings, individuals, or events are purposively selected for the significant information they can offer that might not be got from other sources. Battaglia (2008) states that a non-probability sampling design can be categorised into a) quota sampling; b) purposive sampling; and c) convenience sampling.

In order to draw valid conclusions for the entire study population, I used a probability design to select the students who participated in this research to generate a sample representative of that population. In the present study the number of students in the writing class varied (e.g. 26, 28, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35) (see table 4.7). I randomly selected 2 students from each class with fewer students (in classes with 26, 28, 28, 29 students) and 3 students from the larger classes to make a total of 20 from 8 classes. Furthermore, the 20 Saudi undergraduate students who participated in the present study had attended either private or public secondary school (see table 4.8). This was a variable within the population. The present study revealed that 12 students came from public schools and 8 came from private schools, according to their responses to one of the questions in the semi-structured interview.

Table 4. 7: Student sample

Writing classrooms	Students No.	Sample No.
1	33	3
2	30	3
3	35	3
4	32	3
5	29	2
6	26	2
7	28	2
8	28	2

Table 4. 8: Public/private school distribution of the students in the study

State/ public school No.	Private school No.
12	8

With regard to the teachers who participated in this study, I also used the probability or random sampling method. For instance, academic staff were randomly selected from different nationalities[5] including Saudi, Egyptian, American and Australian with different educational and teaching backgrounds in EFL for three reasons: (a) to increase the reliability and validity of the research; (b) to draw a valid conclusion that could be generalized; and (c) to avoid a 'volunteer' sample. In this sample participants were easily accessible and willing to engage in the study. There is no

[5]Nationality was not a significant factor in this study.

discussion of 'volunteer' sample in any detail in this study as probability sampling was used to select participants.

With regard to observation classes, 8 writing classrooms were selected for observation using purposive or non-random sampling. Writing classes were selected to yield information about the academic writing experiences.

4.4.4 The data division

The data division is primary (direct) sources such as interviews and observation where I collected data directly from informants, and secondary sources such as documents and the assignments which were written and assessed by the teachers and which I used for a different, academic purpose - evidence for my present research - than their original use.

1) **Primary data sources:**

a) **Interviews with**

- Bureaucratic/decision-making level representatives of higher education to gain insights into the value, principles and nature of the implementation of the regulations set by the Ministry of Education in relation to writing in EFL (see figure 4.3).

- Directors of English Language Institute at Saudi Western University responsible for implementing the regulations set by the Ministry of Higher Education at university level.

- Classroom teachers tasked with the practical implementation of the instructions of the other 2 interviewee groups, and students of English classes.

b) **Observation**

- Classroom observation: eight semi-structured observations took place in eight writing classrooms (at levels three and four) in order to explore the practice of writing in English;

2) Secondary data sources:

a. Institutional documents relating to the value, purposes and implementation of the practice of writing in English based on the regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education and institution decisions, for example, teacher guidelines and procedures for teaching writing, assignment details and assessment criteria.

b. Writing samples from the same students as I interviewed to investigate the writing practices at Saudi Western University

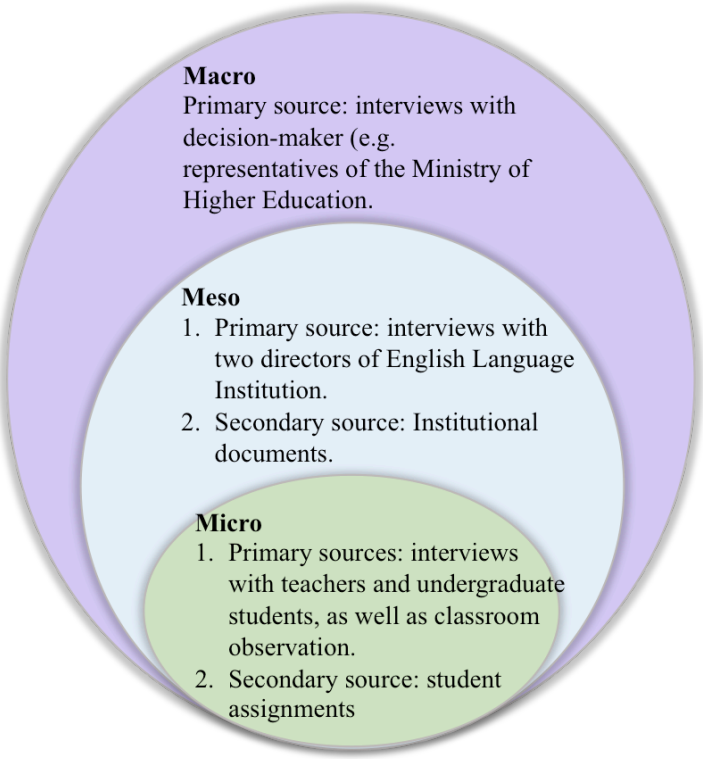


Figure 4. 3: The hierarchical levels which were the sources of the answers to the research questions

4.4.5 Data collection

The three main methods that I used to gather data for the present research were interview, observation and textual data/discourse analysis (see figure 4.4). I have to make it clear that the observations came after the interviews and the processing of the interviews and the textual data. The observations, therefore, were used to verify and support and the two other sets of data. These methods situated me, the researcher, in a particular socio-historical position to acquire an emic/etic lens on the

text/context. The emic perspective refers to the insider, writer perspective and interpretation, but, the etic perspective refers to the outsider, researcher-analyst's perspective. These methods are significant strategies in Linguistic Ethnography and used in Academic Literacies studies. Lillis (2008, p.356) identifies a key feature of ethnographic work as the 'holistic pull', which indicates the use of various types of data sources and methods to triangulate the results. A detailed description of each method is presented below.

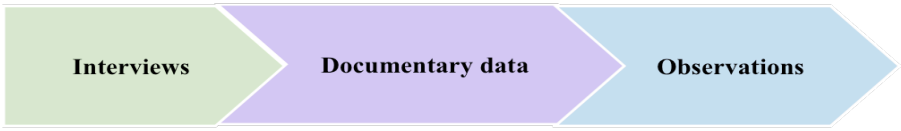


Figure 4. 4: Data collection sources

4.4.5.1 Triangulation

Cohen et al. (2007, p.141) define triangulation as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (as in this study). Triangulation can be also used to eliminate bias and possible subjective interpretations and to increase the reliability and credibility, especially in qualitative research, of the results (Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Creswell, 2012; Denscombe, 2010).

4.4.5.2 Interviews

An interview is a verbal communication between the researcher and the researched to gather considerable information about a specific phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2007). Interviews are used to gather the opinions, experiences and motivations of individuals on particular matters (Gill at al., 2008). It is a central strategy in educational research (Dawson, 2002) and the most common instrument in Academic Literacies to capture the ethnographic context and present the participants views on

the specific experience under examination, to justify observations that have been conducted during the study, or to offer further information concerning the cultural or social context of the study. Miller and Gladdner (1997, p.99) suggest "information about social worlds is achievable through in-depth interviewing". Interviews in Linguistic Ethnography pay attention to the setting in which texts are constructed and regulated, avoiding the superiority of the texts over interview subjects that may occur in other types of discourse analysis.

The epistemological and ontological 'architecture' of ethnography argues that there is no separation between language and text/culture and setting (Lillis, 2008). In academic writing research, there is an increase in the use of interviews resulting from the shift towards examining text in context (Ivanic, 1998). An ethnographer therefore needs to make explicit the relationship between text and context through the use of the heuristic of emic/etic perspectives (Blommaert, 2007). Ethnographic methodology encompasses a number of methods such as interview for reaching emic/etic perspectives. Emic and etic perspectives provide the researcher with an additional emic perspective from the individual subjects. For example, semi-structured interviews help to unpack more interesting insights (as in the present study) to elicit the subjects': (a) literacy history: the researcher elicits autobiographical information about academic literacy experiences in order to understand the current practices in the broader socio-historical contexts of student life; and (b) talk around the interview questions: the researcher can prompt students to talk and reflect on academic writing in order to find out what is important to them. 'Ethnographic sensibility' refers to the dynamic interplay between the 'emic' and 'etic' perceptions which take place during the research stages (Lillis, 2008). It is one of the main features of ethnographic studies.

Interview is a co-construction between the interviewer and the interviewee, situated within specific contexts and formed within their power relations and identities. There are three fundamental types of research interview: the structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview (Gill at al., 2008). Firstly, structured interviews have predetermined questions that all the interviewees are asked, with no variation and with or little or no space for follow-up questions to answers that need more justification and elaboration. This format is quick and easy

for researchers who are not practiced in interviewing and possibly have quantitative objectives. Secondly, semi-structured interviews contain of a list of major questions that help to define the areas to be examined but allow the researcher and respondents to diverge in order to elaborate or offer a detailed justification of an idea. This approach is useful because: (a) it offers interviewees a good amount of guidance on what to talk about; (b) is more flexible than a structured interview; (c) allows a degree of freedom and flexibility in gaining significant information from interviewees about a particular topic (Gill at al., 2008); (d) allows for the exploration of information that is significant to the interviewee but may not have earlier been considered as important by the researcher; and (e) allows the interviewer to think of new themes and ask new questions in the area of the research (Saunders et al., 2009).

Finally, unstructured interviews consist of open-ended (e.g. that do not require only a yes/no response or one from a limited set, as in multiple-choice) questions with no or little guidance on what to talk about. Respondents are free to choose how to answer. This format lacks predetermined questions and is performed with no or little organisation, so is very time-consuming, difficult to use and manage or organise the data as there may be few or no common themes in the respondents' answers. It may be useful as an initial study to identify topics of interest or relevance for further research.

To understand the participants' insights concerning academic writing, the semi-structured interview questions were carefully phrased. Saunders et al. (2009) point out that questions in semi-structured interviews are flexible so the researcher can delete, change the order or even add new questions he/she thinks are necessary to explore the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007; Gill et al., 2008). The interview questions in the present study had both closed and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions gave the participants a choice of responses, whereas, open-ended questions provided participants with the opportunity to freely express their points of view (Saunders et al., 2009). Open-ended questions were designed to get more information about the participants' perceptions of the practice of writing in English in the target context. Furthermore, there were 4 different sets of questions in this study. Each set was designed to address a particular group of participants – who each differed in their experience of or impact on academic writing at tertiary level – that

is, the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, the two University directors, and the 11 teachers and 20 students. A sample of the interview questions is presented in table 4.9 and the full list of these questions is in appendix (2).

Table 4. 9: Guidelines for interview questions

The hierarchical levels	Interview questions
Macro – government level	• What is the Ministry of Education's view of the importance of writing in English? • Have there been any educational changes concerning writing in English? If so, when and what are they? • What is the rationale behind these changes • What are they trying to achieve?
Meso – institutional level (University directors)	• How do you interpret/understand the regulations of the Ministry of Higher education in relation to writing in English? • What is the nature of these regulations? • Are these regulations compulsory? Do you agree with them? • How do you/the teaching staff turn these regulations into actions? • What is the nature and purposes of these actions? What are Saudi Western University's objectives and goals concerning the writing experience? • Do you believe writing in English is important for students for various educational purposes? • Do you promote writing as an important part of the higher education system? • Do you consider it as a good tool to help graduate students gain a scholarship or employment? (extrinsically useful)
Micro – classroom level: Staff	• Why do students produce written texts? • How do they produce written texts? • Is the purpose of producing a written text to improve their writing in English? Or do they do this just because it is part of the syllabus? • What kind of writing activities take place in the classroom? • How do you decide what to teach? • Would you like to do things differently?
Micro – classroom level: Students	• Do your (students) write for social purposes and/or for personal interest? • Could you outline your previous writing experiences? • How have these experiences shaped your current writing practices? • Did you study in a public or private school or both? • Could you tell me more about your learning experiences? • Why do you want to learn English? • Do you want to learn how to write in English? Why / Why not?

To achieve emic/etic perspectives of the context/text, Lea and Street (1998) suggest that it is important to examine the understandings of the acdemic staff and students about their academic literacy practices to recognise the nature of learning. The semi-structured interview suits this purpose best, to understand the current writing practices and perspectives within the wider sociocultural context. Individual, one to one interviews were preferred in this study rather than a focus group for a number of reasons: (a) the interview method is believed to offer a 'deeper' understanding of

social phenomena (Gill at al., 2008); and (b) it is useful when a variety of different stories are expected to be told about the same context (Cohen et al., 2007).

Face-to-face interviews were held with respondents who agreed to be interviewed (see table 4.10). They were informed that the interviews were held to provide information about the nature of their classroom writing practices (relevant photographs which illustrate classroom furniture and organisation are available in chapter 2). The interviews with all of the participants were held in a quiet lounge in the Saudi Western University, with the exception of the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, which were held in their offices. I selected this lounge for the interviews because it was convenient for the subjects and provided a comfortable environment. The length of the semi-structured interviews varied (see table 4.10) due to the subject's level of knowledge about writing as well as to their personality. Some of the interviews lasted 1-1.5 hours, with a long transcript. I therefore selected the transcript data for further analysis according to its relevance to the research questions. I used Nvivo and discourse analysis.

Table 4. 10: The time and number of interviews in each group

Participants	No.	Minutes
Male representatives of Ministry of Higher Education	2	90
Male director English Language Institute	1	90
Female director English Language Institute	1	90
Female English language instructors	11	60
Female undergraduate students	20	34-60

Kvale (1996) suggests a good qualitative research interview is required to: (a) engage, understand and interpret the key features of the life worlds of the participants; (b) use natural language to gather and understand qualitative knowledge; (c) be able to reveal and explore the nuanced descriptions of the life worlds of the participants; (d) elicit descriptions of specific situations and actions, rather than generalities; (e) adopt a deliberate openness to new data and phenomena, rather than being too pre-structured; (f) focus on specific ideas and themes, i.e. have direction, but avoid being too tightly structured; (g) accept the ambiguity and contradictions of situations where they occur in the participants, if this is a fair

reflection of the ambiguous and contradictory situation in which they find themselves; (h) accept that the interview may provoke new insights and changes in the participants themselves; (i) regard interviews as an interpersonal encounter, with all that this entails; and (j) be a positive and enriching experience for all participants (1996, p.30).

This list provides useful guidelines for using interviews in educational research. In my qualitative research interviews investigating the writing experiences of Saudi undergraduate students, I followed these criteria as far as possible. To avoid any possibility of confusion, the interview questions were carefully constructed using natural, simple language in order to avoid ambiguity. All the directors of ELI and teacher interviews were in English, but Arabic was available for use, if needed, to confirm understanding, to convey ideas, to fully express themselves, and to save time. On the other hand, the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and student interviews were in their native language – Arabic – so they could fully express their perspectives and ideas. It is also important to note that the interviews with the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education occurred before February 2015. Since February 2015, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have merged. The administration of education in Saudi Arabia is now under one umbrella, the Ministry of Education, which may have an impact on some of the issues raised in the interviews through more links or continuity between primary, secondary and tertiary education. For further information see chapter 2, section 2.4.

All the interviews with the teachers and directors in ELI were recorded and transcribed in English, while the interviews with the two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education and the students were recorded in Arabic, transcribed and translated into English. I listened to each interview and compared it to its transcript to increase the accuracy of the written transcripts. Then I gave the transcripts to the respondents to verify that they were a true and accurate account of the interviews and identify any points that seemed unclear. Any concerns were discussed and relevant (minor) changes made. The English version of the transcripts was checked by an experience tertiary level teacher of Applied Linguistics and EAP for clarity (as were the original interview questions in English).

The order of the interviews was at three levels. There are: firstly, at the macro level with two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, secondly at the meso level with two university directors; and thirdly at the micro level with the teaching staff and students. According to the relationship between the different research methods, the interviews came first, and informed the observation and then, the textual data was collected. A detailed description of the observation method is presented below.

With regard to disadvantages, arranging and carrying out an interview is time-consuming. An interviewer also needs to have good communication skills to undertake an interview (Mackey and Gass, 2005). Since anonymity is difficult here, the interviewees may attempt to act differently. Furthermore, shy respondents are more likely to produce inadequate data, whereas others may provide data unhelpful to the research (Dörnyei, 2007, p.143).

4.4.5.3 Observations

Observation is a common technique for collecting data in education and the social sciences. It is "the systematic noticing and recording of events, behavior, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.107). Hymes (1981, p.84) argues that a considerable number of social researchers "assume that what there is to find out can be found out by asking"; however, human social and cultural behavior always occurs spontaneously with neither direct awareness nor direct reflection. As Robson (2002, p.310) remarks "what people do may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check".

There are three common kinds of observation, namely, structured observation, semi-structured observation and unstructured observation (Cohen et al., 2007). Structured observation decides in advance what it is designed to observe. This method is useful when an observer already knows the research hypothesis and s/he is going to use the observational data to prove or disprove it. Additionally, this approach concentrates on the frequency of the populations' actions to find out how often things happen rather than why they happen, which is inappropriate for this study. The second is semi-structured observation, which consists of a list of issues and the observer

collects data to illuminate these issues in a systematic way, which was appropriate for this study. Unstructured observation, which means the researcher does not know in advance what s/he is looking for, hence goes into a situation to observe what is going on before deciding whether it is important for the research or not appropriate in this instance.

Semi-structured observations were favoured over the other two methods because: (a) semi-structured observation is far less predetermined than structured observations so an observer is able to eliminate issues s/he thinks are not significant for the research (Cohen et al., 2007); and (b) it is hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis-testing, so suited to this study. Eight semi-structured observations were held in eight writing classrooms (at levels three and four) in order to explore the practice of writing in English, to achieve emic/etic perspectives, to understand students' lived experience of higher education. The following table (4.11) presents the number of writing classes observed in this study. It also displays the relationship between the teachers and students interviewed so that each teacher can be linked to the class the student interviewees attended. Each class was observed once for two hours.

Table 4. 11: Classroom observations

Classes observed	Observations No.	Observed instructor	Classes attended by interviewed students
ELI 103	1	Teacher_9	1. Student_15 2. Student_18
ELI 103	1	Teacher_6	1. Student_12 2. Student_13
ELI 103	1	Teacher_7	1. Student_6 2. Student_10 3. Student_17
ELI 103	1	Teacher_11	1. Student_1 2. Student_3 3. Student_20
ELI 104	1	Teacher_4	1. Student_11 2. Student_14
ELI 104	1	Teacher_8	1. Student_9 2. Student_7
ELI 104	1	Teacher_3	1. Student_4 2. Student_8 3. Student_19
ELI 104	1	Teacher_10	1. Student_2 2. Student_5 3. Student_16

To understand the nature of writing practices and what 'academic writing in English' means to students and teachers, I carefully created an agenda of issues, based on my review of the literature (see table 4.12). The observation themes/issues can be found in appendix (3). I gathered observational data to discover why such practices often happened. The issues were: (a) classroom practice and methodology; (b) interactions in the learning process, i.e. the dynamic, on-going relationship between teachers and

students; (c) the authenticity of the learning material used as topics and their relevance to students' real-life situations; (d) learning inside and outside the classroom; and (e) the learning outcomes.

In this study, non-participant observation was preferred over participant observation because non-participant observation mainly focuses on gathering data about a particular phenomenon in depth, in the social world, with no direct interaction with its subjects (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2009). A researcher simply notices and documents his/her observational notes about the phenomena being observed. On the other hand, in participant observation, an observer has to engage with the activity, interacting with its participants, as well as writing down his/her observations (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2009), making the former approach more applicable to this study.

Table 4. 12: Observation schedule

1.Teaching practice and Methodology Procedures	**A***	**N/A****	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
1. 1.How does the teacher introduce the writing task? Does the teacher state the expected learning outcomes? Does the teacher introduce the topic? Does the teacher discuss the topic with the students? 2. How does the teacher contextualise the writing topic? 3. How does the teacher achieve the academic goals? 4. How is the writing task set up? 5. How is the writing task run? 6. How is the writing task concluded? 7. What kind of writing activity takes place in the classroom? 8. Do students write for social purposes and/or personal interest? 9. Are the writing topics related to the students' everyday lives such as make a hotel reservation, booking an appointment? 10. Have the writing topics been generated purely from the curriculum? 11. Does the teacher adjust her plans in order to meet her students' needs?					

12. Does the learning process take place inside and outside the classroom?					
2. Interaction in the learning process	**A**	**N/A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
The dynamic-on-going relationship between teachers and students. Procedures A) Teacher-learner interaction 1. What kind of interaction takes place between the students and teachers? Students respond to questions from the teacher Teachers ask questions and elicit feedback from students 2. Do the students gain substantial support in order to independently complete their writing task/s? 3. Do the teachers respond to students' questions and comments? 4. What type of feedback does the teacher give? 5. How often does the teacher give individual attention and feedback? B)Learner-learner interaction 1. Do students discuss the topic with their teachers and/or their peers?					

Key: A = applicable N/A = non-applicable

With regard to good observation, Saunders et al. (2009, p.288) suggest it involves a "the systematic observation, recording, description, and analysis and interpretation of people's behavior". Observations were recorded with an audio recorder so the discourse could be transcribed and documented. I also made careful observation notes about what I had seen without interacting with the participants. I was not allowed to use a video recorder within the classrooms. Students and staff were asked to be video recorded but they refused. They did not wish to be seen because of the sociocultural sensitivities and restrictions of Saudi society (see chapter two). However, they agreed and gave permission for the use of an audio recorder in the classrooms. Observations were manually transcribed to avoid missing any data. The transcribed data were used as direct evidence (i.e. quotes) to present interesting insights into the participants' perceptions of the nature of the writing experience. To increase the reliability and validity of the observational data, I made conscious efforts to be objective in gathering and analysing the observational data, as this method of data collection is inherently subjective in nature.

4.4.5.4 Documentary data and student essays

The third sources of data were textual data consisting of 'institutional documentation' including the policy of the organisation – time allocation to classes, points to be taught and schemes of work, teacher guidelines and procedures for teaching writing, assessment and feedback, assignment details and assessment criteria (for further information see appendix 4). The other documentary data – 'student essays' – were collected from the students I interviewed with the feedback and marks given them; these marks and comments also constitute institutional feedback, while the essays themselves are examples of writing in practice done in class rather than as homework. Twelve written samples were gathered from the students in the observed classes.

Furthermore, this study used Linguistic Ethnography to analyse the 'institutional documentation' to look for key terms in documents and see if they were repeated in the interviews, which implies internalised concept acceptance by speakers. The official texts are matters of power rather than reality in the setting of the broader ELI policy, as well as the social context, and their requirements may be challenged by the learning paradigms in the classroom context (see chapter 6, research question two for further information). This approach may place some emphasis on the relationship between the dominant discourse and institutional practices whereby discourses are employed to legitimate and foster specific social or institutional structures.

This study is thus located in a particular social setting, combining three sources of data, which provided a useful source of evidence for a Linguistic Ethnographic analysis. These sources provided a means to examine how academic writing was conceived and practiced in the research context and the challenges presented to a more forward-looking approach.

4.4.6 Data analysis

The process of data analysis in qualitative research in general and in ethnographical works in particular, is recursive over all the stages of data collection and the analytical process. Thorne (2000, p.68) defines the process of the data analysis of qualitative research as "the most complex and mysterious of all the stages". Walford (2009) notes that an ethnographic approach to data analysis consists of identifying

themes, generating theories, and then further analysis for more certainty about the results.

In the present study, the process of data analysis involved four stages. The first was the analysis of the data from interviews at three levels; namely, micro/meso/macro. The second was the analysis of the data obtained from the observations in Saudi Western University classrooms. The third was a review of the institutional documentations about the practice of writing in English, assessment and feedback. The fourth was the analysis of student essays and teachers' feedback on their work.

The process of data analysis was not linear but dynamic and recursive in nature. For instance, each stage of the data analysis identified themes and new sub-themes to consider in the following stages or even reconsider for earlier stages. I continuously reflected at each stage of the data analysis as themes emerged from the data. At the end of the analysis process, I reviewed the entire data set and analysis process again to find new insights into the overall picture and to answer the research questions and to suggest future work in this area.

4.4.6.1 Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software

In this project, the three sets of data were analysed using Nvivo[6] Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) which helps the managing and organising of data and avoids qualitative data overload. CAQDAS was also used in automating the coding of qualitative data, for instance, identifying themes and sub-themes. It was very useful for category comparison across the data sets.

However, Seror (2005) suggests that using computer software may eliminate some of the essential elements of qualitative research such as reflexivity. In this project, I was conscious of the role of the reflexivity of the researcher in qualitative research, and was highly engaged in reflecting on the data and linkages as the themes emerged.

[6] QSR International Pty Ltd 2014- programme (version 10.0.3)

4.4.6.2 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is one of the main strategies in Linguistic Ethnography and one of the key instruments for data analysis in this study, defined as the "close study of language" (Taylor, 2001, p. 5). Discourse analysis is a field of research rather than a unified approach. Taylor also identifies four main approaches in discourse analysis. The first approach concentrates on the language per se, while the second approach concentrates on how language is used. The third approach concentrates on recognizing forms of use in particular contexts and the fourth concentrates on analysing the way in which language is constituted as a social practice. The fourth is the preferred tool to handle data within the Academic Literacies and Linguistic Ethnographic approaches, the two key frameworks in this study.

Foucault (1972) suggests that discourses are sets of demonstrations and practices through which meanings are made and established and demonstrate specific systems of knowledge and power. This study draws on Foucault's understanding of discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, p.49); these practices create knowledge and formulate practices and patterns in specific social and cultural contexts. The practice of power in particular contexts is revealed in discourse. Dominant discourses regulate and establish conventional patterns of seeing and understanding the world which are taken-for-granted, and which may promote and privilege certain patterns of power.

In this study, I used the poststructuralist concept of discourse in that language is considered as essential to the construction of knowledge production and meaning creation; discourse analysis formulates and establishes what is said and performed in particular institutions.

Poststructuralist theory further developed Foucault's notion of discourse and discursive practices. Poststructuralism and postmodernism reject the concept of universal truth. They are more interested in interrogating and deconstructing the established ways of understanding the social world. The two approaches emphasise the complexity, fluidity of knowledge, power and identity in the real world. Poststructuralism emphasises the role of language in understanding the social world. Deconstructing texts is the central analysis technique in poststructuralism, which

goes beyond the simple binary oppositions (up/down) of structuralist approaches to an interest in binary oppositions at a deeper level (Derrida, 1976), as, for instance, the concepts of god and the devil involve the intermediate binaries of good and bad. Derrida also believed that one binary term governs the other, which in turn makes a hierarchy. I think it is important to mention that using the macro/meso/micro is comparative and made up of various binaries (micro/ meso; meso/macro; micro/micro; micro/micro; meso/meso; macro/macro). This will be further discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.4.6.3 Interviews

The interviews were one of the key ethnographical instruments in the present study. The directors and staff interviews were digitally recorded in English and transcribed verbatim including repetitions, hesitations and simultaneous speech. On the other hand, the representative of the Ministry of Higher Education and student interviews were digitally recorded in Arabic, transcribed and translated into English. Interview transcripts were given to be read and checked by the interviewees as accurate accounts of what took place in the interviews and any changes required were made (see appendix 5 for further information).

The coding of the interview data was conducted in three stages. In the earlier stages of the interview analysis processes, I drew on NVivo). Charmaz (2006, p.46) defines coding as "the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data. Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means". The first step in the coding process was line-by-line coding using the thematic analysis/analytical approach, whereby the data were coded as nodes and then tagged with emergent themes (see figure 4.5). I was determined to identify all the themes from the interviews; the process of tagging themes was thus iterative, requiring a great deal of trial and error and refinement.

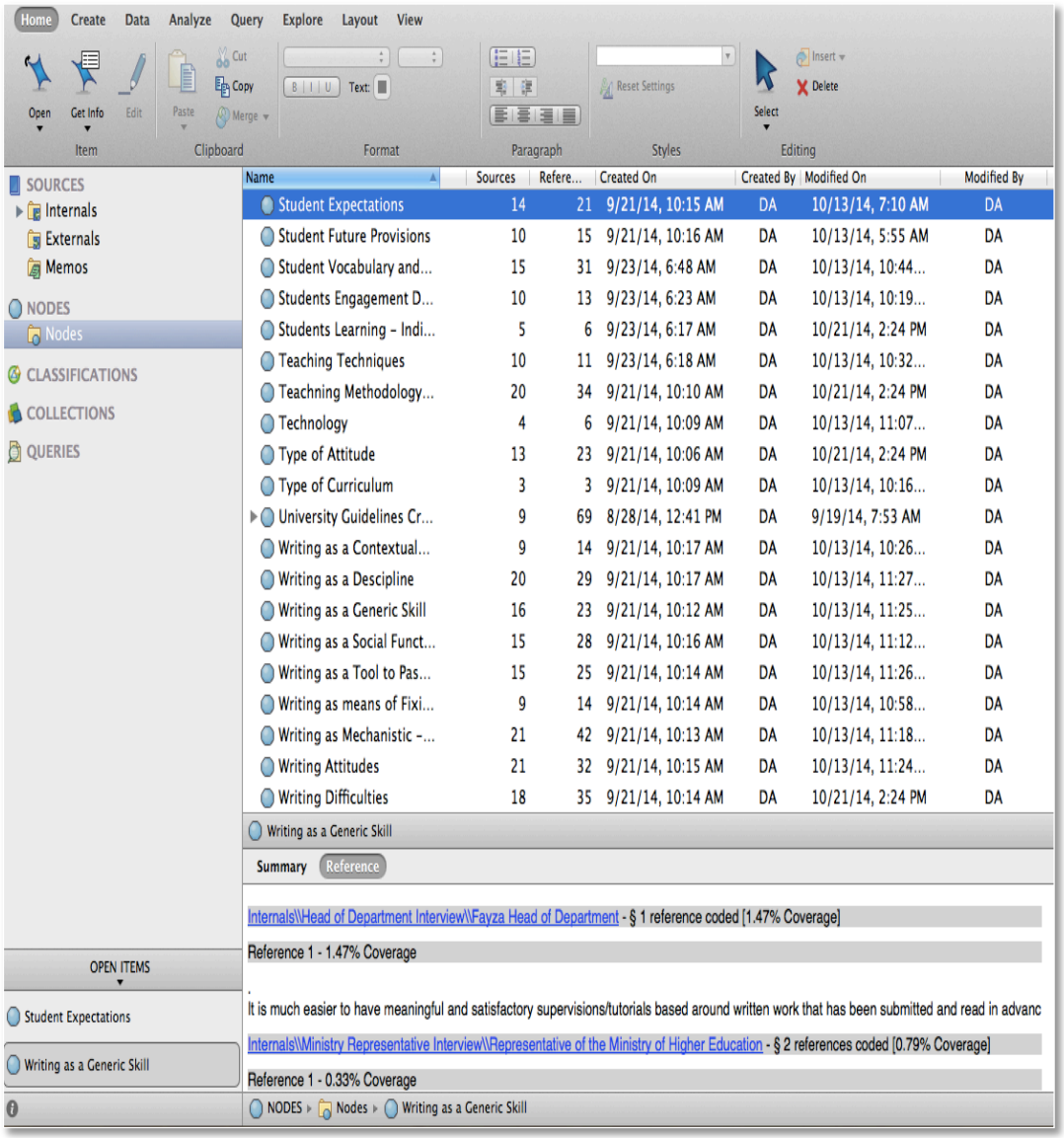


Figure 4. 5: Coding interview data in Nvivo

Although, it is hard to avoid subjectivity in qualitative research, I attempted to be led by the data as the themes of importance emerged using induction (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.4). This inductive method increases the credibility of the analysis as themes emerge and are not imposed, and so help to remove bias (Golafshani, 2003). As the analysis progressed, themes were defined and connected to quotations from the interview transcripts. These supporting themes were used to answer the research questions. For example, the quote below was identified as evidence associated with 'cultural constraints':

> This country [Saudi Arabia] has its own traditions and culture. When **we** come to talk about knowledge, we cannot ignore the

> traditions and culture of each country. Traditions, culture and education are greatly interrelated, especially in the Kingdom of Saudi.

After revising and reflecting on the interview transcripts, this quote was classified as relating to 'the effect of culture on writing materials: teacher's views', in answer to the first research question. It is also important to acknowledge that some participants' responses were coded more than others because their interviews reflected more points relevant to answering the research questions. However, there was one script, which was not very useful, which due to monosyllabic responses, not addressing the topic, lack of co-operation or understanding, coughing or other irrelevancies.

The second stage of analytical process was the coding of the interview data, using the deductive analysis approach to data with some predefined a priori codes as guidance to help direct the analysis (Waring and Wainwright, 2008). I did use an a priori template list of aspects about the practice of writing to investigate the practice of writing in English through the lens of Academic Literacies theory to see how far in theory or practice, aspects of Academic Literacies ideals were identifiable – as discussed in the literature review concerning the Academic Literacies and Study Skills approaches (Lea and Street 1998). Academic Literacies theory situates itself in opposition to Study Skills, which it sees as a prescriptive, non-social deficit model, which does not give a prominent voice to students or value fully their contribution through interaction in the social community of their subject of study, (so this aspect of the research was deductive) (Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010).

From the Academic Literacies and Study Skills approaches in the literature review and current writing research (Ivanic, 2004; Lea, 2006; Lea and Street 1998), I developed a list of themes, for example: the prescriptive non-social or negotiated, single genre; the supposed transferability of skills; focus on grammatical accuracy rather than meaning in the teaching and learning of writing attributed to the Study Skills approach by Academic Literacies which might be identifiable and aid the analysis of the data obtained from interviews. On the other hand, the underlying philosophical ideals of Academic Literacies, concepts of individual contribution and interaction in a socially relevant context (subject domain) in writing may also be

present, if only in embryonic form, and so help point the way forward (Lillis and Scott, 2007; Street, 1984). While this thesis does not claim that the Study Skills approach is used in Saudi Western University – either per se or as envisaged by Academic Literacies – it does provide a contrast to the basic tenets of the Academic Literacies approach and suggests a way of assessing the actions observed and reported in the data in terms of a spectrum, with Study Skills at one end and Academic Literacies at the other (as indeed Academic Literacies perceives the model). In other words, using the Academic Literacies critique of the Study Skills deficit model is a useful tool (Lea and Street, 1998). I considered most of the criticisms of Study Skills by Academic Literacies and measured them against the findings (Cottrell, 2001; Wingate, 2006). The Study Skills approach as envisioned by Academic Literacies was a useful tool in this instance to uncover ways to assess and reflect on the teaching of writing as practiced, and the potential for development.

As the analysis of the interviews progressed, I shifted towards a more detailed and contextualised account, a more Linguistic Ethnographic perception. At this level, I summarised the comments using the themes that emerged in addition to those identified through Nvivo, which revealed what was going on and how the actors placed themselves in terms of the research questions and their power relations. For the discourse analysis, I looked at the data in more detail to note the use of specific terms that were useful indicators of the placement and attitude of the speaker in respect to the research questions and the different levels of education delivery and consumption. I considered the purpose of the comments or the underlying meanings which they seemed to convey. Whilst Nvivo was very useful at the first and second levels of the analysis of the data to identify themes and help analyse and categorise the data, discourse analysis looked at the text in context in more detail and for underlying meanings not apparent in the surface structure analysis through the words and phrases used – which is what Nvivo can do. Linguistic Ethnography was very useful to discover the underlying concepts. I was interested in meaning above the word level and in the combination of words/phrases/sentences in a particular context. Phrases signify many things apart from what might be their semantic meaning. They show relationships, attitudes and understandings. As a Linguistic Ethnography analyst, I draw on discourse analysis and looked under the surface of the actual

phrases or choice of words to see the deeper meanings and relationships they conveyed. For example,

> I am going to need English in the near future. I'm going to write a lot of stuff. Maybe, I will do some research in my future subject when I am older. That's why I have to learn to write a message to my boss, for example. [Student_12]

For instance, when Student_12 says *I have to learn to write a message to my boss* she assumes that she will have a certain place in the work hierarchy and someone - the boss - will be above her. She, as a woman, will hold a lower position. This may be expected as a temporary phenomenon, as she is a student, but it could also imply acceptance of a wider, more permanent socio-cultural phenomenon. For instance, Hofstede's cultural analyses of countries was used as a benchmark to comment on the attitudes revealed from the data, the hierarchy and relationships illuminated in the example here, as well as in chapters 6 and 7.

Furthermore, I used Linguistic Ethnography and particularly Bakhtin's concept of the voice within the voice, when people echo the voice of authority in their utterances, to deepen the analysis of the interviews. As an example, one of the director states that:

> **I believe that writing in English is important for some but not all educational purposes.** Definitely those who are able to write well in English will most certainly have better chances than those who are not. [Director_2]

His 'I believe' statement seems to reflect the institutional attitude towards English also expressed at the meso level, suggesting it is an accepted credo. He refers to his current beliefs about the significance of writing. *'I believe'* depends on the context in which it is used, so in the meso level context, it is more likely that he is upholding the view of authority offering solidarity with it, rather than giving a personal view (see chapter 6).

Moreover, I used discourse analysis and Bakhtin's inner voice concept to analyse the interview data. I also provided a list of grammatical features (theoretically and with examples) which reveal certain perceptions to make it easier to interpret the findings of the study. It is important to note that discourse analysis needs to be analysed in

context. For example, grammatical makers such as 'I believe', 'Everyone knows' and 'we perceive' do not exist 'in themselves' (see table 4.13), but only in their relations, what the interviewees said in the context in which they said it (for further information see chapter 6, research question two). Therefore, the meaning of phrases like 'I believe' depends on the context in which they are used. With this in mind, Bakhtin's concept of the double-voiced discourse, the voice of power and authority the *other* voice in the utterances of individuals was kept in mind during the analysis. In the meso level context, it is more likely that the interviewees are upholding the view of authority, not giving a personal view. Bakhtin points out the use of these general phrases like 'everyone knows ' and 'in fact' indicate a concept not originating from the speaker, therefore coming from some external authority, as illustrated in table 4.13.

Table 4. 13: Grammatical markers

Discursive phrases	Meaning
I believe	It depends on the context in which they are used.
Everyone knows	It assumes something is a fact and does not need to be explained, so in discourse examples here it is often revealed as the official voice - not requiring explanation - but also implies that something is common knowledge. In a hierarchy, the top, macro level, largely decides what knowledge is common, what is acceptable. In using this phrase, the representative is indicating his authority, those things he does not need to explain, and is also making a claim for their validity.
We perceive	This utterance suggests the voice of a particular group.
We say	Can be an attempt at inclusion (everyone agrees) or to show authority.
In fact	It claims that what follows is true and does not require explanation.

4.4.6.4 Observation

Observation is a hallmark ethnographic instrument which seeks to capture the truth, understand and present, in this instance, the full picture of the writing practices in English as experienced in reality. The observational schedule allowed me to focus on the identified issues to answer the research questions (for more details, see table 4.12 in section 4.4.5.3). As a non-participant observer, my presence did not seem to affect the behaviour in the classroom. For instance, after a few minutes, the students no longer seemed to notice my presence in the classroom, they did not look in my direction or pay me any attention, so I believe my presence as an observer had no substantial effect on classroom procedures. It is hard to fully eliminate observer bias as observational data are obtained through human senses – mainly hearing and sight.

However, the observations in this study contributed to the triangulation of the three methods of data collection which help reduce the limitations which occur in using single-method research and reinforced the reliability and validity of the findings.

The analysis of the observation data was also carried out using NVivo (see figure 4.6 below). The observational transcripts were coding iteratively to identify nodes/codes. The relevant themes from the observation data were tagged and analysed using the thematic analysis approach concerning the research questions. In the second coding stage, I looked at the examples generated from Nvivo I had already categorised and checked to see if they were still significant and relevant in order to carry out further analysis using Linguistic Ethnography. As previously discussed in the data collection section, this study drew on three methods/tools to answer the research questions. I have to make it clear that the observations came after the interviews and the processing of the interview and the textual data. Observations, therefore, were used to complement the two other sets of data. The observation data was analysed and the data obtained from interviews and observations were compared to identify similarities and differences and to respond to the research questions. The data gained from observation was also matched against what interviewees such as the directors of the English Language Institute, staff and students said about writing to see whether it reflected what they really did in practice.

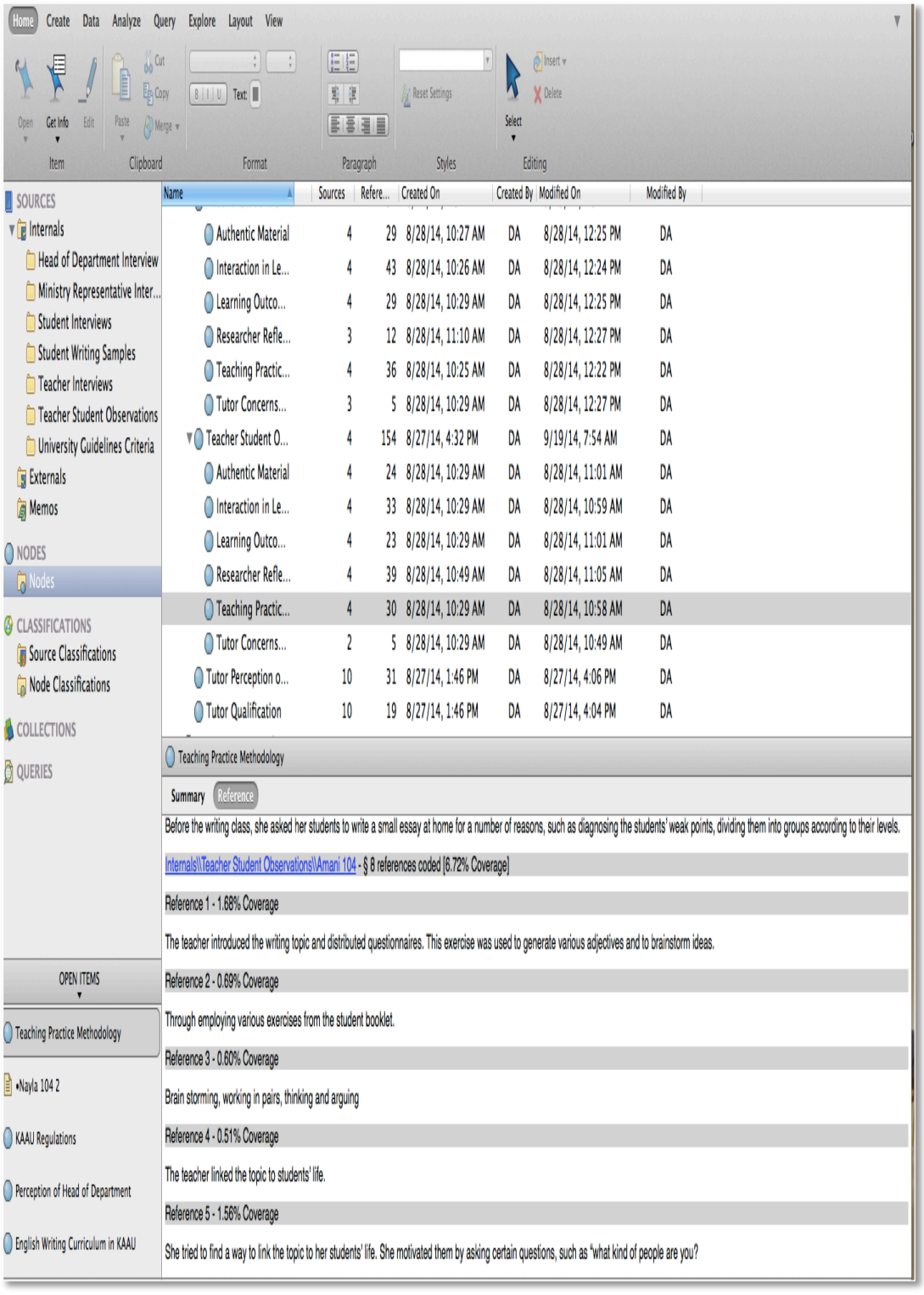


Figure 4. 6(a): Coding observation data in Nvivo

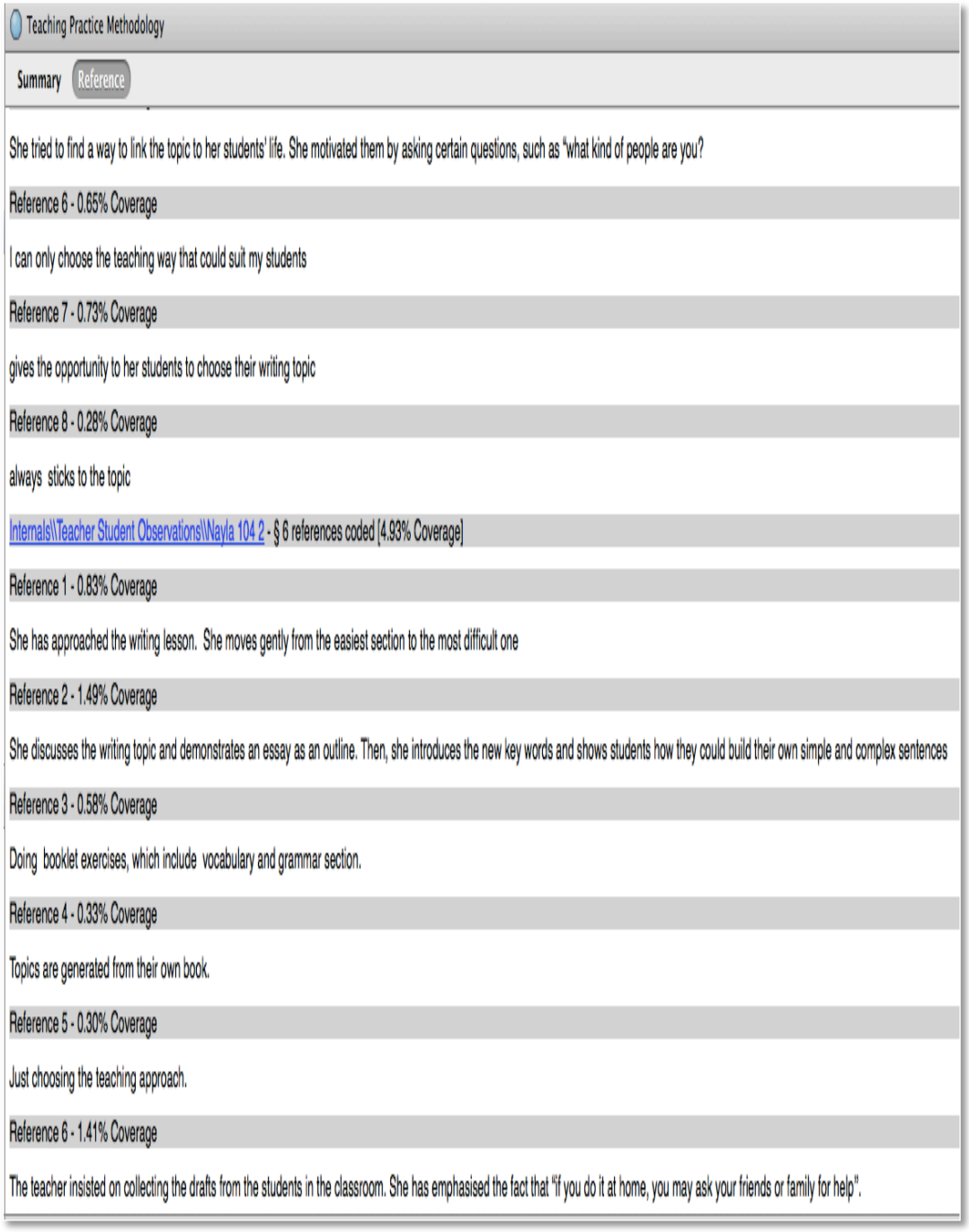


Figure 4.6 (b): Coding observation data in Nvivo

4.4.6.5 Institutional documentation

All the English language institution documentation in this study was related to the practice of writing in English, assessment and feedback. Documentary data consisted of the English Language institution policy and procedures such as course syllabuses, the instructors' and students' pacing guide. Most of the documentary data were soft copies, but some were hard copies. I scanned the hard copies and uploaded them and then, I transformed all of the soft copies documents into the NVivo. I used NVivo to manage the documentary data (see figure 4.7 below).

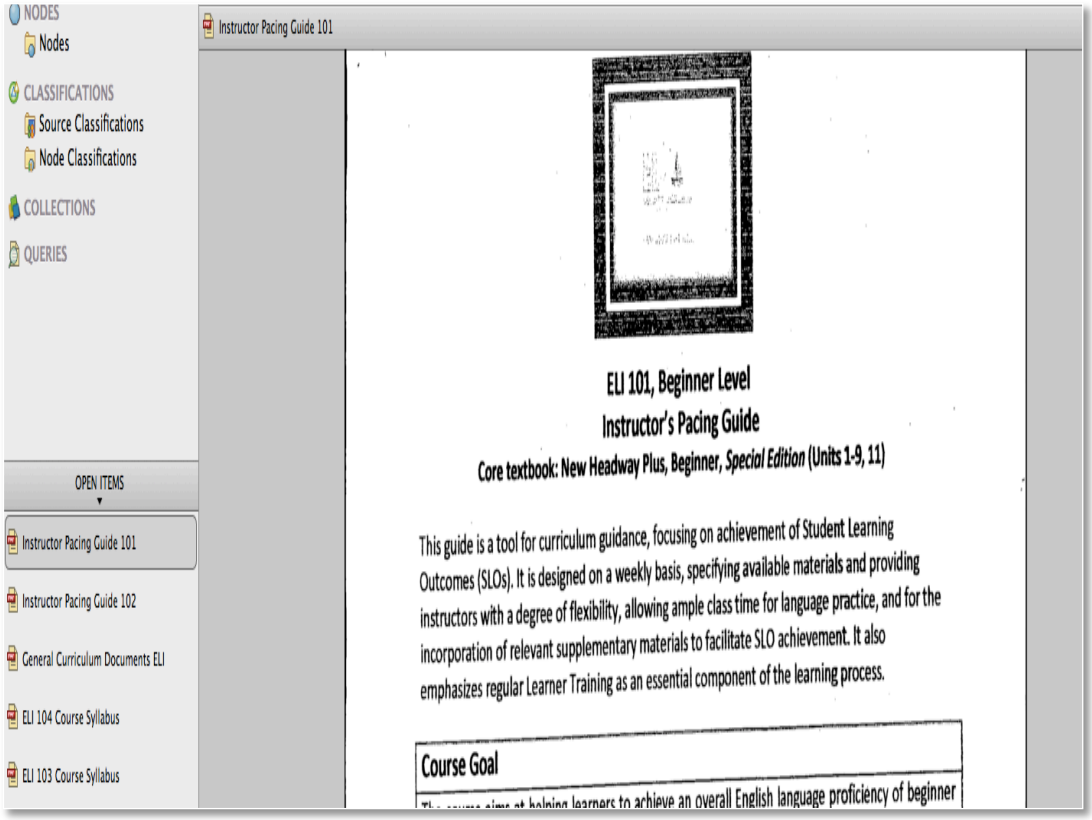


Figure 4. 7(a): Managing institutional documents in Nvivo

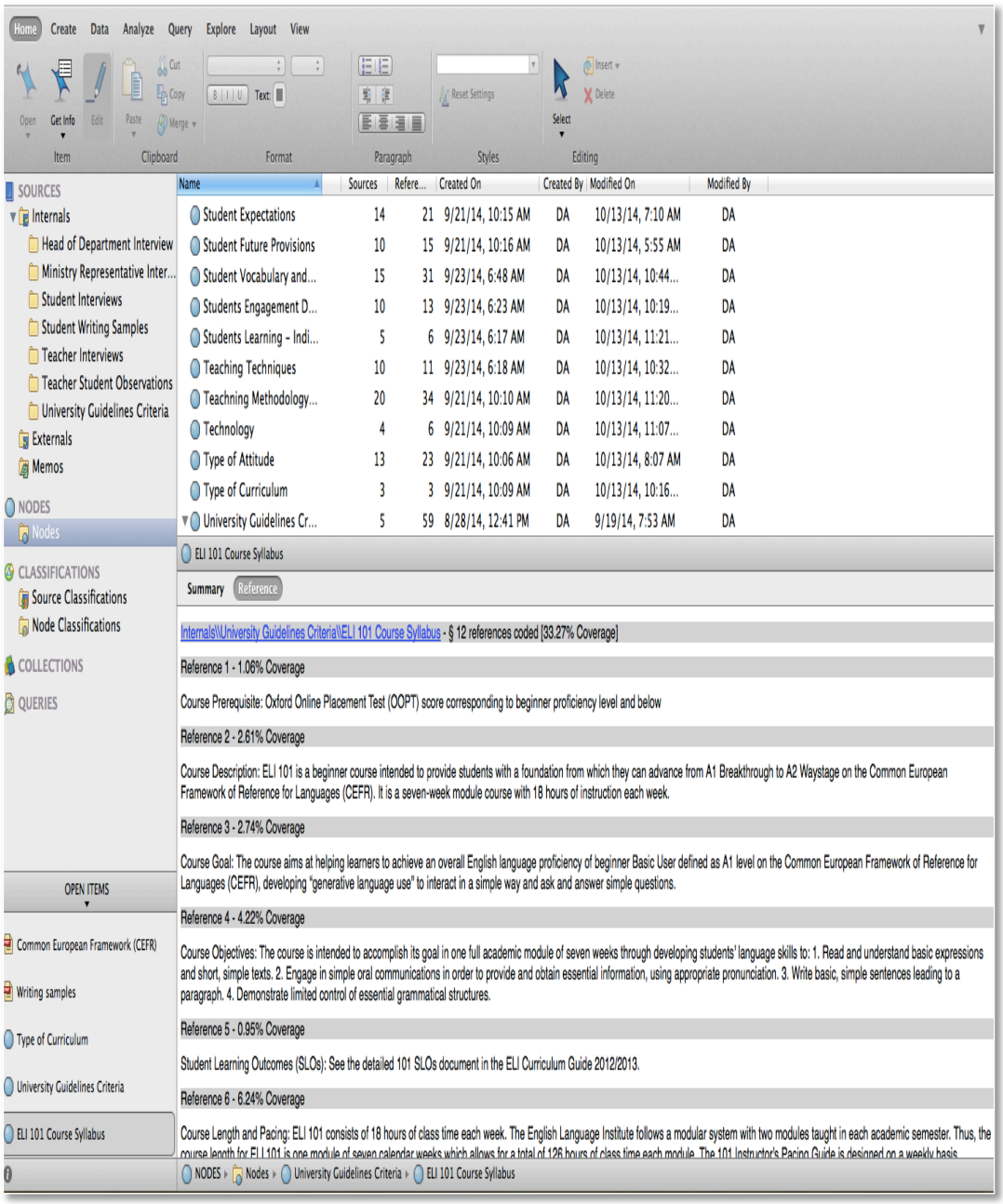


Figure 4.7 (b): Managing institutional documents in Nvivo

Furthermore, I used discourse analysis from a Linguistic Ethnography perspective to analyse the institutional documentation to investigate in detail the context of the main themes identified concerning writing practices to discover the underlying concepts and make visible the operating mechanisms and to look for hierarchies (Bakhtin, 1981). The analysis of the institutional documentation was carried out through reviewing examples of English Language Institution documentation to identify reference to learners acquiring grammatical rules, being taught a limited

range of vocabulary, a specified time-frame lesson-by-lesson guide. which were valuable indicators to provide a more detailed and contextualised account to discover what was going on and how the actors placed themselves in terms of the research questions and their power relations within the institution (for further information see chapter 6 section, sections 6.2.4 and 6.2.7). I was also interested in identifying the purpose of writing practices and how the writing practices reflected the dominant institutional discourse (Swales, 1990). With this rich source I was able to compare examples across the interviews, observations and the official discourse under the same topic to show how concepts become internalised to appear the norms and are accepted unconditionally – the areas that Linguistic Ethnography aims to reveal.

4.4.6.6 Student writing

Student essays provided a means of identifying the key discourses to investigate what the ELI requires student writing to deliver in terms of writing practices. I drew on Linguistic Ethnography, to analyse and make visible the matters of power and knowledge embedded in texts, which play a central role in understanding the key patterns in student writing practices and production.

Written assignment were analysed using discourse analysis from a Linguistic Ethnography perspective as well as student writing samples provided an in-depth understanding of student writing practices within their particular context. The analysis was conducted in two rounds. The first round was to review examples of student essays and feedback given by teachers to students. During the second round, I was interested in coding the staff's comments on student essays through looking for certain phrases and examples in student essays which teachers commented on and gave feedback about their writing. This emphasised a number of interesting aspects; for instance, writing was regarded as a technical skill with grammatical rules and exam-based; relationships of authority and power were revealed between the staff (as maintainers of the hierarchy at this level) and students. Some of these categories arose from the Academic Literacies critique of their perception of the Study Skills approach as focusing on grammatical accuracy rather than meaning making and communication and perceiving writing as an exercise in accuracy rather than conveying the attitudes and feelings of the writer (for further information see chapter 5, section 5.2.7.1).

4.5 Summary

The chapter presented the methodological framework of the research and the ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations involved in implementing this ethnographic study. I have also presented details with regards to the objectives, the research questions, the ethical considerations of the study, with details of the adaptations made to the research procedures and tools informed by the pilot study. I selected a qualitative approach and associated myself with the (social) constructive paradigm which sees realities and meanings as multiple and constructed within the process of social interaction. This world view highlights how each participant has their own description of their experiences, which become the researcher's major data in the study. I then provided details of the multiple ethnographic methods; interviews, observation and documentary data which I used to generate narrative data and to gain an in-depth exploration of student writing practices in Saudi Western University.

This chapter also presented the Linguistic Ethnographic (1) as a practical organising framework for the interviews and (2) as an analytical tool to investigate the utterances of individuals at the different levels to indicate where the power and control over the teaching of writing at Saudi Western University lie. Data were analysed in inductive and iterative ways such as thematic analysis. The major findings of the research are presented in chapter 5.

Chapter Five - Findings and Discussion (Research Question One): The similarities and differences in the teachers' and students' understandings of what academic writing implies

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with eleven English teachers and twenty undergraduate students, the classroom observation of eight writing sessions at levels - three 103 and four 104 - documentary sources, which include institutional documents and students' written essays and teachers' feedback comments on their written work (see chapter 4, section 4.4.5). The findings in this chapter and in the following chapters 6 and 7 are organised as responses to the research questions. This chapter focuses on the first research question:

- **(Micro level):** What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English language institute in Saudi Western University?

The micro level data comes from the teachers and students (see tables 4.2 and 4.3 in chapter 4 for details) and consists of their responses to the first research question. This chapter focuses on the teaching staff and students' views from the micro (classroom) level and their understandings of writing practices. Research question 2 will be covered in chapter 6, and research question 3 will be covered in chapter 7.

It is important to mention firstly, to preserve the anonymity of interviewees, the 11 teachers are referred to by number (i.e. teacher_1 to teacher_11) and the interviews with teachers took place in English. The 20 students are also referred to by number (i.e. student_1 to student_20). Their interviews were in Arabic and translated by the researcher. The extracts presented here in English have minimal modifications to syntax for comprehensibility and the translations have been checked for the same purpose, but both reflect a true account of the respondents' views at the time and have been checked by them.

5.1.1 The theoretical and methodological frameworks

Academic Literacies model is the research theoretical framework. As discussed previously in the literature review, the Academic Literacies model moves beyond the Study Skills and the Academic Socialisation models to view writing as a meaningful social practice that is purposeful, and includes issues associated with epistemology, identity and knowledge, and is not a deficit model where problems are seen to lie with the students (Gee, 1990; Ivanic, 2004; Lillis and Tuck, 2016; Street, 2010). Consequently, it also problematises the meaning and the manifestation of perceived 'problems' in student writing in higher education (Lea and Street, 1998).

Linguistic Ethnography was used as the methodological framework to consider the data from 3 hierarchical levels of power - micro, meso and macro - and reveal the different views as well as the Bakhtinian voice of the 'other' that could be embedded in a single utterance at each level. These 3 levels (and their related cultural practices) also served as a way of organising the discourse data on how writing is delivered and practiced in Saudi Western and comparing the views of actors at the same and different levels of hierarchical power. The Linguistic Ethnography approach aims to give voice to all levels of a hierarchy and to compare the views and understandings of the actors at different levels of involvement: macro (governance level of Saudi Arabia and the top tier of Saudi Western University), meso (departmental heads responsible for carrying out the decisions of the macro level) and micro (the teachers responsible for course delivery and the students). Linguistic Ethnography draws on Bakhtin's concept of hybrid construction which is used to reveal the voice of the *other* in an individual's utterances. Therefore, this analysis of participants' interviews can reveal more than the surface evidence about each interviewee might suggest, and comparing the interview data across the hierarchical levels presents a more rounded view of the degree of interconnectedness of each level and with other levels and on what basis.

While Academic Literacies and Linguistic Ethnography aim to reveal hidden voices, either those who have no voice in society or who are not often heard, Bakhtin's concept is used to recognise the voice of the other in the dialogic discourse of individuals with the ultimate goal of liberating the voice of the individual from the fetters of the other (for further information, see chapter 3, the literature review). This was a particularly important aspect of this research; as will be seen, the functioning of

the present system is far removed from the democratic principles of the Academic Literacies model and there is no framework for students or teachers to offer their views to the higher levels, so this research is important in giving them a voice here.

Table 5.1 below presents a short summary of the results comparing the teachers' and students' views, as although both groups are considered part of the micro level in terms of general power and influence, there were differences between the views of the teachers and the students which also illustrate the unequal power relations between teachers and students within this level.

Table 5. 1: The key findings of the first research question

Topic	Teachers' views	Students' views
R1 Writing difficulties due to	Poor spelling, punctuation, grammar	Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation but knowing the rules doesn't mean knowing how to write
	Not being taught to write well at school	Not having enough practice/experience of writing at school or in ELI
	Many students are not interested in learning how to write in English	Writing within a narrow set of topics and genres (no emails or memos useful for work) is not useful or motivating
	Lack of time	Lack of time
	Students only interested in exam marks and passing	Yes, but focus on test topics means not learning useful things and passing tests does not mean knowing how to write
Students need to write in English because	They need to pass the ELI tests so they can go on to study at university	Writing is important for their current studies and future professions
Writing requirements:	Writing in English is the capacity to manipulate surface language structures such as grammar and vocabulary	Writing is much more than knowing the correct grammatical rules and using the correct vocabulary
Essay topics	Writing topics conform to religious rules rather than students' practical learning needs	Students need to practice broader types of writing tasks relevant to their future courses

	Writing essays use general, simple topics - descriptions of people or places	There is a lack of clarity about the role and value of writing tasks
Nature of the writing practices	Limited writing experience	Limited writing experience
		Writing was de-contextualized from cpmmunication in this sense, due to the requirements of the exam-centered community
	Power inequalities are executed in social relations	Neither collaboration nor interaction were highly cultivated in the classroom
Assessment	Students' key interest was to get through their courses	Students interested in learning how to write in English
Feedback	Fix problems with student language skills	Comments on language problems are not enough for students to improve their writing practices
	Correctness and accuracy of the structural and linguistic patterns were highly emphasised by the teachers. The focus was on the text, not the writers.	Students wanted more than this, to be seen as persons with objectives.
	Illustrated the social relationship of 'power' and 'authority' between staff and student at this micro-level.	

The relationship between students and teachers is a product of the top down management system, which constrains the time teachers have available to fulfill their allocated teaching goals and thus limits their classroom methodology choices. The following section discusses the key findings of the study. The staff and students' interpretations and conceptualisation of student writing in higher education are presented and discussed according to the themes that emerged and are relevant to research question 1.

5.2 What does academic writing mean to staff and students?

To answer the first research question: *What does academic writing mean to staff and students?* The participants' interpretations, observations and documents are presented from three sources of data according to the themes and subthemes identified from the thematic analysis in table 5.2, below.

I drew on NVivo to analyse the qualitative data and to identify the themes from the data for this chapter as well as chapters 6 and 7. I used a mixed inductive and deductive thematic analysis approach (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Waring and Wainwright, 2008). Firstly, I used the inductive approach to allow all the themes to emerge; the themes and sub-themes were then identified and refined to connect them to the research questions. For example, the relevant emerging themes were used to answer the research question in this chapter and in chapters 6 and 7. Then, I used a deductive approach through using a priori codes as guidance to assist the analysis. The a priori template list was created through the lens of Academic Literacies theory to see how far in theory or practice, aspects of Academic Literacies ideals were identifiable - as presented in the methodology (see chapter 4, section 4.4.6.3) - regarding the Academic Literacies approach or its critique of the Study Skills approach (Lea and Street 1998), to investigate the writing practices in the English Language Institute at Saudi Western University.

Table 5. 2: Example of themes and subthemes for the first research question from the micro level interviews

Themes and sub-themes	Topic
1.Students have difficulty writing in English*:* "You know that our students find **writing hard**, why". [Teacher_6] "The bad thing is that we didn't have 'enough experience' to write a good piece of writing. **There are many challenges in the writing process at the university level**. [Student_5]	Students are unable to write well at higher education level. This is a common situation in many EFL contexts.

2. Why do students need to write in English A. Views about students' writing purposes : "**Writing for students depends on being practica**l. In terms of - it depends on what they want to study". [Teacher_4]	Teachers' views of why students need to write in English.
B. Students' awareness of their need to write in English: "**Writing is important for research, study, applying for a job**. Even when we get a job, **we sometimes need to write reports in English**". [Student_17]	Students' range of reasons for needing to write in English.
3. What do students need to write "I believe that good students have to use the **vocabulary** and **grammar rules** they've learnt in class. Whatever they've caught up, **they need to use in writing**". [Teacher_ 10]	Participants' interpretations of what writing skills are required for writing in English
"My knowledge is good but **I need more practice.** I know lots of 'words' and my 'grammar' is good too. I know the 'rules of the target language'; but I do not know 'how to write". [Student_16]	Difference between knowing about a language and knowing how to use it.

5.2.1 Why do some students have difficulty writing in English?

As previously noted, Academic Literacies as a research paradigm can be used to explore the conflicting understandings of student writing which may exist at tertiary level and thus clarify some of the reasons for the poor quality of student writing in Saudi Western University. It also seeks to identify the difficulties student writers encounter through problematising the meaning and the manifestation of perceived 'problems' in their writing (Lea and Street, 1998) and suggesting how to promote more effective writing practices in higher education. Below I present the teachers' and students' perceptions of student writing, which can provide insights into the challenges students face in higher education.

The interviews with the teachers indicated their perceptions of student writing in higher education. While teachers expected students to have already developed a set of essential skills before enrolling on the pre-degree English course at university level,

they suggested that most students lacked the set of basic skills, such as adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge, which they needed for writing in English above the sentence level. The results of this study seem to be in line with previous research results, such as Alharbi (2015), Al-Khairy (2013), Fareh (2010), Grami (2010), and Hujailan (2004) which reported that EFL students demonstrated poor language proficiency and had limited writing experience. In this regard, two of the teachers commented:

> **You know** that our students find **writing hard,** why? They don't have the vocabulary for writing. I mean that most of the students don't have sufficient background to write about things in English. [Teacher_6]
>
> Students have **serious difficulty** in structure, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. This is mostly due to the way **we perceive** the language. [Teacher_1]

They both perceived lack of vocabulary as a problem and teacher_1 suggested students' difficulties were even wider, involving grammar, punctuation and spelling. Both teachers infer group solidarity (not individuality), by suggesting their views are shared, a common perception – '*you know'* (1) by teacher_6 (presumably referring to the researcher's experience as a teacher) and '*we perceive'*. The teachers' use of '*you know'* and *'we perceive'* suggests that some of their utterances are the voice of a particular group - that of teachers in general. As noted previously, I use Linguistic Ethnography, particularly Bakhtin's view of speech, to investigate the relationship between the speaker and the context of the utterance, which includes not just the listener, but 'where the speaker is coming from'. It is also necessary to consider who the speaker's utterances represent - herself, a group she belongs to, a group she thinks she understands, a group she owes allegiance to and so on? Are the views expressed personal rather than repetitions of the internalised voice of authority through group solidarity? Additionally, the teacher's responses suggest that the problem lies with the general education system, as students, upon arrival, were equipped with only limited writing skills. Students' inability to write well in higher education might be due to their previous learning and writing experiences. As three teachers argued:

> I don't know, there is something wrong at school, **I think.** When the students enroll at university with a low level [of English writing knowledge], we don't have enough time **to rectify the**

> **problems** they had at school. It's only a year and there is another problem, which is the system we are following. [Teacher_4]
>
> **I think** students face **a problem in writing** as a result of their **weak background** from their previous learning experience. [Teacher_5]
>
> Students' background of learning writing in English in schools **is limited** and different from what is required at university. **I think** students have to be adequately prepared for higher education. [Teacher_9]

The interviews with teachers revealed that they perceived the students writing in English to be limited, but attributed this to a lack of support for writing at school level. The use of '*I think'* by all three and *'let me say'* by teacher_4 below show the participants' current beliefs about the issue. They see the problem as something they are not responsible for as individuals, or one they could easily fix – due to the teaching system for the foundation classes.

> **Let me say** what has not been taught at school for 7 years **can't be rectified in a year**. It needs a lot of effort and concentration. [Teacher_4]

Teacher_4 saw the difficulties as not fixable in a year due to the teaching system for the foundation classes. Their responses may also be defensive against potential criticism of their teaching delivery. This will be discussed more in section 5.2.5.1. In this study, students are perceived not to have access to the appropriate skills for writing in English in higher education. Their language skills such as grammar and vocabulary were below the level that the teachers believed to be acceptable in higher education. From this deficit perspective, the students seemed to be responsible for most of the learning challenges they encountered in higher education because they had not accumulated the necessary resources before the start of their courses in ELI. According to Lillis and Scott (2007), much academic writing research concentrates on student texts rather than literacy practices, which may lead to defining problems with student writing as textual, resulting in pedagogies which are mainly textual in nature. Haggis (2006) suggests moving away from the perception of an individual, deficit approach to student writing problems to one which focuses on investigating the possible influencing factors of cultural norms and practices on higher education.

5.2.2 Why do students need to write in English?

This section offers an overview of the participants' views of why students need to write in English. Interviews with the participants showed how some responses view writing in English as embedded in the traditional grammar/vocabulary/ practice approach to learning English rather than a tool for learning in higher education, while others exhibit some awareness of the kind of concerns Academic Literacies highlights. I start with teachers' interpretations concerning why students need to write in English (the purpose) and the then students' interpretations regarding why they need to be able to write in English in the future.

5.2.2.1 Teachers' interpretations

The interviews with the teachers illustrate their views as to why students need to write in English (the purpose). The interviews with the teachers revealed that writing is perceived as a technical practice used for limited writing goals and purposes across the university, what Lea and Street attribute to the Study Skills approach - which they use as an umbrella term for any narrow-based approach that ignores the social aspect of writing, the community of writers, as discussed in the literature review (Creaton, 2008; Street, 2010). The teachers argued that writing in English has more significance for students who aim to complete their university education in English - if the medium of study later on is English - but it is not important if they study through Arabic.

> **Writing for students depends on being practical**. In terms of- **it depends on what they want to study**. For instance, if they're going to a college where the medium of study is English, then writing in English will be essential for them. But if students are going to study psychology and the medium of instruction is Arabic, I don't think then writing is important. Ummmm it doesn't mean anything to them at that time. **It only means something which they have to do to pass the exam**. It's not something they will be eager to understand, **they will just be eager to know and master enough of it in order to continue their studies and nothing else**. To sum up, it depends on which direction students are going in. [Teacher_4]

> **I don't think writing is beneficial** for the students since most of them, according to what they always tell us, will apply to do Arabic Majors where English is of no use at all. [Teacher_8]

Teachers 4 and 8 imply that writing has neither intrinsic nor extrinsic value for those university students whose academic courses are not taught through English. In both cases, they seem to position themselves empathetically with the students, so from that perspective they consider why students need to write in English, which reflects the motivation of the students and that of the teachers as well.

Teacher_1, by contrast, points out the extrinsic value of writing in English can have for future study overseas, showing her wider and more positive view of the potential use of English.

> **I think writing in English is important** generally because it is one of the four skills needed to acquire a language. But **it can become very important if someone continues her studies abroad**. She needs to excel in writing to be able to satisfy the needs of studying and also to manage to communicate well with the world around. [Teacher_1]

Teacher_11 below suggests that writing in English is important for students whose future subject is scientific, for instance, medical students, because the medium of study for science is English. Science students were therefore consciously aware of their need to learn how to write in English and responded to their teachers in class and were motivated. However, if students are going to study arts, like geography, where Arabic is the language of study, these students might have little interest in learning English because they had no immediate need for writing in English for their first degree academic courses, and only needed it to pass the entrance exams. Below teacher_11 presents her own, general view of student needs - '*personally* […] *because of the world we are in right now'* before going on to give details and reasons for the students; attitudes to and success in writing in English.

> Personally, **it's important to learn how to write in English** because of the world we are in right now. **It's** also **important for science students**. However, for the arts students, they don't see why they need to learn English when they have no plan to use it further. It depends on the students. But most science students meet the teachers' expectations [of good students]. They are willing to do anything to get better marks so they always ask questions when they don't understand. Most of the arts students don't meet the expectations [for university level students]. They are taking English Language Institution classes because it's mandatory for them. So they don't actually enjoy learning. Again it depends on the students. Science students produce good

> solid pieces of writing whereas most arts students cannot even produce simple present tenses. [Teacher_11]

5.2.2.2 Students' interpretations

The Academic Literacies approach gives a prominent place to students at the centre of the process of learning to write and values their contribution as active participants through interaction in equal partnership with their teachers and peers within the social community of their subject of study. It is necessary, therefore, to examine students' understanding of literacy practices as well as those of their teachers and how they could foster their learning.

Nineteen of the undergraduate students expressed their wider interest in learning academic writing in EFL in their interviews. When asked to elaborate on why they would need to write in English in future and for what purposes, the students responded that they saw writing as being very important for their future professions, as illustrated by the comments below. Student_17 produced a long list of future needs for writing in English, going beyond academic and work to include social and official needs not considered in the preparatory EFL classes.

> **Writing is important for research, study, applying for a job.** Even when we get a job, we sometimes need to write reports in English. In addition to that, we need to write in English when we apply for a visa. The internet also makes us need to write in English. **Writing in English is always there, at anytime and everywhere**. [Student_17]

Student_13's response was less specific, and in terms of the students' needs as a group, but also referred to wider, extrinsic needs for writing in English.

> I mean that we have to learn how to write in English in order to be able to do a lot of things such as applying for a job, studying. There are a lot of things we have to do by writing in English. [Student_13]

Student_11's response is personal and refers to her creative writing needs for self-expression as well as for her future job.

> I need to learn how to write in English **in order to express myself** and **to be able to handle my future job as a surgeon**. I think each job nowadays requires the ability to write in English. [Student_11]

Student_4 points out that basic job needs include the ability to speak and write in English.

> If you're going to get a simple job, the first thing they ask about is: **Do you know how to speak and write English? Really, it's important**. [Student_4]

The analysis of the interview responses showed how keen the students were to learn and master English writing skills because of their importance for getting and doing a good job in the future. English and the ability to write in English have extrinsic value for these students' futures, which they are well aware of. Alkaff (2013) argues that EFL writing is essential for finding the best job opportunities. The students are aware that writing in English is widely required in many sectors in Saudi Arabia, for instance, education, tourism and health. Students therefore tended to value writing in higher education as a critical skill. Writing skills are seen as not only for university life, but are also lifelong - transferable - skills as the capacity to write for different purposes is conceived of as essential. These views do not locate writing to a specific social interactional niche like Academic Literacies, but see writing skills as a basis upon which to develop in several communicative areas. Student_12 points out this as well, imagining her future.

> I am going to need English in the near future. **I'm going to write a lot of stuff**. Maybe, I will do **some research** in my **future subject** when I am older. That's why **I have to learn to write a message to my boss, for example.** [Student_12]

Student_12's 'a lot of stuff' suggests many different purposes. It also illustrates the hierarchical structure of Saudi society in her potential workplace when she says '*I have to learn to write a message to my boss'* she assumes that she will have a certain place in the work hierarchy and someone - the boss- will be above her. She will hold a lower position. This may be expected as a temporary phenomenon as she is a student, but it could also imply acceptance of a wider, more permanent socio-cultural phenomenon of the lower status of women. For instance, Hofstede's (2011) cultural analyses of countries served as a benchmark to comment on the attitudes revealed in the data, the hierarchy and relationships illuminated here as well as in chapters 6 and 7. Linguistic Ethnography draws the researcher's attention to the speaker's standpoint to the information contained in her utterance.

Student_5 is aware of the extrinsic value of being able to write in English for formal, rather than personal needs. Her more conservative attitude is reflected by her perception that greater vocabulary knowledge and practice are key to improving her ability to communicate.

> **Writing is very important for educational purposes and future jobs**. When I know more words, it will be easy for me to **communicate**, but it needs more practice. [Student_5]

Student_11's reference to the 'process of writing', 'experience' and 'develop this skill' suggest a deeper understanding of the function and use of writing as more than a requirement of the university or for advancement in the employment hierarchy.

> I think **writing is an important skill** in English language. **I know that it takes a lot of experience to handle the process of writing**. I myself am not sure if I'm good at writing or not, but I will hopefully **develop this skill**. [Student_11]

The results suggest that most students see writing ability as a purposeful tool, with extrinsic value for their futures, and most of them are willing to learn as express the view that they need more practice or experience. Most comments suggest a broader conceptualisation of the skills and purposes involved in writing in English than those of their teachers. The students' views showed their greater awareness of English as a tool rather than an exercise to pass exams. Student_5 (above) referred to her need '*to communicate'* and having a voice is central to the Academic Literacies approach, which sees writing as a social, meaningful practice situated in the beliefs, power relationships and institutional discourses of the academy, and has an effect on identity (Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010).

5.2.3 What do students need to learn in order to write?

As noted previously, the Academic Literacies view is that if we can understand how the staff and students - in this case, in the English Language Institute - perceive students' writing, this can illuminate any mismatches between the perceptions at all levels and what might be missing from them, and so help reconsider the best way to develop writing practices (Lea and Street, 1998). This section presents the difference between the teachers' view of what they thought the students needed to learn or practice to write in English and what the students themselves said they wanted, which

was more than knowing the correct grammatical rules and using the correct vocabulary. It shows the gap between the teachers' perceptions of their students' needs and the students' own conceptions of their writing needs in higher education needs. It also suggests the lack of an informed dialogue between the students and their teachers, that students' needs - rather than curriculum needs - were not much discussed.

5.2.3.1 Teachers' views

This section aims to present the teachers' views of what students need to learn in order to help them write effectively in higher education. The interviews with the teachers demonstrated their interpretations of what students need to learn or practice to write effectively – their learning writing needs. Teacher_4 (her we *know* in line 1 suggesting teacher solidarity) below points out that both speaking and writing are vehicles for students to express their ideas, but she considers writing more restrictive because of its generic sub-types and formal structural requirements. As a teacher, she refers to both what writing involves as production as well as its different genres and purposes. She also refers to language competence in terms of 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' as well as presentation issues such as 'organisation' and 'layout'. She concedes that expressing ideas in any language or way is not easy, suggesting an underlying basic skill or ability needs to be cultivated.

Teachers in the English Language Institute deal with writing in English as the ability to manipulate surface language structures like grammar and spelling accurately in mainly relatively banal rather than academic contexts, with no emphasis on meaning-making or creativity in message-making for a reader. This type of approach, it is claimed, focuses on fixing students language problems (a process referred to disparagingly as the Study Skills approach by Lea and Street) as discussed in the literature review (Street, 2010). This kind of approach takes the view that knowledge is a one way transfer rather than constructed.

> Of course, we know that **writing is a productive skill** through which students express themselves and ideas: writing is production, like speaking. Sometimes students express their ideas through speaking but writing is more restricted. It's different from speaking since **when you write you have to follow certain structures, procedures and so on. You also**

> **have to follow certain formats in writing** because we have different forms of writing, for example, we have a paragraph, an essay, an article, an e-mail or a letter. [Teacher_4]

> **Writing essays is a demanding task, including syntax, layout and organisation**. Also, the process of putting down your ideas in a piece of writing isn't simple or easy. For these reasons I think students find it hard and difficult to write. [Teacher_4]

Teacher_4 considers writing in terms of being constrained by the end-product of a particular type or genre. She concedes that the process of writing is difficult, but offers no ideas about how to develop writing dynamically. The Academic Literacies view is that learning writing should be a dynamic process which offers space for making errors and revisions, not fitting into a pre-defined space (Ivanic, 2004; Street, 2010).

Teacher_8 also considers writing as complex, but focuses on basic language skills such as structure and vocabulary. She also refers to the writing style of the target language. Seeing writing in the target language in objective - albeit complicated - terms of vocabulary and structures ignores the subjective input of the writer, a criticism leveled at the Study Skills approach by Lea and Street (Lea and Street, 1998), although it should be remembered that Lea and Street theorise about students writing in English as mother tongue who already possess English language knowledge.

> **I think writing is a complicated process** and difficult to teach as it combines a number of skills. A **writer must have a solid knowledge** in **vocabulary** use and must be familiar with **sentence structure**, in addition to the writing style of the target language. [Teacher_8]

Teacher_3, however, points out that the teaching methods for writing now focus on the writing process and not just the product. She also suggests that the students work co-operatively on the process and preparation of writing. However, she suggests that without adequate vocabulary or sentence structure, written work will be limited.

> The institutional teaching style of writing has developed recently. Three years ago it used to be that you just needed to introduce the topic, ask questions and then the students wrote. It was productive only. **But now we are adapting the writing process in the sense that we brainstorm the vocabulary,**

> **brainstorm ideas, link the ideas together and discuss the layout of the essay**. Students then have to generate ideas, brainstorm and come up with related vocabulary, relate the ideas together, discuss the layout of the essay. **They learn how to relate ideas, how to use suitable linking words.** It is like guided essays to some extent; but, again they have the freedom to produce their own ideas within the topic selected for them. [Teacher_3]

Teacher_3, shows awareness of the more process-focused, interactive approach to writing through students brainstorming and generating ideas as part of the process of writing and this self-expression is a move in the direction of a less didactic and more student oriented approach, towards what the Academic Literacies approach advocates. Students are able to articulate their voices and bring their experience to the writing task, and thus establish their individual identities (Lillis and Scott, 2007; Street, 1984). However, it is not clear how much or how often the above teaching methods are promoted in the English Language Institute.

During classroom observation, however, I witnessed limited co-operative writing preparation in the classroom (see appendix 6). I observed students working in pairs to do a number of prescribed writing tasks from the writing booklet (see appendix 7 for further information). They brainstormed the adjectives used to describe physical appearance, wrote adjectives on the spider chart in their writing booklet, then wrote their own essays 'Describe one of your relatives' individually. Similar situations were described in other interview data, an example of which is below from teacher_10 (who also uses *you know* line 7 to indicate groups solidarity/common experience):

> When you were there in the classroom with me, I wasn't able to carry out all the activities. We had only some pair work where students can come and write on the board. Today, I had some group work. I assigned different topics and asked some groups to generate contrasting ideas about different topics and then they shared them. **They were able to write the arguments because you know what happens during the exam day, they run short of ideas and vocabulary**, or at least, they feel uncomfortable. Thus, when they generated the sheets and some arguments in their groups - Insha'Allah- it'll be very helpful and useful for the upcoming writing assessment tomorrow, is what they said. [Teacher_10]

> If students **have lots of words** for special sentences that's why when they write about a certain topic, it will be easy and good.

> And if they don't have enough words or even sentences, they won't be able to write about anything. [Teacher_3]

> I believe that good students **have to use the vocabulary** and **grammar rules** they've learnt in class. Whatever they've caught up, they need to use in writing. [Teacher_10]

Teacher_10 claims that written production depends on the vocabulary and grammar rules previously learned, on producing a blueprint and then filling it in, and according to teacher_3, no prepared words or sentences would mean the students had nothing to write about in the exam. This again takes a very static, constrained view of writing, an approach partly due to lack of class time, as teacher_10 below suggests:

> I believe that good students **have to use the vocabulary** and **grammar rules** they've learnt in class. Whatever they've caught up, they need to use in writing. [Teacher_10]

The interviews with staff generally support the perception of writing practices and skills as based on general principles and knowledge of language rules which can be transferred across courses and genres. One of the teachers (teacher_7), however, suggested the importance of reading as an input for student writing in higher education.

> I **think writing is a reflection of what you've read**, what you have in your mind. Like speaking: speaking is a reflection of what you think, what your assumptions are, your thinking, your ideas, everything. So writing also when you start writing, **you put everything that you have in your mind into a piece of writing.** That's why, the more you encourage your students to read, the better results you are going to get. They should produce a piece of writing, a paragraph, an essay, a post or even a written opinion. I have a suggestion that after every reading class, we should have some writing. Usually, we link the skills: speaking and listening and reading and writing together. Thus, whenever we've been reading, we should write. Already, we have a lot of reading, go and check the curriculum, a lot of reading there. So if they're doing a lot of reading, then they must be doing a lot of writing. [Teacher_7]

Teacher_7's description of the transfer of experience from reading input to writing output and writing as a reflection of thinking and speaking implies the beginnings of a more dynamic, creative teaching process. Students sharing their experience of reading through writing might be embryonic of Lea and Street's social writing community

(Lea and Street, 1998, 2006). According to Matoti and Shumba (2011), writing is a key skill in knowledge production in higher education. Students in higher education are expected to master literacy practices such as thinking and applying the appropriate writing conventions in order to handle the university tasks such as reading and producing knowledge (Coffin et al., 2003; Ramoroka 2012).

Teacher_11 outlined the methods she uses for teaching the skills for writing, including error correction. If used well, these can sensitise students to meaning-making for the reader (to communicate with the reader) but the focus here seems to be on static rules forms rather than being dynamic and meaningful communication. The methods used could have a better focus.

> Writing booklets, of course. Students **write new grammar rules** and **vocabulary** in their notebook and on the board. Also, every morning I post three sentences for them to proofread on the board and we go through them. [Teacher_11]

Teacher_7 is cynical about writing teachers' general dismissive attitudes to writing in English and the rote learning of rules, a passive and non-creative activity. It is not clear whether she counts herself as one of these teachers, but she locates the problem within the teachers - not the students - lack of time or other reason. She also points out the wash back effect of the need to get good marks in tests, which often restricts the goals and objectives of teaching to that which is examined (Elshawa et al., 2016). The examined aspects seem to be knowledge about the language rather than how to use it.

> Writing teachers don't give any importance to writing in English. They just give students **grammatical rules** or drills. They give them **rules to study**, learn by heart, and **then reproduce them** to get the mark. [Teacher_7]

Teachers handle writing in English as the capacity to manipulate surface language structures such as grammar and vocabulary spelling accurately in mainly relatively banal rather than academic contexts, with no focus on meaning-making or creativity in composing a piece of writing for a reader. Lea and Street (1998) argue that it is essential to examine how both teachers and students interpret the parameters of their written literacy practices to recognise the nature of student learning. As previously stated in chapter 3, the Academic Literacies approach considers the contextual and

cultural elements of student writing within specific subject areas in higher education as central to an understanding of how students learn to write (Lea, 2004). The views so far suggest that there is little in the way of task-based, purposive or observational writing, for instance, describing a process or experiment, how something works or anything involving dynamic change or development as its topic.

5.2.3.2 Students' views

The Interviews with students did indeed suggest that students have their personal understandings of what attributes and practices they need to write in English at tertiary level - their writing needs. The students were aware that writing is a complex process. They admitted that it was difficult for them to write in English. The students were also unclear about what constitutes good writing, but they knew that writing is much more than knowing the correct grammatical rules and using the correct vocabulary. Fourteen students commented in a similar vein to these referenced below.

> My knowledge is good but **I need more practice**. I know lots of 'words' and my 'grammar' is good too. **I know the 'rules of the target language'; but I do not know 'how to write'**. I think I do not know the writing process. [Student_16]

> The bad thing is that **we didn't have 'enough experience' to write a good piece of writing**. There are many challenges in the writing process at the university level. [Student_5]

> When I was a student in grade four, writing was the hardest skill. **It requires specific words, more details.** I wish they'd taught us how to write in English. [Student_20]

The students showed awareness that writing requires practice and more skill than just the ability to reproduce correct grammar and appropriate vocabulary. They showed awareness that writing is a process, not just a product, and that processes other than grammar and vocabulary are involved. The fact that they would like to learn more of the 'how to' of writing suggests their needs and expectations are not met by the course design.

The comments below illustrate this perceived gap in what they would like or feel they need to learn and what and the way they are taught. Student_13's comment shows how demotivating this is for her.

> I think writing is the hardest part of learning English at the university level. I don't like it. **I don't even like the way my teachers ask me to write about things**[…]. It's very difficult for me to join the 'sentences together' and 'generate the ideas'. [Student_13]

Student_7 strongly rejects what she is taught, adding that what they are asked to do is just repetition, with no creative input, far from Academic Literacies ideals.

> **No, it isn't useful.** One of my teachers at Saudi Western University asked us to write a paragraph/ an essay, she gave the 'nouns', 'adjective' and a lot of things we have to use. **It was just to copy not to add anything** ……mmm. What can I say!!!!!. [Student_7]

Student_11 points out she is being taught about the presentation of writing - the form - rather than how to do it, and shows her awareness of these different elements and their relative value for her, whereas student_13 while seeing a need for grammar and listening, dismisses the writing classes as not very useful.

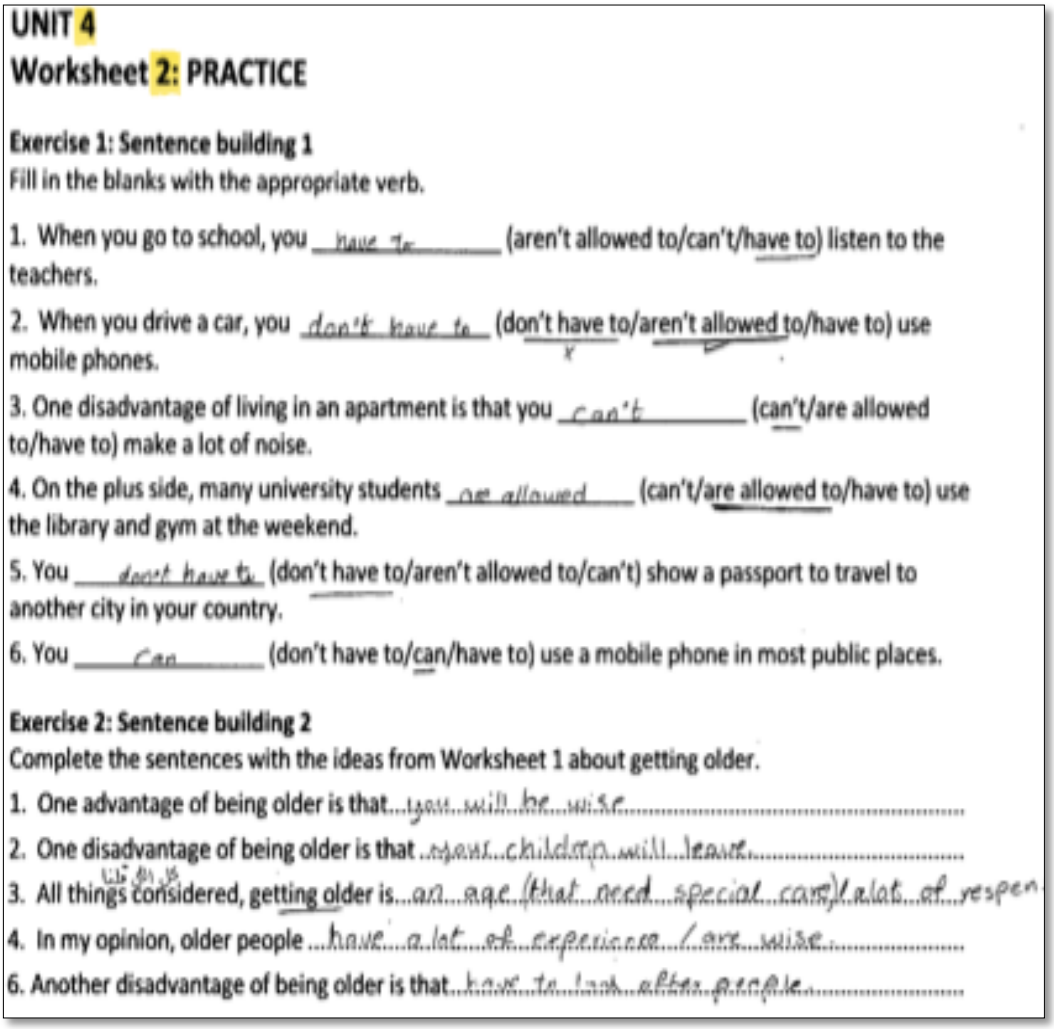
> **No, I mean they taught us primary writing**, **the basics for writing** something such as indenting before 'starting writing' our paragraph and 'underlining the title' of that paragraph. [Student_11]

> I could use some 'grammar', listening but **I don't think that writing classes are really useful**. [Student_13]

The students overall reported that the teaching practices they experienced did not appear to support their writing skills at university level. The students were aware that the surface features of language such as grammar, spelling and punctuation while necessary, are not sufficient to support writing practices in higher education.

This finding was also confirmed by another set of data, the 'Worksheet' from the student writing booklet for each university module. It illustrates the type of writing task given the students, which include making grammatical choices, sentence completion and gap-filling practice (see figure 5.1) and is concerned with the technical matters of learning basic language skills, such as grammatical structures. However, while the sentence completion section arguably, leaves some room for individual choice, this is only within a very narrow framework. There is very little evidence of the process of writing - except for the brainstorming comments - the

planning, outlining and revision of ideas, which even Academic Literacies might concede is a common aspect of the writing process even if there are variations according to the writing context.



UNIT 4

Worksheet 2: PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Sentence building 1

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb.

1. When you go to school, you have to (aren't allowed to/can't/have to) listen to the teachers.
2. When you drive a car, you don't have to (don't have to/aren't allowed to/have to) use mobile phones.
3. One disadvantage of living in an apartment is that you can't (can't/are allowed to/have to) make a lot of noise.
4. On the plus side, many university students are allowed (can't/are allowed to/have to) use the library and gym at the weekend.
5. You don't have to (don't have to/aren't allowed to/can't) show a passport to travel to another city in your country.
6. You can (don't have to/can/have to) use a mobile phone in most public places.

Exercise 2: Sentence building 2

Complete the sentences with the ideas from Worksheet 1 about getting older.

1. One advantage of being older is that...you will be wise.....
2. One disadvantage of being older is that ..your children will leave.....
3. All things considered, getting older is...an age (that need special care)/a lot of respen
4. In my opinion, older people ...have a lot of experience / are wise.....
6. Another disadvantage of being older is that..have to look after people.....

Figure 5.1: Student worksheet[7]

Evidence from the worksheet above suggests that students' main practice activities focus on grammatical accuracy and the appropriate vocabulary. The institutional influences on student writing will be further discussed in chapter, 6. Academic Literacies theory would argue that particular writing communities have their own writing processes, and these are outside the experience of those who are not part of them, so students cannot learn through them. In its purest form, this poses an

[7] This exercise comes from the 'Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide' –Oxford University Press (ELI, 2014).

insurmountable wall for the English writing teacher who is not simultaneously an expert in a range of subject areas. The range of writing activities was also very narrow, restricted to the essay other than mostly single sentence writing exercises.

5.2.4 What do students write about? Essay topics

This section provides an overview of teachers' views of the influence of culture on writing materials in the English Language Institute. It also discusses their own interpretations and views regarding essay topics. Then this section presents the students' views of essay topics.

5.2.4.1 The effect of culture on writing materials: teacher's views

As previously stated (see chapters 3 and 4), the aims of Linguistic Ethnography, like all discourse analysis, are to understand what is really going on behind the things people say, in this case what the interviewees say - how far their responses are formed around cultural expectations or the discourse of authority. Teachers 9, 4, 1 and 7 confirmed that the English language materials in the present study had been modified to meet local cultural and religious values. This requirement was echoed in the teachers' responses to the research question: Are writing practices influenced by certain cultural factors?

Teacher_9 below echoes the received wisdom of authority - the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - and her use of 'we' to suggest group membership and abdication of personal responsibility.

> This country [Saudi Arabia] has its own traditions and culture. When **we** come to talk about knowledge, we cannot ignore the traditions and culture of each country. Traditions, culture and education are greatly interrelated, especially in the Kingdom of Saudi. [Teacher_9]

Teacher_4 also bows to authority in pointing out the textbook has approved material for use in the Middle East, therefore her choices have been made for her.

> **You know that the book we teach here is 'Headway'** [*New Headway Plus, Special Edition, Oxford University Press with Headway Plus Writing Guide for additional writing support*]. **This book's material is suitable to be used in the Middle East**. [Teacher_4]

Teacher_1 gives broader examples of what is unacceptable in writing according to Islamic rules, rather than quoting the textbook, so her received wisdom seems to come from a higher authority than the education department:

> **Writing [in English] must follow the Islamic rules**. It shouldn't, for example, discuss having a relationship without marriage or being free from the supervision of parents before marriage. **It is also influenced by tradition**: girls are not free to express their feelings towards the other sex in writing or reveal their love to boys. [Teacher_1]

Teacher_7 points out the constraints on the choices of topic for reading or writing and also more recent restrictions on music:

> Sometimes yes and sometimes they can't write on any topic; there are certain topics because we are here in Saudi Arabia, there are certain topics about which they can't write. Even reading, if the text isn't culturally adequate or well modified, it's skipped. […] Four years ago, I had a curriculum of music and different topics that we don't write about or we don't discuss now. [Teacher_7]

The cultural restrictions are reported by the teachers in terms of the requirement of authority and not challenged or commented on. The fact that the course book is a general language course book suitable for use in Arabic-speaking countries rather than with a focus on writing for academic purposes, further constrains and limits teachers' choices of essay writing subject matter and writing activities, although the teachers accept this as necessary. This will be further discussed in the section below. The administration may see the appropriateness of this course book's language materials as the solution to most problems - giving the cultural dimension precedence over all other considerations. On the downside, this can create largely uniform and static teaching, with little dynamic response to the kind of needs the students expressed in 5.2.3.2.

The teachers' responses and justifications suggest that home cultural factors regarding what topics are suitable or unsuitable hold a dominant position in Saudi Arabian society, thus in education. The influence of local cultural and religious norms was evident in this study, in the process of selecting what were regarded as appropriate writing topics conforming to religious rules rather than students' practical learning

needs. Similar to the findings of Shah et al. (2013), the conservative nature of the Saudi context affects teachers' efficacy in the classroom. Rugh (2002, p.46) points out that the Saudi Arabian "curriculum has traditionally been heavily focused on religion and Arabic". According to Grami (2010), it also prohibits students from writing about certain topics, which may limit their writing knowledge and skills in their future areas of study. Because the chosen course book is a general English language course book - albeit suitably corresponding to the requirements of the Saudi hierarchy in terms of promulgating the appropriate and accepted cultural norms - its syllabus does not cover areas of use or relevance to studying another subject through English.

5.2.4.2 Teachers' personal views of essay topics

Seven of the teachers reported their own interpretations and views regarding essay topics. They suggested that students' writing in the English language institute is restricted to a few general, simple topics - descriptions of people or places. Essays at the highest level usually consist of 4 paragraphs on a restricted range of topics and are about 150 words - somewhat short of most undergraduate academic essays - as reported by Teacher_4 below (also invoking solidarity/shared knowledge by *you know)*.

> **What the students write in levels (1) and (2) is very simple, as you know.** They write about themselves, their age, their names, and their family, and then they go to level 4 which is the highest level in which they are asked to write an essay of 4 paragraphs including 150 words or more. **They are going to write about describing a friend, a family or one of their relatives;** I mean describing somebody - whoever. Even writing at this level (4) is not varied but limited to only 2 topics. [Teacher_4]

Teacher_1 is also critical, pointing out that writing topics neither prepare students for their future subjects of study nor engage the students' interests or emotional responses, thus encourage no spark of self-expression.

> **Writing topics mostly concentrate on simple subjects** that don't involve students' feelings or interests. They do not provide them with topics that prepare them for their future subjects of study, or even talk about subjects that touch their emotions [….]. It doesn't provide them with the spark that encourages them to write freely about themselves. [Teacher_1]

The teachers' comments above show that the limited writing topics were not valued by them because they were not interesting or motivating for the students and not related to their future studies. Neither did they appear to help students experience the reasons or ways people communicate with each other in writing or help them participate in their future disciplines. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), students have to immerse themselves in a community of practice to understand the complexity of the writing process and become familiar with the conventions of a particular community (Hyland, 2009). Schmitt (2005) also argues that students need to know how to write using the resources of a certain discipline; this acts as a process of acculturation into that discipline. They also have to read around the discipline in order to familiarise themselves with its key values, concepts and theoretical underpinnings, otherwise, it will be extremely hard for students to write within this new discipline. The above comments from teacher_1 suggest that there is little or no communicative purpose in the students' writing and no intended audience. Students mainly write descriptions of familiar areas.

The classroom observations confirmed that, at the four levels of language proficiency, students were required to write only two essays in each module, throughout the 7 week period. The writing topics observed in this study did not take into consideration the students' interests or future academic goals. Table 5.3 shows all the writing topics set by the English Language Institution (ELI, 2014). However, this shows that there are types of writing other than descriptions of people and places – one in ELI 103 and one in ELI 104. The 'advantages and disadvantages' and the 'for and against' essays can be seen as sharing a general academic form and function for writing. However, the students do not have the opportunity to determine what to write about in an 'advantages and disadvantages' essay. The teachers determined what the students wrote about, for example, 'Write about the advantages and disadvantages of travelling by ONE form of transport'. Lea and Street might argue, that there is no point in such essays anyway as there is no transfer of form and function from one discipline to another, a debatable point. However, as Lea and Street write in the context of native English speakers with the necessary general language ability, there needs to be some language learning progression integrated into acquiring or developing writing in English as a necessary tool for tertiary education. In this vein, according to Wingate et al. (2011), efficient argument is important in academic writing.

Table 5. 3: Essay topics

Level of language	Writing topics
ELI 101	Write about your family Describe a city or town
ELI 102	Write a paragraph about your friend or relative Write about your last holiday
ELI 103	Write a story about a time when things went wrong Write about 'advantages and disadvantages'
ELI 104	Write a 'for and against' essay Describe one of your relatives

Adapted from English Language Institution (2014)

Topics like these may be within the students' language capacity in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but they do little to motivate or stretch them neither do they relate to academic subject areas. Students were expected to write essays to address their writing topic, but for an unspecified audience and thus writing was approached as a purposeless activity. As previously argued (see chapter 3), the lack of awareness of audience or communicative purpose conflicts with the arguments of the Academic Literacies approach (Lillis, 2001). According to Ivanic (1998), the power relations between writer and reader are important in order to understand student writing.

This raises the question of how teachers decide what to teach within the confines of the possibilities open to them. With respect to this question, it was noted that writing topics for the writing curriculum are designed at a higher administrative level within the institutional hierarchy of Saudi Western University. The teachers claimed that they taught not from choice, but because they had to follow the rules set down by the administration, though teacher_3 claims that this style suited her students - maybe thinking of their need to pass the exams. As pointed out earlier, Linguistic Ethnography views language and the social world as shaping each other, hence "close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity" (Rampton et al., 2004, p.2). From a Linguistic Ethnography perspective then, when decision-making ability is absent at the micro-level, responsibility is also affected, so lack of choice can result in complacency and fossilised teaching. Teaching can become stagnant and non-responsive to students' needs if teachers believe they have no power. As Hofstede (1980, 2011) points out,

Saudi Arabia scores high on the power distance dimension. This suggests that members of a social group or citizens accept a hierarchical order - everyone has a role and place. Teachers_3 points this out, though she contends that she can choose her teaching methods.

> We [teachers] are terribly sorry for not having the luxury of free writing. We just follow the curriculum and we are not allowed to choose what goes in it. [Teacher_3]
>
> **I can only choose the teaching style** that suits my students. [Teacher_3]

The teachers' responses suggest that they follow the prescribed goals and topics in the syllabus with little deviation. This is also confirmed by institution documents (see chapter 6). They do not seem to have any flexibility to change or modify what to teach in the writing classroom, though they indicated in their interviews what they would do so, given free choice, as exemplified by, teacher_11's comments below, showing awareness of a better way to engage the students in writing by relating topics more to the students' lives, which is a way of valuing the experience the student brings to the classroom and advocated by Academic Literacies.

> **Writing topics are generated from the curriculum**. If I could give them topics they'd like to write about, I would but I cannot, **I do not have much freedom here**. For level 3, I kind of like the first writing topic because they can relate it to their own lives. **It might be better if they could write about pleasant memories and experiences instead of bad memories**. Also, I don't like the second topic-advantages and disadvantages. I wish that ELI would change the topics to something the students can relate to in their own personal lives. [Teacher_11]

During the observation sessions, I witnessed how the teachers appeared to follow without deviation the prescribed weekly lessons plans from the institution to instruct writing skills. They mainly used the 'writing booklet' for activities. Within the writing class, teachers did have 'freer writing sessions' which meant students had the chance to practice and develop writing (from first to final draft) but the teachers still had limited choices of topic within these freer sections. Teacher_11 described her attempts to change how she taught.

> YES and NO. **We don't have much choice here. We follow the 'pacing guides'**[8][what has to be achieved each week]. I really didn't like our writing booklet. I went to one of the administrators last year to show her how I want to teach. I brought samples and showed her. She looked at it**, but my idea was rejected because she wanted me to teach the same thing**. I was very disappointed until this year. I mentioned this incident when the English Language Institution asked for feedback. Surprisingly, that email went to the men's section and Simon replied. He gave me the green light to adjust the writing! [Teacher_11]

Teacher_11 managed to cross the gender divide and have a dialogue with a male colleague and exchange views and advice, but such small victories, while useful for the participants, are not enough to push the system to adopt a more dynamic, interactive and flexible approach to teaching and learning, but they do throw into relief the difficulties teachers face (see appendix 8 for further information). The teacher in question is a non-Saudi, so may be less inhibited and able to question authority more easily than her Saudi colleagues. Her comment also indicates an instance where ELI asked for feedback and she responded. It could be that feedback requests are formal statements and not expected to be followed up, but Teache_11 shows that feedback can have an impact.

5.2.4.3 Students' views of essay topics

The students' views of writing topics seemed to suggest they are relatively bland and fail to either encourage or motivate them to learn how to write. Student_16, below, also suggests the topics are childish and not suitable for university level study.

> **The writing topics are very simple** at university level. **The topics are not useful at all. The topics are very easy.** These topics suit primary school and not university level. [Student_16]

Student 7 agrees:

> I think the English language institute **has to improve its writing topics**, **which are very simple**. We are in the university. Writing topics do not motivate us to write. [Student_7]

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[8] It is a tool for curriculum guidance, concerned with accomplishing student learning outcomes (SLOs) on a weekly basis. It identifies the available materials and provides tutors with a small degree of flexibility within the class time allocated for specific language activities, and relevant supporting materials to achieve SLO< *students claim this doesn't happen, they don't understand* (for an example see appendix D). For further information see chapter 6.

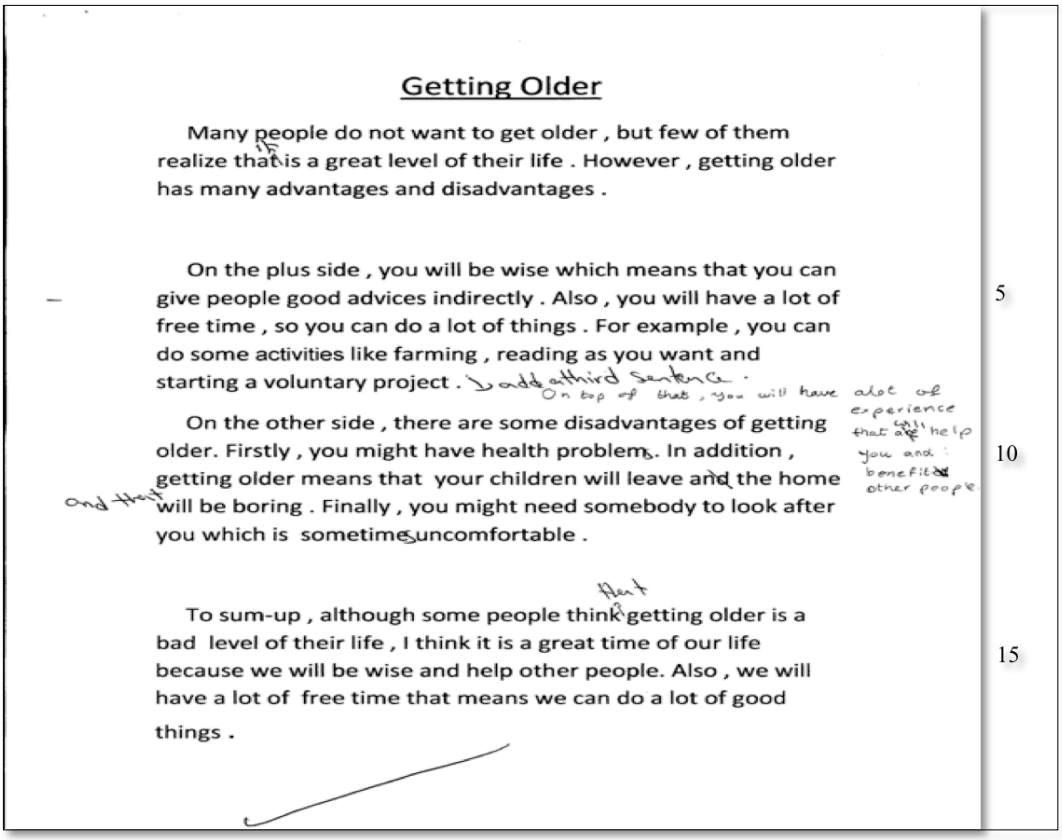
But student_14, while criticising the quality and usefulness of the writing practice, also mentions the absence of grammatical focus.

> There was a little focus on grammar, **we never wrote a useful piece of writing.** It was just very poor writing. [Student_14]

The students suggest that they were not challenged by the over simplistic topics and therefore did not find writing about them useful at university level. Some students argued that they need to practice broader types of writing tasks relevant to their future courses, more academic relevant topics:

> **I'd like to write about something useful.** I want to be an engineer so I want to write about anything in relation to engineering. [Student_9]

Figure 5.2 below illustrates an example of a student essay based on a topic from *Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide.* The student presents a reasoned 'for and against' argument; her essay has an introduction, examples to support her for and against argument in separate paragraphs, and a conclusion. This type of essay, while relatively rare, could be seen as exemplifying what Lea and Street refer to as an extreme case of 'the Study Skills approach'; while the essay genre reflects an academic type, the topic is quite divorced from any discipline or academic topic nor is there any preparatory reading research (see links to reading pointed out by teacher_7 section 5.2.3.1). However, even this is likely to be a more useful basis than the usual descriptive, accuracy based essays, even though the teacher's comments also seem prescriptive and also belong within Lea and Street's view of the Study Skills approach.



Getting Older

Many people do not want to get older , but few of them realize that is a great level of their life . However , getting older has many advantages and disadvantages .

On the plus side , you will be wise which means that you can give people good advices indirectly . Also , you will have a lot of free time , so you can do a lot of things . For example , you can do some activities like farming , reading as you want and starting a voluntary project .

On the other side , there are some disadvantages of getting older. Firstly , you might have health problems. In addition , getting older means that your children will leave and the home will be boring . Finally , you might need somebody to look after you which is sometimes uncomfortable .

To sum-up , although some people think getting older is a bad level of their life , I think it is a great time of our life because we will be wise and help other people. Also , we will have a lot of free time that means we can do a lot of good things .

5

10

15

Figure 5.2: An example of a student essay

This general argumentative essay shows that the student has mastered the idea of balance, as she gives both sides of the argument a similar amount of space and does the same for the introductory and concluding comments, as in lines (4 and 9). However, this type of general writing topics does not help students construct new (as in their disciplines) knowledge in a proficient way. Students in higher education have to engage with relevant academic topics to promote their academic understanding and thus their writing skills, articulate their voices convincingly as advocated in Academic Literacies. They also need to bring their own experiences to the writing task, negotiate their ideas and support them with the appropriate literature to give their work more reliability, validity and credibility (Lea and Street, 1998). Thus, in effective argument in academic writing the relationship between writing and critical thinking is very strong (Jones, 2006; 2009; Mitchell, 2000; Wingate et al., 2011).

As previously discussed in chapter three the literature review, the Study Skills approach would argue that a student can transfer at least some of her/his understanding of argument, balance and logic to her/his future subject of study (Ivanic, 2004).

Academic Literacies, on the other hand rejects the idea of common genres (like argumentation) features and hence rejects the idea of transfer from one discipline to another and argues that the Study Skills perspective ignores the significance of individual disciplines and the community of practice (Gimenez, 2008). According to Neumann (2001), it may belie the variety and complexity of disciplines. It is also runs contradictory to the perception that academics recognise their place within their area of a particular discipline (Neumann, 2001; Nesi and Gardner, 2012)[9]. However, the key emphasis of Academic Literacy practices is on the individual, how each student acquires the ability to switch practices from one site to another, to select and apply the appropriate linguistic practices to each context and to manage the social meaning and identities negotiated within her chosen discipline (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010).

5.2.5 Understanding the nature of the writing practices

This section presents an overview of participants' views of the nature of writing practices in English. The interviews with the participants revealed that writing in English received little attention in ELI.

5.2.5.1 Why practising writing is restricted, according to the participants?

Despite the significance of writing practices in higher education (Badger and White, 2000; Dempsey et al., 2009; Turner, 2004) - as most assessment is through writing, not just exams, but essays, reports, dissertations and theses - writing practice generally still receives little attention. Most of the academic staff in this study also suggested that writing is undervalued in the syllabus and in the amount of time allocated to it in ELI classroom instruction. Teacher_7 points out that writing tends to be an added-on extra, time permitting, rather than a core part of the curriculum and claims this is common practice (*we tend*, line 7).

> **I think writing is not given as much importance as the other three skills**: listening, reading and speaking. **It isn't in the curriculum not in the class.** It's not given as much time as speaking. Students speak more than they write. They read more than they write. When it comes to writing, I'm telling you the truth: we "the teachers" since we are overloaded with other

[9] However, certain disciplines do borrow from other disciplines, particularly the humanities, social science, philosophy, politics, cultural studies, linguistics and so on, particularly in terms of methodology and to theorise, as is the case with this thesis.

> things, when we are in class, **we just tend to do it [writing] quickly**. I've done writing, it's at the end of the class or the lesson and that isn't correct. [Teacher_7]

Teacher_ 3 points out less than 3/18 hours are devoted to writing.

> **Writing is a part of the curriculum, but it isn't given a specific time or even 3 hours a week**. It is not something that is considered as a part of the syllabus on its own. [Teacher_3]

The academic staff argued that the pressures on the very limited time available for writing instruction did not allow them to do more than keep to the syllabus. Furthermore, the students also considered the amount of time available for writing to be problematic. Ten students claimed that the available time seemed to be insufficient for developing their academic writing skills, thus agreeing with their teachers, as the examples below illustrate.

> **The teacher didn't give as much time to writing,** sometimes students feel that writing isn't important and the language is only about speaking. [Student_17]

> They spent lots of time in developing our listening and speaking skills but not writing. [Student_16]

> We didn't do much writing in the classroom. [Student_11]

> We focus on speaking. We discuss various topics so that we have the opportunity to practice the language. **However, there was little focus on grammar, we never wrote a useful piece of writing.** It was just very poor writing. [Student_14]

These comments suggest the students had limited writing experience, in terms of both time and content or in Academic Literacies terms, examples of appropriate writing to critique and give them a more equitable power base. Student_14 above also links writing to knowledge of grammar, presumably thinking of accuracy in writing. Interestingly, both teachers and students agree on the limitations imposed by time constraints. Students had little opportunity to practice the process of writing because teachers lacked the time to teach useful academic writing skills.

This was also been confirmed through the classroom observations; I noted that there was little or no focus on the actual writing. I observed that students were directed to construct their own essays at the end of the class. The writing class was divided up to

cover brainstorming, the discussion and exchange of ideas and thoughts about the writing topic in small groups of 4. Then, they completed the writing exercises in the writing booklet before writing up their essays individually. It seems the controlled writing exercises were prioritised over freer individual essay writing. Brainstorming is arguably part of the creative process of writing although in this case, as a precursor to booklet exercises, it appears more of an accuracy check than a truly creative process. In any case, there was not enough time for the students to complete their essays.

This raises the question of why writing is undervalued in the syllabus, practices and in the amount of time allocated to it in ELI classroom instruction. The 'modular system' in operation in the ELI seems to influence writing practices. A modular system consists of 2 modules per 14 week term. Modules ELI 101, 102, 103 and 104 consist of 126 hours of class time per module in a 7 week period, that is, 18 hours of class time per week in the English Language Institution (ELI, 2014). The time-frame of the modular system - seven weeks, with eighteen hours of teaching each week - creates a big challenge for academic teachers. The limited time for instruction influences teaching practices in the current context, a problem also found in similar contexts by Al-Seghayer (2014) and Al-Khasawneh (2010). As the following quotes from some of the teachers illustrate, if each class changes teacher after every seven week module, it is difficult for teachers to follow-up the progress of each student individually (and some lack of continuity) with only her previous teacher's brief notes for guidance. In the present study, the number of students in the writing classes varied - 26, 28, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33 and 35 (see chapter 4, section 4.4.3).

> **There is another problem, which is the modular system we are following.** For example, if I teach a group of students a certain module, I become aware of their problems, I become aware of their needs. **As soon as I realize these problems and needs, they go on to another group with another teacher.** Thus **if I were with them for 2/3 modules, I could help them more** and give each one of them a task that can help her develop her language to reach the best level. On the other hand, the same thing happens with the other teacher in the other group. I want to say **if we taught those students for at least one semester, we could do something to help them develop their writing.** Let me say what has not been taught at school for 7 years can't be rectified in a year. It needs a lot of effort and concentration. [Teacher_4]

This is a plea for a less restrictive timetable and about creating a better context for learning. The current system looks to be more of a production line model. Another teacher gave her critique of the modular system and identified time and quantity of information as the key issues for review.

> The modular system puts a lot of pressure on the teachers and students as well. That's why **we have** to face it; we are short of time for carrying this out. There isn't enough time for students to digest whatever they have learnt. The modular system focuses on quantity. This is the main flaw. I don't know why!!!!!!! But to my mind, we should teach less and practice more since it doesn't make sense if you teach too much. Now I'm going to give you an example; it's that when you feed a baby […] - the doctors advise not to overfeed the baby otherwise it's going to vomit. This is exactly what happens with our students. If you over teach, nothing will stay down; they'll vomit because they don't have time to digest. No, the language learning process needs time; it's a matter of time. Time here is our problem; as we've a short time, we always rush into the sea because we've to follow a precise timetable. On the other hand, as you see, you feel the pressure a teacher can no longer bear. In the beginning of the module, once you hear there's an exam, the stress comes on and you're rushing. Of course, if you're stressed about that, what about your students? They will be stressed as well. But you have to follow the syllabus. [Teacher_8]

As teachers 4 and 8 point out, the modular system creates a number of challenges and critical issues for them (*we have to*, line 2). The challenge within the short (7 week) modules is the brief time given to cover writing within the overall syllabus, to support the students' weakest points as well as challenge their stronger points and meet the course objectives as well. This appears to leave little room for teaching student writing.

As far as the teachers were concerned, they followed the demands of the writing curriculum within the allocated time, which did not include time-tabled slots for writing, so they do what they can. Some teachers see this as pedagogically fruitless, but they are constrained by the curriculum. If the only measure is passing the test then the meso-level and those in the micro level who have test success are seen to be successful. It may be that no one has thought of any other measures of success such as happiness, progress, satisfaction, and the development of skills. However, it is clear

that tests have powerful wash back effects, therefore, changing the test type - they way of assessing writing - could be a positive start.

Furthermore, taking a Linguistic Ethnography standpoint to consider the power relations influencing their utterances, teachers may accept ELI classroom instructions as defined, static, a part of their role as upholders of the status quo, as Hofstede's (2011) cultural analysis suggests, and may feel powerless on a personal level, that they have no capacity to modify, interpret or make changes. Following the prescriptions as they see them, can also absolve them from making efforts to modify the situation by devoting more time to teaching writing skills, for example. This finding reveals that power inequalities are executed in social relations (Coffin and Donohue, 2012), and the interviews and observations indicated instances of perceived power inequalities. What they see as the overarching need (power) will also guide their actions - the cultural and educational norms, time constraints and the exams. However, teacher_11, below adds that more time should also be devoted to developing students' academic writing skills to support their cognitive skills as well as more genres of writing, like application forms.

> **Students need more time to practice the language; they also need to write for various purposes** […]. We also have to promote the students' ways of thinking on how to write an application form or something like that. [Teacher_11]

In the current context, the interviews with staff showed that writing receives little attention, not only in English but also in Arabic. Writing skills are not part of the main educational culture. As Goldburg (2013) states, for many years, teaching and learning English has placed greater emphasis on enhancing oral language, vocabulary and grammar, but not written instruction. Teacher_4, for example, in the present study points out that writing in general (*in her point of view, line 5,* which could be seen as a critique of the general education system) is not seen as a focused, taught skill, but something that develops as a result of other language skills - or does not, as the case may be:

> **In our [Arab] culture, writing is not given great importance.** I mean that it's something that you have to get used to do and practice for a long time and then you can master the skill. This is because when we come to write essays, we find it really demanding and not simple to write. […] **In my point of view,**

> **the main problem for Saudi students is that they didn't learn how to write.** [Teacher_4]

Teachers 9, 7 and 3 similarly, say writing is a neglected skill at school, which makes learning it more difficult later on.

> **We don't teach our students how to write in EFL during their early years.** As a result it is difficult for them to learn how to write when they grow up. [Teacher_9]

> Students aren't used to writing not even in Arabic.[…] **Writing is not given much attention,** like the other language skills. […] It's not given as much time as speaking. Students speak more than they write. [Teacher_7]

> Students' speaking is better than their writing in English. […] **These students are exposed to more spoken English language than written input**, so their writing skills seem not to make any noticeable improvement. [Teacher_3]

These views suggest that writing tends to be ignored and that speaking and listening receive greater attention. This situation may discourage students from considering learning to write in English as important, as there is little classroom support promoting writing. These cultural views of what is more important and less important in learning a language seem to be enacted in the classroom as also suggested by the findings from the classroom observation.

Moreover, during the classroom observations, I noted limited interaction between the students and teachers. Although the students were invited to participate in the classroom, they were quiet and listened to their teachers; they did not negotiate or debate the topics with her. According to Academic literacies, the basis for interactive writing is where all the parties have equal power to participate and negotiate within the learning process (Street, 2010). It seems that neither collaboration nor interaction were highly cultivated in the classroom. In addition, during the class observation, I found the teachers insisted on collecting drafts from the students in the classroom so they could not finish off their work at home. Teacher_11 gave the following reason:

> However, I had students who copied from the net. **My opinion is that writing should take a place in the class room**. [Teacher_11]

The reason for this, it seemed, was some of her previous students had done their own work at home. Teacher_10 argues that:

> If you do it at home, you may ask your friends or friends for help. [Teacher_10]

Asking for other ideas and opinions is precisely the social interactive aspect Academic Literacies advocates, though the teacher_10 may have been commenting from a strictly accuracy perspective.

This suggests that the information Saudi students can access is limited to the textbook, while students in higher education are expected to be exposed to a wide range of information from a variety of learning sources. It seems the novice writers had little or no access to sources of information and ideas about the topics for writing exercises other than what was available from experience or inside the classroom. Confining writing to the classroom also discourages students. Academic Literacies argues that students need to negotiate ideas, browse various online sources and articulate their voices in class. The aim is to develop writing norms within the social context of a discipline, empower students' individual identities, and promote their self-assurance on a more holistic basis as they learn to engage with the learning process, not just factual information.

The writing syllabus and the teaching and learning of writing in the English language Institute is central to this study. However, the findings from the present study suggest that writing skills are undervalued in the English Language Institution and lack a specific syllabus responding to students' current and future needs. It appears to be an afterthought, an add-on skill used to practice grammar skills or restricted topics, time permitting.

5.2.6 The importance of the assessment of writing in English

This section aims to present the participants' views (i.e. teachers and students) of the significance of the assessment of writing in English. Interviews with the two groups showed how some responses suggest assessment in English for higher education is the main motivator that could encourage students to improve their writing skills while others were interested in acquiring the ability to write in English. I will start with teachers' views and students' interpretations.

5.2.6.1 Teachers' views

Writing in higher education is considered a key skill. This is due to the fact most work, including essays, examinations and dissertations are assessed through writing (Andrews, 2003). Shah et al. (2013) reported that most Saudi students are mainly grade-driven in that exams and assessment are the primary purpose of their learning. Similarly, in the current study, several of the teachers conceptualised their students' writing practices in terms of formal assessment, which appears to be assessment of the teachers as well as their students. 7 of the teachers echoed the view that the students' main concern was to get through their courses rather than them being intrinsically interested in learning how to write. This finding suggests that assessment is one of the key motivators that could stimulate students to develop their writing skills if more prominence was given to the assessment of writing as a communicative skill rather than a test of grammatical accuracy. The extracts below are from six of the teachers.

> **Students write to pass the writing assessments**. They always complain about English in general, especially writing, for it requires a sound knowledge of English. [Teacher_8]
>
> Students are just here at the university to pass the exam and be promoted to the second level. [Teacher_3]
>
> **Students write because they have to pass ELI classes**. There is no other reason for them, except for a few students who really want to learn the language. [Teacher_11]
>
> A large number of students in the foundation year cannot write. According to them, who in are the majority, **the main reason for writing is to pass the exam and nothing else**. [Teacher_3]
>
> **Students want to pass their English exam** at the university. [Teacher_9]
>
> I think that they want to learn to write only to answer questions. [Teacher_5]
>
> **Students care a lot about their marks**. What if I have made a mistake? But if they make a mistake, I'll correct it for them. I learn from it but they care about the marks and nothing else; **they write to get the mark, they read for the mark, they do everything for the mark**. [Teacher_7]

This conceptualisation was common in the interviews with teachers, and most seemed to share the same view, believing that students only have one extrinsic purpose for writing and that is to pass the module and the exam. From the teachers' perspectives, the students appeared to have no intrinsic interest in their writing per se other than to display the grammatical accuracy and vocabulary needed to pass the module.

During the observation sessions, I noted 6 teachers mainly focused on the exam and how to prepare their students for it. The teachers repeated the word 'test' many times throughout the class. They highlighted 'writing topics' that might come up in the coming exam. They used them to motivate the students to practice writing before their assessment. This shows how the teachers' values influenced their teaching practices in the writing classroom. Teacher_10 revealed her strategy.

> **To motivate the students, I tell them 'Guys'! You have to work**, you have to improve your writing **because you have an upcoming writing assessment** and of course, you need it for medicine, pharmacy, engineering. [Teacher_10]

For this teacher, as with most of the others, the main objective of her teaching was to provide her students with the necessary support to help them pass the exams to move up to the next language level class.

5.2.6.2 Students' views

Although 7 of the teachers agreed that the students' key interest was to get through their courses rather than being legitimately interested in learning how to write in English, ten students argued in their interviews that passing the assessment/examination at the end of each module was not their main focus, but, acquiring 'writing skills' was their ultimate goal, and that needed to be developed as part of their overall learning process. They wanted to learn to write well enough to pass the exam, and yes, exams were driving their learning process, but the writing for exams and the exams themselves could also target more academic skills. Students also reported that they are not satisfied with their teachers' practices and the emphasis they put on exams, because that imposed restraints on their writing practices. Student_14 points out that little learning takes place:

> Concerning the exam, **the teacher gave us 4 topics** and **we wrote short essays about them**. One of them will come up in

> the exam. **I memorise them but I do not understand their ideas**. Sometimes I get full marks but I learn nothing. This was not useful. [Student_14]

Student_7 also thinks that teaching for the exam does not help them improve.

> Teacher told us what we had to write in order to pass the exam not to improve our language or our writing skill. Just to pass the exam, which is not enough. [Student_7]

Student_6 points out that they know in advance the topic they have to write about and how to get full marks, but understand very little.

> **In the exam, we know the topic which we have to write about and get full marks (10).** We are not happy because we do not understand it. All we know is the general idea of the given topic. [Student_6]

Students 14, 7 and 6 clearly point out what they see as the uselessness of rote learning possible essays to get high marks, as they learned little or nothing from this procedure. Student_7's claim that her teacher told her the only reason to write was to pass the exam is disturbing, as some teachers interpret the exam-focused impetus for writing practices as coming from the students, not from them.

It is interesting that the staff's interpretations of students' views and the students actual views do not seem to share the same concept of writing practice as being limited to the technical accuracy required by the exams. Evidence like this suggests that not all students are happy with the overall emphasis on exams in the classroom, contrary to the beliefs of some of their teachers. The strong emphasis on exams encourages students to think no further than the exam and how they can manage to write accurately. For example, if students know the topic before the exam, they may recall memorised information in order to pass it. This may suggest little cognitive or creative abilities are required to pass exams, thus inhibiting the practice and ultimately the ability to write in English. Perhaps one of the most difficult features of the examinations is their negative effect on the students' learning process through their wash back effect on teaching for exams rather than for learning (Elshawa et al., 2016). The students themselves have suggested the need to re-conceptualise writing in the institute and this also suggests that many teachers are out of touch with their

students and/or only respond to a higher (meso) level in the hierarchy. Student_17 put the point well, though she refers to language skills in general.

> I mean, they must go beyond the mark and passing the exam to the main aim in the process of learning at university level, which is acquiring the language skills. [Student_17]

Students like student_17, who need English ability for their academic courses, want the teaching of writing to go beyond examination needs because this is not their ultimate goal at university; they need to learn to write not only to complete modules, but to acquire good writing skills for their future study and probably work.

Because the institution is exam-driven, the students need to pass the exams otherwise they cannot proceed. This is not a goal imposed by the students, but the way the teaching system has been set up and the staff and students are part of that system. The students want to be successful, and success means first of all, passing exams, but they also have goals for the future to fight for and those who need English for their subject of study realise that they need more than the writing ability taught to pass the modular exams to study successfully.

5.2.7 Student writing: The use of feedback

The interviews with teachers revealed that they were mainly concerned with fixing problems with student language skills such as grammar and spelling - referred to as the deficit model, by Academic Literacies (Ivanic, 2004; Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 2006). This was frequently implied by their reference to writing problems as without these core skills, it was perceived that writing skills could not progress. The 'Study Skills approach is based on the assumption that students are identified as having language problems (Cottrell, 2001; Street, 2010; Turner, 2004), therefore the approach aims to fix problems with student language skills. Three of the participating teachers (teacher 11, 3 and 5) stated that focusing on the surface accuracy of writing rather than developing the student as a writer responded to the students' perceptions of what it means to learn writing skills, in their teacher interviews.

> The writing class is useful only if the teachers teach their students the writing process. I know it is not easy to follow because they haven't done it. Students think that it's the teacher's job to correct their writing. Students write and give their writing to

> teachers to correct. They have no concept of a writing process, they don't see that they can learn by themselves and from their peers just by looking at their own writing. […] **For me, I correct students' mistakes and sit with them. I explain their mistakes, but I write two things they can concentrate on.** It's impossible to correct ALL the mistakes. It's too much. **I tell them to pay attention to plural forms, spelling, capitalisation or verb tenses. I pick two areas they can improve.** [Teacher_11]

Teacher_11 above acknowledges that there is a better way to teach writing – writing processes and peer learning, for example - but she still focuses on accuracy, on two areas to help her students grapple with errors as there are so many.

> We [teachers] have certain correction codes [checklists] to correct our students' mistakes during writing. Some students have some surface mistakes such as punctuation, grammar and subject verb agreement. We write this code and discuss such simple mistakes with our students. [Teacher_3]

Teacher_3 above acknowledges that the correction codes used relate to the surface features of writing, while teacher_5 below touches on the creative aspect of writing but the process seems limited to correcting mistakes and using teacher-created model answers.

> I encourage them and accept any ideas. **Then, I correct some mistakes and write some models.** [Teacher_5]

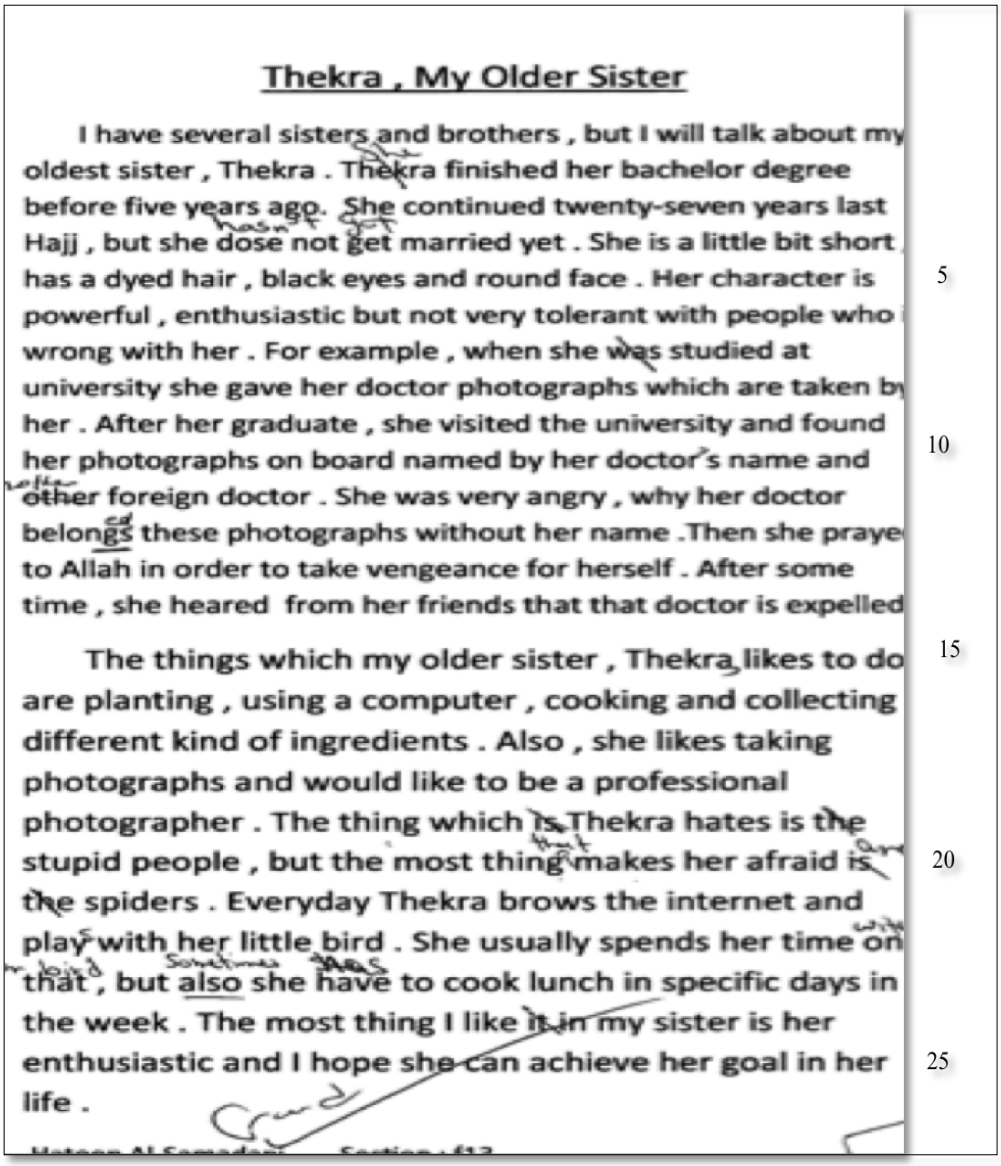
The teachers' aim seems to be to provide students with the basic structures of written English the students need to write in English in their exam; their subject areas are another matter and subject teachers who teach through English probably have neither the time nor the skills to teach them to write in their future subject classes. The courses the students attend in the pre-study year are, after all, foundation courses, and designed to provide basic skills and there is no continuing support system for English once the students have started their degree courses. The methods the teachers use seem neither the best way to cultivate the necessary writing skills in students nor what many students themselves want though there is probably an arts/science divide here, as the former have no course requirements for English. They teach what they see as common requirements.

5.2.7.1 Classroom observation and textual evidence

It was apparent from the classroom observations that the 'correctness' and 'accuracy' of the structural and linguistic patterns were highly emphasised by the teachers. For example, during one observed writing class, the teacher paid more heed to the 'accuracy' and 'correctness' at the word, sentence and text formation levels than she did to the communicative function of the text or the intended audience. The meanings were ignored and not discussed or even considered.

This finding was also confirmed by another set of data - the students' written essays and tutor written feedback, of which there is an example below (see figure 5.3) (ELI, 2014). I examined the relationship between staff and students concerning essays through analysing the tutor's written feedback on student work. The teachers' feedback can be seen as a genre in itself, simultaneously identifying students' language problems which need attention and preserving the relationship of authority and power between staff and students, as there is no negotiation of meaning and the teacher is the source of power and knowledge. This contrasts with the Academic Literacies model of writing as a social process, where students' input and ideas are as valuable as those of their teachers in the social community of their subject of study to co-construct knowledge (Lillis, 2001; Street 2010).

Lillis (2003) argues for the need to transform the pedagogical practices in higher education. She claims that students need dialogical approaches rather than monological approaches. Applying the monological approach in classroom practice, means students only receive feedback on the written essays from their teachers who are the dominant actors within the social context. On the other hand, the dialogical approaches offers students the opportunity to express what they like and what they do not like by writing to their peers or giving feedback to others. Students have the opportunity to 'talkback', in this approach, which helps them play an active role in the learning process. Elton (2010) also suggests that a discussion between teachers and students about their work may solve students' writing problems, which are attributed to the tacit nature of academic writing.



Thekra , My Older Sister

I have several sisters and brothers , but I will talk about my oldest sister , Thekra . Thekra finished her bachelor degree before five years ago. She continued twenty-seven years last Hajj , but she dose not get married yet . She is a little bit short , has a dyed hair , black eyes and round face . Her character is powerful , enthusiastic but not very tolerant with people who wrong with her . For example , when she was studied at university she gave her doctor photographs which are taken by her . After her graduate , she visited the university and found her photographs on board named by her doctor's name and other foreign doctor . She was very angry , why her doctor belongs these photographs without her name .Then she praye to Allah in order to take vengeance for herself . After some time , she heared from her friends that that doctor is expelled

The things which my older sister , Thekra likes to do are planting , using a computer , cooking and collecting different kind of ingredients . Also , she likes taking photographs and would like to be a professional photographer . The thing which is Thekra hates is the stupid people , but the most thing makes her afraid is the spiders . Everyday Thekra brows the internet and play with her little bird . She usually spends her time on that , but also she have to cook lunch in specific days in the week . The most thing I like it in my sister is her enthusiastic and I hope she can achieve her goal in her life .

Figure 5.3: Example of teacher feedback on a student written work

Table 5. 4: Example of analysis of tutor feedback on a student's written work

Line	Student writing	Teacher feedback	Type of corrections
Line 2	'**Thekra'**	Deletion of '**Thekra**' and replaced by 'she'	**style feature (reference) not accuracy, so could be contested.**
Line 4	She '**does not**' get	She >**has not** >got	grammar, tense change to present perfect
Line 7	She >**was studied**	She >**studied**	grammar, tense change to past simple
Line 10	Her >**doctor** name	Her >**doctor's** name	possession use of apostrophe (')

Line 11	>**Other** foreign	>**With** foreign	preposition required with, not adjective 'other'
Line 12	Belong**s**	Belong**ed**	grammar, change tense to past simple
Line 15	**Thekra**	Thekra >**,**	punctuation, use comma(,) for inserted information about the subject of the verb.
Line 19	The thing which >**is** Thekra hates	The thing which >Thekra hates	grammar, delete verb to be (is), use verb 'hate'
Line 19	>**The** stupid people	>Stupid people	grammar, delete the definite article (the) as general reference not specific.
Line 20	The most thing> **makes** her afraid is the spiders	The most things > **that makes** her the things that make her most	cohesion, use of relative clause (that); word order
Line 20	The […] makes her afraid > **is** the spiders	The […]makes her afraid >**are** the spiders	grammar, plural of verb to be (are)
Line 21	>**The** spiders	>Spiders	grammar, delete the definite article (the) as non-specific reference
Line 22	Everyday Thekra […]> **play**	Everyday Thekra […]>**plays**	Grammar, subject- verb agreement
Line 22	She usually spends […] her time> **on**	She usually spends […] her time >**with**	preposition correction to (with)
Line 32	She usually spends… her time >**on that**	She usually spends… her time >**with her birds**	prepositions , phrasal (with)
Line 23	But >**also**	But >**sometimes**	cohesion, connective of time (sometimes) not number.
Line 23	She >**have**	She >**has**	grammar, subject- verb agreement
Line 24	I like > **it in**	I Like > **in**	grammar, delete the pronoun (it) unnecessary

A Linguistic Ethnography approach to the instructor's feedback on the student's assignment suggests that power lies with the instructor about what the key elements of good writing are and these are correct ‘cohesion’, ‘grammar’ and ‘punctuation’ rather than ‘meaning-making’. However, there are other errors not corrected, such as in line (3)- 'before' should be deleted for grammatical and accuracy and in line (9) graduation’ not ‘graduate’, so it is an individual teacher's, non-negotiated view of what she finds acceptable.

Furthermore, the student's essay here is marked in terms of accuracy, not in terms of its success as a piece of communication. However, the overemphasis on correctness

limits students' knowledge of (negotiated) meaning-making and communicating with a particular audience. What is of concern is communication - within a social community and to the reader. Does the reader get a good idea of Thekra from the description? Does this student succeed in her purpose of conveying her view of her sister? She does to an extent, irrespective of any errors. If this element of assessment were added (as it is in most global English tests like the Cambridge English Language Assessment battery of English Language tests) then the focus can switch to helping students express their ideas. Table 5.4 is an analysis of the current feedback system.

Even though students may lack the elements of accurate writing - as in the example above where the student had made a number of mistakes of 'grammar' and 'punctuation' - written comments suggesting how to improve her writing could have paved the way for future progress. While the instructor wrote 'good' on the student work, no reasons or explanation for this comment are given. Is it good relative to the number of mistakes, the ideas or the construction, the student's previous work? In the essay analysed above, the teacher identified grammar, punctuation and cohesion mistakes; in other words, only errors, apart from the positive *good* at the end. This seems to fit the Academic Literacies perception of a study skills deficit approach, where the student has errors the tutor needs to correct, hence there is an imbalance of power.

This raises the question: How can feedback guide students to improve their writing skills in higher education? It seems that this type or genre of feedback focusing on the surface structure of language such as grammar and 'punctuation' emphasises the authority of the teacher to decide what is or is not acceptable and is both easy for teachers to use and equally easily interpreted by students since it is a uni-dimensional focus on accuracy. Its usefulness for helping students express their ideas and support their writing processes and progress is, however, highly debatable.

From the aspect of Linguistic Ethnography, the tutor's written feedback on the student's essay also illustrated the social relationship of 'power' and 'authority' between staff and student at this micro-level. The instructor clearly had the authority to judge and the right to criticise, underline and correct the student's essay on the basis of an institutional assumption of what is 'correct'. There was no basis for discussing the outcome or of students sharing their written production with each other for peer

learning in a more social and mutual learning context such as Academic Literacies promotes.

Additionally, institutional documentation such as the *'New Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide'* offers a checklist for the assessment of work. It focuses mainly on grammar, text organisation and stylistic features. It is also used in class and can help students to take on the role of assessor of each other's work in progress (see figure 5.4). This checklist for learning how writing assessment works in class and tests seems to have limited relevance for communicating in writing in that it requires no emotional response from the reader, like agreement or disagreement with the points made. It illustrates the emphasis put on surface language features - albeit wider than grammar and vocabulary - imposed on both staff and students by the institutional system. However, the overemphasis on surface correctness and acceptability limits students' experience of meaning-making, communicating with a particular audience, contested concepts and creativity. As Barton et al. (2007, p.106) claim, viewing "literacy as knowledge about the linguistic rules and patterns of written language, rather than as a creative self-expression, or purposeful communication of content" is to limit writing to a set of decontextualised skills. This was contested by teacher_7, to the extent that she promoted the input of reading to writing, as shared reading can prompt discussion, views, opinions (see section 5.2.3.1).

With your partner, read your paragraph and check	✓	
The first sentence in each paragraph is 2-3 centimetres from the margin.		
Clearly stated topic sentence for both advantages and disadvantages.		
Capital letters at the start of sentences. (**M**y father comes from Dundee in Scotland.)		
Start with an introductory paragraph		5
Two body paragraphs (pros and cons)		
Concluding paragraph		
Correct capitalization of days, months, names, cities, countries, and places. (**A**hmad, **S**eptember, **F**riday, **M**r, Jeddah, **S**audi **A**rabia, **K**ing **A**bdul **A**ziz **U**niversity, **E**nglish, **S**tarbucks, etc.)		
One verb (or more)in every sentence		
Correct word order (They live in a big house in Jeddah.) (~~**live they**~~ in a big house in Jeddah.)		10
ONLY ONE subject in a sentence . (*My family* ~~***they***~~ *eat in a restaurant every day.*)		
No run-on sentence. (On that particular day, she was exhausted,* she went to bed.)		
Adjectives to make writing interesting.		
Repetitive language avoided: (**so** good, **very** exciting, **quite** interesting, **absolutely** amazing) (**a lot of/ several/ many/ a number of** advantages)		
Linking words and phrases to organize writing: *and / but/ because/so / First of all/ However/ On the other hand, for example/ for instance/ moreover/ / Finally/ In conclusion*		15
Positive points: One advantage of/*Another advantage is that .../*Another point in favour of/ *On the plus side, / Firstly, / Secondly, / also...*		
Negative points: One (main) disadvantage of ... is .../ Another point against... is .../ A further argument against		
Introductory **If**-clause/ **When**-clause (**If you live in the downtown of Jeddah,** you **will** probably...)		
Comparatives: (much **faster than**/ much **more exciting than**/ ***not*** **as** interesting **as**)		
Topic vocabulary for advantages and disadvantages		20
Introducing a point, using phrases like ***with respect to*** *price.*/ ***regarding*** *price.*/ ***in terms of*** *price.*		
Expressing how sure you are about what you say: *must/ should/ can/ may/ might/ could/ seems/... is highly likely that ...*		
Spelling (use a dictionary)		
Full stops at the end of sentences.		
Concluding sentence		25

Figure 5. 4: Example from *Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide*

The wring guide is very prescriptive; for instance, the body has 2 paragraphs and a concluding paragraph, uses comparatives, such as in line (5-6-7), if/when clauses, positive and negative points, presumably, because of the topic. The rest is mainly to do with accuracy or style, such as in line (8-9-10-11), though 'expressing how sure you are about what you say' is a strong element in English as much of what seems to be verbal grammar is, in fact, such as in line (22), an expression of the speaker's

attitude, so it is important to be able to use modal verbs (can, might and could, 22) to express meaning accurately and not be misunderstood.

From the findings above, language features such as 'grammar', 'punctuation' and 'organisation', appear to be seen as the key components of essay writing, the external packaging of marks on paper, not the ideas, arguments made or responses aroused. Teachers therefore look for these easily identifiable elements in student writing - the accuracy of the structural patterns - with little attention to the communicative 'content' or the 'argument' of the student essay. This limits the students' potential for growth and improvement by constricting writing in English to be limited to a set of rules. It also maintains the status quo of the hierarchical structure which decides what is to be learned and how it is to be done and assessed. This checklist could work well as the basis for key forms etc. as a starting point for a more productive discussion of what else is necessary to make a good piece of writing. If it is followed to the letter and set in stone - which may be far from its original intention - then it becomes nothing more than a static, prescriptive set of rules. The interpretation of its use is key here. From the observations, however, there was very little classroom autonomy. Classes followed the prescribed rules of time and guidelines. However, some students are clearly not challenged or stimulated by such a structure for learning.

One of the students, student_4, however, referring to the teachers' emphasis on the correctness of the language form, gave a more positive comment.

> I remember my teacher, when I made mistakes, they corrected them and so I learnt from my mistakes. [Student_4]

5.3 Summary of the key findings for research question one

To answer research question one and gain insights into how students and staff understand and interpret writing practices at higher education level, their perceptions of writing in higher education were gathered through interviews and observation, and documentary sources. The analytical framework of Linguistic Ethnography was used to help reveal the underlying meanings within their discourse, and so gave voice to those in society who are not often heard or able to give their views, particularly the students, in this case. The Bakhtinian concept of the voice of the internal other was used to reveal the dialogue with the other voice – usually the voice of authority – present in the utterances of the speakers.

A comparison of the teachers' and students' interpretations of student writing in English for higher education revealed interesting findings. These are: a) both teachers and students agreed that students lacked basic writing skills; b) there was a mismatch between the teachers' views of what they thought the students wanted - primarily to pass the exams - and what the students themselves said they wanted - more time to practice writing and more academically relevant topics; c) the interaction between teachers and students was revealed in terms of their power relations; for instance, the teachers alone were in charge of assigning tasks and assessing students' work, d) the heavy influence of the policy and procedures of the English Language Institution on writing practices; for example, the teaching instructions and writing topics seem to be sanctioned by a higher level in the hierarchical power-based structure, the meso-level, and amounted to little more than the teachers having to slavishly teach the assigned textbook tasks. The teachers had little input to classroom teaching on an individual basis, in spite of their experience and qualifications.

The findings revealed that students seemed to lack competence in basic language skills such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling in their writing tasks, which seemed to confirm previous research findings (e.g. Al-Khairy, 2013; Grami, 2010; Hujailan, 2004) that Saudi students demonstrated poor language proficiency and had limited writing experience. Teachers expected their students to have learned to write accurately in English at school before going to university, but often, this was not the case. On the other hand, the student interviews suggested that neither previous nor current teaching practices appeared to support the writing skills necessary for higher education, but were based on a narrow product view of writing, with no particular purpose or reader in mind. Previous studies like Al-Khairy (2013) produced similar findings to the present study. Al-Khairy found that Saudi students demonstrated poor language proficiency because of inappropriate English Language teaching approaches which did not promote student language proficiency, in particular, did not support writing in English.

Another interesting finding illustrates the mismatch between the teachers' concepts of what they thought fulfilled the students' immediate requirements for writing at university (passing exams), thus largely excluding any extrinsic academic writing needs for their studies and future careers. This contrasted with the students'

understanding of what student writing involves at university and what they needed to learn, suggesting a level of discord between the two groups, teachers and students, at the micro level. The observation and interview data revealed that the objective for the teachers was for the students to pass the exams rather than to teach the students how to communicate through writing, which is central for students in higher education. Moreover, the triangulation of the three sources of data - interviews, observation and documentary - shows that, in practice, teaching amounted to providing the rules of surface language features - structure, vocabulary and organisation – which the teachers conceived as the main components of student writing in higher education. They gave the students rules to study, learn, and then reproduce in response to exam questions (which were very similar to the exercises in the course book) so they could pass the exams. This alone illustrates the absence of creativity in the teaching of writing, and its limited targets.

One interesting point to mention is that, although the students may have internalised the importance of the accuracy of the surface elements of language from their current and previous experiences, they were aware that being able to use the appropriate grammatical rules and vocabulary was not enough to enable them to write successfully in higher education. They memorised ideas, vocabulary and essays to pass exams, given they knew the topic would be one of a possible 4 or similar to what they already had practiced in class, and had model essays they could learn by heart. This suggests that the students were highly aware that grammar rules and a product (rather than a process) approach was not enough to enable them to compose a good piece of writing. They were aware that good writing was more than what was defined by exam results, including the need for self-expression, facility in writing for different purposes, genres, readers, levels of formality and so on. As previously stated, they seemed well aware of the gaps in their knowledge and that these were not being addressed by classroom teaching, as they had no clear idea about how to go about writing an essay from scratch and felt confused and unsure about what constituted a good piece of academic writing in their subject areas. Those who needed to use English for study purposes saw their future writing challenges lay in interpreting and understanding how to produce writing at tertiary level. Any models they had came from the text book and were on general and often trivial, subjects. They would have liked to learn more about the process and the 'how to' of writing rather than only

accuracy. These findings do not seem to be totally in line with Grami (2010) whose findings were limited to Saudi students' need to focus on language elements, such as grammar, the appropriate vocabulary, and punctuation to write an error-free piece of writing. Grami's research focused on the final product alone, not on the process or the communicative and social aspects of writing, which some of the respondents in this research showed an awareness of.

The most interesting finding is the difference between the teachers' perceptions of what they thought the students needed and the students' own perceptions about what they thought they needed regarding writing in English. Some arts students, who did not need English for their future studies, might have the perceptions the teachers attributed to them, but the science students, who did need to write in English for study purposes, disagreed more with the teachers' views of what they believed the students needed. Nevertheless, the teachers did not seem to properly consider that the science students had separate needs from the arts students, seeing all the students as one homogeneous group. This shows the teachers' lacked sensitivity to (some) students' real needs and interest in writing in English, and probably reflects the same lack of consideration and differentiation found at the meso and macro levels.

Another key finding is the interaction between teachers and students in terms of the power relations and who decided the meaning, relevance and creativity of writing activities within the classroom. Assigning tasks and assessing student work was completely the remit of the teachers and the higher levels, with very little room for negotiation by students – except possibly a small choice between a few essay titles. The interviews, observation and documentation showed some awareness of the inequalities of power between the teachers and students at the micro level, and the teachers and the meso level and acceptance of it, especially by the teachers, to a greater or lesser degree. The appropriateness of control over the teaching and learning process residing with the meso and macro levels was accepted. For instance, the interviews and documentary data such as the pacing guide showed that teachers get clear instructions from the English Language Institute about what to do in the writing classroom and when. In practice, teachers reported that writing practice was only carried out time permitting, after the allocated tasks in the teachers' pacing guide for the successful completion of a module had been completed. In other words, writing

had no priority or sometimes any space in the classroom at all. There was no official time slot for writing practice; curriculum completion on time was the goal, not learning. Teachers also confirmed that they did not have the flexibility to select what to teach, which influenced their response to students' needs and thus their impact on teaching and learning. The findings of the present study confirm previous research such as Hall's (2011), which revealed that teachers in the higher education system in Saudi Arabia do not have the flexibility to select how to teach writing as they are guided by institutional policy.

Findings from the student interviews revealed that they had clear instructions on what to write about - mundane topics - and how to write according to the 'accuracy' feedback from their teachers. The teachers decided how writing should be produced and what was considered as good writing. The power relations in the classroom were socially unequal, which includes the students' reliance on the teachers and text book, with no access to other sources of information and ideas about the topics of writing exercises due to the very limited range of models and available technology. They had no practice in the kind of individual research or reading skills (which teacher_7 in section 5.2.3.1 advocated) necessary to prepare for academic subject writing. Interaction and collaboration were not highly valued (though there was some pair work observed in class). Neither did they practice or experience the way people communicate in particular disciplines through writing - reports, notes, emails or memos, for instance, the social aspect of writing.

The analysis of the qualitative data shows a lack of insight into the function and value of writing tasks – or the role the students had as writers, or the priorities and values they give to the texts they produce. Teachers need to understand the students' role and suggest a target audience to write for and thus position novice student writers in a context when they set writing tasks. The students themselves seemed to be unaware of any communicative role for their writing, other than an exercise in accuracy or in following rules. In brief, writing was considered more as an abstract set of rules to produce a product with no particular purpose or value, was thus divorced from considerations of the processes involved, any communicative purpose and the objectives and voice of the writer.

Another interesting issue is the writing topics. What do students write about in higher education and what did ELI students write about? There were limitations and a lack of clarity about the criteria for selecting writing topics in the English Language Institute. The general writing topics seemed to be decided at the macro and meso levels (or were in the textbook) and were not highly valued by either the teachers or students because they were generally not interesting or motivating, but apparently restricted by the acceptable cultural norms in Saudi society, with its tremendous influence on what are regarded as suitable topics. These issues will be further discussed in chapter eight "discussion and recommendation". The students' identity as writers was unclear in terms of how to place themselves within both the context of the topics and the function of the writing concerning any target audience and their future identity as students of a particular subject. Written essays appeared to be composed without clear consideration of the writer's voice or role and purpose or the identity and purpose of the reader, and while the extrinsic purpose - to pass the module and the exam - was clear, there appeared to be no intrinsic purpose in writing per se other than grammatical accuracy. However, students in higher education are supposed to articulate their voices and to bring their experiences to the writing task, to empower their individual identities and promote their self-assurance as they learn to engage with the learning process through the act of writing (Street, 2010).

According to the Academic Literacies approach, it is important to identify power inequalities in social relations (Coffin and Donohue, 2012), and the interviews, documents and observations in this study indicated instances of power inequality. The imbalance of power between the students and teachers (micro level) and the meso level was illustrated by the nature and type of feedback students received from teachers, with more emphasis on finding and fixing students' language errors, because the form and type of feedback was decided at the meso level, based on the textbook. Feedback was thus concerned with easily identifiable mechanical issues like grammatical and punctuation errors and technical skills, and teachers did not consider any elements – like communicative purpose - outside the prescribed parameters, which is how hierarchies exercise control. The higher levels of the hierarchy control the lower levels and govern all practices in an institution, in this case, controlling the writing topics, the form of feedback, classroom practices and examinations. However, the students felt that the comments on their language problems did not help them

improve their writing practice. They argued for the need to receive feedback comments about different aspects of writing, including meaning making.

The English Language Institution checklist for writing and error correction showed little or no concern for the semantic (let alone pragmatic) meaning entailed in grammar, i.e. understanding that grammar is actually used to convey meaning, and is not just an abstract exercise in accuracy. A better understanding of this would make it possible to teach grammar and the role of punctuation in a more meaningful way, for instance, by taking a constructivist view of text where the reader negotiates the meaning of a text from the information supplied by the writer, including the inferences within the text. The fourth key finding concerns institution regulations about student writing, such as the guidelines, the requirements of the modular system, writing topics and assessment procedures (see chapter 6 for meso-level data - What role does the English Language Institute play in framing student writing practices?). Consideration of the meso level data in chapter 6 reveals the constraints and control experienced at that level and the effect on the administration and delivery of courses. The next chapter discusses research question 2, which focuses on the meso (administration) level.

Chapter six - Findings and Discussion (Research Question Two): The influence of the English Language Institute and its Directors on student writing

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented and discussed the data analysis of the interviews with staff and students at the micro level, class observations, and documentary sources. This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with the two directors of the English Language Institution at the meso (administration) level - one female and the other male - and the documentary sources - the institutional documents like writing guides and writing sheets from the writing booklet designed and adapted at the upper administration level of the English Language Institute (ELI). The findings in this chapter and in the following chapter 7 are also organised as responses to the research questions. This chapter tackles the second research question:

- **(Meso level): What role does the English Language Institute play in framing student writing practices?**

The meso level data comes from the interviews with management level decision-makers (the directors) to investigate how the two directors of the institute understand writing in English at tertiary level. It also aims to investigate the institute's policies and procedures and its role in framing the conventions and boundaries of writing practices.

It is significant to mention that: firstly, to preserve the anonymity of interviewees, the directors are referred to by number (i.e. director _1 (female) and director_2, (male). The interviews with the directors took place in English. The extracts were in English and they were transcribed from a tape-recording with minor modifications to syntax to enhance comprehensibility. I also interviewed the 2 directors individually so they could freely express their views and would not be affected by the presence of the other. Interviewing them together, at the same time, would also have been culturally unacceptable. This is because of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia. This illustrates how cultural norms could have projected onto the boundaries/scope of this research.

Additional profile information is that director_1 had a (vocational) qualification in teaching, but director_2 had purely academic qualifications (see table 6.1). Their subjects of study and years of experience appeared to influence their interpretations of the practice of writing in English in the ELI. Director_1 seemed to have had frontline experience in the classroom and considered/discussed ways of fostering writing in English in higher education; however, director_2 appeared to be at some distance from the practical demands of delivering education, writing in English in particular. Furthermore, the two directors of ELI are not at the top level of the university as an institution, they are only the joint directors of a sub-part of the university which is the ELI.

Table 6. 1: Profile of the Directors of the English Language Institute

#	Pseudonym	Qualifications	Years of experience
1	Director_1	BA, MA, PHD	25 years
2	Director_2	BA, MA, PHD	20 years

6.1.1 The theoretical and methodological frameworks

As outlined, the main approach concerned specifically with the learning of writing at tertiary level is the Academic Literacies approach, which sees institutions like universities as the sites of discourse and power, and hence writing and learning reflect epistemology, identity issues and power relations, not simply skills and socialisation (Creaton, 2008). Developing writing should take place within the social context of equality of power between teacher and student and within the subject of study; students should be able to critique the writing of teachers and other writers in their subjects and not be considered as the passive recipients of received wisdom, but equal co-constructors of knowledge.

As previously noted in chapter 4, section 4.3, Linguistic Ethnography as a methodological framework considers the context in which discourse occurs and helps reveal the power relationship of the speakers to each other, in terms of occupation, control and upholding the regulations of the state or a higher authority (Rampton et al., 2004). Linguistic Ethnography is also concerned with identifying the underlying influences behind utterances - social-cultural norms and power hierarchies, many of which the speakers may not be consciously aware of. To reveal a more detailed analysis of relationships, I used Linguistic Ethnography (discourse analysis), to

deepen the analysis of the interviews and the formal documents to discover why things are they way they are and reveal the imbalance of power relations in hierarchical systems and reveal those voices which are silent or are not often heard.

Bakhtin's concept was also used to suggest when the interviewees seemed to give official rather than personal views - their positions in the hierarchy might make them less likely to say anything that might damage their positions. In the directors' discourse, on many occasions, the speaker conveyed the official values rather than their own personal values in their talk as they positioned themselves in relation to the institution, namely, Saudi Western University, i.e. their place in the hierarchy. Interestingly, as line managers, the directors have to uphold the philosophy of the system, so I expected their views to be conservative. In this situation, the researcher has to ask the question, "who is doing the talking?" in the voices which emerge in each of the director's extracts. The answer is there is rarely a single 'voice' or only the voice of the speaker. There is often another, institutional voice, present within the words the speaker vocalises. I therefore argue that this is one of the ways by which institutional values are transmitted, internalized and maintained. Consequently, they can also stagnate and resist progress and innovation, which can limit the development of teaching methods and materials and consequently, learning.

6.2 The influence of the English Language Institute on student writing

The particular socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia is reflected in the data and the manner of its collection and analysis - the participant interview data was collected at 3 levels- macro (top), meso (middle) and micro (bottom). The interview questions posed in relation to the research questions were appropriate to the experiences and knowledge of each level of the hierarchy, in this case, the meso level (see the meso level interview questions in chapter 4, the methodology chapter), the management level decision-makers for the English Language curriculum and practices within the ELI.

Table 6.2 below illustrates the meso level responses on the right, to the themes generated from the micro level Nvivo data analysis on the left. The micro level interview data was the primary source (being the richest source of interview data) for identifying themes, which emerged in the analysis through using NVivo. These

themes then formed the basis for the comparative analysis together with the themes in the data from the other levels.

Within the themes generated in response to question 2 at the meso level, it can be seen that the example responses from the Directors seem to refer to official regulations rather than pedagogy.

Table 6. 2: The English language Institute's role in framing student writing practices according to the micro level and meso level

Themes and sub-themes derived from the micro level analysis, which were then used in the meso level analysis	**Meso level example responses**
1.Writing in English is challenging at tertiary level	"When Saudi students enter the university, writing **poses the most significant challenge** which needs to be strengthened. This is because a writing task at this educational level usually takes on a different and challenging dimension" [Director_1]
2. The status of writing in English and the skills needed	A. "I believe that **writing in English is important for some but not all educational purposes"**. [Director_2] B. "Writing in English requires students to have a good **amount of vocabulary** and considerable knowledge about the **grammar, and language structure**". [Director_1]
3.The influence of hierarchy on writing materials	"There is **some discretion at the top administration level of the university i**n terms of curriculum content and pacing". [Director_1]
4.The Institute restricts the writing process :	"Teachers must follow a particular policy as best they can but they also have to pay attention to students' needs". [Director_2]
5.The influence of culture on writing materials	"At Saudi Western University, we try **to introduce culturally suitable topics while teaching writing skills. This approach is suitable to match learners' needs to their customs and culture without offending anyone".** [Director_1]
6.Teaching and learning practices	"In order to help students to gain knowledge and become involved in the learning process, teachers must assign sufficient time to developing the relationships within the classroom. This will help them to promote the learning environment in which students feel

	comfortable exchanging ideas". [Director_1]
7. Understanding the nature of the assessment practices	**A. Interviews** **"University students will be considered to pass or fail in their courses depending on their exam results". [Director 1]** **B. Documentary evidence** "Make sure that listening and reading passages from the course book units in the core curriculum **are covered as some of these will come up in mid – and end-of- module exams**" (section, 6.2.4, lines 20-22)
8. Views to changing the nature of literacy	"By implementing the literacy instructions based on understanding and adding new and challenging writing tasks, by enhancing the writing opportunities because both the writing process and discipline stimulate students' thinking, we can help them to develop their thoughts and ideas about the topic. We need to raise our students' awareness about the fact that to write is to think, and it is part of the academic path". [Director_1]

It is important to mention that I use bold font to indicate Nvivo categories, underline certain words and phrases to indicate an (LE) analysis developed from Bakhtin discourse concepts and italics to show references to previously quoted interview. The interviews illustrated Bakhtin's concept of official voices within individual utterances in the framing of their responses, while the content of the utterances - their views of writing in English - can be compared with the Academic Literacies' view of socially constructed writing. Bakhtin's views also complement the Academic Literacies objective of giving students a voice in a social setting of mutual respect.

6.2.1 Writing in English is challenging at tertiary level

The interviews with the two directors of the English Language Institution indicated some differences of view regarding why writing in English is challenging at tertiary level. Director_1, the female director, refers to writing as 'the most significant challenge' and claims writing in English is considered as one of the most difficult skills for a student to master. She adds that this is due to the need 'to analyse different texts', 'to add their own ideas', and 'to navigate across a much more demanding

terrain of writing skills'. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), writing in a foreign language is difficult because it requires producing and organising ideas through the proper selection of words, sentences, and paragraphs to create a readable text out of such ideas. Her comments suggest awareness of targeted standards, which may be part of the official assessment in some academic disciplines.

She seems to see the teaching of writing in English at secondary school as falling short, but she suggests secondary education has different requirements of students, so students are not taught the writing they need for tertiary level, thus suggesting an inherited deficit from secondary school level. Students have to write academically at university level - essays, reports and term papers. According to Chin et al. (2012), all the forms of writing created for the purposes of teaching and studying could be called academic writing, which is different from other forms of writing, as it includes: a purpose, which is to demonstrate knowledge; an audience, the reader of the written text; evidence, style, and knowledge of the process of writing. Thus, the descriptions of one's family commonly used at school and even in the Institute as writing assignments, fall short of this definition and the requirements of what constitutes the context of academic writing. In this regard, director_1 commented:

> When Saudi students enter the university, writing poses **the most significant challenge** which needs to be strengthened. This is because a writing task at this educational level usually takes on a different and challenging dimension. Despite the fact that at the secondary schools students studied several aspects of the type of writing required of them at the tertiary level - where they were taught how **to analyse different texts** and then **to add their own ideas to them** - very often university students find that a quite new kind of writing is demanded of them rather than what they have already been taught. They realise that they have **to navigate across a much more demanding terrain of writing skills** at University level. It is crucial for our students to improve their writing skills to find their ways to success. [Director_1]

Her response also suggests she has engaged with the importance of writing in English for students, particularly in the last sentence, which seems to be a personal view: *It is crucial for our students to improve their writing skills to find their ways to success (12,13)*. The use of 'our' students also suggests homogeneity and solidarity (not

individuality). On the other hand, director_2 placed responsibility for learning on the mental attitude of the learners (when asked about cultural restrictions to learning):

> **No, there aren't any restrictions.** Restrictions are only in the minds of learners who do not want to learn. [Director_2]

His response implies that learners' attitudes are responsible for any difficulty in writing English in higher education, not the pedagogy. Director_2's response below appears to regard the students' attitudes to learning as given or natural responses that are fixed and cannot be influenced by teachers or teaching methods, only by other 'privileged' classmates. The logic suggests - contrarily - that the teaching of writing in the ELI could have little or no effect on student learning outcomes - and therefore following this logic, the priority from the meso and macro level perspective - is to preserve cultural norms, leaving teachers to sort out language problems within these official confines. Writing in English and student needs seem almost incidental, certainly not prioritised. The ELI does not seem to take any responsibility at management level (it seems to abdicate responsibility) for fostering good practice, offering support (certainly not in the Academic Literacies' sense). 'We' in the quotation below seems to refer to the meso level as the actor allocating the students to groups.

> **There are variations among students. Some are better than others for various educational and socioeconomic reasons.** *We* try to make the best of this situation by having the more privileged students influence the less privileged to overcome language learning difficulties. Teachers are expected to play an effective role in solving student language problems. [Director_2]

It is just possible that director_2, the male director, could be referring to mixed ability groups whereby the privileged groups could influence or lead the less privileged, but reviewing teaching methods or material is not considered. His response suggests he is distanced from the problem - perhaps he rarely visits a classroom and lacks 'chalk face' experience and sees students' needs as individual to each or as a matter of organisation at classroom level, not one of teaching, syllabus or general policy, not a problem to be tackled at a higher level than the classroom. This suggests he accepts the present situation and the current efforts made to ameliorate it. This view is reflected in the comments of the other director_1 below, i.e. that learners'

positive or negative attitudes have the most influence on learning, which also suggests that other areas like the curriculum and methods and the teachers themselves have a minor role to play.

> **It is noted** that students are more highly motivated when they have positive attitudes, which encourage a variety of students' desired behaviours to happen. This includes better class participation, better retention of writing skills, and continuation of language study. [Director_1]

Director_1's impersonal *it is noted* suggests that students, or rather, their attitudes, are responsible for the outcomes of their learning process, and this is common knowledge. Those with positive feelings are more likely to engage both inside and outside the classroom and continue to engage with writing. There is no reference to ways in which the ELI or teachers can contribute to motivating the students.

> Learning writing in English depends on whether students are taking English only to satisfy the English language requirement or to be able to deal with a major that is taught in English. For the latter, writing is, of course, more important and is a necessary requirement. [Director_2]

Director_2, above suggests that students' future needs are reflected in their attitudes to learning English, both of which are extrinsic; short-term, to pass university entrance requirements or longer term, to study through English. Neither considers the quality of the teaching materials or how far the teaching goals of the course book correspond to the tertiary skill needs of Saudi Western students, let alone their differing individual goals, as contributory factors. It seems that the overarching focus is conformity and obedience to the expectations of a culturally static society.

6.2.2 The status of writing in English and the skills needed

Director_1's references to a 'better college grades', 'greater academic achievement', 'important', and 'credible' show that she values writing in English as a key skill for academic and work purposes, and therefore as a practical need. Writing in English is essential for educational success in higher education (Weigle, 2002), a crucial means of communication within several individual subjects, where those with a command of English clearly may have better employment chances than others who do not possess written skills. For instance, businesses may need candidates who can express

themselves clearly in writing in English, as she points out below:

> Students' skills in writing are considered as a key factor to language learning success and **better college grades** and **greater academic achievement** in the university. Few techniques can be applied to improve writing skills for college success.[…] Good writing skills are **important** when a profession requires written communication. In everyday communication most people communicate via the written word. This happens when they use emails, notes, letters, texts and tweets. Whether you are writing a message to a colleague, writing to your boss, or making a newsletter, your writing skills may either improve or impede your career path easily, even though you are not a writing professional. Mainly, writing abilities can make a difference to how one comes across. People are generally seen as more **credible** when they have good writing skills. [Director_1]

Linguistic Ethnography can reveal more about the underlying meaning of an utterance, and helped me, as a researcher, to highly engage with the interviewee's underlying meanings and intentions. From a Linguistic Ethnography approach, director_1's comments indicate the influence of the hierarchical structure of Saudi society when she offers examples of the importance of writing, such as, 'writing to your boss' (9), not being the boss. However her comments also suggest she is well versed and experienced in a range of forms of writing in English. Tweeting in English could well be a class assignment (a social context) but she makes no link between uses of writing and teaching writing in the ELI. Her reference to 'an overwhelming opinion' below, also suggests she is voicing the official view within the system, rather than a personal view.

> There is an **overwhelming opinion** that writing skills are critical to educational purposes and academic success. **University students will be considered to pass or fail in their courses depending on their exams results.** Then, when exams turn out to be essay tests, then one way to raise their grades in those exams is simply by employing the principles of good writing. [Director_1]

Director_1, above suggests the only measure for academic success is passing the essay tests, there are no other measures of assessment such as individual development over time (apart from the portfolio) enjoyment or satisfaction. On the other hand, director_2, below claims 'writing in English is important for some but not all

educational purposes', which indicates a more restricted view of the value of good writing skills in English and limited to certain areas of study compared to director_1. He refers to arts students, who do not need proficiency in English for their future studies, while science students do need to write in English for study purposes. However, he agrees good writing skills in English give any student an advantage. His 'I believe' statement seems to reflect the institutional attitude towards English - also expressed at the meso level - suggesting it is an accepted credo. He refers to his current beliefs about the importance of writing. *'I believe'* depends on the context in which they are used, so in the meso level context, it is more likely that he is upholding the view of authority as if it were a personal view.

> **I believe that writing in English is important for some but not all educational purposes.** Definitely those who are able to write well in English will most certainly have better chances than those who are not. [Director_2]

Director_2 below verbalises the ELI voice concerning the importance of writing for career purposes after studying and possibly that of the wider university as an institution. He refers to the voice of authority, of the institution that he works for as a voice that is fixed at a higher (macro) level and is non-negotiable.

> **The institution's philosophy is to teach students the necessary skills that they can use for the job market.** Writing skills are important to learn, without which, obtaining and maintaining a career after graduation is never easy. [Director_2]

Director_2 seemingly acknowledges both the hierarchical structure and its right to decide writing needs (see documents, section 6.2.7) without much consideration of what *necessary skills*, means, for example. It appears like an accepted mantra. From the stand–point of Linguistic Ethnography and considering the Bakhtin concept of the voice of authority within the discourse of individuals, director_2 passes on the views of the dominant power and may not even be aware of a separation between himself as an individual, and the authority that employs him. For Bakhtin, "a mature subject should learn to reject authoritative discourse and adopt only those parts of others' perspectives which fit with her or his values and experiences. Such a subject would have an active, independent and responsible discourse, respecting the alien word in its autonomy" (Robinson, 2011, p. 6).

When the discourse of participants (like director_2) contains the voice of authority, it usually means they accept it as representing the truth, as Hofstede's cultural analysis suggests, and are not really aware of it as non–personal to them or they use it for protection or as an excuse for inaction (although Bakhtin says they should learn to reject that which does not fit their views or risk stagnation). It also suggests their powerlessness and acceptance of the status quo as they cannot change the hierarchical structure.

The two directors of the ELI also gave their views of what writing skills involve. Director_1 saw 'vocabulary', 'grammar', and 'structure' as the necessary basis for organising concepts and developing writing as a cognitive skill. Her comments suggest an orientation towards a Study Skills (as perceived by Academic Literacies) rather than an Academic Literacies approach. Director_1 also suggests the development of writing skills brings general benefits like increased self-confidence, organisational skills and an analytical mind as well as improving speaking. This detailing of much broader benefits (neither director_2 nor the macro level offered detailed comments) suggests this is her personal professional belief concerning writing in English. This kind of personal voice also is not fixed and can be negotiated, expanded, developed.

> Writing in English requires students to have a good amount of **vocabulary** and considerable knowledge about the **grammar,** and language **structure**. Effective written English helps ideas, feelings, and opinions to move smoothly through without the writer being confused. **Effective writing** reflects positive traits such as clear thinking, an analytical mind, and self-confidence. It is also the mental organisational skills of the person which come into picture at this stage. **Good written English** enhances and organises the thinking process, which enables the writer to speak in a better way. Written English is helpful while giving presentations as concepts, knowledge and future strategy should be noted down by the presenter to make sure others can understand. [Director_1]

Director_2, below while agreeing that L2 learners need to be able to express themselves through written English, sees this as more important for those taught through English, so adds very little to his earlier comments, seemingly restricting himself to the official view-point of English as the means to an end of a restricted group (whose medium of instruction is English).

> It is very important for learners of English as a second/foreign language to be able to express themselves through writing. **Writing in English becomes even more important for those whose majors are taught using English as medium of instruction**. [Director_2]

The findings from the first research question reported that writing practice in the ELI is seen as a technical matter of learning basic language skills, such as grammatical structures (see chapter 5, section 5.3). The observation and interview data revealed that writing is treated as a skill rather than social practice, as most of the interview and documentary data focused on linguistic forms such as grammar, vocabulary and spelling. My classroom observations also suggested that the main objective in most classes was to prepare students' technical language skills for exams rather than the practical use of the language for communicative purposes in social contexts. This meant there was little student interaction, except for paired work for the correction of texts (see chapter 5, section 5.3.2).

6.2.3 The influence of the hierarchy on writing materials

The choice of this theoretical framework, Academic Literacies, illuminated for me, as a researcher, the outcomes and shortcomings of the hierarchical structure that currently exists and which Academic literacies - at its core - criticises, demanding more democracy for students and respect for their contribution to learning, as an interactive process (Street, 2010; Turner, 2004). Linguistic Ethnography analysis extended this understanding to suggest how individuals higher up the hierarchy can appear equally trapped in a system that does not encourage individual voices as tools for innovation or change.

During the interview, I asked for the directors' understanding of the principles/purposes behind the selection of curriculum content and the considerations involved. Director_1 stated that the university, as an institution, sets the parameters within which the ELI has to operate. The implication is that the university itself follows guidelines from the top (macro level) of the hierarchy.

> **There is some discretion at the top administration level of the university in terms of curriculum content and pacing**. Curriculum proposals are presented, discussed and a final decision is made to select *an appropriate curriculum*. [Director_1]

The excerpt above shows the curriculum in the ELI is based on a hierarchical power-based structure rather than pedagogical principles. She refers to the top-down imposition of the teaching curriculum, the top administration level being the only place where proposals, which have been developed by the meso level, are made and discussed with no reference to or investigation of students' learning preferences or teachers' input from their experience. What an *appropriate curriculum* is seems to be decided bureaucratically rather than by teaching professionals. However, Barton et al. (2007) point out that students' preferences and needs vary according to their study context and aims (as well learning preferences). Initially, they need to improve their writing skills to the appropriate level for their courses. This variation in students' needs and preferences depends on their previous learning experience and future learning needs.

As suggested above, this raises the questions of who inputs into the curriculum proposals and what is their expertise or experience of classroom teaching? What does the top administration of the meso/university level know about English language writing curriculum content and pacing? They are not teachers with up to date classroom experience in all subjects, so does director_1 refer to policy-makers' decisions or to herself and her fellow director as the top administration level for English curriculum matters? What consideration - if any - is given to learner's needs in selecting the curriculum, is unclear, except insofar as needs are conceived as what is culturally appropriate - a homogeneous package suitable for all.

Director_1's response above suggests it is the official voice rather than her own, echoing Bakhtin's concept of seemingly voicing the official line. According to Bakhtinian, "our speech, that is, all our utterances (including our creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness" ....These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (1986, p.89). Thus what she refers to as an *appropriate curriculum (4)* suggests it is prescribed according to administrative needs rather than pedagogical ones. Even though (below) she refers to a range of inputs to match learners' needs, individual learner preferences in selecting the curriculum, she does not clarify how these needs are discovered or appear in the curriculum.

> **The selection of curriculum inputs aims to provide students with a range of different ways to process information** and show what they have learned, so as to 'match' the way in which each student learns most successfully. [Director_1]

Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the claim she makes of matching the way each learner finds effective in the pacing guide, and the only way to demonstrate what they have learned seems to be through testing. There are also two strands of students: those who need to learn writing only for university entrance, i.e. the art students; those who need it as a medium of study, i.e. the science students. This raises the question of how the curriculum can cover these different needs as classes are grouped according to English level, not students' study needs and objectives for learning English; if learners' preferences were taken into consideration for their learning course, then the curriculum(s) would need to reflect this (Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997), which does not appear to be the case.

The detailed analysis of the discourse – interview and documentary – from the stand-point of Linguistic Ethnography and the Bakhtinian concept of the voice of authority within the discourse of individuals, suggests the views given were generally not personal, but internalised from the power base of the directors themselves (Bakhtin, 1981). *"There is some discretion at the top administration level of the university in terms of curriculum content and pacing" (2, p. 209)* (director_1) suggests these matters are outside the remit of the directors as prime movers and 'some discretion' suggests the main decision-making power lies with the macro level. (While director_2 mainly reflects the institutional voice of authority, director_1 adds the voice of the professional in her references to *effective writing*, *cognitive* and *organisational skills* and so on, reflecting perhaps her experience as a trained teacher and articulating what she feels she ought to say as a professional rather than offering a individual personal view (see section 6.2.2 for further information).

Director_2's comments below suggest the lack of any criteria/guidelines for selecting the curriculum, giving the notion of homogeneity, the 'one size fits all' system irrespective of the different goals and levels of students, and appears not to be a topic of interest or consideration for him, which may reflect his powerlessness to modify procedures or that it is not his concern.

> **There are no regulations** to be deployed for selecting the curriculum. [Director_2]

He seems to give an 'official, non-committal' response. He uses 'no regulation to be deployed' which suggests topic avoidance. He may have little experience of practical teaching or interest in or knowledge of what actually goes on within the English Language Institute classrooms. He seems to be like the ideal company man taking the university philosophy as his mantra. Anything that falls outside it may be a waste of time considering if he believes he can change nothing.

6.2.4 The Institute's constraints on student writing

Research has reported that teachers in Saudi Arabia are not free to select how to instruct writing in higher education, their teaching techniques are bound by institutional policy (Hall, 2011). Similarly, director_1 confirms that matters of curriculum content and pacing are decided at institutional level (i.e. the top administration of the university - *There is some discretion at the top administration level of the university in terms of curriculum content and pacing)* while ELI implements those decisions:

> **We select topics and teaching techniques** that target students with multiple learning styles. [Director_1]

It is not clear how director_1 envisages the relationship between students' *multiple learning styles* and the curriculum or teaching and learning at classroom level. She describes below a 'one size fits' all system of instruction, which suggests there is uniformity in the educational experience - it is the same for all. Teachers have to focus on similar activities from the writing booklet while giving students the chance to practice freer writing sessions within the class for their first and final drafts. However, as both directors pointed out, the students do not all arrive at university with the same level of ability or experience; for instance, some have public education while others have been privately educated - with the inference that private education is superior - so the education ELI offers does not take account of these differences or individual needs although they acknowledge they exist.

> **All teaching settings for writing skills are suitable for our students. We have writing booklets for uniform practice.** Freer practice sessions in the form of first and final drafts give

> students equal opportunities to improve their writing skills. [Director_1]

Furthermore, director_2's response below confirms that teaching writing in the ELI is controlled and teachers are expected to follow the Institute's teaching system 'as best they can' - prescribed weekly lesson plans produced by the ELI to teach writing skills. Although, he suggests teachers have to consider students' needs, he does not go into how they might do this. This also supports director_1's suggestion of uniformity (conformity) in the educational experience at Saudi Western University and also places responsibility for delivery upon teachers.

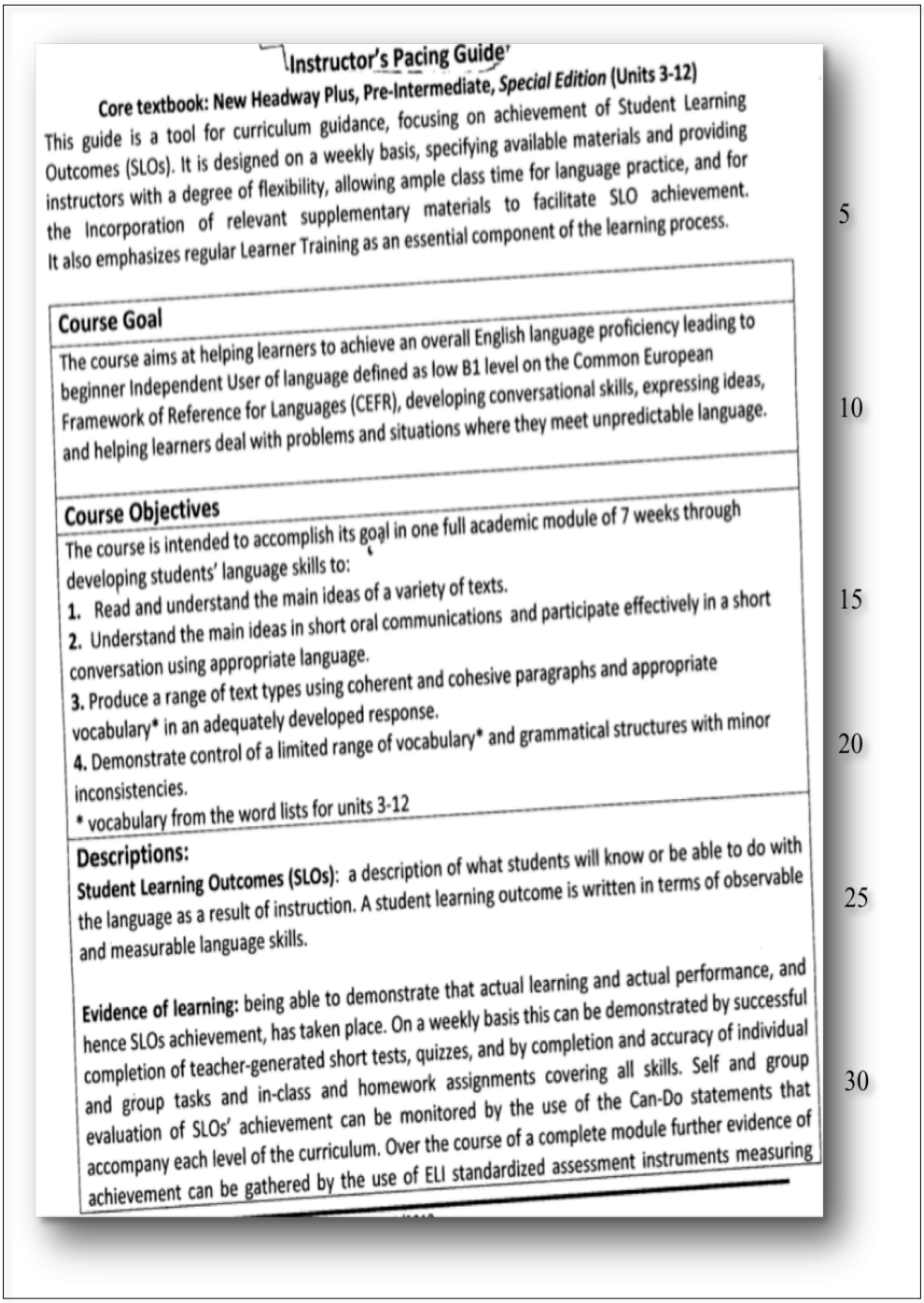
> **Teachers must follow a particular policy as best they** can but they also have to pay attention to students' needs. [Director_2]

From the standpoint of Linguistic Ethnography, the Institute directors' discourse suggests the relationship between the university management and the ELI, and the ELI and the teachers is top down, one of authority and power, through the selection of writing topics, techniques and learning styles. '*Teachers must follow a particular policy as best they can' (1,2)* reveals how policy dominates over needs and practice.

The classroom observations confirmed that the teachers followed the pacing Guide within their classes. The writing process seemed to be a very controlled both in terms of the 'content of the knowledge' and the 'type of writing techniques and activities' carried out. As far as the teachers were concerned, they tried to follow the demands of the curriculum within the allocated time - which does not set aside time-tabled slots for writing - so they do what they can when they can. Teachers see this as pedagogically fruitless, but they are constrained by the curriculum (see chapter 5, section 5.2.5.1 for teachers' comments). The fact that writing in English is not even timetabled or given specific time slots suggests it has little or no significance - which may be the case for arts students, but not science students - within the English language pedagogic framework of the ELI, but also within the overall university system.

Furthermore, from a Linguistic Ethnography perspective, the institute document below, 'Course Pacing Guide', seems to be a top down approach designed to direct and guide the teaching of English, with little space for individuality or methodology input from teachers. The analysis of the document illustrates that the course is

planned on a weekly basis with goals, objectives and descriptions (6, 11, 22). It also indicates the textbook units and language items to be presented and practiced within a specific time frame and the expected learning outcomes (26). Learning goals and outcomes are common ways of planning and setting out courses to be open and clear to learners, but are rarely presented as inflexible and within highly specified time ranges. An example from the document, below, states that teachers have to "**make sure** that listening and reading **passages** from the course book units in the core curriculum **are covered as some of these will come up in mid – and end-of-module exams**" (52-54), illustrating the emphasis on passing exams rather than learning. Additionally, it is important to note that the teachers and the meso level referred to the teaching guide almost as a holy book which has to be followed strictly and without question. As they consciously referred to the 'course pacing guide', this implies acceptance of the Bakhtinian voice of the other as superior and non-contestable. This also ties in with Hofstede's concept of behaviour in highly hierarchical societies in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular.



Instructor's Pacing Guide

Core textbook: New Headway Plus, Pre-Intermediate, *Special Edition* (Units 3-12)

This guide is a tool for curriculum guidance, focusing on achievement of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). It is designed on a weekly basis, specifying available materials and providing instructors with a degree of flexibility, allowing ample class time for language practice, and for the Incorporation of relevant supplementary materials to facilitate SLO achievement. It also emphasizes regular Learner Training as an essential component of the learning process.

Course Goal

The course aims at helping learners to achieve an overall English language proficiency leading to beginner Independent User of language defined as low B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developing conversational skills, expressing ideas, and helping learners deal with problems and situations where they meet unpredictable language.

Course Objectives

The course is intended to accomplish its goal in one full academic module of 7 weeks through developing students' language skills to:

1. Read and understand the main ideas of a variety of texts.
2. Understand the main ideas in short oral communications and participate effectively in a short conversation using appropriate language.
3. Produce a range of text types using coherent and cohesive paragraphs and appropriate vocabulary* in an adequately developed response.
4. Demonstrate control of a limited range of vocabulary* and grammatical structures with minor inconsistencies.

* vocabulary from the word lists for units 3-12

Descriptions:

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): a description of what students will know or be able to do with the language as a result of instruction. A student learning outcome is written in terms of observable and measurable language skills.

Evidence of learning: being able to demonstrate that actual learning and actual performance, and hence SLOs achievement, has taken place. On a weekly basis this can be demonstrated by successful completion of teacher-generated short tests, quizzes, and by completion and accuracy of individual and group tasks and in-class and homework assignments covering all skills. Self and group evaluation of SLOs' achievement can be monitored by the use of the Can-Do statements that accompany each level of the curriculum. Over the course of a complete module further evidence of achievement can be gathered by the use of ELI standardized assessment instruments measuring

Figure 6. 1: Instructor's pacing guide

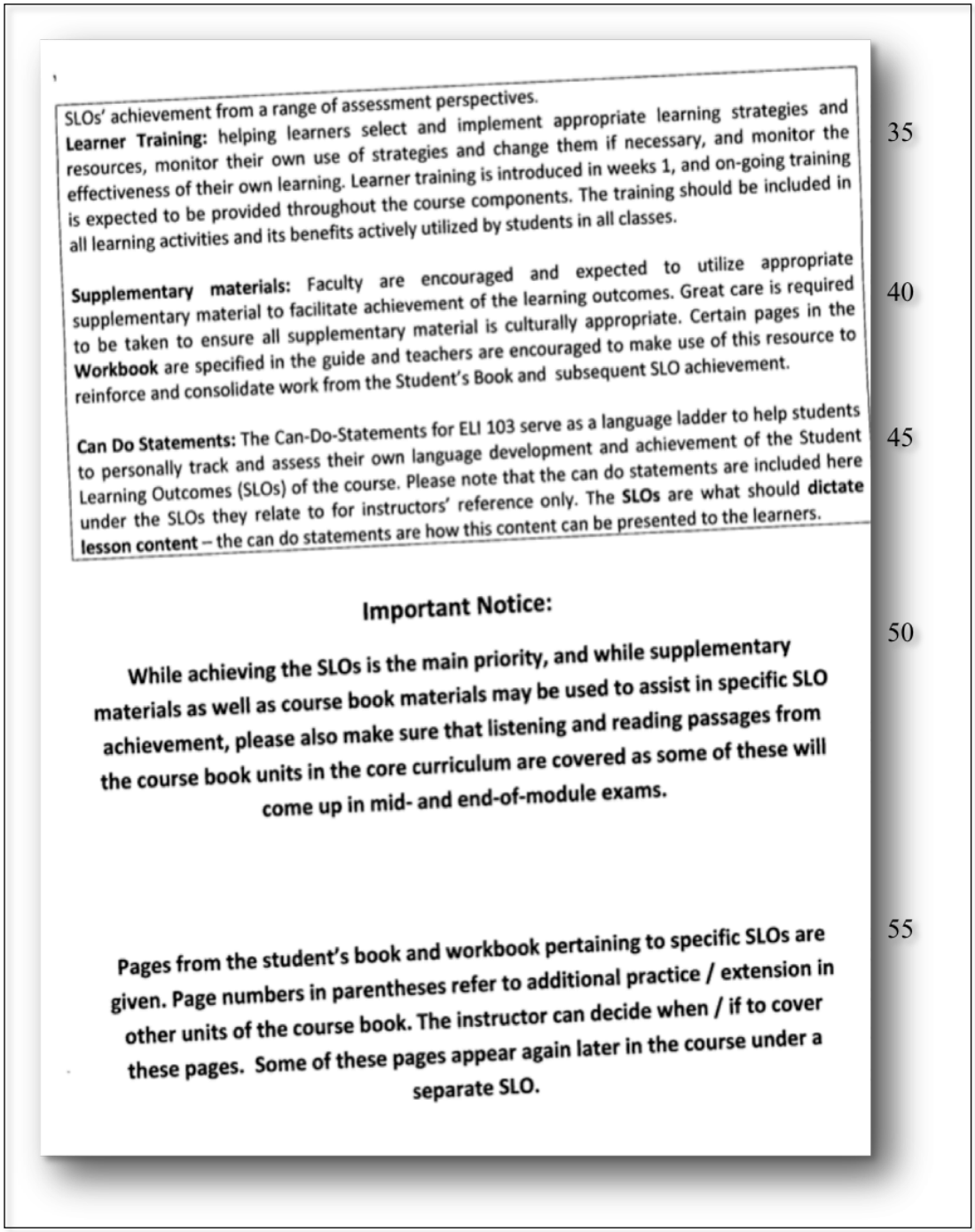
From Figure 6.1, it appears that the ELI contribution is the title - Pacing Guide - which has been pasted on to the top of text from the course book. Moreover, the analysis of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) above, seem to be of a level that is unlikely to fit the needs of studying through English at university level for any language skills, not just writing. The course objectives seem at odds with evidence of learning suggestions:

1. **Produce a range of text types using coherent and cohesive paragraphs** and appropriate vocabulary in an adequately developed response (17, 18).
2. **Demonstrate** control of **a limited range of vocabulary** and **grammatical structures** with minor inconsistencies (19, 20).

The range of text types produced (based on the essay genre) is highly restricted not a range; however, write about 'advantages and disadvantages', or a 'for and against' essay at least practice the cognitive thinking and argumentation required in academic study, while pure description in 'describe one of your relatives' (see chapter 5, section, 5.2.4.2) provides little relevant practice. The second point refers to surface language structures, not communicating with a reader. So, the concern is not just about the level of language ability aimed for as appropriate to the needs of all students but the narrowness of the curriculum delivered, returning to the question of how far the objectives of the course book and the 'one size fits all' curriculum reflect the needs of students who will study through English, though it may be adequate for those who only need to pass the university entrance test. The directors' and teachers' assumptions that most students arrive with a relatively low level of English proficiency, not enough to tackle writing in English, could be the reason for the low level of curriculum content. It could also be to ensure that most students are able to pass the exams and to proceed through the course levels to gain entry to their degree courses, especially if the passing the English exams is seen as a formality, a fence to jump, rather than having any other useful purpose by the powers that be. This leaves the science students who do need English for their studies, sidelined. In addition, the evidence from the first research question reports students' comments that class learning was not challenging enough for some of them (chapter 5, section 5.2.4.3).

The same system accommodates both those who need English merely as an entry requirement and those who need it - especially writing skills - because it is the medium of study. These needs are substantially different, but the writing experience, as well as the other English language learning, appears to be the same in terms of course delivery at each of the levels described below. This issue raises the question of whether students who complete the final module (SLOs) do reach a level that allows them to study adequately at university using English. There are, however, no more advanced level classes each semester to match the different abilities of the students at

the start of the course or their differing needs - whether learning through English or English as an entry requirement. All the classes use the same material, regardless of the different levels of ability or needs of the students, which can make some students feel bored. The supplementary material (39, below), seems to come from the meso level - recommending certain pages in the textbook, not from the teachers. The learner training (34, below), I observed after week 1 used activities from the course book about reflecting on and revising what had previously been learned, using mainly memorisation and repetition strategies.



SLOs' achievement from a range of assessment perspectives.

Learner Training: helping learners select and implement appropriate learning strategies and resources, monitor their own use of strategies and change them if necessary, and monitor the effectiveness of their own learning. Learner training is introduced in weeks 1, and on-going training is expected to be provided throughout the course components. The training should be included in all learning activities and its benefits actively utilized by students in all classes.

Supplementary materials: Faculty are encouraged and expected to utilize appropriate supplementary material to facilitate achievement of the learning outcomes. Great care is required to be taken to ensure all supplementary material is culturally appropriate. Certain pages in the **Workbook** are specified in the guide and teachers are encouraged to make use of this resource to reinforce and consolidate work from the Student's Book and subsequent SLO achievement.

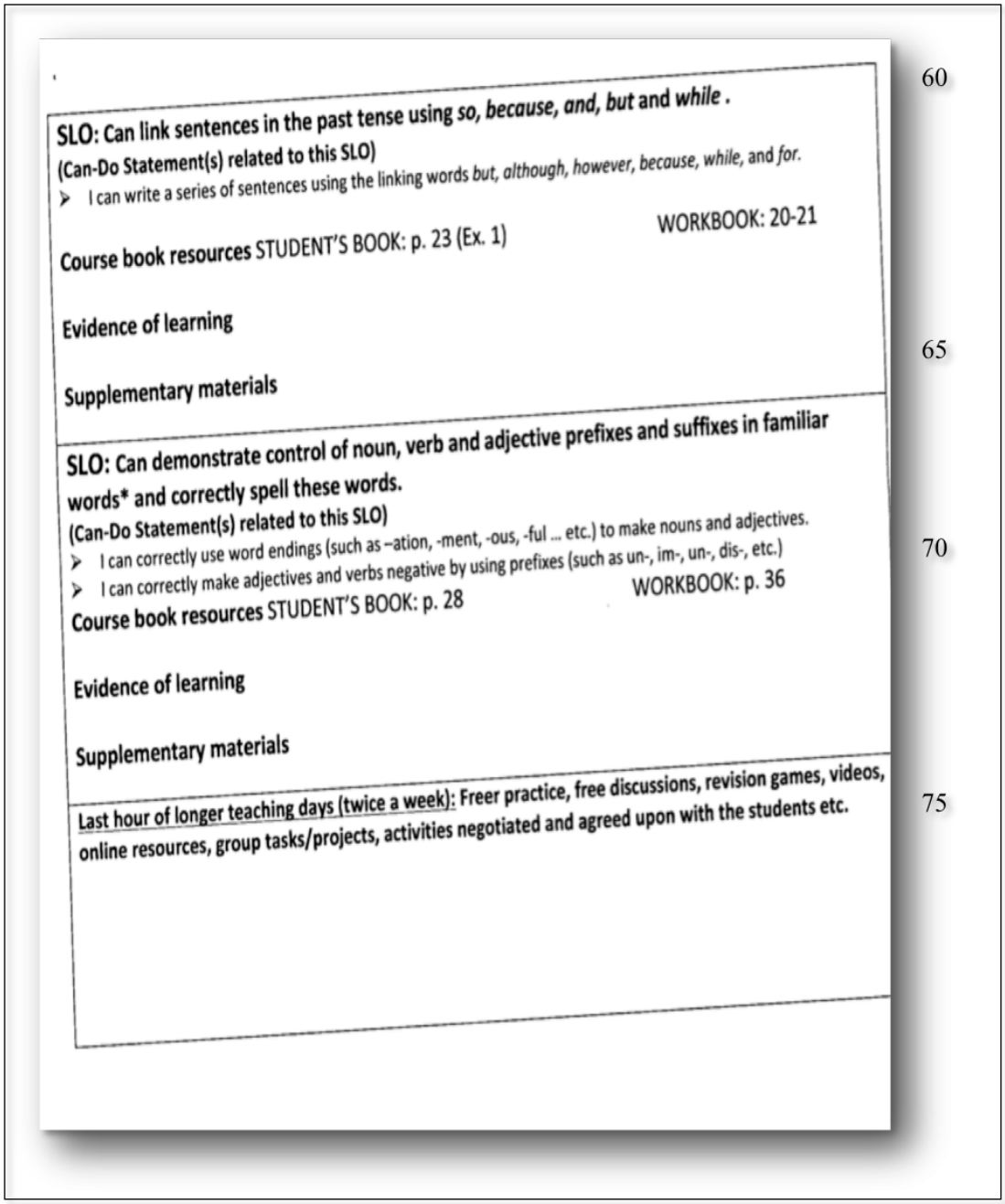
Can Do Statements: The Can-Do-Statements for ELI 103 serve as a language ladder to help students to personally track and assess their own language development and achievement of the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) of the course. Please note that the can do statements are included here under the SLOs they relate to for instructors' reference only. The **SLOs** are what should **dictate lesson content** – the can do statements are how this content can be presented to the learners.

Important Notice:

While achieving the SLOs is the main priority, and while supplementary materials as well as course book materials may be used to assist in specific SLO achievement, please also make sure that listening and reading passages from the course book units in the core curriculum are covered as some of these will come up in mid- and end-of-module exams.

Pages from the student's book and workbook pertaining to specific SLOs are given. Page numbers in parentheses refer to additional practice / extension in other units of the course book. The instructor can decide when / if to cover these pages. Some of these pages appear again later in the course under a separate SLO.

Figure 6. 2: Instructor's pacing guide



SLO: Can link sentences in the past tense using *so, because, and, but* and *while* .
(Can-Do Statement(s) related to this SLO)
- I can write a series of sentences using the linking words *but, although, however, because, while,* and *for.*

Course book resources STUDENT'S BOOK: p. 23 (Ex. 1) WORKBOOK: 20-21

Evidence of learning

Supplementary materials

SLO: Can demonstrate control of noun, verb and adjective prefixes and suffixes in familiar words* and correctly spell these words.
(Can-Do Statement(s) related to this SLO)
- I can correctly use word endings (such as –ation, -ment, -ous, -ful … etc.) to make nouns and adjectives.
- I can correctly make adjectives and verbs negative by using prefixes (such as un-, im-, un-, dis-, etc.)

Course book resources STUDENT'S BOOK: p. 28 WORKBOOK: p. 36

Evidence of learning

Supplementary materials

Last hour of longer teaching days (twice a week): Freer practice, free discussions, revision games, videos, online resources, group tasks/projects, activities negotiated and agreed upon with the students etc.

Figure 6. 3: Instructor's pacing guide

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 6.3 above, teaching writing in the present study was perceived with reference to the: *lesson-by-lesson guide*, *number of course book resources*, and a *specified time-frame*, with narrow emphasis on the quantity of points to be taught within a given length of time, rather than responding to students' actual needs in terms of the process as well as the content of knowledge, and the time needed to assimilate and practice it. The ultimate goal of some - study through English (including several genres of writing) - is not considered. As pointed out in the

Literature review (Chapter 3) the course book aims to teach integrated skills, which means there is no specific focus on writing; writing is only a means to practice grammar and vocabulary.

As a result, the ELI's constraints, such as the pacing guide for writing practices within the classroom only referring to grammatical accuracy, do not appear to be appropriate for instructing writing in higher education, while they may suit the general English language purposes of the course book. The guidelines seem to reinforce the discourse of the power and authority of the meso level (ELI), together with the macro level. Teachers at all levels are not formally encouraged to collaborate or engage collectively through the exchange of ideas to help them respond better to student needs in the learning process in general and the writing process in particular. Teachers are constrained by what is perceived to be valuable and has to be used with students rather than their own experience in the classroom or judgment of when material should be presented or how it is to be approached. In line with previous studies, these teachers in Saudi Arabia teach within certain restrictions; they have little autonomy and independence at the stages of the education system in Saudi Arabia, from primary to higher education. Therefore, teaching mainly focuses on following the curriculums and instructions (Al-Seghayer, 2005). This is due to the centralisation policy of the education system in Saudi Arabia (Shah et al., 2013) as explained in chapter two – the context of the study - and is a way of exerting power and control from the top down.

6.2.5 The influence of culture on writing materials

The interview with director_1 illustrated how the cultural sensitivities of Saudi society influence the selection of writing materials and topics in the classroom. According to Grami (2010, p.16), the Saudi context is "a rigid, deeply religious one, where religion and tradition play a very dominant position in every aspect of life, including education and educational policies" (see chapter 2, section 2.3). This is a view of culture as static and unchanging, and of maintaining the status quo, leaving little scope for progression. It also sees students' needs as objective, that is, their obligation to conform to cultural expectations, rather than their subjective learning needs.

> **Culture, as an ingrained set of modes of perception and behaviours, is essential in learning a foreign language.** At

> Saudi Western University, we try to introduce culturally suitable topics while teaching writing skills. This approach is suitable to match learners' needs to their customs and culture without offending anyone. [Director_1]

Above, director_1 indicates that the writing curriculum content (as far as it exists) is modified to fit the cultural and religious values of the home culture (Rugh, 2002). This takes precedence over writing needs or topics, when she states that: *we try to introduce culturally suitable topics while teaching writing skills (lines 3,4)*. The use of *we* also suggests the accepted voice of authority.

Such writing topics include writing about your family or one of your relatives, describing a city or town and seem intended to be 'safe' topics, where cultural and traditional values will be reflected (Grami, 2010; Rugh, 2002). This view sees culture not as evolving or socially co-constructed by the members of a given society, but as static, as a tool for maintaining the status quo and the existing power relations and ensuring general conformity (Hofstede, 2011). Writing topics which could be broader and more generally relevant are kept separate from any cultural origins, so that only the safe, relevant or shared topics that fit within the L1 home culture are used. On the other hand, director_2 when asked about cultural restrictions, claims:

> **No, there aren't any restrictions.** Restrictions are only in the minds of learners who do not want to learn. [Director_2]

This echoes his earlier responses that responsibility for learning rests with the learners. It may be that he does not recognise or wish to acknowledge the relevance of any possible external constraints imposed by perceptions of Saudi culture, hence the question is irrelevant. According to Al-Seghayer (2014), the language curriculum in Saudi Arabia has certain constraints and conceptualisations which may restrict the learning process.

During the observation sessions, I witnessed the course book Soars and Soars (2012) *New Headway Plus - Special Edition*, Oxford University Press with *Headway Plus Writing Guide* for additional writing support. The book is approved by the administration of the English Language Institution following the approval of the university and the Ministry of Education, even though, it does not seem to be relevant to the needs of all the learners it is used with.

Firstly, *New Headway Plus* is a general language course book suitable to be used in the Middle East, and not concerned with academic writing or tertiary level study, so the focus, of necessity, is general. English-speaking cultural norms (i.e. in some of the topics) have been 'neutralised' or removed as the aim is not *intercultural communication*- however in some sense, many academic studies do required intercultural understanding. This means it avoids any cultural content which might inhibit sales in the Middle East, although there are some global high cultural themes, like world art. Nevertheless, it has been used in SA and approved at the highest levels because it is perceived as safe, especially concerning the need to preserve the cultural status quo. This may also because the suitability of the course book - in terms of method and content - was decided at a higher (macro) level, possibly with limited direct experience of teaching. It seems to respond to the cultural needs and thus avoids any further concerns about its suitability.

Secondly, the textbook's philosophy with regards to its suggestions for teaching writing - grammatical accuracy - do fall into what AL calls *the study skills approach*. It mainly incorporates general language skills, such as grammar and vocabulary through four graded levels, whilst students need more than general language patterns to develop their writing ability. This finding is in line with a previous experimental study in the Saudi context conducted by Al-Roomy (2015). The study suggested that curriculum designers should create and implement language tasks that encourage language learning communicatively rather than only linguistically, to enable students to use it as a tool for their studies. According to Genc and Bada (2005), obtaining the target language requires more than manipulation of the lexicon and syntax. Students need to learn more about the people, country and culture of the target language to communicate successfully (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003). It is suggested that engaging with cultural content would raise student's educational awareness (Gray, 2000). Reda (2003) also argues that this course book is inadequate for improving student writing practices in higher education as it is a general course book with rather lower targets than those required for university study using English.

I also observed in the writing classroom that students seemed bored with the writing material used, as there was no inspiring or challenging writing tasks during the learning process. The teachers taught their students by explaining the writing

materials and then asking them to write based on the instructions in the writing book and worksheets. This left little creative freedom or purpose for the apprentice writers. According to Ghufron (2015), many students face a problem in learning academic writing because of the uninteresting teaching materials used and the lack of inspiring activities to motivate learners.

6.2.6 Teaching and learning practices

According to the Academic Literacies approach, knowledge should be co-constructed by students and teachers together in a socially neutral (non-hierarchical) context to allow students the power to take responsibility for their own learning (Lea and Street, 1998), (see chapter 3, section 3.3.4.3) while, the meso level - the ELI - seems to think that knowledge transfer is in the hands of the course book and teachers (both content and form) and that students are empty vessels waiting to be filled, with no particular needs or contributions to make to the learning process. Director_1 seems to place responsibility on teachers for carrying out the entire teaching process and creating the appropriate environment for learning, presumably having done her bit by adding comments to the already prescribed course book in the pacing guide and other official documents. She does however, acknowledge awareness of the negative effect of teaching approaches which may demotivate the students and inhibit their learning and the responsibility to use a variety of teaching strategies and even refers to student-directed learning.

> In order to help students to gain knowledge and become involved in the learning process, teachers must assign sufficient time to developing the relationships within the classroom. This will help them to promote the learning environment in which students feel comfortable exchanging ideas. Several factors, such as students' background experience, differences in their academic ability, motivation, values, and attitude have significant influences on students' learning. Therefore, it is **our responsibility** to use different teaching strategies and methods. Creating a classroom environment that makes students passive bystanders is undesirable and detrimental to student learning. Thus, to engage our students in the learning process, **we should strive** to creatively design lesson plans that implement student-directed rather than teacher-directed learning like lectures. [Director_1]

However, it is difficult to see any space for these desirable features. Director_1, acknowledges the extent of the demands on teachers and takes a professional tone – 'our responsibility' (8, 9) and 'we should strive' (12) (suggesting these are agreed or accepted instructions passed down from the meso level) and also by referring to the need for student-directed rather than teacher-directed learning. She is aware of the problem and/or she is saying what she should say (in the Bakhtinian sense) as a professional educator. What is not acknowledged is the relationship between materials, methods and student-directed learning - none of which are possible without changing the prescriptive and static curriculum and methods currently in place. There are no suggestions as to how teachers can make create pedagogic alternatives within the present system.

In spite of the director's assessment of the desirability of student-centred (not lecture-based) learning, during classroom observation, I witnessed the teachers' tendency towards a teacher-centred approach whereby the teachers were the main and reliable source of knowledge. Students had little or no access to sources of information and ideas about the topics for writing exercises other than what was available from the teacher or inside the classroom - not their own or their classmates' knowledge or experience (which would be more in line with AL's concept of socially-based learning). This finding is in line with a number of local studies that traditional teaching approaches, including teacher-centred approaches, were mainly used in the instruction of writing in English in Saudi Arabia (Al-Khairy, 2013; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Bersamina, 2009). This affects the educational environment and learning practices; students' learning processes tend to lack the communicative, co-operative principles advocated at tertiary level for developing student writing skills and their English language competence (Fareh, 2010). Writing is thus a largely solitary activity rather than a communicative social process, with an audience and possible collaborators. Regarding the issue of students bringing their experience to the writing classroom and progressing from the known to the new, simple materials like maps of a local area which students know could be used to help them collaboratively provide instructions for the best way to get from A to B. This sort of material is more likely to provide the basis for useful writing skills practice and avoid cultural concerns as a pre-existing source.

Below, director_1's use of *we* (1,4) suggests shared professional group membership (i.e directors and teachers) but goes on to place responsibility with teachers to be open to change and learning new teaching strategies based on research and practice. However, the reference to appropriate behaviour and 'protect their dignity' seem to have cultural implications, and these appear non-negotiable, so it not clear within the current pacing guidelines how teachers can convey the feeling of caring and nurturing or protect students' dignity.

> **We should remain up to date with research within** the field and try to apply new methods and strategies and heed findings **that might lead to adjusting teaching strategies**. We should admit that our job is not only to teach lessons, but also to teach students how to behave appropriately when they encounter problems. Teachers should convey the feeling of caring for students and **protect their dignity**. [Director_1]

Nevertheless, director_1 below goes on to suggest some teachers *who assess their students' knowledge and preparation levels* (1,2) can have inputs to modify weekly lesson plans and semester plans and to give opinions to on how to help students succeed in class. However, this is not all the teachers and when or the frequency of this input is not given and in any case, it concerns highly restricted input as the goals are short-term class success. This limits and restricts all the teachers' contributions - though a few seem allowed to input, possibly those who mark tests - and ensures teachers remain at the micro level in terms of power or the authority to initiate change or make modifications.

> Teachers who assess their students' **knowledge and preparation levels** are asked to give opinions to adjust weekly lessons and semester plans to best teach their students the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in class. [Director_1]

In practice, however, the evidence from the data (chapter 5, section 5.2.4.2), reveals that only teacher_11 appeared able to make a minor change to the writing guide exercises. She got permission, she explained, from the male side of the ELI, from a male colleague. This raises a whole new issue as it suggests another layer of administration or responsibility or even collaboration between some teachers and possibly the directors, an 'intermediary level' in the hierarchy between the meso and micro levels with responsibility for teaching materials is at least possible. A subset of

teachers could take on specific tasks like writing/adapting the worksheets for the approval of the meso-layer, who do not actually do the practical work, but - presumably - approve it. When teacher_11 appealed for clarification about whether she could adapt the workbook and said she got approval from the male side of the ELI, this implies a similar, female team-leader who was not helpful in this instance. Follow-up research could investigate whether there is a separate (in) formal system functioning as support for teachers at a more practical level and who they report to and the extent of their responsibilities. Teacher_11 seemed to approach an ELI unit which had curriculum responsibilities with some trepidation, and to find it easier to appeal to 'the male side' - her idea was rejected by the female side - and regarded the permission she achieved to make minor changes as something of a victory. This suggests several things: this challenge was minor and resulted in a minor change, so had little effect; only highly persistent and motivated teachers like teacher_11 are likely to challenge the prescriptive frameworks they are given to work within; that there is no input in general from teachers to what seems to be a curriculum unit, again questioning how far the producers of the formal contents of the curriculum - at all levels, including undetermined ones like the possible curriculum unit - interact with or are informed by the micro-level. It seems very little, at best.

6.2.7 Understanding the nature of the assessment practices

Writing is a key skill in higher education as most university assessment is through writing (Badger and White, 2000; Dempsey et al., 2009). The theoretical underpinnings of the written assessment practices in the ELI seem to come from behavioural psychology and training programmes which consider learning and writing as a cognitive and individual skill (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010; Turner, 2004) and are reflected in director_1's comment about the need for *clear thinking, an analytical mind. It is also the mental organisational skills of the person* (p225, line 5). A view of written literacy as technical skills exhibited itself in the high premium of ‘correctness’ evident in different sets of data (Barton et al., 2007). Correctness is treated as the key value in various contexts rather than other values such as purpose, meaning, and communication. Correctness was emphasised and reinforced as a main value in writing texts at tertiary level at Saudi Western University. It appears in

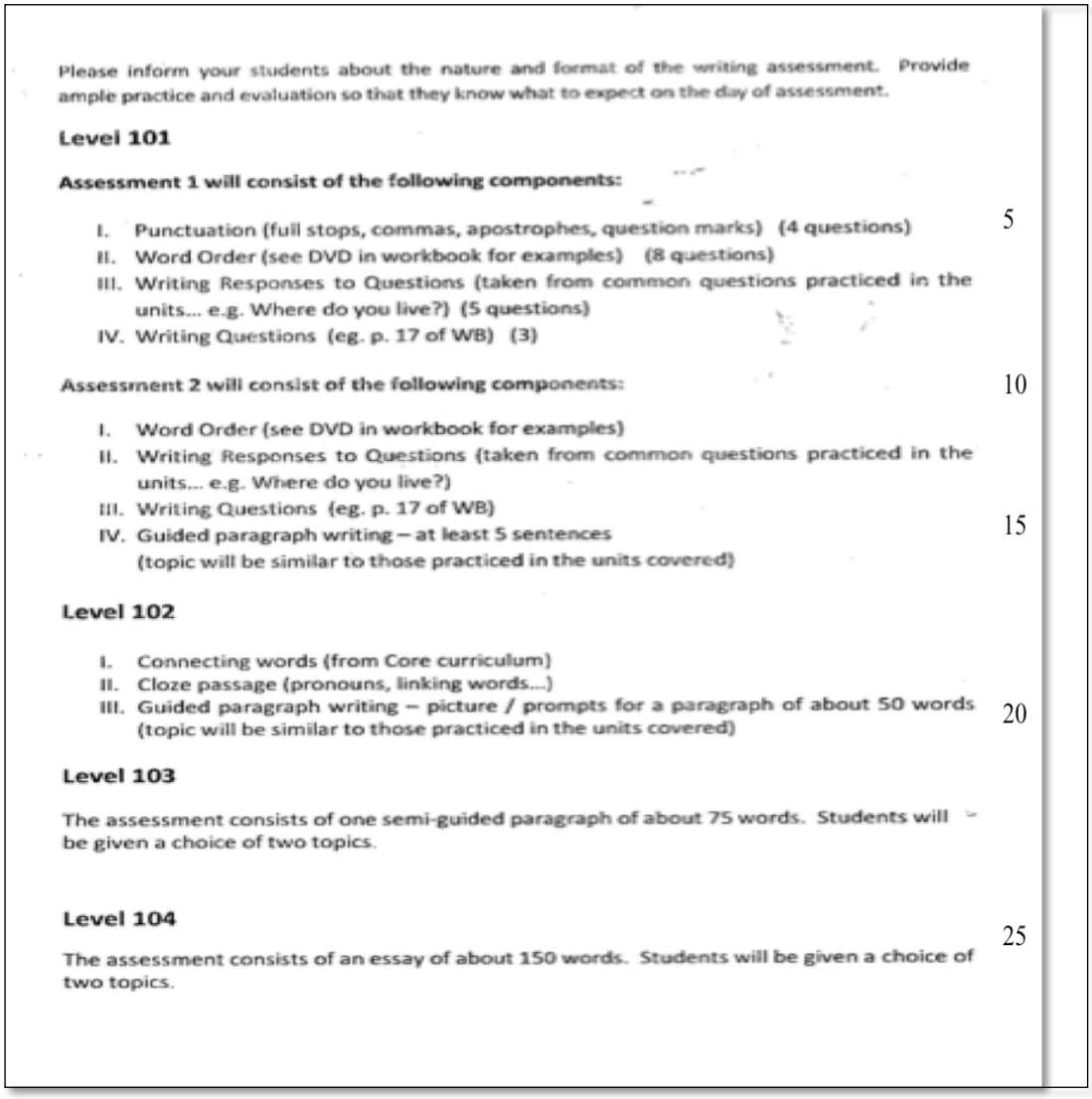
documents and assessment practices which focus on the linguistic form rather than meaning when writing an essay.

The ELI documentation illustrates how student writing achievement is measured within each module: the mid-module and final examinations (70%), two written examinations (10%), continuous assessment (portfolio) (10%) and two speaking examinations (10%). Speaking assessment is outside the scope of this research. The mid-module and final examinations focus on accuracy and on using the correct forms; students have to produce a number of simple sentences forming a descriptive paragraph to demonstrate their control of basic aspects of language such as grammar, vocabulary, capitalisation and punctuation in a neat and comprehensible form. Students have to write two essays per module in 30 minutes (10% of the final grade).

There are two types of written tasks: grammar exercises including, sentence completion - and writing tasks which could be in the form of essays or notes. The nature of the written assessment varies over the 4 levels. For instance, at levels one and two, the written assessment consists of writing a guided essay. Essay topics are similar to those practiced in the units covered. At level three, the assessment consists of writing a semi-guided essay. At level four, the assessment consists of writing an essay. Students at (levels three and four) are given a choice between two writing topics, while emphasis in the continuous assessment (portfolio) is on a number of written tasks which can include grammar and sentence completion.

The ELI documentation such as the 'writing assessment overview' illustrates the nature and format of the writing assessment (see figure 6.4 below). It suggests that writing assessment is restricted to a set of components in a standard assessment sheet so teachers and students can understand the nature and format of the writing assessment within the ELI. Additionally, this document is mainly concerned with the basic language tools necessary for writing something down and indicates that students' writing achievements are assessed by displaying control of the appropriate: *punctuation (5),* having *well-ordered and comprehensible writing within limited choices (6,11), and grammar (18,19)*. The documents seem to support the interviews, and illustrate the rigid grammar/accuracy approach criticised by Academic Literacies. They show the basis of the curriculum and underline what is seen as crucial on a week by week basis (i.e. the pacing guide).

This document also suggests that writing assessment seems to operate as a closed system, without reference to any external reality/audience or need for creativity to respond to new situations. Consequently, the ELI's teaching activities do not promote the skills needed for social practices (Barton et al., 2007). There is no free expression or other elements of language, such as how to convey meaning to readers by example, metaphor, by making claims or hedging - forms that can occur in various genres and types of writing - only surface language features are considered, with little semantic or pragmatic intent included.



Please inform your students about the nature and format of the writing assessment. Provide ample practice and evaluation so that they know what to expect on the day of assessment.

Level 101

Assessment 1 will consist of the following components:

I. Punctuation (full stops, commas, apostrophes, question marks) (4 questions)
II. Word Order (see DVD in workbook for examples) (8 questions)
III. Writing Responses to Questions (taken from common questions practiced in the units... e.g. Where do you live?) (5 questions)
IV. Writing Questions (eg. p. 17 of WB) (3)

Assessment 2 will consist of the following components:

I. Word Order (see DVD in workbook for examples)
II. Writing Responses to Questions (taken from common questions practiced in the units... e.g. Where do you live?)
III. Writing Questions (eg. p. 17 of WB)
IV. Guided paragraph writing – at least 5 sentences
(topic will be similar to those practiced in the units covered)

Level 102

I. Connecting words (from Core curriculum)
II. Cloze passage (pronouns, linking words...)
III. Guided paragraph writing – picture / prompts for a paragraph of about 50 words
(topic will be similar to those practiced in the units covered)

Level 103

The assessment consists of one semi-guided paragraph of about 75 words. Students will be given a choice of two topics.

Level 104

The assessment consists of an essay of about 150 words. Students will be given a choice of two topics.

Figure 6. 4: Writing assessment goals and levels

All the assessment features mentioned above (including length and topic) are surface features of language without purpose and meaning or communicative intent, totally

devoid of the social construction of meaning AL advocates and attributes to what it refers to as the 'Study Skills approach', which much of figure 6.4 exemplifies.

Classroom observation also confirmed that more emphasis was placed on the form of language like punctuation, spelling and structure rather than language functions like making requests, on the advisory notices in the classrooms (see figure 6.5 below). Teachers placed more emphasis on notions of accuracy, form and grammatical correctness in writing, and paid less attention to the intended meaning or any communicative or interactive function or purpose. This can make a language seem functionless and dead and focus on correctness may reflect a limited vision of what is considered to be learning, progress, or success. This view of accuracy and correctness is related to a view of literacy which sees reading and writing as skills or competences while the focus on meanings, functions and use are linked to a view of literacy as a social practice (Creaton, 2008; Ivanic, 2004; Wingate, 2006).

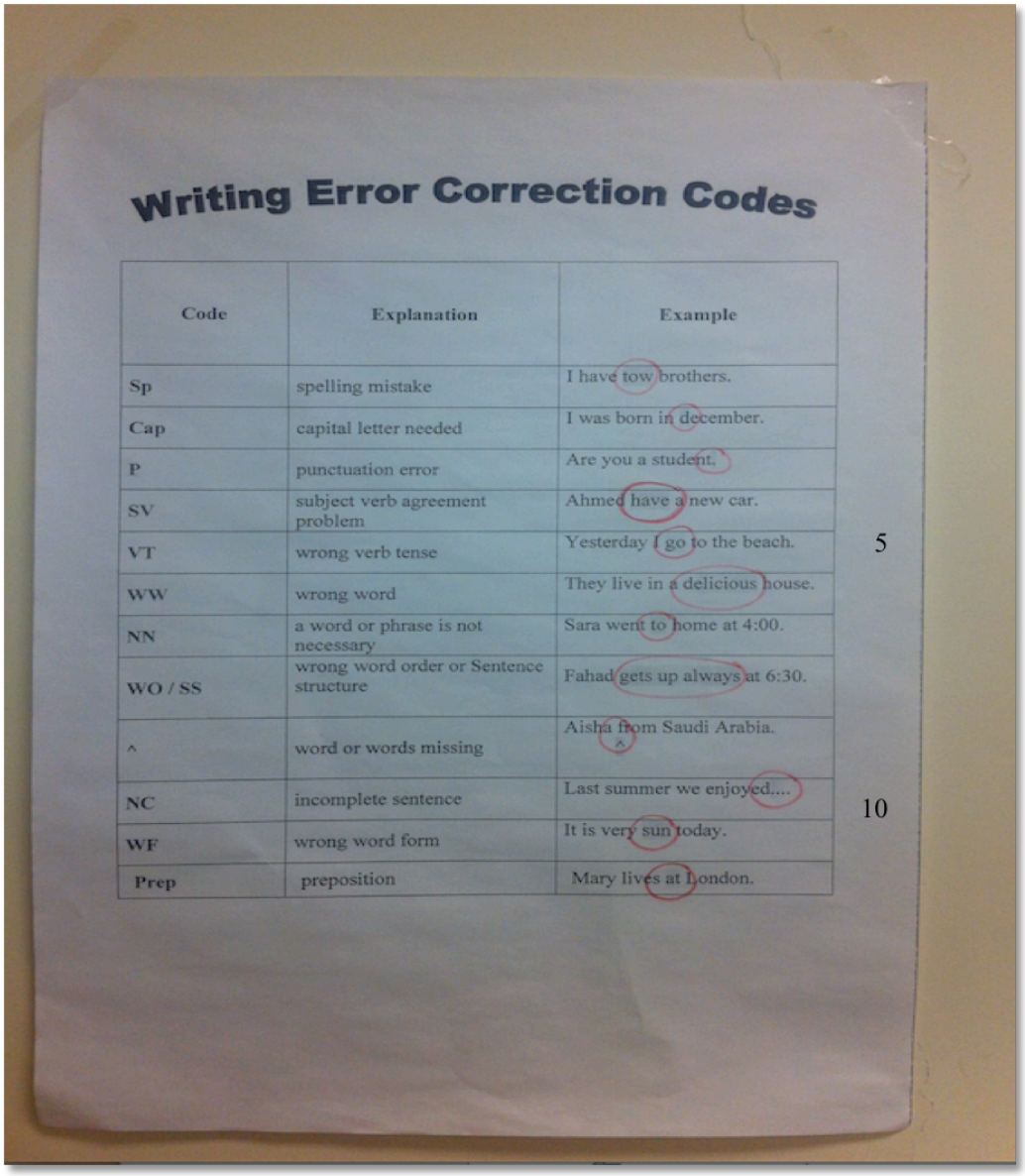
The data indicates why teachers have a strong grammar focus and privilege correctness of grammar and punctuation as main goals. This what the ELI requires and what the directors relay, especially director_2. It could be what they themselves believe it, but in a hierarchical system, individual beliefs are largely irrelevant if not accompanied by the ability to make changes. The educational documents and interview data reveal the power and authority of the ELI over tutors and students and its control over assessment and consequently, the objectives of learning as well as the focus of learning. However, the powerlessness of the ELI in relation to the overall university authorities and probably the macro level decisions is suggested in the references to some discretion and input.

> **There is some discretion at the top administration level of the university**. [Director_1]

The extract above suggests power relations are top down, in one direction only. Furthermore, in the ELI checklist for writing and error correction, there seems to be little or no understanding of the semantics, that is the meaning entailed by the use of grammatical forms, that grammar actually serves as a vehicle to convey meaning. With a better understanding of this, it is possible to show how grammar functions from the standpoint of meaning. For instance, ' *Have you been seeing my wife*?' has a particular connotation (have you been having an affair with my wife) while the

similar *'Have you seen my wife?'* has no such undertone of meaning, but the difference might be difficult to teach within cultural boundaries, so nuances in the target language can be lost as well.

ELI documents like the 'writing error correction codes' on the notice boards (figure 6.5) suggest the relationship between teachers and students is also one of power and authority, the teachers being supported and authorised by the Institute's procedures and regulations as the guardians of knowledge. While there is a convenient short form coding system to indicate the type of error: *spelling* (1), *punctuation error* (3) and *subject verb agreement* (4), these do not include any reference to the communicative function of writing. However, there is some indication of communicative function in *Figure 6.6 Rubrics for writing Folder Assignments*, p. 32, in the requirement of relevance to the topic. This is possibly also an attempt to preclude the production of essays learned by heart to reproduce in the exam. The relationship between ideas requires a conceptual understanding of them and their connection to other ideas to ensure the intended message is conveyed, and this feature of language seems to have received little attention.



Writing Error Correction Codes

Code	Explanation	Example
Sp	spelling mistake	I have tow brothers.
Cap	capital letter needed	I was born in december.
P	punctuation error	Are you a student.
SV	subject verb agreement problem	Ahmed have a new car.
VT	wrong verb tense	Yesterday I go to the beach.
WW	wrong word	They live in a delicious house.
NN	a word or phrase is not necessary	Sara went to home at 4:00.
WO / SS	wrong word order or Sentence structure	Fahad gets up always at 6:30.
^	word or words missing	Aisha from Saudi Arabia.
NC	incomplete sentence	Last summer we enjoyed....
WF	wrong word form	It is very sun today.
Prep	preposition	Mary lives at London.

Figure 6. 5: Examples of writing error correction codes

The holistic writing assignment notes below (6.6) also illustrate that even with a mark scheme, the writing assessment is - to a limited extent - impressionistic and thus open to more than one interpretation. However, the overarching requirement is topic focus and maintenance. The documents clarify the nature and format of language assessment in the ELI and consequently its strengths and shortcomings to a researcher. This raises the question of the process of marking students' essays in the ELI (see figure 6.6 below). The assessment criteria rubrics of the folder assignments below do not reveal whether each teacher marks their own students' work or whether they mark each other's or whether each script has two markers in the interests of fairness and consistency across classes - to ensure the validity and reliability of the

assessment methods, which is of concern especially when test results affect students' career paths. If teachers are under pressure to produce good results, their assessments of their own students may be more lenient, even within the rubrics, which are also subject to different interpretation by different tutors.

Director_1 referred to input from teachers involved in assessment procedures, which suggests there may be some monitoring/double-marking, but while the criteria for the grading codes (below) are published publicly on the notice-board, their implementation is unclear; results can affect the teachers' reputations as much as the students' successes or failures. It is outside the scope of the present research, but how issues of validity and reliability are maintained over classes of the same level over time are handled might shed light on some practices within Saudi Western University.

Grade	Description
10	• fulfills length requirement and consistently adheres to the assigned topic • very well organized and clearly divided into beginning, middle and end • effective use of linking words • an effective topic sentence and relevant supporting sentences • minimal syntax or tense errors and accurate use of appropriate vocabulary • few errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization
9	
8	• fulfills length requirement and adheres to the assigned topic most of the time • somewhat organized and divided into beginning, middle and end • some use of linking words • a clear topic sentence with mostly relevant supporting sentences • a few syntax or tense errors and adequate use of appropriate vocabulary • some minor errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization
7	
6	• fulfils length requirement but sometimes digresses from the assigned topic • somewhat organized but not clearly divided into beginning, middle and end • inconsistent use of linking words • topic sentence is present but the supporting sentences are inconsistent • some syntax or tense errors & occasionally inaccurate use of relevant vocabulary • a few major errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization
5	
4	• doesn't fulfill length requirement and often digresses from the assigned topic • poorly organized and not clearly divided into beginning, middle and end • only few linking words are used • unclear topic sentence with inadequate supporting sentences • frequent syntax or tense errors and mostly inaccurate use of relevant vocabulary • numerous errors in spelling, punctuation and capitalization
3	
2	• full of irrelevant ideas showing lack of understanding of the topic • complete lack of organization • no linking words used • no topic sentence with minimal support • full of syntax or tense errors and mostly inaccurate use of relevant vocabulary, affecting meaning • full of spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors
1	
0	• completely unrelated to the assigned topic • absolutely illegible • no answer at all

Figure 6. 6: Examples of rubrics for writing folder assessments

Teacher feedback to students about the error correction codes above is a controlled process through an ELI document informing students about the meaning of teachers' feedback on their first draft. The form instructs teachers how to give feedback in the form of error correction - largely relating to grammar, punctuation and appropriate vocabulary - and return first drafts to students for improvement. The only improvement envisaged is on these features. In addition to the teachers' correction code, students can be asked to carry out self-evaluation and peer-correction, or be given a model text for comparison and a contrastive analysis of the language in the model and in their first drafts, or students can work on their mistakes from the correction codes either individually or in groups. This offers some possibility of social interaction/input to writing through peer pairs or groups, which can give some

concept of an audience/purpose for writing and gets away from the 'lonely' writer view criticised by Academic Literacies. Teachers also have to give positive written feedback about what was good in the first draft and what students can do to improve their writing, which is a laudable step. Although these instructions seem to offer explanation and clarification to students about interpreting teachers' feedback and feedback procedures, the interview and documentary data also reveal the constraints and rules that seem to be placed on both teachers and students, thus affecting their autonomy and possibilities of focusing on common problem areas in the learning writing environment, so leaving little room for the co-construction or sharing of knowledge.

Assessment inevitably has a wash back effect on teaching and learning as it shows what is considered to be more or less important in learning, thus affecting the views of both teachers and students on what is taught and is perceived as important to learn. How far successful grades from these assessment forms and their values indicate an ability to study through English, including to write, and thus meet student needs at the ELI level, remains in doubt. It may be that the goals and assessment are more focused on students' with comparatively low levels of English who need to pass the English assessment only in order to proceed to further studies, not those who need to study through English.

6.3 Views to changing the nature of literacy

Director_1 (below) seems to have real experience of the classroom and ideas of how to promote writing in English in higher education, and refers to literacy instructions suggesting that she conceives the features of writing assessed as the basic structural underpinnings of writing, i.e. as basic written literacy. She suggests writing can be made more meaningful by linking literacy (grammatical accuracy) to its meaning and function rather than just grammatical accuracy as marks on a page. She thus suggests more variety of tasks and the link between writing and thinking. “Writing as a Thinking Process” is an earlier conceptualisation of formal writing (Lawrence, 1972), meaning putting down and organising ideas on paper helps the writer to extend and rethink ideas, in much the same way as reflection or diary-keeping is encouraged as a useful practice for learners and researchers nowadays.

> **By implementing the literacy instructions based on understanding and adding new and challenging writing tasks**, by enhancing the writing opportunities because both the writing process and discipline stimulate students' thinking, we can help them to develop their thoughts and ideas about the topic. We need to raise our students' awareness about the fact that **to write is to think**, and it is part of the academic path. [Director_1]

Her focus is on the need for more challenging activities and opportunities to write in English because she sees writing in English as a cognitive skill. Her comment demonstrates her awareness of this view of writing, rooted in everyday purposefulness academic activities. Her response seems to demonstrate some enthusiasm for development and transforming her ideas into practice. Her use of *we* (5) *we* and *our* (7) suggests she perceives this as a shared task and objective. This director's philosophical underpinnings to her views (and a voice) on the nature of literacy (here, basic writing skills) and language could be the Bakhtin voice of the professional or her personal voice based on her years of experience - if somewhat outdated. Additionally, director_1's reference to meaningful individual teacher/student encounters seems practical, but still a post hoc remedial, rather than a creative process from the start as it based upon spotting errors, which also reflects the teacher's power (where knowledge is sited) over the student (who makes mistakes).

> **It is important to have satisfactory and meaningful tutorials and supervisions to talk about a student's written task** which has been submitted and checked in advance. **This will help teachers to identify and diagnose any potential language problem** that may block or influence the student's understanding related to academic integrity. [Director_1]

Organising time so that students' work can be submitted and read by teachers in advance of tutorials, which last almost half an hour and take place about three times per semester, aims to improve the efficient use of time and have more relevance, but the perception is still that students have problems that teachers have to mend - a deficit view of student learning that Academic Literacies criticises. While director_1's comments relate to the organisation and quality of the teaching support offered students, director_2's, below refer more to the quantity and type of writing tuition offered:

> I think there should be **more emphasis on teaching writing skills**. Writing practices can be promoted by increasing the number of writing classes and by assigning writing classes to teachers who themselves have been trained to teach writing skills. [Director_2]

Director_2's views in this instance, place more emphasis on how writing in English is taught and who is best placed to teach it, rather than it being the responsibility of students to make progress. He also refers to writing skills and more writing classes, suggesting he has a wider view of writing than accuracy, which suggests *I* (1) may be a personal view in his own voice, possibly from his own learning experience. At a practical level though, this solution shifts to writing skills, suggesting going beyond accuracy, but it essentially manipulates and maintains the current framework and goals without conceptual innovation, so is a response which still accepts, to a large extent, the status quo.

Although he does acknowledge, by implication, that teaching writing requires training and for teachers to have a particular skill set - presumably, this refers to new teachers recruited for the purpose or teachers already employed who have teaching writing training, not to on-the-job training for teachers currently employed. This issue raises the question of whether any training is offered - workshops, perhaps to help teachers new to the job or update those who have been there for some time - and leads on to the question of whether teachers themselves are socially integrated and co-operate by sharing their teaching tasks and concerns, which would greatly expand their experience and support their teaching.

6.4 Summary of the key findings for research question two

The second research question explored the key institutional discourses that shaped the students' writing practices, assessment and the feedback given. The findings suggest that writing in English at tertiary level in Saudi Arabia is conducted as an institutional matter with institutional needs rather than for the students' individual development and teaching in response to their writing needs and functions at tertiary level and beyond. The ELI does not take into account what the students think they need as writers at university, or what the demands of the students' future subjects of study are. Science subjects, as discussed, use English as the medium of study (at least in part) so at least some reading and degree level written assessments are through English. The

two directors demonstrated the ELI's attitude to, and the basis upon which they prescribed the parameters for writing in English in the curriculum, the practices, pacing guide and assessment criteria within the classroom. There was little or no input or feedback from the teachers or students, who experienced the classroom at the 'micro-level' through the writing curriculum, booklet, following the prescribed activities, pacing guide and writing assessment documents. The only outcomes or indicators of learning perceived were thus the exam results and individual portfolios. Both meso and macro levels indicated one of the problems was that students learnt essays by heart to repeat them in the exams. The teachers gave strong hints about exam topics beforehand, which encouraged this approach. Thus the only feedback valued by the system was superficial and uninformative, neither concerned with the true ability of the students as individuals, the quality of the teaching nor the quality and usefulness of the curriculum and materials. There was continuity, it seemed, year on year, no innovation or development, because the information required for that was not sought, although, this research has shown that the micro level, especially the students, had a wealth of suggestions and ideas to offer to improve the writing experience. In fact, the ELI offers only general English instruction with target levels below what would be acceptable for study through English at most universities where English is the medium of instruction - or learning, for instance, where much of the literature is in English.

This study, therefore, provides a clear conceptualisation of the delivery of writing tuition and the processes and factors influencing it. Figure 6.7, below, illustrates the entire writing process in the ELI at Saudi Western University, where culture seems to take precedence over all else, so that not only were topics restricted, but the modus operandi of instruction is also based on principles which are not pedagogic but *culturally-based and on a hierarchical power-based structure*.

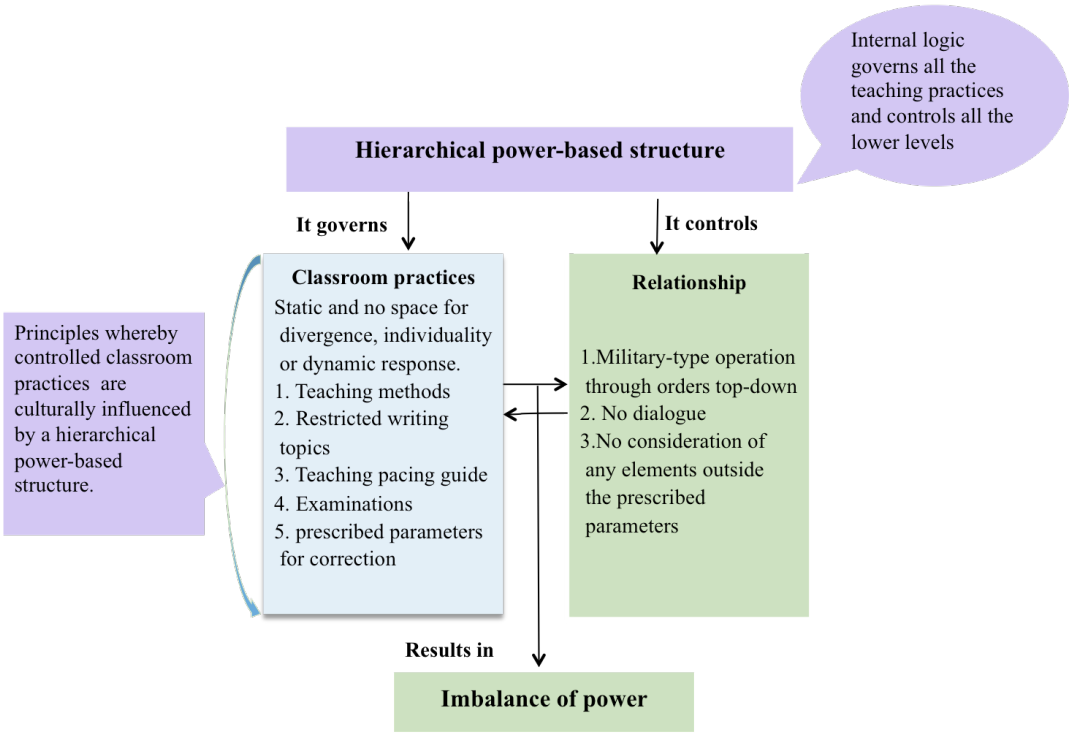


Figure 6. 7: The writing process

The interview data from directors 1 and 2 showed the meso level attitude to the curriculum, teachers and students and indicated a rule-governed culture whereby the context demanded adherence to cultural norms, which were placed above the academic writing needs expressed by the students and, to a degree, by the teaching staff (Elyas, 2008; Grami, 2010; Shah et al., 2013). The need for conformity influenced every aspect of teaching and learning. Key words might be 'power', 'control' and 'homogeneity' to describe the educational and overall context (Hofstede, 2011). As seen above, teaching writing in English appears to be a controlled, almost military operation; there is no room for manoeuvre outside the framework or guidelines and no consideration of any elements outside the prescribed parameters, such as how writing processes are enacted in an individual way - what Academic Literacies suggests should be in place for students at tertiary level. Writing processes are not so easily identifiable as punctuation errors, for example, and are thus less easy to describe and teach. As the point of hierarchies is to control the lower levels, this internal logic governs everything, from the teaching notes to the examinations and classroom practice, with no space for divergence, individuality or dynamic responses, all of which could require too much discretion on the part of the teachers and threaten homogeneity.

In the data discussed earlier from the meso level, the directors revealed the overarching university requirement for deciding the context of writing in English as the need to maintain the existing cultural norms in terms of topics and behaviour, exemplified by the separate classes and teachers for each sex, and is non-negotiable. The next requirement appeared to be assessment and the best way to get good results. The third requirement seemed to be the need for uniformity and conformity within each level so that the course book, pacing, work book assessment and so forth were the same for everyone – a one size fits all approach, requiring no further consideration or soul-searching. The fourth criterion seemed to be emphasis on the easily assessable components of English - grammar, structure, vocabulary and punctuation, aspects which could, in fact, be produced or mechanically corrected by computer (as in a spell-check) since mistakes outside the rule-governed program are less easy to identify (Chomsky, 2002).

Thus, the human elements of creating and communicating meaning are largely absent, in the teachers as well as in the responses required from students. Writing is not considered a social process as Ivanic (2004), Stierer (2000) or Street (2010) consider it, but as a prescribed, abstract process within strict parameters, with no ascribed communicative function other than displaying perceived formal accuracy.

To start with, the interviews with the directors illustrated how the hierarchy and culture of Saudi Arabia, particularly of Saudi Western University, impose a restricted framework for teaching writing in English. For example, the text book *New Headway Plus, Special Edition,* and its teaching practices and writing topics have the approval of the upper administrative level of the university (and the macro level), mainly influenced by Saudi cultural and religious norms. Choosing a 'safe' text book taking account of the cultural context was perceived as the most suitable approach to adopt. Tudor (2001, p. 35) acknowledges that "the classroom is a socially defined reality and is therefore influenced by the belief systems and behavioural norms of the society of which it is part". It is interesting that the findings from the first research question (see chapter, 5, section, 5.2.4.1) confirmed the influence of Saudi cultural and religious norms on selecting what were considered suitable writing topics by matching these to religious norms rather than students' practical learning needs. Importantly, the students reported that they needed to practice writing about particular topics suitable

for their future academic courses - i.e. culture-free topics - within the English class, but this did not happen.

One concern about the earlier findings is that the relationship between the directors and teachers means that the classroom is largely controlled from the meso level, as discussed in chapters 5 and 6. The teachers confirmed these findings from the first research question and argued that the teaching and learning of writing in English at tertiary level in ELI is considered a controlled and organised concern through a regulated and restricted curriculum implemented by them. The teachers also acknowledged that they did not teach in the way they would like or could, to respond to student needs, blaming the imposed structures of the Institute or earlier school teaching and learning for any shortcomings. At the same time, the teachers had limited input opportunities, and few related to 'individual' student needs. All the interviews and documents indicated awareness of this imbalance of power and acceptance - to a greater or lesser degree - of the appropriateness of control over teaching and learning. As pointed out, taking away decision-making from teachers also limits their responses to students' needs and thus their contribution to teaching and learning. The ideals of Academic Literacies of social cooperation, the co-construction of meaning and the social equality approach (Lea, 2006) seem remote from the lived experience in Saudi Western University.

An interesting point that emerged from the results was the lack of communication between the meso level and micro-level on a day to day basis; communication seemed to be top down from the meso level to the micro level through formal written ELI official documents (see section 6.2.7). This also suggests that unqualified acceptance of these communications was expected - as in a well-functioning hierarchy - but also, as illustrated by one teacher's attempts at procuring clarification, no system existed for explanation or clarification. Information was presumed to be self-explanatory or clear and that no individual interpretation would deviate due to any misunderstanding or confusion about the intended message from the higher levels. This again illustrates how far removed the system was from day to day reality, human cognition and behaviour. The findings from the ELI also showed that the meso level did not appear to seek much feedback from teachers or students about their needs for their learning of writing at tertiary level, (as identified in section 6.2.6) - and within the hierarchy,

this may have seemed irrelevant - consequently decisions were largely based on suppositions about how English language learning takes place, which were largely mechanical and out-dated. As partly admitted by the directors, decisions had little to do with pedagogical needs but were more related to the university as an organisation or indeed, to the culture of the country, since the macro level decided what was acceptable for operating within the cultural context of the Middle East, which was why the text book was chosen to deliver all the functions of a curriculum.

It is necessary, therefore, to understand the impact of the hierarchy of the educational system on students, the largely one way (top down) flow of communication, and the cultural aspects, and how these impact on any learning or writing experience at tertiary level. At a much deeper level, the hierarchical structure of the educational system and the country itself has an overarching influence on the power relations which it imposes within the classroom in terms of teaching (teacher led). This has a much greater effect than any theory of learning or of writing or of study, i.e. what the infrastructure - as it is - does not, will not, or cannot support. However, the micro level of responses from the students show that the deficits they perceive are in the delivery of instruction, not in themselves, and this ability to think outside the hierarchical framework is encouraging. It would also appear that although the directors have some awareness that there are other ways to teach writing - especially the apparently experienced teacher, director_1 (but who also speaks with a professional voice which may not be her own) - they tend to think in terms of tweaking small areas or aspects, rather than considering the overall structure (with its hierarchical and cultural implications), which has the biggest impact on what occurs in the classroom. They do not appear to consider the bigger picture except in terms of the constraints it puts upon them 'not to upset anyone', the clerics, for instance (see chapter, 7, section, 7.5.3). The next chapter discusses research question 3. It focuses on the macro level (top) in the Ministry of Education.

Chapter Seven- Findings and Discussion (Research Question Three): The role of the Ministry of Higher Education in supporting writing in English

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with two representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education (macro level). I analysed the representatives' responses to understand higher education policy for student writing in higher education.

- (**Macro level): What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role for supporting student writing in higher education?**

This question was put to the two representatives of the Ministry of Education at the macro level (the policy-makers) to answer the third research question. It aimed to investigate how the Ministry of Education interprets its role in promoting student writing practices at tertiary level. It sought to examine the Ministry's views and policies for framing writing in English at a higher education level. Furthermore, it is significant to mention that: firstly, to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the representatives are referred to by number (i.e. representative_1 and representative_2). The representatives of the Ministry of Education were interviewed in their native language – Arabic - so they could fully express their perspectives and ideas. Their responses were then translated into English. Both were male.

Additional profile information is that representative_1 had 18 years experience of working in the Ministry of Education, while representative_2 had 30 years experience. Representative_2 began as a school teacher then became a school representative, school director, (equivalent to a head teacher) supervisory director, and then assistant to the General Director of academic education, a university lecturer and representative of the Ministry of Education. Representative_1 responses suggest he perhaps had more familiarity with the research issues and had more interest in the investigated area.

Table 7. 1: Profile of the representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education

#	Pseudonym	Qualifications	Years of experience
1	Representative_1	BA, MA, PHD	18 years
2	Representative_2	BA, MA, PHD	30 years

7.1.1 The analytical framework

Academic Literacies as a research framework was used in this study as a lens through which to investigate how writing in English operates in practice at tertiary level in Saudi Western University to provide a greater understanding of participants' perceptions of this context in order to make visible and explicit the relationship between text (what people say or what appears in documents) and context (what happens in practice in particular situations) (Coffin and Donohue, 2012). Academic Literacies considers literacy as social practice, therefore it addresses issues of identity in social contexts, particularly power relations, and different ways of knowing (Lea and Street, 1998; Lillis and Scott, 2007).

As with previous analyses (see chapters 5 and 6), Linguistic Ethnography as a methodological framework can help reveal the inequalities of power relationships in hierarchical systems and give a voice to those in society who are either silenced or are not often heard. In addition, Bakhtin's concept of the 'other voice' applied to analysing discourse can help distinguish and reveal the hidden voice of 'others' in a speaker's utterances (Bakhtin, 1981). It also seeks to identify the official and personal voices in the interview and documentary data, to help distinguish official (the received views of authority) from the personal views of the speaker. For example, Bakhtin points out the use of general phrases like 'everyone' and 'in fact", indicate a concept not originating from the speaker, but coming from some external authority.

This chapter therefore tries to identify what is personal within the utterances of the macro level, that is, the real views of the speakers and what is repetition of the prescribed view of authority. The macro level representatives were more likely to give an official rather than personal view due to their position in the hierarchy, which made them less likely to say anything that might compromise their position and status. Their responses show how the Ministry concepts at the top of the power structure are understood and acted upon at the lower levels. Their answers seem to

illustrate how different their concerns are from those of the meso and micro levels and how much - or little - they are aware of the practical issues which confront the lower levels. It seems they tended to respond to reflect their positions, the official view - or that of the Ministry - of the situation of writing in English at university level rather than drawing upon any their personal knowledge or any investigations or research they might be expected to have carried out. Therefore, Bakhtin's perspective in the analysis of their discourse may help to tease out and distinguish their personal voices from the voice of authority which may cloak their responses.

7.2 What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role for supporting student writing in higher education?

Table 7.2 below illustrates the macro level responses on the right to the themes generated from the micro and meso levels Nvivo data analysis on the left (as discussed in chapter 6, section 6.2). Within the themes generated in response to question 3 at the macro level, it can be seen that the example responses from the Ministry of Higher Education representatives seem to refer to the philosophical concepts underpinning the present view of writing in English at tertiary level.

Table 7. 2: The Ministry of Higher Education's role in framing student writing practices in relation to themes from the micro and meso levels

Themes and sub-themes derived from the micro and meso levels analysis, which were then used in the macro level analysis	**Macro level example responses**
1. The importance of writing in English	**One of the most important skills the student at the university level needs** to have **is writing**. The students are supposed to perform some tests and to do some research and this, for sure, would need good writing skills. [Representative _1]
2.Problems of student writing: a remedial approach	**Writing is one of the most important problems that students in Saudi Arabia are facing in the English language,** because it is among the most difficult skills that challenges students in Saudi Arabia. . [Representative _2]
	A. Learners lack experience in the process of writing
	The main difficulty is that students don't acquire new vocabulary, phrases or even understand grammar well. The problem is that we don't give them the opportunity to improve

	their reading and listening skills first in the pre-tertiary level. [Representative _1] B. Deficiency in the teaching skills **I think we need to admit here that there is a deficiency in the teachers at this point**. The problem is not solely the students'. However, the main problem is that some teachers don't have the ability and proficiency to offer the subject at a good skill level for writing. [Representative _2]
3.The role of the Ministry of High Education in writing in English	There is no doubt that the **Ministry of High Education has an essential role in teaching writing in English.** It's the organisation that is completely responsible for encouraging or even discouraging students from studying. **It's the organisation that provides all educational links to different techniques, approaches and aids which can help in learning such a skill**. We can't forget or ignore the role played by the Ministry of Higher Education in **setting the rules for teaching everything** at universities. [Representative _1]
4. The effect of Culture on student writing	Saudi society is an eastern one. **Each eastern society has its own culture, customs and traditions that no one can oppose or ignore.** Even in the process of teaching writing at school, institutes and universities, teachers, professors and instructors should **consider cultural factors. Teaching writing as a subject or a language skill at Saudi universities isn't restricted in any way that stops students learning. Its only restriction is to maintain the culture of Saudi society. These restrictions are completely based on the piece of writing presented by the writer not on the teaching of writing in English as a subject.** You can write as you like but **before you write you have to choose your subject and decide whether it is suitable within Saudi society or not.** [Representative _1]

7.3 The importance of writing in English

According to the Academic Literacies approach, writing is a key skill in higher education, because it allows students to express their understanding of their academic courses and to be successful in their endeavours (Lea, 2006; Lillis, 2001). The interviews with two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education revealed why writing in English is considered important in higher education at the macro level. Representative _1's comments suggest that writing is a significant skill that has to be mastered by university students because they will be assessed through writing as well as writing being necessary for academic research. Representative _1 stated:

> Learning at university level is not an easy task; it requires a lot of skills. Among these skills is the perfection of the English language, as English is considered the most internationally used language. **One of the most important skills the student at the university level needs to have is writing**. The **students are supposed to perform some tests** and **to do some research** and this, for sure, would need good writing skills. [Representative _1]

Representative_1 suggests below that students have to develop a number of skills to handle university tasks; however, he considered writing as the most significant of all. As Alexander et al. (2008) and Andrews (2003) argue, writing is a skill that has to be mastered because most work in higher education is assessed through writing, including examinations, essays and dissertations. Furthermore, representative_1 pointed out:

> Here we are concerned with the **academic writing** which **helps** the students **to document their pieces of work**. Academic writing relates to **giving information** or **illustrating ideas**, so when it comes to research, the student can fully manage the way to write up such work. [Representative _1]

Representative_1 suggests here that academic writing is a tool that helps students to document their own work, create knowledge and present their reasoning. He viewed writing as a necessary skill for students to carry out their academic tasks, giving it an extrinsic value and going beyond views of basic abilities like accuracy, suggesting he is speaking from personal experience of studying and/or teaching. He also seems to have in mind the report genre (*document their pieces of work)* rather than the essay. It is in that sense, a practical response about language in use - not in the abstract - concerning what students need to be able to do to succeed.

However, representative_2, below suggests that writing is one of the four basic language skills and as important as (not more) than any of the others, hence perhaps not worthy of particular attention and makes no reference to its functional/practical/extrinsic use. It is a general comment, and suggests the speaker is either stating the obvious - which is incontestable, but not illuminating - or has little interest in the topic.

> The basic skills needed to learn a language, whether it is the Arabic or English language, are four skills **- the skills of writing, reading, listening, and speaking**. [Representative_2]

However, the findings from the first research question put to the micro level reported that students saw writing in English as important in both their academic and non-academic lives, in contrast to the macro level view (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2.2). For instance, 19 of the undergraduate students stressed that mastering writing skills would provide them with a good opportunity to do many things, including studying, working and travelling, which gives a much broader view of the usefulness of English. The significance of writing in English is that it may influence the entire teaching and learning process in tertiary education and is important for its extrinsic value as a means to an end, as (student_17) points out '*Writing is important for research, study, applying for a job. Even when we get a job, we sometimes need to write reports in English. In addition to that, we need to write in English when we apply for a visa'*. Writing is important for research, study, applying for a job. The Internet also makes us need to write in English. Writing in English is always there, at anytime and everywhere (Yamani, 2000).

However, in practice, the actual value the education system puts on writing is often minimal. There are no dedicated time slots to writing in the ELI curriculum - it seems to be mainly used to practice grammar. This study is also a response to encourage recognition of the need to promote student writing. Many scholars note that although writing is a very significant means of communication, approaching it seems to be a much neglected skill in many language courses, in both first and foreign language contexts (Badger and White, 2000; Dempsey et al., 2009).

This raises the question of why writing in English is important in Saudi Arabia. Representative_1 seemed to use his own voice in his responses. He reported that writing in English is important for numerous reasons, such as education, business and religious responsibility. Representative_1 stated:

> Writing in English in Saudi Arabia is very important for many reasons. First, all academic scientific branches depend on English. All communications between multi-national companies are in English. Also, for spreading Islam, we need perfect English writers to do this job. [Representative _1]

His response above shows awareness and acceptance that writing in English is important in several contexts: for science education because English is the medium of study; English is also the medium of communication in most international companies; finally, it is important for Muslims to spread the message of Islam around the world, and this can be done through English. This suggests Islam can go hand in hand and benefit from good writing in English rather be threatened by it. According to Osailan (2009) and Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013), writing in English would help Muslims to communicate with peoples from other cultures, to share the ideal picture of Islam and to exchange information about Islam with people who speak English, including those who speak English as a second or foreign language. This is a functional, more goal-oriented view of the use of English beyond the abstract concept of using the correct grammar as being central to learning English and writing in English. *We need* (line 4) seems to refer to the Saudi population in general, group inclusivity, rather than the voice of authority.

However, representative_2 below offers a more conservative view of the importance of writing in English in the Saudi context and sees it as something that has to be verified by research, suggesting there is limited evidence relating to the importance of writing in English, and presumably, he responds in relation to the Saudi context, not wider research into writing in English that includes Academic Literacies theory. Unlike representative_1 he does not consider the wider global aspect of possible benefits from being able to write in English. His conservative view suggests he does not wish to speak outside his comfort zone, perhaps because he himself is unfamiliar with the teaching and learning of writing in English or reluctant to express an opinion of the extrinsic value of English, so limiting his responses to the basic skills within the language system.

> **In fact, the education system in Saudi Arabia considers the English language to be secondary as a foreign language.** Everyone knows that teaching the English language is dependent upon basic skills, which are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. **And we say, unfortunately, until now, there has been a limited amount of academic research by which you can pinpoint the importance of writing in schools and universities** [Representative _2]

Furthermore, Linguistic Ethnography reveals more about the interviewee's response. His response seems to reflect the top down views of overall, unquestioned authority. He does not seem to speak in a personal capacity but represents the official view as a given, undisputed truth, Bakhtin's (1981) double-voiced discourse. His comments suggest that he is repeating a generally accepted and undisputed view (Bakhtin's other voice) through the use of standard phrases such as *'In fact' (1), 'Everyone knows' (3), 'we say' (5)*. Phrases of this type can indicate concepts which the speaker has adopted but has not originated, and according to Bakhtin, they indicate authority over the speaker or the speaker using them to represent authority. *In fact* and *everyone knows* presumes that what follows in the discourse is undisputed, agreed by everyone and does not need to be explained. In this sense, it has authority, *Everyone knows* and *we say* also present the idea of general agreement and authority over other views or ideas and the assumption that something is a fact and does not need to be explained, so here it is used as the official voice also implying that something is common knowledge. In a hierarchy, the top largely decides what knowledge is common, and acceptable. In using these phrases, representative_2 indicates his authority, he does not need to explain - and is also making a claim that what follows is true, non-negotiable and does not require explanation. By using terms like *we* and *everyone* he also implies no dissent.

Representative_2 seems to speak with and use the voice of authority, not a personal voice. As pointed out, the voices of the official and personal can overlap and coincide. For instance, standard responses which mirror the official view might include utterances concerning beliefs, traditions, the accepted system or way of doing things. This may occur for several reasons, like the speaker's wish to maintain group solidarity, group responsibility or avoid responsibility, wishing to maintain the official view, a social position in the hierarchy, maintain face and avoid being critical of the current situation. It can also be because the speaker believes there are only correct or incorrect answers and does not have or is unused to, the concept of negotiated meaning and giving a personal opinion.

7.4 Problems of student writing: a remedial approach

In the interviews with the two representatives, both acknowledged that there is a problem with student writing in higher education. They placed the problems with either individual students and their previous learning experiences (i.e. private and public schooling) or with their teachers. They seemed to blame the Ministry responsible for school-based education in English, and therefore responsibility was outside their area of concern, or to safeguard their position, they could be unwilling to conceive of other reasons for in adequate student writing. However, according to AL research, writing problems are not located within individuals but with institutional behaviour, as institutions set the practices. For instance they select the type and topics of writing without considering the students' needs. This is a key reason for students' writing difficulties. Representative_2 agreed there was a problem - with the teachers - and acknowledging it meant solutions could be looked for. *We* (lines 2, 3 and 5) *the focus on this side* implies taking responsibility at the macro-level and doing something about the concerns.

> And I think the focus on this side and **admitting that a problem is facing the students in writing means we should acknowledge that and look for solutions.** If we don't acknowledge and search for solutions, the problem will not be solved. We have noticed that the teacher-graduates, in the last ten years, were weak graduates. [Representative _2]

7.4.1 Learners' lack of experience of the process of writing

The origin of the Study Skills, 'bolt-on' approach' is in the era when students were expected to transfer their literacy learning at pre-tertiary level to university level and then extend this knowledge by socially building upon the required literacies throughout their studies (Wingate, 2006). The key assumption of the study skills approach (according to Street) is that learners have a deficit that can be improved through learning a number of skills (Creaton, 2008; Street, 2010). According to Creaton and Street, the study skills approach separates the process from the subject matter because study skills may be taught separately from course work. Such courses may aim to address a number of skills such as essay writing, revising for exams and note taking in isolation. Another criticism, as discussed, is that they can focus on surface features, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar rather than meaning

content (Street, 2010), much like the traditional teaching of languages through grammar and vocabulary.

In the present context, the teaching of English and writing in particular, follows the traditional grammar/vocabulary approach, as also advocated in the *Headway Plus* course book, which can be said to approximate to what Lea and Street refer to as a deficit (Study Skills) model, although there is no teaching of Study Skills per se in ELI. What Lea and Street refer to as the *Study Skills* approach is grounded in the assumption that student writing 'problems' are caused by disadvantaged students or students who receive inadequate preparation, which fits well with the comments of the two representatives about the inadequacy of pre-tertiary teaching and the notion that remedial action can help students get up to speed (Creaton, 2008). Study Skills teaching also aims to help students handle university tasks such as essay writing, revising for exams and giving presentations (Wingate, 2006). This deficit conceptualisation is in line with the interview with representative_1 of the Ministry of Higher Education who considered difficulties in academic writing are due to students' lack of acquisition of new (formal) knowledge, excluding any notions of communication and meaning exchange. However, he does link improvement to practice in reading and listening as well - which should have taken place at secondary level - so not a concern of this Ministry. However, there is some acknowledgement of shared responsibility in *we don't give them* (line 3).

> **The main difficulty is that students don't acquire new vocabulary, phrases or even understand grammar well.** The problem is that we don't give them the opportunity to improve their reading and listening skills first in the pre-tertiary level. [Representative _1]

Representative _1's claim that students have poor acquisition of vocabulary and little understanding of grammar indicates his focus is on basic language skills such as, *'vocabulary'*, *'phrases'* and *'grammar'*, suggesting an orientation towards Street's deficit model (here formal, structural learning) rather than an Academic Literacies co-operative and co-constructing of knowledge approach. Secondly, blaming the secondary education system for not offering students opportunities to practice reading and listening as part of the process for composing writing, suggests he has some

notion of the dynamics of writing. On the other hand, representative_2 acknowledges writing in English is difficult and challenging:

> **Writing is one of the most important problems** that students in Saudi Arabia are facing in the English language, **because it is among the most difficult skills** that challenges students in Saudi Arabia. [Representative _2]

Writing is a challenging task within the context of learning English, though learning English has only relative importance in comparison to other needs. This finding in line with previous studies conducted in the Arab world (Abdul Haq, 1982; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2003), i.e. that writing is seen as the most challenging skill when learning a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. According to Al-Fadda (2012) and Grami (2010), writing in English is a complex and challenging skill for most Saudi EFL learners.

This raised the question of whether there is a notable difference between public and private school students. The response from representative_1 below, suggests there is a noticeable difference between public and private school students because private schools provide higher quality education than public schools do. Private school teachers and administrators are accountable for their teaching and the progress of their students. They provide the best quality of education in general and teaching English writing in particular. This again echoes the notion of deficit in certain students and schools. Private schools are more able to adapt to changes in education practices and technology:

> The outcome of high quality writing by students depends on the quality of the input they receive at school. According to the better quality of education and teaching of writing in private schools, their students perform better and have better competence levels than public school students.[…] I think that the private schools provide a higher quality of education than public schools do. The private school teachers and administrators are accountable for themselves and their students. They provide the best quality of education in general and teaching English writing in particular. Private schools are more able to adapt to changes in education practices and technology. [Representative _1]

He argues that private school students are superior to public/state school students in English language proficiency. Similarly, a previous study carried out by Deraney and

Abdelsalam (2012) found that private school students were fluent in English and started their university academic courses with this advantage. *I think* (line 5) also seems to a genuine, professional opinion, and could be critical of the overseeing of the public schools sector - in contrast to *the private school teachers and administrators [who] are accountable for themselves and their students.*

Representative_2 acknowledged that writing in general is difficult, whether in Arabic or English. In the extract below, he lays the responsibility for any inadequate performance with schools (both public and private). He acknowledges the deficits in the school system - after 12 years of study, a student can graduate without knowing how to read a job advertisement or write a job application - and suggests that this is something the Ministry of Education might need to focus on at school level. Again, responsibility for the problems students face in writing in English is not accepted by the Ministry of Higher Education, and the concept again is of a deficit. See chapter 2, sections 2.4 for further information about the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. This raises the question of why there is little or no emphasis on writing skills in the context of secondary or tertiary education in Saudi Arabia.

> It is often noticeable that the writing skill is one of the most difficult skills that students are faced with, in case of either, the English or the Arabic language. **A student may not learn and master the practical portion of the writing skill at either the private or the public school. Hence, we might find a student who graduated after 12 years from public school,** and **who does not know how to write a job application correctly**, **how to read a job application**, or **how to fill out an application**. And this is one of the mistakes that students are faced with, which is **the insufficiency or neglect of making the student capable of writing, in either the English or Arabic language.** On this note, the Ministry of Education needs to reconsider the necessity of focusing on this skill. It also needs to pay more attention to this teaching/learning deficiency. [Representative _2]

His response suggests he responds according to his official position and blames both types of school for students' writing deficiency, a possible problem for the Ministry of Education to solve because of the inadequacy of the teaching of basic practical writing skills in English at secondary level. Neither type of school seems to be

effective in developing students' writing competence and skills or in preparing students for the complexity of students' writing needs at tertiary level. This implication is in line with a study conducted by Al-Seghayer (2014), which reported that current teaching practices and material focus on imparting knowledge rather than teaching and practicing skills, so students are incapable of writing well in English as they do not practice meaningful writing.

According to Al Fadda (2012), students need to develop abilities like communicating their ideas, critical thinking, brain-storming, as well as conventions about layout and paragraphing in order to produce good pieces of writing in EFL rather than memorisation, which seems to be a strategy used to pass exams. Representative_2; suggests there is some deficiency in what students learn in school which requires attention from the top level of authority - the Ministry of Education level. He seems to be saying that the problem was due to the school system - whether private or public - and because the school system is under the Ministry of Education, then poor English prior to university is not the problem of the Ministry of Higher Education. He seems to blame the other Ministry to distance himself from the problem and thus protect his position. However, since February 2015, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have been merged. The administration of education in Saudi Arabia is now under one umbrella, the Ministry of Education. The aim of the merger was to unify the policy and administration for the whole education sector under one Ministry. As discussed earlier, the interviews with the two representatives in this study occurred before February 2015, hence there are references to the Ministry of Higher education. See chapter 2, section 2.4 for further information about the now amalgamated, single Ministry of Education responsible for primary, secondary and tertiary education.

The findings from the first research question indicated that some participants had attended private schools, where they had a different type of education as they had been exposed to more English than the students who went to state schools. However, when it came to writing competence or writing skills, the teachers found no great difference between the private and public/state school students' performance. One of the ELI teachers (teacher_1), claimed that 'The only similarity I can see is that the final outcome for both kinds of students, in private and public, is pretty much the

same - neither produce good writing in English, but for different reasons'. Students seem to be ill-prepared for writing in higher education or for the world of work. This suggests that neither type of school gives sufficient opportunities to students at secondary level to practice their writing skills so they can manage the tasks of higher education.

7.4.2 Deficiency of teaching skills

Representative_2 acknowledged (below) that teachers' lack of capacity for teaching writing skills can contribute to students' writing difficulties in English. He stated that language teachers in Saudi Arabia are not well qualified to teach writing skills in an effective way, thus the problem does not only lie with the motivation of the students. These comments also illustrate how writing in English is seen in isolation, as an independent skill, not a social activity, and follows the deficiency model train of thought - this time, the deficiency is in the teachers.

> I think we need to admit here that there is a deficiency in the **teachers at this point.** The problem is not solely the students'. However, the main problem is that some **teachers don't have the ability and proficiency to offer the subject at** a good skill level for writing. [Representative _2]

The Saudi government is aware of the lack of proficiency of local language teachers (Al-Hazmi, 2003; Bersamina, 2009; Grami, 2010). Similarly, previous studies have reported that teachers suffer from low English language proficiency in the EFL context in China (Chen and Goh, 2010). Liu (2007) states that EFL tutors may never be able to reach an adequate level of linguistic proficiency, which may be the basic causes of the problems students face in acquiring writing skills in English.

Furthermore, representative_2 reports below that teachers' lack of training in teaching approaches can attribute to students' writing deficiency because their teachers have no or inadequate training in the appropriate teaching methods. He does accept there is a problem, giving his opinion (I think) and suggesting it is up to the Ministry '*we need to reconsider'(1),'we don't acknowledge' (7),* and *'we have noticed' (8)* to tackle it.

> **We need to reconsider** the teachers' preparation. **The teachers' preparation must be a faultless preparation**. And the teacher's preparation should be via high educational foundations, whether in or outside of Saudi Arabia. And I think the focus on this side

> and **admitting that a problem is facing the students in writing means we should acknowledge that and look for solutions.** If **we don't acknowledge** and search for solutions, the problem will not be solved. **We have noticed** that the teacher-graduates, in the last ten years, were weak graduates. [Representative _2]

It is not clear what solution representative_2 has in mind but one possibility could be teacher's in-service training courses to upgrade their skills with the latest developments in ELT methodology.

7.5 The role of the Ministry of Higher Education in supporting writing in English

The Academic Literacies approach suggests that the construction of meaning is often an area of conflict between institutions, teachers and students. To understand the nature of writing practice and to identify what the fruitful and non-useful practices are, it is important to examine the interpretations, expectations and goals of each group of actors - students, EFL teachers and academic subject experts and administrators - regarding student writing practices and production requirements to provide the necessary contexts and support for writing. In this, the Ministry of Higher Education might be expected to take a lead. While claiming to be aware of the concern, no concrete suggestions were forthcoming for the MoHE representatives.

7.5.1 Goals of teaching writing in English

The interview with representative_1 illustrated that one of the aims of the Ministry of Higher Education is to prepare students for their professional lives. He also seems to be aware of the need to inform students about the extrinsic needs and value of good English skills for their professional lives. The first line below suggests that plans are being put in place to prepare students better.

> It is understood that the Ministry of Education has plans **to prepare students, especially after their graduation**; jobs need employees with skills and experience. I think the Ministry should do their best for this. **The Ministry should inform students that they need English in their work**, in their communication in everything. **They should equip them for a lot of jobs at university**. They should give them a series of courses in English. [Representative _1]

Representative_1 above showed awareness of the students real final goal needs for English in the job market as well as those of students as a first step to developing a more dynamic teaching and learning model for writing at tertiary level in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, he acknowledged that writing courses have to foster students writing skills in a variety of areas from writing paragraphs, composing theoretical and scientific research reports, summarizing and paraphrasing.

> These courses have to enable students **to write simple paragraphs**; **to enable students to write up theoretical and scientific research well**; and to enable them to summarize and paraphrase their reading research. [Representative _1]

Although, the Ministry of Higher Education representatives seems to be aware of the importance of the students' real needs, they do not seem to consider how to contextualise or improve them. Representative_1 refers to isolated sub-skills like paragraph construction and although he adds other necessary skills, the concept of communication and the social aspect of writing are missing. This raises the question of whether the Ministry is able to achieve the broader goal of teaching English in higher education. Representative_ 2 suggested (below) that the lack of an appropriate educational plan to achieve certain academic goals for English could cause problems for Saudi students.

> I think that the main problem students in Saudi Arabia are faced with, in the English language, **is the limited goals of the educational plan for writing in English.** [Representative _2]

The use of *I think* (line 1) in the above quote and in other quotes from representative _2 suggest he is responding as an individual to a problem he has some understanding of, rather than only as an official. As Al-Seghayer (2014) points out, a well-developed plan for education is required, including writing in English, constructed on a theoretically sound basis with well-defined objectives and goals to be achieved by the end of each academic semester. At the moment, the goals are passing exams to demonstrate structural knowledge, not knowledge of language in use.

7.5.2 The responsibilities of the Ministry of Higher Education

The Ministry of Higher Education directs and handles higher education learning in Saudi Arabia (Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). It also manages international academic relationships and education offices abroad. The public universities are overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education, but they seem to enjoy a degree of independence in administrative matters and academic affairs (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, representative_1 stated that the Ministry of Higher Education, the top of the hierarchy, selects the education curriculums throughout the education system by setting the parameters within which learning and teaching writing in English has to operate. The top (macro level) is also involved in selecting the teaching staff, as described below Given this confirmation of the top down transfer of requirements, it seems that for change to occur, the macro level has to be persuaded not so much of what to do (of which there is awareness) but how to do it, which seems to need focus.

> The relationship is divided into two essential parts: the academic and the official one. **Concerning the academic one**, it is represented by the **supervision of curriculum implementation**. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible **for choosing the educational materials for each university** and also **the criteria for the syllabuses**. **This means laying down the procedures** and also the **assignments within each curriculum**. **Concerning the official part,** the Ministry of Higher Education has the role of overseeing each university for s**electing the best staff.** The Ministry of Higher Education spares no effort to identify **the best professional and well-trained staff** to teach in universities. This role generates new responsibilities such as sustaining excellence and high quality in each profession, and that must be maintained. [Representative _1]

According to Hofstede (n.d.), Saudi Arabia has a high score on power distance relationships. This indicates an inequality and subordinate relationships between different parties, where the top level guides and supervises the lower levels. Each person in this type of social context accepts his/her role to either guide or follow according to his/her position in the hierarchy with no explanations necessary. This is in line with the findings in research question 2, where director_1 confirmed that the English Language Institution in Saudi Western University followed guidelines from the top (macro level) of the hierarchy (see chapter 6, section 6.2.3)

From the perspective of Linguistic Ethnography and particularly drawing on Bakhtin's concept, representative_1 reflects the Ministry of Higher Education's voice of authority. He confirmed below the main role of the Ministry of Higher as a public education institution :'*(there is) no doubt that the Ministry of High Education has an essential role in teaching writing in English'* (1,2) and it is '*the organisation that is completely responsible for encouraging or even discouraging students to study'* (4,5). This indicates clearly, as with common consent, that the Ministry of Higher Education has ultimate control over public education institutions.

> There is no doubt that the **Ministry of Higher Education has an essential role in teaching writing in English.** It's the organisation that is completely responsible for encouraging or even discouraging students from studying. **It's the organisation that provides all educational links to different techniques, approaches and aids which can help in learning such a skill**. We can't forget or ignore the role played by the Ministry of Higher Education in **setting the rules for teaching everything** at universities. [Representative _1]

Representative_1 confirms that the Ministry of Higher Education has overall charge, choice and responsibility for providing institutions with the necessary staff and educational resources as well setting the rules for teaching everything at universities. This finding refers back to the macro level (e.g. teachers and students) talking about 'some discretion' (see chapter 5 for further information). Furthermore, he stated that they provide the teaching staff and material that suits the teaching methods, both within universities and at each level of proficiency of English, and also have some control over the labour market. The power and responsibility of the MoHE seems to offer little possibility for the meso or micro levels to deviate or respond to local or particular student needs, according to representative_1.

> **To provide the modern curricula that match new methods**; **to provide with professors, teachers and instructors** and to limit the number of [overseas] workers that are needed in the labour market. [Representative _1]

> As for the English language, the Ministry of Higher Education **determines the levels needed by each English department to improve their students' standards** in almost every skill. [Representative _1]

This raises the question of the gap between the teaching materials and textbook in Saudi Arabia and the students' needs in reality. The administrators and syllabus designers in various universities in Saudi Arabia are unable to select the appropriate materials or textbook for their students. They have to accept the bureaucratic (rather than the informed opinion of educational practitioners). Consequently, the approved teaching materials and textbooks fail to meet the students' needs and the administrators and syllabus designers are not free to deviate from the textbook to meet their students' needs. Therefore, Saudi Arabia needs to consider the importance of reconsidering the basis - information, experience - which the macro level base their selection of ELT materials and textbooks, and the kind of skills, experience and training that teaching staff require to successfully support students.

This questions on what basis the writing curriculum was designed and whether a needs analysis was carried out, and if so, what or whose needs does the curriculum serve other than those of the hierarchy? The syllabus designers and policy makers in Saudi Arabia have not developed a curriculum on the basis of what academic subjects expect students to be able to do and thus identified what practical and functional skills will help students succeed (Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). It seems unlikely that they visit classrooms on a regular basis, if at all. There are assumptions about the operation of the hierarchy in the macro as in the meso layers, and its operations are laid down as facts and not highly debated. Consequently, the philosophy behind the teaching of English does not seem to respond to the professional needs of different groups of teachers or students. As a result, it is important for Saudi Arabia to consider needs analysis as a key procedure for developing curriculum and syllabus design for its students (Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013) rather than relying on a general course book written outside the country simply because it is culturally acceptable - and therefore avoids the need for further decision-making. Students' needs and desires are the key driving force for learning English and Saudi teachers have a wealth of experience to offer (as suggested in their interviews) in tandem with curriculum designers and students' view to create their own home grown materials.

7.5.3 The effect of culture on student writing

The interviews with the representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education showed the impact of culture on student writing in higher education. The Ministry of Higher

Education puts cultural constraints on students writing as a way of protecting its eastern culture and maintaining the status quo. Saudi society fears the spread of English language use may undermine its local culture, identity, traditions and customs (Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). According to Al-Seghayer (2013), language and culture are inseparable. Language is more than a collection of words and expressions as these combine and develop to express culture, identity and customs. Mahboob and Elyas (2014) also argue that the fear of the impact of English on eastern culture may demotivate students from learning to write in English.

> Saudi society is an eastern one. **Each eastern society has its own culture, customs and traditions that no one can oppose or ignore.** Even in the process of teaching writing at school, institutes and universities, teachers, professors and instructors should **consider cultural factors. Teaching writing as a subject or a language skill at Saudi universities isn't restricted in any way that stops students learning. Its only restriction is to maintain the culture of Saudi society. These restrictions are completely based on the piece of writing presented by the writer not on the teaching of writing in English as a subject.** You can write as you like but **before you write you have to choose your subject and decide whether it is suitable within Saudi society or not.** [Representative _1]

Representative_1 confirmed the cultural sensitivities of Saudi society, which influence the teaching writing process and students' writing of essays. However, while he claims that students have the opportunity to write about what they like, their selection of writing topics have to meet Saudi local culture and religious values. As he states, *'before you write you have to choose your subject and decide whether it is suitable within Saudi society or not' (11,12)*, his response reveals that the Saudi home culture is more important than students' needs or freedom of expression in higher education. There is also the suggestion that the lower levels of the hierarchy cannot be trusted with deciding the appropriate material and curriculums, so this has to be done at the top and that while in theory, there is choice in writing, in practice, it is unlikely that students are able to choose topics, considering the prescriptive control of the macro on all aspects of teaching English - including assignments.

In practice, the findings from the first and second research questions showed students' needs as objective responsibilities, that is, their obligation to conform to cultural expectations, rather than their subjective learning needs. (See chapter 5, section

5.2.4.1 and chapter 6, section 6.2.5).

> I think that the Ministry of Higher Education **doesn't put any restrictions** on teaching writing in English **as long as it doesn't oppose the culture and religion**. It's the Ministry of Higher Education that encourages students to learn writing in English. It offers them scholarships to study abroad. As we mentioned before, **restrictions are set on a piece** of writing not teaching writing as a subject. [Representative _1]

The comments above reveal that the interviewee is clear that the Ministry of Higher Education does place cultural constraints on student writing topics in order to protect its local culture. From a Linguistic Ethnography approach, representative_1 is aware of the cultural constraints and does not question them, but accepts them as a part of his job working for a higher authority. The logic of the constraint being only on individual pieces of writing, not on teaching writing as a subject seems to again reiterate the abstract, rule governed view of writing being marks on paper conforming to abstract rules, with no hint of the communicative or social message-bearing nature of writing (in any language). It is decontextualised and - at heart - useless in this form. He confirmed the macro (top) level does control everything (the cultural agenda). This means he accepts his powerlessness even to think differently and does not struggle for change or maybe cannot even imagine anything outside the confines he currently operates within - where the overriding aim is to protect Saudi culture and customs, which ultimately assumes these are static, unchanging and do not develop. Unfortunately such circumstances also restrain developments in education, even though his mention of scholarships to study abroad suggests students can get the opportunity to step outside the Saudi cultural constraints - as long as they do not do so in Saudi Arabia.

This suggests that particular kinds of barrier can be vital to protect particular institutional assumptions and practices, as suggested by the macro level, for the protection of Saudi customs and culture. The importance of understanding social practices and attitudes as the reason for perceived deficits is one of the main principles of the Academic Literacies approach (Ivanic, 2001; Scott, 2000). This approach shifts from deficit approach to individual learning problems to a more dynamic approach, which attempts to find out the problematic features of practice and discourse in higher education. According to Haggis (2006), the key concern about

learning in higher education has changed from focus on the problems with learners to the aspects of the curriculum or the interaction process within the curriculum that can demotivate and prevent students from being able to access the subject.

On the other hand, representative_2, denies the existence of any educational restrictions to the learning writing in English (below), but mentions clerics who believe English may negatively influence the learning of Arabic by Saudi students as the main restriction, as their views can influence teaching writing in English, current writing practices and support traditional teaching methods. These clerics are influential in Saudi Society, even influencing the Ministry of Education - in that sense - their power base is above the macro level described here, in his view, i.e. religion is the power behind customs and culture. He points out that a large body of evidence, from both inside Saudi Arabia and more generally, points to the fact that two languages can be learned simultaneously, without one negatively influencing each other, contrary to the beliefs of some. (*As it is known,* line 1, implies common knowledge that does not have to be explained or justified.)

> There are no educational restrictions. However, as it is known, there are directions by some clerics, in Saudi Arabia, who are compliant with religious organisations. Some of them think that teaching the English language early is not beneficial, and it might affect the student's standard in the Arabic language. They hold false beliefs as a student at such age and at such grade cannot learn two languages simultaneously. However, scientific studies, whether in Saudi Arabia or in other European countries, have proved that a student, in this subject and at such age, is capable of learning and mastering more than one subject, on a condition that this subject is presented via academic and educationally correct principles, and on a condition that there is an academic environment, prepared for the mastery process of this language by the student. [Representative _2]

The comments (above) suggest that representative _2 challenges the idea that learning English may affect the learning of Arabic particularly at a younger age. For some clerics, acquiring the Arabic language is essential for developing their eastern identity and culture and must not be exposed to harmful influences (Al-Dameg, 2011; Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). According to Osailan (2009), Arabic is regarded as a holy language for Muslims, as indicated by its utilisation in the holy book- Qur'an - as well as Islamic guidance.

Furthermore, representative_2, below gives his interpretation of (*I mean, 1)* of the appropriate framework for how language is best learned, with pronunciation/enunciation as primary, suggesting he is using his own knowledge here to give a personal, expert opinion, since he places spoken knowledge before written and notes the connection between the two.

> And I mean by that this, **language primarily, needs parameters** (the different aspects of language such as pronunciation, vocabulary, writing, and others). Since a student, **if being able to learn and practice via these parameters,** he/she would be **able to master the correct enunciation of a word**. Then afterwards, will be able to **write it correctly**. Then, s/he will be able to use it correctly in speaking. [Representative _2]

They in the passage below seems to refer to the clerics or traditionalists, who do not know what they are talking about '*and they judge this weak graduate […] And this is untrue' (3,5)* and suggest that their views that the learning of English will influence the learning of Arabic should be discounted.

> But when the subject is given far from these educational fundamentals that must be present at school and in the teacher, the graduate will be weak. **And they judge this weak graduate to** be the result of his/her mind intertwining between the English and the Arabic language. **And this is untrue**. [Representative _2]

Representative_2 of the Ministry of Higher Education's remarks about the need for evidence suggest it is necessary not just for pedagogical reasons but to convince '*some scholars, in Saudi Arabia, who are compliant with the religious organisation'* that things need to be done differently, as he suggests. In this sense, external evidence can be useful to the Ministry of Higher Education to push forward more up to date ideas. However, this is still evidence to be used top down, not needs-related, but argument-related at the upper levels of the hierarchy. Writing in English still seems to be conceived of as an abstract set of rules rather than an active process of communication.

7.5.4 Lack of communication flow

As Lillis and Scott (2007) point out, the Academic Literacies approach has a specific epistemology, that of literacy as social practice, and a specific ideological stance, that of transformation in which there is an emphasis on addressing the inequalities in social relations.

The interview with representative_2 illustrated that the communication between the Ministry and what happens in the classroom at university level is highly limited. Representative_2's responses suggest a lack of communication or knowledge-gap between the decision makers at the top level, who seem to be working in the dark, and the type of writing practices in English and processes implemented at Saudi Western University – (the meso level). For instance, there was no evidence offered for any systematic inspection of classroom teaching or evaluation of course outcomes and teachers' performance, which could be expected of a Ministry of Education, and suggests there are shortcomings in monitoring writing quality control and experience in Saudi Arabia. Representative_2's critical comment below about evaluation based on *personal impressions* concerning writing pedagogy, showing awareness of the inadequacy of the situation, but he suggests no macro aims for ensuring the reliability, consistency and validity of teaching throughout the country as a whole through regular monitoring or inspection or in service teacher-training.

> **It is noticeable that evaluation is based on the personal impressions of administrators and directors.** And there are some artistic reports that the English pedagogic supervisors write about the teaching of this language. Yet, are they focusing on this skill [writing] only? There is no study present that affirms the existence of a course of action by which they could prove that the writing subject at university level is heading in the correct direction. [Representative _2]

He is also critical of the administrators' and directors' assessment of the effectiveness of the teaching methods and approaches developed for student learning at university level as there is no evidence upon which to base standards, so he refers to their reports as *artistic*. His use of '*correct direction'* suggests one answer to the problem, the one size fits all in respect of student needs, and in this instance, he seems to be taking a conservative stance. There is some suggestion of awareness of the poor quality of teachers (see section 7.4.2) but whether this is through formal assessment or

impression, is not clear (though it seems to be the latter), in this comment: *However, the main problem is that some teachers don't have the ability and proficiency to offer the subject at a good skill level for writing.*

In practice, evidence from the second research question suggests that only an informal feedback system[10] is in place to assess the quality of the teaching/learning process (see chapter 6 for further information) in order to make adjustments or improvements. One of the heads of ELI, (director_1), stated that "*teachers who regularly assess students' knowledge and preparation levels while writing are asked to give opinions to modify semester plans as well as weekly lessons to best teach their students the skills and information necessary to succeed in class".*

However, there was no suggestion of monitoring teachers' classroom practice or other support by the meso level or of maintaining standards except by strict adherence to the weekly teaching plans. Monitoring procedures at Saudi Western University are highly limited and it is not clear what the Ministry – macro level - does to ensure standards are raised or maintained, or, are consistent across institutions. There seems to be a need for more formal assessment procedures both internally, to include teacher-training updates and assessment of teaching as well as students, and externally by the Ministry to oversee the quality of higher education in each subject area in each institution and to raise standards through inspection to obtain vital feedback for the development of new procedures and engender more dynamic, forward looking teaching programmes and still protect culture and customs in terms of topic. However, it may also be that this consultative behaviour would be seen as a threat to culture in the form of the hierarchy.

The decision makers will not be fully aware of what is happening in the higher education if the Ministry of Higher Education does not carry out inspection and quality control in the universities. The Ministry of Education, however, does carry out inspections in public and private schools which involve observing teaching and educational processes at lower education levels. This information could feed in to students' pre-tertiary English language needs. Education at university does not have such a formal evaluation procedure.

[10] This system is individual to each institution.

7.6 Lack of research in the field

Another interesting issue raised by representative_2 was that the lack of field research into writing in English - that is, applied rather than theoretical research - which could help provide appropriate guidance for teaching to enhance students' learning. He claims teaching writing in English does not seem to be based on any evidence-based research which could provide insights into the effectiveness of any of the teaching pedagogies which could be implemented in the writing classroom or to support student's lower writing proficiency. His reference to field research suggests he may be speaking from personal, expert, awareness or he may be offering this perceived lack as a reason for maintaining the status quo (in the absence of concrete evidence for anything better) in the comment below. Neither does he dismiss the views of practitioners, except insofar as what he seems to be aware of is not focused on writing alone. Whether he or the Ministry of Higher Education sees field work outside Saudi Arabia as irrelevant or they are just not aware of it, or do not see their role as sponsoring research in Saudi Arabia itself, is unclear, as is the *voice* here. While there is awareness of the views of administrators and directors (5) either these are considered as unscientific (not based on research) or as irrelevant to the macro level.

> Unfortunately, until now, there have been no academic field research studies by which you can pinpoint the importance of writing in schools or diagnose the causes of students' writing deficiency. However, it is notable that there are personal impressions of administrators and directors. [Representative _2]

Similarly, a previous study suggested that lack of research in Saudi Arabia is one of the main obstacles to improving the standard of education in Saudi Arabia. There is not enough empirical knowledge – scientific evidence - to improve academic writing practices in the higher education sector (Krieger, 2007). This finding suggests the need for more field research to understand the problems students experience with writing to help guide the Ministry of Higher Education and teachers to provide students with good writing practices.

7.7 Recommendations from the Ministry of Higher Education

Representative_1's response (below) to *how can we promote student writing practices in higher education*? seems to be personal '*In my opinion' (1)* and in favour of high stakes writing focusing on exam results as proof of proficiency. The comment about

handwriting may refer to mechanical legibility rather than the ability to compose. The reference to new concepts in the follow up process (last line) is vague and this passage seems defensive.

> In my opinion, to improve students' writing, firstly, they **should have written exams throughout the university year**. **They should do research** especially into their handwriting. [Representative _1]

> Of course yes. We notice a lot of work in developing new strategies to facilitate the process of teaching writing in English **using new concepts in the follow up process**. [Representative _1]

Representative_2's response seems to be personal '*I hope' (1)* in favour of good teacher preparation and the continuation and extension of teacher training courses. He argues that these courses are considered important qualifications for teachers in the Saudi context and seems prepared to contemplate progress and development.

> **I hope** that the Ministry of Higher Education will repeat and intensify **offers of strong training courses that focus on the weakness seen in teaching standard**s, and deal with the problem, because that will reflect back on the students' levels. And if we expand these courses and take the opportunity to overcome the lack of teacher preparation, then, God willing, we will arrive at the aspired target. [Representative _2]

However, it is not clear how *the weakness in teaching* standards he refers to is seen or by whom, or who will deal with the problem or how - whether *expand these courses* refers to in-service training or on only teacher-training. Representative_2 seems very removed from detailed knowledge of this context in this instance, as he appeals to ultimate level of the hierarchy for God's support. However, he suggests (below) that writing skills need to be developed gradually, from an early age so that by the time learners are university students, most will have the necessary skills.

> **If the teachers spread and intensify this approach**, of the necessity **of having the students master correct writing at a young age**, from grades one, two, and three, he might begin with writing a word, sentence, line, two lines, and so on. Then, they would start with a kind of guidance, encouragement, and correction. **I think they are capable** of solving this tough problem that a great percentage of students in Saudi Arabia experience. [Representative _2]

The above quotes suggest that students need to practice writing in order to acquire written linguistic competence, as well as writing skills. Writing is seen as a series of graded, technical accomplishments. It also lays the problem at the door of the school system and the students themselves '*I think they are capable' (6)* rather than a concern at macro level. Overall, the macro level does not seem concerned with the details of how students learn, simply what they should learn. Issues of the curriculum needed to develop and support such skills do not arise.

One might infer the responses' from the Representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education show that they seemed removed from the realities of Higher Education at classroom level and their responses and concerns were rather general and non-specific. They did not refer to any detailed studies, research, or Ministry of Higher Education concerns or activities to find out the reasons behind the students poor writing proficiency in higher education. It is not clear how the Ministry operates or what its remit is from the responses except to uphold the local customs and culture. While in general, the two Representatives seemed to represent the face of the Ministry and show constraint, in Bakhtinian fashion, there were occasions when their own voices, their academic training or opinions seemed to lend more passion to their comments. However, their assessment of the situation and possible support or remedies from the Ministry seem based on the idea of deficit or faults within the system of education delivery - the teachers, students or local phenomena - exams. In other words, the overall culture of education and the larger culture and customs within which it operates are taken as set, unassailable and not open to discussing. This means it is very difficult to see how progress can be made from the current perception of a deficit model that needs remedial action at every level (*from grades one, two, and three, he might begin with writing a word, sentence, line, two lines, and so on)* and where the focus is on mechanical functions and accuracy rather than creativity and communication to a more socially based, interactive and creative way of learning to write in English without change in the underpinning philosophy. Change and development except within very strict and controlled contexts seem threatening, as would undoubtedly the epistemology of the Academic Literacies framework - freedom of speech and the equal social status of participants. Overall, it is difficult to perceive from their responses whether either representative had any deeper knowledge or experience of the issues - from teaching experience or education

abroad, though perhaps this is more likely for representative_1 - hence whether they have personal confidence in the remedies they suggest or are merely operating within the framework of possible comments they can make while maintaining the status of the macro level and their own within that.

7.8 Summary of the key findings for research question three

I employed the Academic Literacies approach as a baseline to investigate the writing experiences of Saudi students in Saudi Western University. This approach offers a critical lens through which to view the current writing practices and most pedagogies concerned with student writing in higher education (Lillis, 2003). It aims to understand how institutions shape people and form their particular literacy practices.

To start with, the findings from the interviews with the two MoE representatives showed that they considered writing as an abstract, neutral technical skill, divorced from readers or communicative aims, more like the private diary of a writer with no external social or communication objectives, and were aware of the students' poor writing proficiency in higher education. More importantly, the participants from the macro level located any difficulty as in individuals, either the students and their previous learning experiences or their teachers. Most of the earlier studies in Saudi Arabia have looked at writing in English as a problem located within the students themselves (e.g. Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Samadani, 2010; Grami, 2010) - a deficit model in Academic Literacies' terms. However, while other studies have related the problems to teaching approaches, curriculums and traditional methods (e.g. Al-Khairy, 2013; Al-Omrani, 2008; Khan, 2011), they failed to consider writing as a complex and / or a contested process within a relationship of authority and power, as this research does.

The findings concerning the writing practices within Saudi Western university are in line with Lea and Street's criticism of the ‘deficit’ approach to writing and learning that comes from autonomous models of literacy - i.e. the one size fits all approach (Street, 2010). This approach makes the assumption that literacy is neutral and acquired by students before they enrol at tertiary level (Wingate, 2006) even though the school level experience differs for each student and is also very different from the tertiary level experience. From this deficit perspective, the students themselves are deemed to be responsible for most of the learning challenges they face in higher

education. Lillis and Scott (2007) argue that much academic writing research focuses on student texts rather than literacy practices, which may lead to defining the problems linked to student writing as textual, resulting in pedagogies which are mainly textual in nature. Lea and Street (1998) argue that conceptualising writing as a neutral generic skill may limit our understanding about the nature of language and communication as well as the *problem* of student writing. They assert that writing practices at tertiary level involve issues of identity and power; students are assessed by their teachers and the university authorities and are thus in an asymmetric power relationship. Cognitive skills such as critical thinking, constructing an argument, understanding writing conventions and how to communicate in writing within their particular subject areas are crucial for university studies and largely ignored. Acquiring these skills implies the need to develop through communication with others in real social situations, where individual contributions are valued, and teachers and students can learn and develop from each other. This is far removed from the concept of abstract, prescribed learning and goals. This research has revealed the very great asymmetry in power relations between students and teachers in ELI and teachers and the meso and macro levels. The assumption underpinning Academic Literacies is that literacy is social practice for the purpose of communication between individuals, hence is, located in a particular social and cultural context (Street, 1995), not a general one. The overarching general context where orders come from the top and everyone knows their place, with no questions asked, is more reminiscent of the structure of the armed forces or police, or an emergency, life-threatening situation.

Furthermore, the analysis of the qualitative data from the participant representatives above revealed how broad (or limited) the learning of writing at tertiary level is, guided and directed by the Ministry of Higher Education. This finding illustrates that cultural and traditional norms in Saudi Arabia have such a strong hold on institutions that they can prevent them from performing at their best, at all levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro). It is not just the content of cultural norms that have to be considered in terms of acceptable topics, behaviour and practices in the writing classroom. At a much deeper level, the organisational culture has an overarching influence on what goes on in the classroom, so that the infrastructure that currently exists does not seem to support the learning process. Organisational cultures exist in conscious and visible practices, in the way people identify what happens in their organisational environment

(Hofstede, 2011) and this affects or even directs not just their behaviour but what they see and accept as the underlying philosophy/epistemology for their actions. One could infer from the current research that learning writing in English at tertiary level is not a matter of individual but organisational – institutional - culture, which shapes and guides writing practices and also sets standards of acceptability for English language skills in general, which for purposes of tertiary level education through English, are comparatively low in Saudi Western University.

These findings seem to be in line with the Academic Literacies critique which argues that because writing is a social practice situated in the institutional discourses of the academy and power relationships, it has an effect on identity or self-perception in terms of role and duties (Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006). It also argues that difficulties in student writing are an institutional matter rather than a matter of individual failure, particularly for undergraduates (Boz, 2009) as scholars such as Gourlay (2011), and Lea and Stierer (2011) argue. This study claims that the perceived deficiency in student writing arises from the institutional discourse, cultural beliefs and aims of the Ministry of Higher Education rather than individual student failure. The discourse of the macro level consistently refers to a deficit (in terms of the Academic Literacies' critique of the deficit model) in particular individuals or areas - students, teachers, assessment, exams - without any consideration of writing as being purposeful, communicative and social, rather than just a set of technical requirements.

7.8.1.The interaction between the macro, meso and micro levels

This section will look at the links between the three levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro). As mentioned before, the interview participants were from three levels and the data was gathered thorough interviews, observation and institutional documents. The Academic Literacies approach - the perceived ideal for developing academic writing and the critique of the so-called study skills approach (Lea and Street, 1998) - was used to investigate student writing practices in higher education in the Saudi EFL context. It is important to consider how the Academic Literacies approach (coupled with Linguistic Ethnography, Bakhtin, Study Skills and Hofstede for the analysis)

contributed to the research theoretical framework and allowed me to examine the data with greater in-depth understanding of the organisational hierarchy[11], the lack of communication flow, the unequal relationships, the content and context of cultural norms and how these impact on students learning, particularly writing, in higher education.

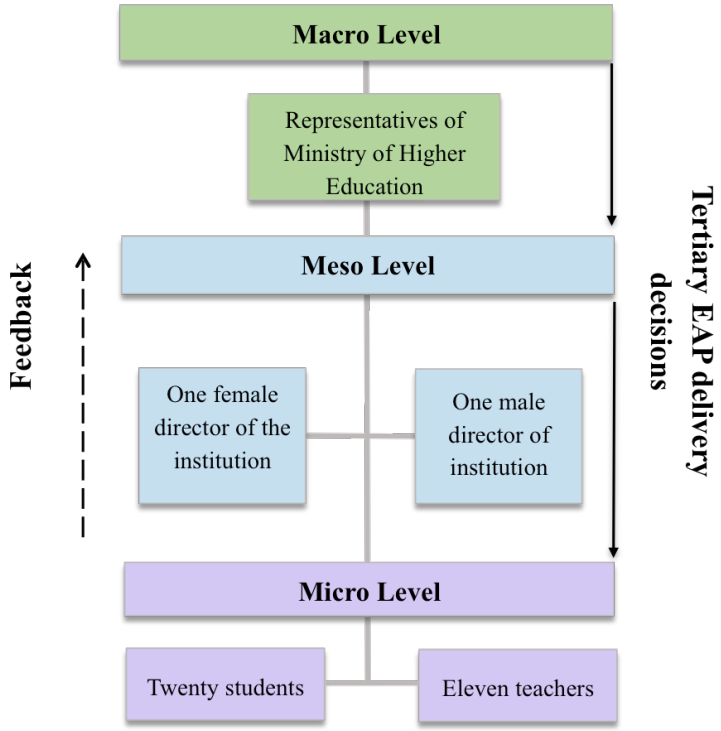


Figure 7.1: The organisational culture

Evidence of the hierarchical structure's operation appears at three different levels, from the macro – official level down. This operational information offers a view of the wider impact of the way a hierarchical structure can operate across the socio-cultural spectrum of society at large - at institutional level in this context - as well as on individual performance and aims. In this study, the participants' responses underlined the operation of the hierarchy within the education system, in accordance with Hofstede's analysis of Saudi Arabian characteristics (2011).

[11] An organogram is a diagram showing the relationship between the different parts of an organisation, with arrows to show the information flows

This study, see the above diagram (7.1), offers a conceptualisation of the interaction between the different hierarchical levels showing the lack of bottom up communication to the upper levels; communication is restricted to top down. The dotted line indicates the ideal counterbalance information flow from the bottom up, which is not built into the structure at the moment. The official macro level is distant and detached, with little involvement in teaching and learning writing at tertiary level. They have little idea of teaching writing practices or what actually goes on in the university level language learning classroom, yet the prime decisions come from the MOE. The meso level also seems unaware of either the teachers or students' actual needs; their main role is to ensure policy and procedures reflect the hierarchical structure; the higher the level, the more power and control (see chapter 6, section 6.2.3).

It is important to mention that an organisation within a hierarchy means that centralisation is common; a hierarchy involves existential inequality, and subordinates expect to be informed what to do and the ideal leader would be an altruistic autocrat (Hofstede, 2011). Evidence of the high power distance dimension - hierarchy - came from the way the interviewees framed their responses to the research questions. The findings indicate that the macro and meso levels, and micro teacher level, all accepted being in thrall to a higher authority which they must support; even the top level actors, who actually really do control the policy, culture and customs agenda seem to be acting in accordance with their perception of religious ideals rather than their own judgement. This means they accept their own powerlessness and do not struggle for change or maybe cannot even imagine anything outside the confines they currently operate within (see chapter 5, section 5.2.5.1). According to Hofstede (1980; 2011), Saudi Arabia scores high (95) on power distance, which indicates that members accept a hierarchical order as everyone has a role and place which does not require any further explanation. More interestingly, the micro level students were the most free in their views and offered their voices more often in the data - maybe because they are young and not so experienced in accepting the hierarchy and 'their place' in it (see chapter 5, 5.2.3.2). This rather turns things on their head - the lowest level in the hierarchy is the most engaged with the possibilities of change.

As stated earlier in chapter 6, the higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia may have some degree of independence to select materials for their students and to adopt their own teaching approaches but this is always under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. In this respect, having been allocated the (textbook) that they must use, the teachers have to follow the parameters set by the Ministry of Higher Education, and are responsible for the delivery of teaching and the processes involved in classroom learning without any other practical support from their peers or the macro-level to help them use materials well or improve their classroom teaching. At the same time, higher education institutes also need to ensure their adoption and use of books and materials complies with the objectives of Saudi education policy; education has to become more effective in order to meet the social, religious and economic needs of Saudi Arabia and to eliminate illiteracy among adults. Given the limitations outlined, this is a hard ask for teachers.

The findings suggest that most tertiary student writing decisions are top down, given in formal written form and not negotiatable in the present system (see figure 7.1). This indicates a lack of useful, informative linkages or opportunity for the micro level to provide useful feedback or comments to the macro and meso level to inform the macro level decision-making process. This was indicated in the analysis of the qualitative data, which showed that feedback only goes a little way, so the macro and meso level get little information from the micro level; consequently, decisions made are hardly student needs-based as there is little or no input from them. Information is limited, mainly top down and focused on what an institution *cannot* do (according to the macro level) rather than suggestions for development. The course book to be used is one chosen because it is specifically produced to meet the cultural needs of Arabic speaking countries, thus of Saudi Arabia (see chapter 6, section 6.2.5). In the next chapter I conclude the present work with a summary of the current study and the main findings.

Chapter Eight – Discussion and recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the fourth research question: to what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context? It begins with a discussion of the role of the Preparatory Year programme of the English Language Institute as a bridge between the English language proficiency of students on leaving school and the requirements for those who need English for their academic studies. It then explores the extent to which the Academic Literacies approach is applicable to the current EFL context. At present, the students who will use English in their academic studies and those who are only following the English course as an entry requirement are taught as a homogeneous group, even though they have different needs. The chapter highlights the value of synthesising the theoretical facets of the Academic Literacies model, such as giving a voice to learners and appreciating their contribution to the learning process, which is important for all ELI learners, together with an operating knowledge of EAP in order to promote good academic writing practices for those students who will need to write in English. The chapter also distinguishes between the role and function of the curriculum as distinct from that of the textbook. Finally, it presents a number of concrete recommendations in light of the contextual factors that have been identified. One of the main implications from the current study is the need for a new curriculum for a PYP course in ELI.

8.2 The role of the English Language Institute

This section discusses the role of the preparatory year programme (PYP) of the English Language Institute as a bridge between the English proficiency of high school leavers and the requirements of disciplinary study, which vary as explained above. Although the PYP aims to prepare around 6000-7000 foundation students for academic writing, the ELI is only responsible for delivering general English classes to the students, organising timetables and other practical matters. It has no input into the content of the curriculum, which is decided at national level. The curriculum and teaching practices seem neither suitable nor adequate for higher education purposes to support students' writing skills for their future studies.

The English Language Institute is tasked with running a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) for high school leavers to foster their English proficiency and help some of them to prepare for future academic writing in their university departments. While the English language course aims to play a critical part in bridging the gap between the students' English proficiency in leaving school and the requirements of disciplinary study or university course entry requirements, the tools available to the ELI do not seem to support this aim. For example, teachers in ELI are required to use a specified (by the upper level) general English textbook, *New Headway Plus, Special Edition*, rather than one aiming to support academic writing development (Reda, 2003). This issue will be further discussed in section 8.4.

As discussed in chapter 5, students in this study experienced a limited variety of writing practices in their ELI modules and limited feedback from their teachers. The nature of the writing practices and the associated assumptions seem to conceptualise writing as a mechanistic, grammar-oriented, surface level process. Writing was de-contextualized from any purpose or aim to convey meaning to an identified readership due to the demand of the exam-centered community, where accuracy and correctness rather than communication with an audience are paramount. The writing practices and feedback seemed to be concerned with easily identifiable mechanical and technical matters which are easy to mark and seemed to be all that was perceived as required of students to become members of an academic community, as discussed in the literature review concerning the Study Skills and Academic Socialisation models (Ivanic, 2004; Lea, 2006; Lea and Street, 1998, 2006; Turner, 2004). As mentioned earlier**,** the teachers tended to perceive writing as general, technical practice because this kind of production/accuracy is easier to deal with than a more meaningful activity that is purposeful and includes issues associated with epistemology, identity and knowledge, as suggested by the Academic Literacies model (Gee, 1990; Ivanic, 2004). Accuracy is easier for teachers to teach and access than successful communicative function (which requires awareness of a target reader's specific social context, like their age, gender, occupation, marital status and so forth).

The findings of the study revealed that teachers' first responsibility seems to be (to follow the perceived hierarchical requirements) rather than to prepare any students to undertake academic writing. This could be due to their dependence on the system for

their own assessment as successful teachers whose students are able to pass exams based on accuracy alone and thus their very livelihoods. These key findings are in line with Hofstede's cultural study (2011), which argues that Saudi Arabia has a high score on power distance. Hofstede claims that, in a high power distance culture, everyone accepts his/her role in society with no complaint or requirement for justification. A hierarchy also indicates the existence of inequality and hierarchal relationships between different parties; for example, the lower orders take guidance on what to do from the higher levels. This also suggests that reflection is not encouraged among teaching staff as a way to improve - except for the consideration of examination results - at the ELI. Little thought was given to what happens to their students afterwards, because that seemed to be considered outside the ELI's remit.

It is also important to mention that teachers expected the students to have learned to write competently in English in their secondary schools before coming to university, but this was not the case. Teachers considered that the students' inability to write adequately for higher education purposes could be due to their poor previous school learning and writing experiences. The students' interviews suggested that neither previous nor current teaching practices appeared sufficient to support the writing skills necessary for higher education.

As discussed in chapter one, acquiring writing skills at tertiary level is critical for many students' future academic lives. Students may face a considerable number of challenges when they begin their academic studies (Askham, 2008). For instance, they might be unfamiliar with the variety and type of language tasks required for their university studies (Schmitt, 2005). These can involve the type of reading, writing and listening tasks they will be exposed to and the speaking tasks they may have to perform. Students therefore need to be allowed to be more independent and aware of their learning needs in order to take responsibility for their progress and development (Askham, 2008; Lowe and Cook, 2003). At university level, students are expected to be able to communicate successfully in English in various genres in their academic departments, but the ELI foundation courses do not appear to include this aim; only syntactical accuracy and vocabulary accumulation.

Although English language proficiency among ELI students, ranged from about near beginner to intermediate level, the ELI's English language courses fall short of the level of English proficiency normally recommended for university study, according to the modules and corresponding CEFR levels the institution aims for, which are A1, A2, A2+ and B+ (ELI, 2014). The level of the English language courses and the examinations students need to pass indicate that students can enrol on university courses with language proficiency levels below what is required for academic communication in writing. The international level is around TOEFL 600 paper-based or 100 internet-based or 7.0 IELTS (Cotton and Conrow, 1998; Dooey and Oliver, 2002) and the required ELI standards of students are far below this. (For instance, IELTS 7 roughly equates to CEFR C1 and CEFR B – the highest class level in ELI is B1, roughly equates to IELTS 5. CEFR A1 and A2 are below around IELTS 4, very basic user level and would not be acceptable for university study through English in most European, Australian or American universities). This comparatively low standard of acceptability also contributes to the low level of proficiency of Saudi students. Since the requirements are low, thus the text book and teaching are also targeted at this low and unrealistic level for satisfactory study using English. These low standards ultimately can impact on the competitive edge of Saudi students in the wider global context.

Haggis (2006) points out that mature education research suggests that there is no direct link between lack of success at school level education and the capacity to participate in future academic life, so school English language education cannot fully account for lack of English writing acquisition in ELI classes or later university courses. However, there is a link between the lack of familiarity with academic work and the capacity to comprehend curricular and institutional expectations. It is not practical to assume all learners enrol in higher education already knowing how to handle tasks such as engaging with reading lists, getting involved with new kinds of genre. Students who enter university with minimal qualifications in their subject areas may be able to benefit from their previous learning experience in other academic areas if they have been encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. It all depends on their individual university experience and the support they get to fulfil their potential.

To sum up, neither the current methods employed nor the course book can help the students advance much beyond basic proficiency – as indicated in the CEFR levels of the courses. They are certainly not exposed to the uses they will need to put English to, like writing or giving verbal reports. There seem to be no functional links to English as a mode of personal expression for them. Indeed, what happens in ELI suggests a very closed, protected and static world, where knowledge about English is valued, not English in use; consequently, there is little in common with the best educational practices aimed for in Academic Literacies.

8.3 The Academic Literacies approach

This section considers the extent to which the Academic Literacies framework/approach is applicable in the ELI context, with particular focus on the language proficiency of the students. It is significant to point out the difference between the theoretical use of AL aims: a) as a hypothetical benchmark for an ideal situation, something to measure current practices against and b) its practical potential for guiding the practice of teaching writing in English in Saudi Arabia or anywhere else in most, if not all, contexts. AL is an aspirational guideline which offers a different way of conceptualizing academic writing as a social practice (Lea and Street, 1998), rather than offering pedagogy. Academic Literacies claims that writing in English can only be acquired (rather than learned) in a specific social context within the environment of the subject of study from subject specialists (Lea and Street, 1998). Therefore, learning to write in an EFL/ESL, EAP, ESP or Study Skills classroom does not fulfil the conditions set down by Academic Literacies, since in this case writing practice takes place in language or language-related classrooms, not from academic subject specialists and in the appropriate environment. While Academic Literacies has no practical pedagogy or suggestions to offer in this context, its conceptualisations in theoretical terms of the often overlooked social aspect of writing is highly relevant to the context of this study.

The Academic Literacies approach has offered a critical lens through which to view the teaching of writing in Saudi Arabia. Using this lens to examine the data has given me a greater in-depth understanding of the limitations of the writing practices at tertiary level in Saudi Arabia. It has illuminated the basic difficulties encountered in delivering even relatively minimal English writing skills in the English Language

Institute. There is no adequate, flexible and progressive framework for learning to be passed on and developed, no community of writing or shared experience within the 'micro' level responsible for teaching and learning writing in English in ELI. Neither is there any underlying functioning philosophy with Academic Literacies' type concerns, or even academic writing aims as an aspect of study skills, as expounded by Jordan (1997, 2002) and others, in either theory or practice within a rigid hierarchical structure which is highly exclusive, not inclusive. There is no social experience of co-constructing the curriculum with inputs from Saudi Arabian teachers, curriculum writers or other experts, no space for shared experience between teachers of which lessons went well, or badly; in short, no input from members of the micro-level to each other or to inform the meso level; no bottom up flow of information.

Another value of the Academic Literacies approach is that it has illuminated concerns like the unequal power relations between teacher and student (and the different levels of the education hierarchy - micro, meso and macro), the lack of any co-construction of learning or the student's ability to take charge of her learning or have any input into the social context of that learning, which should be an experienced reality and not an abstract concept based on decontextualised rule-governed linguistic forms (Creaton, 2008; Street, 2010). As a philosophical ideal to aim for, it can help ELI rethink teaching and learning aims, needs, strategies and priorities in the context of student written production and support. Taking Academic Literacies ideals on board may lead to rethinking and a better conceptualization of academic writing needs in the current context and so lead to a more student-centred curriculum. This aim also suggests the need to incorporate some EAP genres into the curriculum for those who will use English in their academic studies as proxy contexts for academic disciplines This takes a liberal approach to Academic Literacies in Saudi Arabia, because English is not the mother-tongue and Academic Literacies has in mind a native English-speaker context, so assumes basic English language competences are in place before tertiary education begins. This is clearly not the case in the EFL tertiary situation, so EAP writing skills can help learners to bridge this gap in knowledge and experience before their academic courses begin. In more general terms, even those who do not need English for academic studies would benefit from the more communicative, student-centred approach which values individual student's contributions as championed by

Academic Literacies than is currently the case. This incorporation will be furthered discussed in the proposed curriculum in section 8.6.2.

Furthermore, the present research has illuminated the importance of Saudi Arabia's social and cultural context and its immense influence, because of the hierarchical structure of society, on every aspect of an individual's life. This is the general, overarching, influence of national society in Saudi Arabia. Academic Literacies, by contrast, draws attention to the specific local social environment of writing within a course of academic study, whereby tutors and students collaborate on equal terms to experience and produce texts specific and relevant to their subject of study. It also focuses on individual needs and development. Academic Literacies is thus also a product of its cultural context and the type of society it was conceived in, individualistic, which is very different from the collectivistic society of Saudi Arabia. This focus on the social and individual aspect of writing within a specific context is one of the most important contributions of Academic Literacies to this study. Its lens has illuminated the relationship between the wider, national social context and the more local socio-cultural exchanges and the influence of the former on the latter. This is precisely why Academic Literacies precepts could only function within a highly liberal, non-hierarchical higher education system, which, in practice, probably does not exist in this pure form anywhere in the world today, as universities are among the most hierarchical institutions in any country, with their need to defend their reputations and standards. All areas of academic education are responsible to a higher authority, in terms of course requirements, maintaining academic standards over time, between individual students, and between different institutions (external examiners) and so on. There are always rules and frameworks, some more fluid and negotiable than others, but academic subject literacy in practice, is framed by institutional and other forces external to it, like those mentioned above. These influence how academic writing occurs within particular subject areas, the kind of social atmosphere that exists and the influence of the characters of individual tutors and departments (which is why Academic Literacies rejects any generalization) and how conducive they are to supporting the students' development of writing in an academic context. Academic Literacies as a theoretical ideal is still valuable for drawing attention to the social aspect of writing in specific areas of study (and by critiquing the *one size fits all philosophy*) which had previously received little attention.

The findings have revealed that learning writing within the academic subject area context may not be a practical possibility for the English language Institute, which is a unit within Saudi Western University with the purpose of teaching English as a second language, whereas most Academic Literacies research has been concerned with mother tongue academic subject writing. Academic Literacies does not philosophise about basic literacy, as its roots are in mother tongue and tertiary education, hence it assumes basic literacy skills are already in place, and is not concerned with second language learners (Lea and Street, 2006). It is also concerned with the journey of each individual student and how she acquires the customs and habits to feel at home in her discipline (Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006). Its approach is very clear about where academic literacy should be acquired and even when it should be acquired, but has little to say about the processes involved - the how - except that they should not be taught as a set of skills outside the subject discipline, rejecting this as the study skills approach, seen as separating practice from content (Street, 2010). Therefore, Academic Literacies principles cannot be easily applied to the current context. As the Academic Literacies approach does not consider the *how* of learning writing in second or foreign language communities for academic purposes, this practical aspect has to be provided from elsewhere. Lea and Street (1998) are not concerned with the need for 'basic structures' to be in place nor do they 'conceptualise' what these might be, or indeed, if there is any underpinning of a general language of expression in writing. Their ideal students are literate in English but have to learn how to write in their subject disciplines, which is not the same situation that EFL/EAP learners are in.

As already pointed out, the Academic Literacies approach is not practical insofar as its concern is *when* and *where* academic writing skills should be acquired – not taught - in an ideal situation. Consequently, the *how* of acquiring it is not a concern, as Academic Literacies sees no place for the formal instruction of writing. The Academic Literacies model is limited to the conceptual level, with no suggestions for the practicality/applicability of the model as a pedagogical framework for action (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003). It is, however, still a useful conceptual framework for the consideration of writing as literacy, self-expression, the place of students in relation to their teachers, and disciplines, the co-construction of knowledge, and the social aspect of communication and general ways to develop more democratic writing practices,

including extending access to them, which Lea and Street point out can be reserved to an elite (Lea and Street, 1998). Thus, it can motivate course constructors (albeit with elements from EAP and general English teaching) to widen their conceptualization of what teaching/learning writing in English should entail as well as be a useful benchmark for investigating and understanding actual teaching and learning practices and the inequality of relationships and its consequences, which can include the loss of potential student talent. The latter is important because Academic Literacies emphasizes that learners are not passive, they bring experience to their learning, so they should be encouraged to actively engage in their learning through social interaction as equals. How some of the ideals of the Academic Literacies approach could be integrated with aspects of EAP will be discussed in the following section.

8.4 The need for a more EAP- centred approach

This section discusses how my view of EAP has evolved from what was discussed in the literature review. It is reasonable to argue that an Academic Literacies framework would not solve the development needs of learners of English in the current EFL context in Saudi Western University. When learners have general English language competence, Academic Literacies would state that writing should be learned naturally within a discipline, not taught as a separate subject or skill (Lea and Street, 2006). Academic Literacies offers no practical guidance for implementing the teaching of good writing practices (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2003) because it does not believe in programmes to improve writing skills or students being taught how to study. Its argument is that writing evolves from within disciplines and through shared discussion and experience, which clearly does not reflect the context of developing English writing skills or writing in English as a Foreign Language; nor does it reflect the actual practice in many universities where students have English as L1. It is a goal to foster learning writing within a social context of equality and respect (Lea and Street, 2006).

One of the contributions of the current study is its detailed evidence (at macro, meso and micro levels) that what is missing from current practice in writing in English in Saudi Arabia is English for practical needs and communication – social purposes - and that abstract, static, formal knowledge tested by exam results is not an adequate

basis for developing the writing skills needed in an academic context. Using AL as a theoretical approach revealed the social aspect of writing was missing, which suggests that intermediate steps for the development of knowledge are required. It is not possible to go from a general English curriculum as delivered in the ELI straight to a more AL-inspired type of practice, as evidenced from the research. In a sense, not emphasising writing in English more in the ELI programme accords with Academic Literacies view that writing should be acquired (not learned) within the context of the subject of study. What is missing in both the current ELI and AL view is the need for building blocks, making sure an adequate foundation of writing skills (and what these are) is in place before an academic subject course begins. This thesis points out this deficiency in both ELI and Academies Literacies; the adequacy of general language ability (at a relatively low level in ELI) without reference to the skills needed for study or academic writing, or in the case of AL, the assumption that general English writing literacy is already present (within an English mother-tongue context), is itself an assumption of homogeneity, and does not consider individual students' past experience as relevant. The present study proposes that while the Academic Literacies model can operate as an ideal theoretical framework (Lillis and Scott, 2007; Street, 1984), a practical model such as English for Academic Purposes (with some study support like referencing skills or avoiding plagiarism), might be a more fruitful basis for students to develop academic writing literacy in their academic careers.

While EAP refers to teaching English with the purpose of supporting learners' research or study in the target language (Hyland, 2006), Study Skills refers to strategies and techniques which are required when listening, speaking reading or writing for academic purposes (Richards et al., 1985). As discussed earlier, Study Skills are regarded as key foundation elements of EAP courses (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) because they also provide insights into how things work in the general academic context – what is most important – and help solve problems. Therefore, the acquisition of these skills is important for university students who are keen to learn English to pursue academic degrees after studying in the ELI.

The findings of the study revealed the inadequacy of the ELI teaching practices to support students' writing skills for their future studies. Nordquist (2017) suggests some of the parameters of academic writing go way beyond the aims and expectations

of teaching writing at an institution like ELI. Academic writing refers to the argumentative style used by researchers, academics and university students to construct a body of information about a specific topic. EAP writing tasks help students to understand how to communicate in an academic context (Gillett, 2004; Hyland, 2006) and provide an array of the types of writing used in several academic areas. In other words, EAP offers a more specific and more in-depth approach to writing than a general English course book. EAP focuses on providing students of different disciplines with instruction in the common features of academic discourse (Dudley-Evans, 1998). Most definitions of Study Skills claim they are a set of distinct techniques that can be acquired in a relatively short time and applied to most fields of study (de Chazal, 2014; Jordan, 1997; Robinson, 1980); learners can select from and adapt them to suit their own particular needs. Aspects of EAP and study skills can be incorporated into courses from beginner language levels to enrich the learning English for academic experience rather than limit it to more general or even vague or of doubtful use purposes (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

While Academic Literacies focuses on meaning making, issues of identity and power and the quality of good texts in subject teachers' perceptions (Gee, 1990; Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006; Street, 2010), EAP focuses on developing students' writing (and other) skills at the same time as their English language (Hyland, 2006). English for Academic Purposes courses focus more on the different writing genres involved, like reports or literature reviews, far more than the short essays in the course book, and develop students' learning skills through *enquiry*, finding out and research done by the students themselves, individually and in groups (Turner, 2004). For example, they can be their own resources and interview other group members, perhaps with different tasks or objectives to share; they can evaluate different techniques or explain results and help each other to write them up. EAP can include student-oriented work whereby they research information useful to themselves and learn how to present their findings. This kind of learning activity requires a shift from formal accuracy as a criterion for communication, to a more pro-active mode of discovery, self-motivation, self-confidence and responsibility for learning by the students. Such techniques can help to empower students, as AL advocates. However, the current course book does not offer or come within the remit of EAP. EAP can operate in more student-focused ways (as above) and provide some aspects of AL

ideals within its framework. However, such task-based programmes also require a shift from the homogeneous yet individual and competitive mode of working, to one of co-operation and mutual respect, of listening to each other and evaluating ideas, being continually dynamic and forward-looking, accepting criticism as a way to grow. This is very different from the more standardised, prescriptive and static one-size-fits-all easy to assess course based on the grammatical accuracy alone approach of the current textbook and system.

To conclude, EAP is not solely about learning English; it aims to support language learners at higher education levels by equipping them with the necessary skills to communicate in particular academic and cultural situations (Hyland, 2006; Turner, 2004).

8.5 The current textbook 'New Headway Plus' and the curriculum

This section discusses how the curriculum is understood (or not) by the different stakeholders in the ELI. Then, it considers whether the textbook is the de facto curriculum in the ELI. It is important to clarify the differences between the curriculum and the textbook. The curriculum contains various dimensions of learning such as goals, aims, content, assessment and materials (Kilpatrick, 1996) and also a set of subjects or topics. The subjects within the curriculum also have a set of fixed core contents which could make up a syllabus. The subject/topic syllabus also consists of a list of topics generated from the core themes to be taught and goes beyond these core concepts to provide remedial inputs for slow learners and more challenging ones for the gifted. The curriculum and syllabus thus have core goals but the syllabus has some flexibility to cater for different learners' needs. On the other hand, a textbook is used as a typical source of information to study a subject (Basturkmen, 2010; Graves, 2000). It does not focus on specific learners or their different needs or their context of learning, except in a very general sense (as in the case of *New Headway* etc., focusing on Arabic speakers).

As discussed earlier, the English Language Institute appeared to rely heavily on *New Headway Plus Special Edition*, which is a general language course book and does not - nor does it aim - to offer appropriate preparation for study at university level, even as a basic book (Reda, 2003). The *Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide* concentrates on the surface elements of language (Reda, 2003), not on writing as a

social or democratic process (see figure 5.4 in section 5.2.7.1). The syllabus and lesson plans devised by the meso level are based on textbook content alone, the only source of material, and so they follow the same pathways as laid down in the book. While this is understandable as its purpose is general English language instruction in Arabic-speaking countries, its topics and tasks (e.g. short descriptive writing) are general, not targeted to fit into any particular context, and so limited; any usefulness it has as a textbook for science students, for instance, who need English as a medium of study at university and who will write reports, is highly questionable. It certainly does not consider the different needs of students. It is important to point out that the findings from the first research question illustrate how the students found their voices in their interviews to claim what they were offered in the writing class was not challenging enough or suitable for their future academic needs, though they understood the constraints imposed from above. Basturkmen (2010) argues that one of the limitations of textbooks is that they may lead to both learners and teachers becoming dissatisfied with the content and examples, as the courses offered may not be appropriate or relevant to them or at the appropriate level for the learners (Graves, 2000).

It is also important to mention that, although students could access institutional documents such as the (limited) *Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide* for essay writing (see above figure 5.4 in section 5.2.7.1) either from the university website /or from staff, these guidelines did not help them to understand writing processes at university level. These guidelines deal with aspects already familiar from secondary education, which the students considered to be general advice on the basic requirements for written production. Furthermore, the limitations imposed on their experience and practice in learning English and writing in English, as well as the lack of activities, interaction, collaboration and use of resources on offer restricted their learning potential in this context.

The notion of a curriculum seems to be absent in the ELI. The course book and writing syllabus derived from it have no connection with Saudi Western university; relevant subjects for speaking, listening, reading or writing as part of the English learning curriculum within the wider university context – e.g. future subjects of study - are absent, consequently isolating, limiting and restricting ELI teaching and learning

within Saudi Western to the very narrow confines of the textbook as a replacement for (or instead of) an appropriate curriculum. This is indeed a *standalone* textbook and underlines the seemingly abstract, decontextualised and general goal of abstract knowledge acquisition, rather than the practical, goal-oriented use of writing in English as a medium of communication for various purposes and involving a range of skills covering several genres and topics. Students seem to receive an abstract, theoretical type of knowledge of writing with no real opportunities for practice (Al Fadda, 2012). Students' writing in the classroom was limited to decontextualised structural (grammar) practice or a few hundred words on topics of little interest to them, offering a minimal context for practising language functions. This situation neither motivates nor empowers students to use their knowledge in practice. This issue raises the question of why the different stakeholders in ELI consider Headway Intermediate Plus Intermediate Writing Guide provides a suitable writing syllabus for the foundation students' tertiary education.

As mentioned in chapter 6, the English Language Institute's lightly adapted English language material from *New Headway Plus* seems to have been approved at the highest level in the country (macro level), as the book was written to fit the cultural sensitivities of this particular context (Middle East). The ELI course documents seem to largely rely on New Headway Plus for procedures, checklists or rubrics and these seem also to reflect the official discourse from the top of the educational hierarchy. In this sense, the teaching of EFL is institutionalised and controlled by state systems, which means hegemonic control, from the government administration down. Consequently, the institute's meso role seemed to be limited to practical tasks like creating the timetable and pacing guide, much of which comes from the course book. The textbook *New Headway Plus, Special Edition*, Oxford University Press with *Headway Plus Writing Guide* for additional writing support claims to provide a general course specifically for use in Arabic-speaking countries (Middle East). It was negotiated and approved for use and distribution in Saudi Arabia at the highest level. It can be seen to epitomise the context and form that is approved for the teaching of English in the Saudi cultural context and may also have been perceived as sufficient, requiring no other input or interference. In that sense, it may be seen as safe and controllable, unlikely to promote unacceptable ideas. There seems to be more concern about what it does not or must not contain, rather than any value it has as an

appropriate learning programme for future university students. It seems only to be evaluated in terms of what it excludes, not the usefulness or otherwise of its content. As such, it is and has been an enormously successful commodity for its writers and publishers, giving them near monopoly status in the Middle East. While other, general *Headway* textbooks sell to the rest of the world, they do not have a monopoly, but are in competition with other textbooks and publishers.

In the ELI case, both the meso and micro level teachers only deliver courses; they do not create material or have inputs to courses (see chapters 5 and 6). This may also absolve the MOE of any need to provide in-service or training upgrades for teachers or even carry out quality control assessments of university EFL courses, as the textbook parameters make this unnecessary. One of the features of the textbook is to achieve the goals it sets, teachers have to follow the syllabus, which lays down what will be learned by students and in what order (Basturkmen, 2010; Graves, 2000). These goals and the ordering of learning (as in the *pacing guide)* may not match the students' intermediate or longer-term learning needs or indeed their abilities or level, or the goals may not be appropriate to those with the ultimate objectives of study through English. These goals may also not be relevant to those going on to study in the medium of Arabic rather than English. Students reported they were not motivated by an interesting curriculum or current and important essay topics. They were only given mundane topics with little guidance on how to write effectively, although comparing, contrasting and argumentation were incorporated into a few essay topics. The form of feedback and assessment from their teachers was largely based on mechanical, grammatical accuracy. This also means that the learner outcomes projected by the text book and followed in class teaching did not include any study needs for learning English like report-writing, memo-ing, note-taking - the areas a Study Skills approach would include and which Academic Literacies assumes are already in place, so that further refinements can come from within the subject of study. Overall, not only was there little or no writing syllabus as such other than providing practice in the use of grammatical terms or vocabulary; writing classes per se were also conspicuous by largely being absent.

To sum up, neither the current teaching practices employed nor the course book can support the students to advance much beyond basic proficiency in general English

skills. There seemed to be little concern about the relevance or quality of the course book other than its adherence to the cultural and traditional norms of Saudi Arabia. This suggests the ELI course in its current state will be unable to produce students who will go on to be successful writers in their subjects of study, since there is neither a conceptual nor practical framework in place to achieve this. Therefore, this study proposes an alternative curriculum, which will be presented and problematized in the next section.

8.6 Recommendations

This section presents a coherent and workable set of recommendations for writing instruction in the ELI that explicitly address the issues arising from the findings. One of the key implications from the present study is the need for a new curriculum for a PYP course in ELI. This section also offers practicable ideas for how change from the current curriculum to the proposed curriculum might be initiated in the hierarchical structure identified by the present research.

8.6.1 Understanding the proposed curriculum within the remit of the PYP programme for students hoping to gain entrance to the university

The curriculum presented in the next section needs to be understood within the particular constraints of the context for which is designed: specifically, the fact that not all the students will need to write in English once they enter their degree programmes. Teaching science students who need written English skills for their disciplines and arts students who don't together reflects Lea and Street's criticism of the one size fits all approach as the English writing needs of the two groups are quite distinct. This is reflected in the teachers' lacked sensitivity to (some) students' actual needs and interest in writing in English, and probably shows the same lack of consideration and differentiation found at the meso and macro levels, who perceive no difference in students' needs or see them as individuals with different aims or programmes. Neither should teaching arts students English be seen only as hurdle for them to jump. They too deserve a voice and input into their teaching and learning, which may serve them after their academic education.

Street (1984) rejects the one size fits all course, and that different academic courses have their own end purposes for using English. Applying AL concepts to the ELI in the SA context, there could then clearly be two different PYP programmes:

1. **General English teaching:** for those students who will not be studying through English but only have to pass an English exam for university entrance;
2. **English for Academic purposes (EAP) and linked to AL:** with an academic focus for those who are going on to use English in their studies, so it should link through to their degree courses.

There is a strong argument that AL can have value in all areas of learning, so the suggested curriculum attempts to show that all the students (groups 1 and 2) could benefit from aspects of the underlying AL principles. The curriculum for all students is underpinned by the AL philosophy of learning in a social context of equality so that all students have a voice, so aims to provide all the students with the necessary competences to express themselves in writing in English in various genres as befit their needs, be they emails, memos, shopping lists, diaries, notes of good wishes or condolence, recipes, orders and requests so on with awareness of both formal and informal terms of address.

I adapted the curriculum to suit the learning needs of both groups (1 and 2). Group 1 only need English for university access, not for study purposes, while students from group 2 need to study through English, in particular to be able to write assignments in English. The English language courses offered in ELI are general, intended to cover all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) up to intermediate level, so skills are integrated, with no separate syllabus for writing. In the best of all possible worlds, the different English needs of each group would be served best if they were taught in separate classes, with group 1 taught general English and group 2 taught Academic English to respond to their subsequent study needs through English. In practical terms, however, this might not be possible and they might have to be taught as a single group, This is a dilemma for the curriculum designer - to produce a course of study which foregrounds writing as a key production skill for academic study for group 2, yet does not overburden those with no English study needs in group 1. However, what both groups have in common is they will both continue on to

academic study and therefore need to use similar skills, whether in English or in Arabic. With this in mind, the curriculum offered focuses on practicing the skills that lead on to students' independent writing with more focus on co-operative learning, which can benefit both groups in their academic studies more than the type of general English course currently offered. If the groups cannot be separated but have to be taught as one or follow one curriculum, the minor modifications of input material and output aims enable this as all the skills and practices identified in the curriculum can benefit both types of student more than a general English curriculum. While the ultimate needs students from group1 and group 2 have for writing in English are not the same, the underlying academic skills they will draw upon (irrespective of language used) are similar. For this reason I propose that general English students could also learn useful skills in their English classes for their future courses rather than learn English only as a university English requirement, which does not motivate them. It would also give them a voice in the EFL class. The attempt here is to maintain the concept of social equality and treat students from each group equally, not favour one above the other. Although they have different writing needs, they have similar academic skill needs and the same social rights to express themselves in the classroom so the curriculum attempts to reflect this, by for example, setting tasks that value all students' input and involve practical and useful skill practice.

I suggest that taking the underlying AL principles and academic practices as common to all subject areas therefore important for both groups, which is a much stronger synthesis and has a clearer idea of progress. It requires teachers to find minimal and/or easily accessible stimuli so writing does not depend on reading, much more on discussion (AL). As many of the processes are useful to group 1 as well, they can be involved in most processes. The report is focused on as it is much more used in science etc. and has clearer sub-areas than essays, but they can also be applied to essays at a later stage in the course.

The current level of understanding (or lack thereof) of group 2 students' disciplinary writing needs have to be addressed. There are, however, practical considerations like the current level of the students' communicative/linguistic skills in English, as science students, in particular, will have to use English in their degree subjects, while arts

students will not continue writing in English on their courses, so their immediate needs are more limited

This study suggests that teachers can help students develop more fruitfully by finding out what knowledge they already have and then build on that. In this sense, needs analysis is a useful technique to provide tutors with insights concerning students' current level of language proficiency (Shing and Sim, 2011) and the proficiency they need for their future purposes. This means finding out about the students as individuals – asking them questions or for their views. This could be done at the beginning of the course through a questionnaire as to determine general experience, views and needs, with the addition of short individual interviews by teachers to determine individual needs. If part of the interviews were in English, this would also help teachers assess the students' spoken English skills. The responses could provide a framework for a curriculum targeted more at students' needs rather than external textbook goals (Hyland, 2006; Shing and Sim, 2011). The responses could well suggest the need to adjust and modify teacher education to support them in delivering a new needs related curriculum rather than interpreting a prescriptive textbook.

This development also highlights the role of the meso level in promoting in-service teacher training to support the re-orientation of ingrained views. This could be achieved through arranging useful workshops, seminars and in-service training. However, a possible challenge might be the number of teachers required with the necessary expertise to carry out the training, which might require the training of trainers or the recruitment of trainers from outside the country. This kind of challenge is common in contexts where change is being suggested (Bridges and Mitchell, 2000; Kennedy, 1988; Wedell, 2003). Creating temporary solutions to temporary challenges is often needed to make the change work (Bridges and Mitchell, 2000; Wedell, 2003).

Employing key, highly experienced teachers to lead, guide and motivate their colleagues and help from teachers well-versed in EFL/EAP methodology and practice would provide a strong basis to support the innovation. However, managing change usually involves teachers learning and using new skills, which has implications for how they manage their time, in particular, their ability to prioritise. This can be difficult for those who have simply followed a set of prescriptive rules in the past, with little space or encouragement for their input. How teachers perceive their role,

the implications of change and their relationship with colleagues and superiors all have to be taken into account, in particular, managers and those who are managed, to ensure they share a common vision (Bennett et al., 1992).

8.6.2 The synthesis of Academic Literacies, EAP and general English teaching for curriculum development

The present research has clearly demonstrated the hierarchical environment in which the teaching of writing in the ELI takes place and how this inhibits the various actors at each level. This section presents a curriculum model for a potential course for the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) for the ELI. In this curriculum, Academic Literacies key principles have been adapted to underpin the present context alongside ideas from EAP and basic general English needs. The main aims of the proposed curriculum are: a) to give students a voice and encourage the co-construction of learning; b) to write for different purposes and audiences, and manage a variety of writing genres; c) to learn the basic language elements such as grammar and vocabulary within a communicative, social, purposeful context - i.e. to write for a particular audience and purpose, including collaboratively as well as individually. The curriculum is based on the findings from the research, particularly those at the micro level, from the students in particular, as well as teachers regarding how far the present curriculum addresses the students writing needs, especially those going on to study science subjects through the medium of English.

8.6.2.1 Objectives

The overall objective of the proposed curriculum shown in the table below is to help all students learn in a co-operative and negotiated atmosphere of mutual support, following AL principles, and to help students from group 2 to acquire university-level academic writing skills, following Academic English practices.

8.6.2.2 Main curriculum areas: the synthesis of Academic Literacies, EAP and general English teaching precepts

Table 8. 1: Main writing curriculum areas

#	Academic Literacies model	EAP	General English
Aims	To give students a voice	To write for different purposes, and audiences and manage a variety of writing genre	To learn the basic language elements such as grammar and vocabulary and to write for

			an audience and purpose.
Main areas for all students	Learn by doing, taking responsibility for different areas and acting: a) Give students a voice, more autonomy and responsibility for learning - at their own pace - solving problems, asking for help for specific issues they encounter. B) Elicit feedback from students – talk to students c) The communicative and social aspects of writing (Identify purpose and audience).	1-The process of writing – planning, organizing, presenting, rewriting and proof- reading 2-Writing different text types - genre related to students' field such as reports, reviews of research, how to summarise, write arguments, compare contrast and, inform all of which can be aspects of a particular piece or genre of writing.	Focus on language elements such as grammar, vocabulary and punctuation needed to write in different practical genres for different purposes to different people – write to a famous person for their autograph, for instance. Encourage joint exchange of ideas, collective writing. proof –reading each others' work, even writing letters to other class members, all to identify individual needs like vocabulary and structure in order to express themselves. Teacher facilitates these processes.

8.6.2.3 Curriculum plan

The table 8.2 below demonstrates the links between theory and practice. It suggests a curriculum that could support the learning needs of students from both group1 and group 2; group 1 (with more general English needs) and group 2 (with an academic focus). It also suggests how adaptations could be made to support each group's needs in the situation where both groups have to be taught together, not according to their different future needs. The synthesis of Academic Literacies, EAP and general English aims to identify more useful and salient learning for both groups, with a clearer vision of the appropriate skill and competency development goals benefiting both groups' future studies.

Table 8. 2: Curriculum plan

Aims	Material/inputs	Procedures	Comment
Groups 1 and 2 lay basic framework for co-operative work Encourage student input to learning, encourage, especially writing process including learning of general English as students. Familiarize students	1-Simple picture prompts at first to avoid a lot of time spent on text explanation 2-Student reports	Group/pair discussion of prompts in a goal-oriented way and purpose (sell description / product to other groups, individual inputs valued, written production after oral discussion: a) technical - description of image, purpose, use,	Lays ground work for learning within social/cooperative framework and introduces writing more useful for general as well as EAP purposes. Students become aware of English for their purposes

with academic and formal processes, as well as general English needs Ensures that teacher targets real concerns of students, responds to real needs		advantages group writing; b) individual reports after 'selling' to other groups of what happened and what could be done better in future. Reports exchanged within groups to a) proof-read; b) evaluate make suggestions.	Integrating skills, links between speaking and writing (both productive) and AL principles, e.g. they evaluate each other's work as social equals
Gives practice in writing (groups 1 and 2) based on clear aims, cognitive thinking skills Specific genre writing for all students, understanding some academic requirements whether in Arabic or English. Teacher monitors, facilitates, responds to needs identified by students in class discussion before writing, collects common problems for whole class teaching before writing	3-Reports with specifications and claims e.g. adverts or specification for use of hairdryers and make - up. (can be in Arabic)	Group discussion/ evaluation of product claims (real product could be brought into classroom).	Allows focus on discussion (AL) informs and gives practice in common genres (groups 1 and 2 can be taught together with different,, task – based inputs to encourage the critical thinking needed for academic study.
Give experience of relevant academic genre. Student write through samples (ideally models of excellence) to give an idea of academic writing expectations.	4-Student writing from academic areas (anonymous and marks erased) – groups 1 and 2	Proof reading and assessment for accuracy in terms of English use and honest description of product. Students read together and discuss grammar, vocabulary as well as content. Evaluate in terms of writing objectives and how far achieved. Give a mark and comment.	Introduces academic concepts useful to both groups –(group 1 can read scripts in Arabic). Puts them in the position of assessors to help them understand requirements. Social equals are AL principles
	5- Small project work research to make a report (groups 1 and 2)	Students choose topic – could be information seeking with closed questionnaire or open interview or data based, online sources.	Research can be in Arabic or English but final report in English. Introduces quoting, citation and referencing.

Although innovation has become a significant feature of English Language Education (ELE) (Carter and Nunan, 2001), it may not be easily accomplished or

straightforward in every community. Therefore, this proposed innovation is ambitious and needs to be considered in light of the large size of the ELI and the possible resistance expected in a rigid, socio-cultural context such as that of Saudi Arabia (Hofstede, 2011). The culture and hierarchy of Saudi Arabia, specifically within Saudi Western University, impose a constraining framework on student learning, but it would not be impossible to make simple, concrete changes. Meaningful change management in Saudi Arabia will not be easy, but this thesis' clarification of the needs of students, which are not currently met by either the type of textbook selected or the teaching methods used, provides the foundation for a more forward-looking, goal-oriented and ultimately more successful approach to teaching and learning English in ELI.

On the other hand, there is the danger of stagnation resulting from a lack of any real change, or only lip service to change and development. According to Waters (2009), in order to initiate a beneficial change in both the conception and practice of teaching English, many interim/intermediate steps are necessary. Fullan (2001) also argues that the education innovation management process consists of three broad phases. Firstly, *adoption or mobilization* refers to the process in general and the decision to adopt a change. Secondly, *the implementation of the innovation* is about the first experiences of putting the idea into practice. Finally, its *institutionalization* includes whether the change develops into an on-going part of the system or fades away. Therefore, in order to initiate this innovation within the ELI, the proposed curriculum needs to be adopted and implemented in the (PYP) in the ELI and the monitored, evaluated and refined so that it develops into an on-going learning system in ELI. Monitoring by the meso level and key practising teachers is necessary to ensure that interpretation and details of the change are planned and executed wisely, and time lines for all the modifications are established and clearly understood by both teachers and administrators, ideally published for discussion in an easily accessible form for all involved. There is a need for teachers who are in charge of delivering every detail of the innovation to have a clear plan illustrating the changes to be put in place as aims, but to which they can also contribute and modify from their experience of their implementation use. The importance of the micro level input and contributions to the details of innovation must be recognised and welcomed.

Furthermore, the concept of the role of the teacher, which in SA in general, and ELI in particular, seems to be as a kind of interpreter of the text book/socio-cultural requirements (Hall, 2011) rather than a facilitator with ability to draw out/develop the students' potential by using her knowledge of the students' needs and her professional experience and judgement. The teacher could be more a facilitator and support when students need help and ask for it. However, a number of teachers may resist the change in their role as most have been using teacher- dominated procedures in a traditional way for several years. Helping them to get out of their 'comfort zone' may require re-training them, which takes time (rather than simply providing them with information, as, in the current situation). This would also require on-going support from the meso level to help teachers adapt to their new role through articulating new behaviours and attitudes to make the changes work. Leaders of transition have to define the attitudes and skills that such a change must have and offer the necessary resources and training to promote them (Bridges and Mitchell, 2000; Kennedy, 1988).

8.6.3 The role of a compulsory textbook

This section discusses the role of a compulsory textbook in a programme like that of the ELI and the extent to which there is both a need for and scope for a greater degree of agency among actors at the micro-level of the hierarchy.

ELI seems to lack any concern for having a more appropriately designed curriculum – designed *in house* - to suit the size of the ELI programme and foundation students' academic needs, especially for writing, since this research has identified the gap between the teaching of writing and what different students' needs actually are in order to participate fully in their academic studies. The text book *New Headway Plus, Special Edition,* and its writing topics and teaching practices have the approval of the upper administrative level of the university (and the macro level), mainly influenced by Saudi cultural and religious norms, which are seen as the overarching framework. It is important to point out that these can be maintained not by using externally produced textbooks (how much Saudi input did they have and do they just claim to be appropriate for use in the Arabic-speaking world and has anyone investigated this claim) but by calling on local Saudi expertise, people who live in the culture and know how it works.

It is important to note that small changes have already started at the ELI since the fieldwork was carried out. The institution currently uses "*English Unlimited Special Edition"* (EUSE) instruction material (ELI, 2018). EUSE is a CEFR goal-based course designed to help Arabic–speaking learners use English for global communication purposes. The set of four textbooks take learners from Beginner Level (A1) to Intermediate (B1+) level in the Preparatory Year. Each level of study has its own textbook from the above series: ELI 101- Beginner (A1), ELI 102 - Elementary (A2), ELI 103 pre-intermediate (B1) and Intermediate ELI 104 (B+). ELI seems to have switched from reliance on one single textbook, *'New Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide'* to rely on another single textbook series '*English Unlimited Special Edition'* (EUSE) without any other inputs, in the same way as in the past. The new textbook is particularly useful for the international classroom and oriented towards international business communication rather than studying through English at university level. However, the thinking behind the decision-making process does not seem to have changed. It is not clear what the expectations of the new textbook are or on what basis the text book was selected in the first place. It may be a good course; it may do what the old one did, but in a better, but it was not written as a pre-study through English course. It seems to be another *one size fits all* solution of convenience and control, albeit a possibly somewhat better choice. This development is change without innovation (West and Farr, 1990).

It is important to point out that an authority external to Saudi Arabia, that is a publisher and authors, is effectively allowed to determine what goes on in the ELI classroom. The latter's concerns are financial as much as pedagogical, and the course writers have not met or researched the students in ELI (maybe not even in Saudi Arabia) to discover their needs. Graves (2000) argues that ready-made textbooks may not meet the students' needs and interests because textbooks are written for global markets, not specific contexts like ELI. This could seem like an abrogation of responsibility by ELI and Saudi Western, as the main reason for the seeming power of and adherence to the text book is that it was written for use in Arabic-speaking Muslim countries (even possibly following Hofstede's guidelines for understanding Saudi Arabia's socio- cultural profile). This in itself is a generalisation, a homogeneous assumption, taking no account of country or regional identities within the Arab world, let alone those of different students and Saudi Western itself.

This might suggest an agreement between Arab governments and certain publishers who might be asked or had proposed to develop a series of *safe* or uncontroversial English textbooks to address the Arab world. These books seem to promote the minimum of English culture or English in context in order to protect eastern cultural values. This suggests that it might not be easy to initiate any change regarding teaching and learning practices in the present context (Hofstede, 2011), but if these were more related to areas of everyday life (as suggested) by Saudis themselves, then socio-cultural- religious values could still be maintained, although this might require setting out a curriculum and syllabus for MOE approval, which requires a working-party to establish the basics.

The most important feature of the synthesized curriculum with its AL philosophical basis and including relevant features of EAP and general English proficiency is its adaptability. It aims to respond to students' learning needs in both group1 and group 2, and offers the flexibility necessary to respond to practical issues like students from groups 1 and 2 being taught separately or together in homogenous groups. From the point of view of staff, the curriculum has a common principle regarding the kind of teaching activities stipulated, with some differences in the input for each group, so if a teacher has to teach different classes or a mixed class with both types of student, this should not be too taxing. The suggested curriculum presented here takes student needs as its starting point, so they contribute to the input of lessons, through discussion and sometimes selecting examples of pictures or text (e.g. advertisements) or topics that interest or are relevant to them. It also does this by providing practice in the baseline skills students from both groups will need (like research skills, selecting information, focusing, making comparison tables and so on) which lead on to writing in English outcomes in the classroom, with some different outputs according to group, but where the learning processes are the same, so that they, if necessary, can be taught together. In other words, it aims for both groups to learn in an atmosphere of social equality where they can express their views in areas that interest them, either by their topic of by their genre.

8.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the role of the English Language Institute as a bridge between the English language proficiency of students on arrival at ELI and the requirements of

their studies or university entrance. It also investigated the extent to which the Academic Literacies approach could be applicable, and if so, to what extent in the current context. It highlighted the usefulness of synthesising the theoretical views of the Academic Literacies approach and taking useful practical knowledge from EAP and some general English concepts in order to promote more useful writing practices. The chapter also pointed out that a course curriculum and textbook have quite different objectives and should have a different instructional base. The textbook makes assumptions about general language goals independent of any specific learners, while the curriculum is part of a body of learning in a particular subject area created by experts in a specific situation according to the needs of particular students and institutional requirements. Finally, it presented a number of important recommendations.

Chapter Nine– Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions of my investigation. It provides a summary of the study and key findings. I also reflect on my journey and show how the focus and methods developed to allow me to better understand student writing practices in higher education. It then presents the contributions to knowledge within the field and the basis it offers for further studies in the Arab world. This chapter will also consider the limitations of this research, providing recommendations for further work in the area. Finally, it outlines the pedagogical and empirical implications of the study and presents my reflections on this work.

9.2 Summary of the study's key findings

In this thesis, I investigated student writing at university level. The theoretical framework of the ethnographic study is the Academic Literacies critique of the Study Skills approach as a construct, while the methodological framework is drawn from Linguistic Ethnography and Bakhtin's concept of the voice of the other in the utterances of individuals, where relevant. The participants were actors at different levels of the educational hierarchy so were investigated at three levels (macro, meso, and micro) to consider the relationships of authority and power that surrounded the student writing in higher education investigation.

The data were derived from three primary sources: interviews, classroom observation, documentary sources including institutional documents and student's written essay. The research questions were directed at the different hierarchical actors to reflect their roles in response to the overarching research question.

- (Micro level): What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English language institute in Saudi Western University?
- (Meso level): What role does the English language Institute play in framing student writing practices?
- (Macro level): What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role for supporting student writing in higher education?

- To what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context?

During the analysis process, I used Nvivo with all the data to identify the key categories suggested by Academic Literacies, like the prescriptive non-social or negotiated, single genre, the supposed transferability of skills, and the focus on grammatical accuracy rather than meaning in the teaching and learning of writing, as attributed to the Study Skills approach by Academic Literacies. Although Academic Literacies provided the general lens and conceptual principles for how undergraduate writing in English should be developed as a social and contextualised activity, which I used to consider procedures in Saudi Arabia, it offered no practical ideas on how to understand the current situation in detail or set achievable new goals in practical terms. For instance, it offers no rigorous way of understanding the status quo, except in very general terms of what is referred to and critiqued as the *Study Skills approach.*

After the initial NVivo categories had been established to identify the key concepts to investigate, I realised the need for further analytical tools to interpret and understand the data more fully. Linguistic Ethnography - which had already framed the methodology for considering 3 hierarchical levels of actors contributing to the situation of writing in English - also offered a way of analysing my interview data, what I observed in the classroom, the documentary evidence, and student's written essays from its aim to give voice to all levels (or identify the lack of voice) not just the voice from the top of the hierarchy as seen in official institution documents and some of the spoken discourse in the interviews.

Furthermore, Bakhtin's concept of the institutional voice within the utterances of the various hierarchical levels helped show how far individual views are conditioned by the context of the official views and also how far they are contested - in my research, mainly by the students. This was probably due to the fact that the discourse for me, as a researcher, was easier and more natural with them. It is likely that the meso and macro levels were - or saw themselves as - the mouthpieces of the authorities, and my interaction with them as a researcher was also conditioned by my relatively lower status as a teacher/researcher and woman, which made it difficult for me to take full

control. However, the most valuable inputs for the future probably came from the students. How to progress these requires a change in attitude higher up. Hofstede's cultural analyses of countries used to investigate in greater depth the data, hierarchy and relationships, illuminated the power distance in Saudi society and the acceptance of power residing at the top of the hierarchy; however, although the students had little power, they certainly had ideas about how to make improvements.

The Ethnographic study's overarching question concerning the aims and purposes of teaching writing in English at tertiary level was investigated through the three sub-questions put to actors at different levels of the hierarchy, and produced some interesting responses. The three previous chapters presented the results and analysis of the findings regarding student writing practices in higher education in Saudi Western University. Chapter 5 examined students' and teachers' assumptions about student writing, their thoughts about essay topics and assessment and teacher feedback on students' written essays, which demonstrated the relationship of power and authority invested in the teachers through the construction of the official texts and those required from students. The findings point to the gap between the teachers' concepts of writing in higher education - which largely excluded student needs - and the students' understanding of what is involved in student writing at university level and what they need to be able to do to successfully complete their studies.

Chapter 6 described the role of the institution in defining student writing processes and the curriculum at university level. The findings confirm that writing processes and development in higher education are institutional matters rather than related to the writing needs of students in the ELI or indeed the writing skills in English they may need in their subsequent academic courses. It can be seen that writing practices in higher education are embedded in and controlled by institutional relationships of authority and power.

Chapter 7 discussed the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in promoting student writing in the university. The findings uncovered the power hierarchy governing learning/teaching writing in the university. The present study makes a useful contribution to the understanding of the organisational structure, background, tensions and cultural/hierarchical constraints on student writing practices in higher education in the Saudi EFL context.

Chapter 8 discussed the role of the English Language Institute. It also investigated in what way the Academic Literacies approach is or could be applied to the Saudi Western and broader Saudi Arabian cultural context. The present study highlighted the need to synthesis the theoretical views of the Academic Literacies with practical experience from EAP in order to promote more useful writing practices in the ELI.

Furthermore, the PhD experience has widened my understanding of how English writing practices at classroom level are built upon cultural beliefs and are situated within the wider context of the institution and country, hence the development of individuals (at the micro-level) is largely ignored. I discovered that writing education was even more entrenched within the expected behavioural patterns of Saudi culture than I had anticipated, and that this entrenchment inhibits and constrains the development of writing skills in higher education. This chapter will focus on presenting the main findings and their contribution to knowledge.

9.2.1 What does academic writing mean to the teaching staff and students of the English language institute in Saudi Western University?

This research examined teachers' and students' views and understandings of writing practices. The first striking finding is teachers reported that students seemed to lack a set of basic writing skills. The results of this study seem to confirm results from previous studies (e.g. Al-Khairy, 2013; Grami, 2010; Hujailan , 2004) which found that Saudi students demonstrated poor language proficiency and had limited writing experience. Teachers in the current study, however, reported that the school system in Saudi Arabia is the key reason for student's learning gaps when they come to higher education. On the other hand, the students in the study presented their own view of the problems with writing they experienced in their preparatory course within higher education. The students reported that, in their view, being able to use the appropriate grammatical rules and vocabulary were not enough to enable them to write successfully in higher education.

The second key finding was the gap between the teacher's views of writing in English in higher education and the student's understanding of what is involved in student writing in higher education and what they needed (see chapter 5, section 5.2.3). The teachers tended to perceive writing practice as technical practice, essential

for limited writing goals like passing exams in the university. They dealt with writing in English as the ability to manipulate surface language structures, such as grammar and spelling in mainly relatively banal - rather than academic contexts - accurately, with no consideration of meaning-making or creativity in message-making for a reader. In other words, they saw no communicative purpose in the student's writing; the sole purpose was to demonstrate abstract knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The approach aimed to fix students' language problems (referred to disparagingly as the *Study Skills approach* by Lea and Street) as discussed in the literature review (Creaton, 2008; Street, 2010). Accuracy is easy to assess and apply as a general criterion to a cohort of students; it requires little effort compared to assessing attempts at communication, which are both more fluid - not fixed - and individual, which are more difficult for teachers to assess.

The findings, however, illustrated that overall, students often felt confused and unsure about what they thought constituted a good piece of writing and that their own writing challenges lay in interpreting and understanding how to start writing at tertiary level. What may constitute a good piece of student writing in higher education has more to do with issues of social meaning-making, contested argument, rather than with surface language features, and the students were mainly aware of this. The findings of the present study are not in line with previous studies like Grami's (2010), with their emphasis on language elements, such as grammar, appropriate vocabulary, and punctuation as necessary for Saudi students to write an error-free piece of writing. In this study, the participants also emphasised their needs as writers - the need to cope with different genres, from emails to formal job applications in English - rather than learning writing for limited or no clear purposes except to practice technical skills and accuracy. This finding is in line with studies such as Chanock (2004), Lea and Street (1998), Mitchell (2000), Wingate et al. (2011) who argue that writing knowledge is constructed rather than transferred. This research also considered the interaction between the students (or with their teachers) within the English Language Institute practices through which it would be possible to co-construct knowledge, but there was little evidence of this due to time and syllabus constraints except for purposes of correction (rather than creation). Thus, while providing students with appropriate grammatical rules and vocabulary, this was insufficient to enable them to write successfully in the context investigated. Furthermore, while all levels - micro, meso

and macro - were concerned about students' writing performance, no radical suggestions were forthcoming outside the current framework. Only the students had a more globalised conception of operating within the world - with boundaries outside Saudi Arabia.

The third key finding was that teaching instructions and writing topics seemed to be designed at a higher level in the hierarchical power-based structure, the meso-level. Teachers reported that they did not teach the way they would like to or could, to respond to student needs, and blamed the imposed structures of the ELI or earlier school teaching and learning. There was no flexibility within the teaching programme for teachers to interpret or respond to student needs.

The culture seemed to take precedence over all, so that not only were topics restricted, but so was the modus operandi of instruction. Indeed, the top of the hierarchy controlled the lower levels with no room for individuality or dynamic response. The results of this study seem to confirm previous studies' results like Hall's (2011) which found that teachers in the Saudi education system are not free to select how to teach writing in higher education; they are bound by institutional policy. Thus, one can conclude that while the findings show awareness of student problems and the imbalance of power, bearing in mind the ideals of Academic Literacies (in principle as their practical applications are challenged in this context) might lead to a better philosophy or conceptualisation of how to improve student writing practices.

The Academic Literacies' view suggests that the writing process is mainly contested by the implicit assumptions of students and teachers regarding what is considered to be valid knowledge (Lea and Street, 1998; Street, 2010). The relationship of power and authority occurs around the negotiation of these assumptions, which should take place in the classroom - based on equality and respect in social terms - between students and teachers (Creaton, 2008). Above all, without this negotiating, and the communicative use of language to transfer thoughts and ideas, language per se has no practical value at all. Writing in any language is no more than marks on paper till its purpose and message is discovered by a reader. Phrases can be accurate - but meaningless. Accuracy does not imply meaning; sentences like *Angry swans consume butterflies on January 9th* or *Most houses like to go for long walks in the dark with their friends, the oak trees, and sing together* - are accurate but not meaningful

communication, in much the same way as decontextualised single sentence exercises are.

9.2.2 What role does the English language Institute play in framing student writing practices?

This study examined the role of the English Language Institute in defining student writing processes and producing the curriculum. The findings of this study offer a broader understanding of the institutional approach to writing practices in the university. The results suggest that writing practices in higher education are defined as an institutional matter and with institutional needs - including ease of administration - rather than a matter for individual participants in the sense of responding to their needs. While Lea and Street (2006) and Street (2010) argue that writing is a social practice situated in the beliefs, power relationships and institutional discourses of the academy, the core social aspect of writing at the micro level is missing from the Saudi context. This means that the institution in the present study takes no account of how the students think of themselves as writers at university, or what students want their future subjects of study to be or how their ELI course should help prepare them.

The results show how the institution outlines the conventions and constraints of student writing as it sees them, or is required to see them, to fit within the overarching socio-cultural philosophy of the country and within the university. The participants in the current study were operating within the conservative and religious nature of the Saudi context and their responses illustrated its influence on writing practices in English at university level. The findings are in line with those of previous studies, (e.g. Elyas, 2008; Grami, 2010; Shah et al., 2013; Yamani, 2000) and confirm that cultural factors were identified as highly influential on student writing practices in the higher education system.

The findings, overall, suggest that all the procedures and regulations for student writing practices are laid down as if the students were a single homogenous group (perhaps similar to how Saudis perceive themselves), with little or no variation or individuality in spite of the different English language goals of Arts and Science students. Everything, from the teaching notes to the examinations and classroom

practice, with no space for divergence, individuality or dynamic response is governed by ELI within the guidelines of the macro level. The study suggests that the institutional relationships of authority and power are rooted in the university - and wider country - system, and in turn, seem to define the process of student writing. In this case, because the framework for teaching and learning writing in English in Saudi Western University is neither contested nor democratic, the principles of Academic Literacies theory seem far removed. Thus, one can infer that the current situation does not seem able to encourage the development of student writing practices in the university.

9.2.3 What does the Ministry of Higher Education see as its role for supporting student writing in higher education?

This study investigated the role of the Ministry of Higher Education in promoting student writing in the university. The two representatives of the macro level considered writing as a neutral technical skill, divorced from readers or communication aims with no social objective. They were aware of the students' poor writing proficiency in higher education. The MoHE representatives clearly located responsibility for problems elsewhere, in individuals - like the students or teachers - and their previous learning experiences. This finding seems to illustrate Lea and Street's definition of the 'deficit' approach to writing and learning that originates from autonomous models of literacy - i.e. the one size fits all approach (Street, 2003a, 2010) both in terms of the students as a homogenous group and their ELF courses, in spite of the student's different final courses of study. Importantly, the theory underpinning this research is that literacies are social practices, situated in certain social and cultural contexts, therefore, the student's academic subject department and literacy should not be divorced from the area within which it is practiced (Street, 1995). This means the way in which teachers and student interact in the classroom should be through social practice, which influences the form of literacy and the knowledge of literacy developed by teachers and students, especially the learners and their identity and their negotiating power to co-construct meaning as part of their personal development.

As discussed previously in the third research question, the qualitative data from the MoHE representatives also demonstrated how far the learning of writing at tertiary level is directed by the Ministry of Higher Education. Overall, participants at all levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro) showed their acceptance of being in thrall to a higher authority which they have to support - even the top level - which actually really does govern everything according to the cultural and customs agenda. The cultural and traditional norms have such a strong hold on institutions that they have hindered them from performing at their best, at all levels, or developing new strategies. They seem to guide the norms, practices and learning materials. These findings are in line with the Academic Literacies argument that writing is a social practice (in this case the social and cultural norms of Saudi Western University) situated within the institutional discourses of the academy and power relationships, and these have an influence on identity (Lea and Street, 2006). According to Boz (2009), difficulties in student writing are an institutional matter rather than an issue of individual failure, so the institutional needs to reflect on its practices. This study also claims that the deficiency in student writing lies in the institutional discourse of the Ministry of Higher Education and university rather than individual student failure - because the students have no options and little room to negotiate in order to co-construct their learning.

The findings presented above indicate the formality of the present system in writing and the top-down down organisation - not only for writing in English but in all academic subjects at tertiary level. There is no evidence of discussion or negotiation or shared experience between the different levels of the hierarchy, which illustrates the limited if not almost total lack of communication between the different levels except for passing down requirements from the top. Therefore, one can infer from the current research that learning writing in English at university level is not a matter of individual, familiar, but organisational – institutional - culture, which shapes and guides writing practices.

9.2.4 To what extent can the Academic Literacies approach be applied to the ELI context?

One of the contributions of this study is its detailed evidence from observation, interviews, and documentary data of what current practice in writing in English in Saudi Arabia lacks; English as a means of practical communication, rather than an

abstract, static set of knowledge to be memorised for no other purpose than to achieve good exam results. The latter offers no basis for developing writing skills. Using Academic Literacies as a theoretical approach highlighted the distance between the status quo and its conceptualisations, suggesting that intermediate steps for the development of knowledge are required. It is not possible to move from the general English curriculum the ELI delivers, directly to a more AL-inspired type of practice. In one (negative) sense, lack of emphasis on writing in English in the ELI programme accords with Academic Literacies' view that writing should be acquired within the context of the subject of study. What is missing in both the current ELI vision and the AL view is the need for building blocks, an adequate foundation of writing skills (and what these are) in place before an academic subject course begins.

This thesis points out this deficiency at both ends of the AL/ELI spectrum. ELI's detachment from the use and purpose of its students' language acquisition after the ELI courses has lead to the perception that general language ability (at a relatively low level) is sufficient, without reference to the skills needed for study or academic writing. AL assumes that general English writing literacy is already present (within an English mother-tongue context) when students begin their academic subject studies. AL also assumes that students share or have had similar educational experiences – a level playing field - in terms of their general writing skills, which is rarely the case. Study Skills and EAP practitioners would see their role as making sure the playing field is level and that academic excellence is not obstructed by poor communication skills, particularly writing, as writing is the main medium of assessment of academic production.

Therefore, this research suggests that the Academic Literacies model can only operate as an ideal theoretical framework (Lillis and Scott, 2007); a practical model taking account of the EFL context is necessary as the way forward to support students' writing. Such a model needs to incorporate wider forms of writing in English, including experience of different types of written text so learners can handle a range of genres and communicative purposes than largely descriptive essays. In other words, learning more related to academic concepts, incorporating notions from English for Academic Purposes and general English teaching, would be a more

productive basis for students to acquire more specific academic writing literacy in their subject areas later on in their academic careers.

9.3 Contributions to knowledge

The study topic is useful for those who are interested in teaching and learning about writing at tertiary level in the Saudi EFL context and those who share a similar background. The study has provided a number of contributions to the field of teaching and learning writing, which have been presented and discussed. The methodological and analytical framework extended the understanding of the tension between the needs of officialdom and bureaucratic organisations, and those at classroom level for successful learning outcomes. They could be used in similar contexts to tease out the needs of various stakeholders and distinguish between genuine beliefs and the embedded voice of the other in views and beliefs.

9.3.1 Contribution to knowledge: the ideal of interactive experience exchange as a social activity

This research has highlighted the ideal of interactive communication and the equality of voice advocated by Academic Literacies theory in the best of all possible worlds (Street, 2010). In the Saudi context this would need to operate within the organisational structure within the wider context the Ministry of Higher Education (macro level) and the university (meso and micro levels) and would require a ground breaking shift. However, promoting a proactive relationship (with a solid line feeding from the micro level to the higher levels) rather than a passive one to allow communication between the three levels could positively impact on student writing in English in higher education simply because more information would be available.

Figure 9.1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the ideal valued *interactive experience exchange* as a social activity from the concept of Academic Literacies theory. The main mode should be spoken communication with equal access or at least representation at all levels (macro, meso, micro) equal input and ideally, in a neutral and friendly environment in a social - not formal - atmosphere and with an agenda all parties can prepare in order to participate in it. Figure 8.1 below shows the ideal interactive information exchange experienced as a social activity between the three levels (macro, meso, micro). There are also four vertical lines running between the

three levels – two on the right hand side and two on the left hand side. While the tertiary delivery top down arrows are on the right hand side, the feedback bottom up arrows are on the left. They show all the top down and bottom up communication flows between the three levels (micro, meso, macro) to offer opportunities to all levels to listen to each other, learn from each other, to value and to communicate with each other.

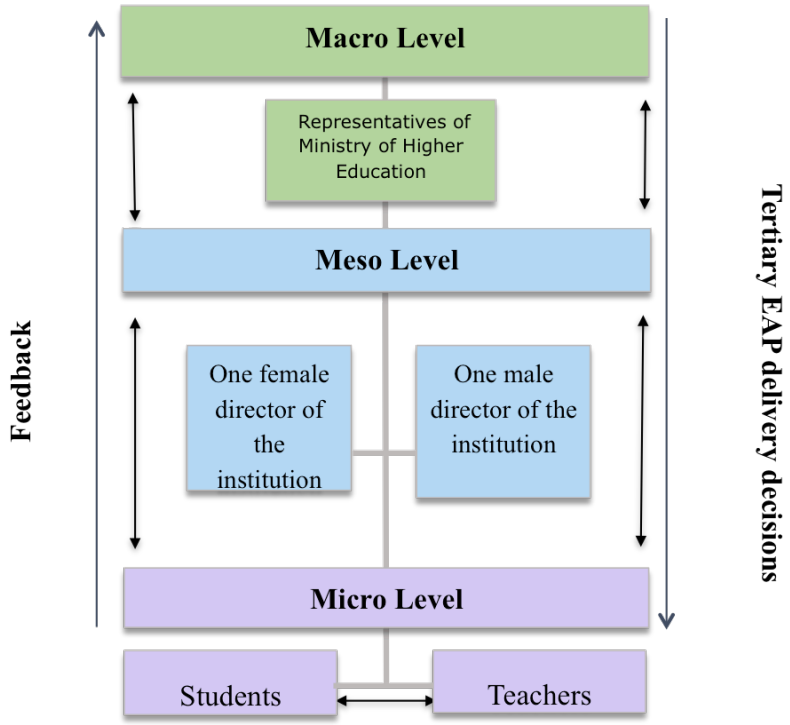


Figure 9. 1: The ideal interactive experience exchange

As can be seen from the figure above, ideally, teachers should have the opportunity to access the macro level - through representation a regular meetings or visits from MoHE personnel to the university on occasion, the top of the hierarchy directly without having to go through the meso level (the directors). This could be achieved through emails, surveys or feedback modes, and would provide valuable insights and information to the upper levels. Students could provide end of module course feedback forms, as is common practice in UK universities. This model also needs to include a horizontal arrow for communication between the teachers and students, perceived to be at the same social level, as Academic Literacies ideals suggest. A similar model needs to replace the current highly discrete levels of the hierarchical system if change and development are to come about. It is difficult to see how the

current situation can progress and move on without a great deal more information exchange. This spoken/discussion mode (rather than written dictates) has more potential for improving the teaching/learning of writing in English than the current system.

One important aspect of the Academic Literacies theory is the term *co-construction of knowledge*, for example, the constructing of the curriculum could then consider student needs as perceived by students and all levels of staff (micro level) and through teachers observing other's lessons and exchanging information, sharing and evaluating the experience of how well particular methods used in lessons went. Furthermore, to start the process of preparation for writing by sharing ideas and experience, students could be given the opportunity to discuss various topics related to their academic subjects or more general topics related to current events, historical themes, and economic issues in the English class. The English classroom should be a microcosm of the world, not separated from the world, if learning is to be effective in the real world. Students could work co-operatively, interactively, as active actors in academia, agents of change, as the Academic Literacies view suggests.

9.3.2 Contributions to the field of teaching and learning

As far as I am aware there has been no research in the field of Academic Literacies in EFL contexts, such as the Middle East/Arab world (e.g. Ivanic, 2004; Lea and Street, 2006; Lillis and Scott, 2007). Translating the contribution of these studies to the Middle East/Arab context is difficult because English is a foreign language, not the mother tongue as is the case in most Academic Literacies research. The originality, therefore, of the study is the context in which it was conducted at Saudi Western University. Although the Academic Literacies approach assumes control of basic language skills and this is not the case in the researched EFL context, it is still a useful framework for highlighting gaps in the conceptualising of what writing as literacy is perceived to be in the EFL/ESL context, the relationship between students and their teachers and their subject disciplines, attitudes to the co-construction of knowledge and students' input, and the social aspect of communication (Lea and Street, 1998). The research suggests encouraging course constructors (albeit with elements of a skills approach in the foreign language context) to adopt an approach more akin to Academic Literacies could produce more dynamic and focused

classroom teaching and learning as well as be a useful benchmark for further investigation and understanding of the actual teaching and learning practices and the detrimental effect of the inequality of relationships and how this might be remedied. This research has suggested that the Academic Literacies model is an idealised theoretical framework for highlighting the approach to teaching writing in an English-speaking university context. However, a model more related to the EFL context is required as a practical model for promoting student writing, which might include more communicative learning reflecting the students' reality; for instance, email and text messaging and aspects of study support or study short cuts to help learners manage a wider range of genres and communicative purposes like reports, curriculum vitae, application letters, not only essays.

This study is also different from most EFL research and studies which either looked at writing in English as a problem located within the students themselves (e.g. Al-Fadda, 2012; Grami, 2010) - a student deficit approach - or related the problems to teaching approaches, curriculums and traditional methods (e.g. Al-Khairy, 2013; Khan, 2011), also deficit approaches, requiring adjustments within the current system or philosophy. None considered writing as a complex and contested process within a relationship of authority and power. Consequently, up to now, the contested nature of academic writing, the conflicting relationships of power and authority which surround the process of student writing in the university (Lea and Street, 1998) have not been thrown into relief. This study argues that the power relations in the Saudi EFL context in general, and particularly in the investigated institution, are socially unequal within the current culture of education and wider culture and tradition and this inhibits learning progress.

This study also claims any shortcomings in student writing fall within the confines of the institutional discourse of the Ministry of Higher Education and university rather than individual student failure. Therefore, adjustment has to come from the institutional framework for student's writing in English to improve. For example, students revealed that teaching practices did not appear to support the writing skills necessary for higher education. They were aware that being able to use the appropriate grammatical rules and vocabulary were not enough to enable them to write successfully in higher education. On the other hand, teachers did not have the

flexibility to select what to teach, which influenced their responses to student needs and thus their impact on teaching and learning.

This study suggests the interactive communication of ideas and equality of voice in line with Academic Literacies theory applied to the overall cultural organisation within the three levels (macro, meso, micro) could promote better teaching/learning of writing in English practices and improve satisfaction with the entire education system at all levels of society without transgressing cultural traditions in terms of topic content, but only change top-down behaviour. The study suggests many advantages of creating an 'ideal interactive experience exchange' as a social activity conceptualised by Academic Literacies theory and operated within the organisational structure; for instance, the social experience of co-constructing the curriculum and teachers exchanging ideas and experience of successful lessons. Indeed, learning has to continue within the organisation itself at all levels and those responsible for delivering education can consult not only books or academia but their own teaching experience and the students themselves. This could promote a proactive relationship rather than a passive one and allow communication between the three levels to positively impact on student writing in English in higher education. The culture and hierarchy limits the students 'writing experience not only by the reliance on a single text book but by its limited aims and accepted standards, which give Saudi students a comparative disadvantage with non-native English speaker students in the rest of the world.

9.4 Limitations of the study

I made my best efforts to ensure the quality of the present research but there are a number of unavoidable limitations regarding several features of the study. These limitations are discussed before presenting the pedagogical implications for teaching/learning writing in English.

Firstly, the study was carried out in Saudi Western University, therefore, the results are not generalisable to further contexts, inside or outside Saudi Arabia; the results might have been more informative if research had been conducted in more than one university in Saudi Arabia. This would have allowed me to broaden the scope of the research and to collect more qualitative data. As a result, more robust findings could have been possible.

It is also important to point out that the intention of the research was to view how writing in English is handled at tertiary level through the lens of Academic Literacies, and thus was always to be a qualitative, not quantitative study. However, a general feature, which also influences other educational contexts and to be borne in mind in other Saudi EFL contexts, is the very strong influence and impact the conservative Saudi culture has on all things temporal as well as spiritual. How to initiate educational change within this restrictive framework or whether this is possible, is a topic for future research.

Secondly, although the study presented interesting findings about what student writing meant to the staff and students of the investigated institution, these were totally based on the interpretations of a small group of female teachers and students. The main justifications for not including male views in this study are re-stated here. The reason is linked to the religious and cultural values that boys and girls have to be segregated at all educational levels including tertiary level (Alamri, 2011). The education system in Saudi Arabia is gender-segregated for social reasons. For instance, female and male students are taught in separate buildings in Saudi Western University by tutors of their own sex. The education system itself restricts the learning experiences of both sexes by forbidding male/female interaction, so limiting the opportunities for discussion and shared experiences and social interaction as part of the cultural norm.

As discussed before, the findings are limited and restricted to female experiences with the exception of the male director at the meso level and the two male representatives at the macro levels, who influence the experiences of female teachers and students. However, male teachers and students who engage in writing in English at tertiary level may have a different experience of student writing. Therefore, a comparative study of the male micro experience (meso, macro) would have provided more informative and stronger findings if the study had involved both male and female interpretations and a male as well as a female researcher. Indeed, I cannot be sure that the present findings such as teachers views of student writing (see chapter 5, section 5.4) would also be the male teachers views and experience.

Thirdly, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, the interviews are one of the primary data sources in the study. An interesting aspect was the relationship between

the interviewer and interviewees within the hierarchical structure - namely, the macro, meso, and micro levels. For instance, it seems the students revealed their feelings more freely, with examples, in their interviews, and seemed comfortable with sharing their views with me, while the teachers were less open. The meso and macro levels comments suggested they were less familiar with the situation and their responses and attitude to me seemed to suggest less empathy for me, in my role as a researcher looking for data. The reason for their attitudes could be their positions in the hierarchy, which seem to influence their attitudes and responses during the interviews. This could have prevented them from contributing any personal views that might damage their positions or show lack of solidarity, and their responses could indicate the Bakhtinian concept of the *institutional voice* rather than their personal voice in much of their discourse. If the participants had been better acquainted and familiar with the interviewer - at the same level of the hierarchy - the views expressed in the interviews might have been more personal than those obtained.

Therefore, as a researcher, it was easier and more natural for me to deal with the students' discourses at the micro level, presumably because I had no authority and actively sought their views. However, the most valuable inputs for the future in any case probably come from the students who have actually experienced the learning of writing in English, but making progress requires a change in attitude higher up. It is likely the meso and macro levels were the messengers of the authorities, and my interaction with them as a researcher was also conditioned by my relatively lower status as a teacher/researcher, which made it difficult for me to elicit their personal beliefs. Personal accounts seemed to happen more within the student cohort, for example, but less so with the meso and macro levels. This could be because the students are still in the process of acculturation into the socio-cultural environment of the university, hence can more easily survey what they experienced at school and what they now experience in the writing classes (Mann, 2008). It is important to mention that they were the only ones to actually experience learning to write in English at their schools – comments from other levels (the meso and macro) are merely their guesswork or presumptions based on statistics, not the process of learning development in individual students.

A further aspect of concern is that the researcher and participants are members of the same community. Although the main focus of the research was to examine the teaching and learning of writing in English at the tertiary level from the participants' perspectives, my personal learning and teaching experience in higher education in the Saudi EFL context might have influenced the way in which I interpreted the findings. This is due to the fact that I am aware of most of the constraints of the Saudi education system. Therefore, this aspect could be considered a limitation of the work as it could have influenced the direct relationship between the research data and the data analysis. However, my background knowledge of the system facilitated my access of the respondents, which may not have been possible for an outsider.

Finally, my own limitations relate to being female, which reduces my access to certain information, affects the way I present the data - as a monologue with the upper levels and a collection of similar grouped responses in the micro - so that there is no indication of any dialogue going on between me and the interviewees, no sense of interaction, so I limit myself to analysing the content of the responses. This is because I had to show the respondents the data and the monologue (without interviewer interjections) was the acceptable form. However, Linguistic Ethnography can still help here. I am not a neutral researcher, but a product of the system I have to work within, which is gendered and hierarchical, hence colours my data and interpretation. Nevertheless, the actual process of the research has allowed me to view the content not just through an Academic Literacies lens, but through a researcher's more objective lens of the culture she is part of.

9.5 Suggestions for future work

The study was limited to investigating the learning and teaching of writing in the English Language Institute in Saudi Western University, therefore, further studies need to be conducted to expand the scope of this research to sample other English language institutions in universities in the Saudi EFL context to see if they experience similar concerns. This could provide a broader range or more detailed knowledge about student writing practices in higher education in Saudi Arabia.

Because this study is limited to the views of two representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education, it would have been more valuable to conduct the research with more representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education with an interest in this area of the research, if such exist. This would have allowed further understanding of student writing practices from the macro point of view, which, in addition to the meso and micro levels, would be useful for gaining a clearer picture of student writing practices in the higher education system. In addition, bearing in mind the student's interest in writing in English for future work purposes, the views of potential employers or other relevant members of civil society could make an effective counterbalance to the views within Saudi Western University and those of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Further research needs to be conducted in the field of writing in English at tertiary level to understand the status of writing in higher education outside the EFL classroom. The macro level informants claimed there is a lack of scientific evidence concerning the relevance of teaching methods for writing in English in Saudi Arabia. It seems clear that scientific/research evidence in the Saudi context has more clout than the needs of students or the experience of educators. Research is also needed to discover the most up to date approaches to teaching writing in higher education which could positively influence the efficacy of the learning writing experience in the target context.

Finally, the study identified the ambitions of teachers and students who are not happy with the status quo of the Saudi EFL context, and they need support. The present system is far removed from the democratic principles of the Academic Literacies model so there is no framework for students or teachers to give their views or feedback to the higher levels, so this research is important in giving them a voice. Examining writing practices at the tertiary level through the lens of the Academic Literacies approach of valuing individual views and contributions on an equal basis has illustrated the constrictions the social hierarchy places on actors at all levels, but particularly, the lower level. I may therefore suggest this as a rich area for studies in the near future as a means to both suggest and then measure innovations in the teaching of writing.

9.6 Pedagogical implications for teaching English at tertiary level

The study suggests that writing in English in higher education needs to receive much more emphasis than it has been given to date, particularly in an EFL context such as Saudi Arabia. This is because students do not seem to have much opportunity to practice the skill of writing either in Arabic or in English. Students do not seem to be empowered with the proper knowledge and practices to manage writing tasks in higher education for themselves. Therefore, the study suggests a number of pedagogical implications which could change the way in which teaching writing in higher education is delivered.

The present study has influenced and changed my concept and practices of teaching writing in English in higher education. I wish to stimulate the directors, my colleagues and students to discover new teaching/learning practices of writing in English through the Academic Literacies approach. The results from the present research present a number of contributions to promoting the teaching and learning of writing in English at tertiary level, particularly in the investigated institution, and in Saudi Universities in general. This research has revealed new information concerning teaching/learning practices of writing in English that will suggest ways forward for further research. Saudi students as well as students from similar EFL contexts are assumed be able to write in English for their tertiary level studies. This research argues for promoting a writing pedagogy, especially in the higher education sector, which conceptualizes writing as a situated practice rather than just a generic skill. The study also suggests that student writing has to be connected to Academic Literacies ideals alongside the teaching of basic generic language skills and the attributes underpinning each discipline/subject. In most EFL contexts, instruction focuses on the surface features of language and accuracy at the expense of meaning and knowledge production. Therefore, students enrol at university with limited writing skills, so their writing practices need to be promoted at higher education level, and if universities have more to do with issues of social meaning-making, contested argument, rather than with surface language features (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate et al., 2011), this aim can be achieved.

The data gathered from the interviewees in this study also showed that students, in the past, have played a passive role in the Saudi education sector. Most of those interviewed indicated that teachers played the main role in the learning process. Ignoring student's role in teaching/learning writing in English in the Saudi EFL context has left no opportunity for students to co-operatively, interactively write as active agents, as Academic Literacies suggests is the ideal. Indeed, the overemphasis of the teachers' role and ignoring the students' role in the Saudi EFL tertiary sector has had a negative impact on the teaching/learning of writing in English. Therefore, this study argues that in the researched context, where the Academic Literacies model is a novel concept, groundwork is needed for the fruitful implementation of this kind of approach to writing at tertiary level, that is, with writing tasks involving discussion, teamwork and co-operation.

As the Academic Literacies approach did not exist in the investigated context, Saudi Arabia, the study suggests that such an approach is required to address wider issues and concerns, both inside and outside the educational context. The Academic Literacies lens illuminated many insightful concerns. Firstly, it was useful to rethink the teacher's relationship with students, seeing them both as part of a community of mutual interest rather than in a teacher-student power relationship. Interestingly, the findings, in this study, suggest that there are more ambitious teachers and students, dissatisfied with the status quo, but they need more support. A possible way to achieve a more student and discipline-centred approach, as advocated by Academic Literacies theory, is through teachers who empower students by eliciting their views and concerns and teaching them tolerance and respect for the views of others through discussion and decision-making about what and how to write. Teachers have to value their students' experience and contribution to knowledge because students can learn from each other as well as from teachers, who can also learn about the student's views and experience. This concerns attitudes, not just academic knowledge from discussion, and adds to the quality of academic writing from understanding and presenting different view-points - argument - which is at the core of academic writing in many subject areas. When students are valued in the learning process, they will be more confident, autonomous and motivated.

Students could be also asked to keep learner diaries tracing their reflections on the learning process itself and record their impressions or criticisms of lectures, readings, applied practice, questions, thoughts, and problems and the solutions they found. This type of writing makes student writers more active participants, more self-aware and the pathway to writing for a specific reason in a specific context can become clearer. According to Gimenez and Thomas (2015), student writers need to develop their writing skills in order to be accepted as active participants and contributors within their academic disciplines. The study also argues that more time needs to be devoted to the teaching of student writing at university. If class time was dedicated specifically to writing - not just as an add-on to grammar practice - students would also have opportunities to practice writing and to become more effective and creative learners, especially if they work in groups to discuss and argue writing tasks. In other words, writing needs more foregrounding than its current status as an activity only carried out if and when there is time. However, this is not to say that writing should be isolated - it can use reading, discussion and listening inputs to provide topic information for reports, plans/pictures, requests or other written forms designed for readers to respond to, evaluate or comment on. That is, to promote a real dialogue, where opinions can be made, say about the plans for the layout of a house. Limited textbook essay forms prohibit access to these more dynamic modes of teaching and learning.

This study suggests that Saudi Arabia has to consider needs analysis as a key procedure for developing courses, syllabuses and standards for its students instead of depending on general language books (Ur Rahman and Alhaisoni, 2013). Brown (1995) acknowledged that identifying student needs for learning writing in English at higher level study and selecting the appropriate literacy practice creates a strong foundation for establishing the efficiency of the teaching and learning of English. This requires a needs analysis, collecting information from students and their receiving university departments to help develop a curriculum that will meet the language needs of different learners (Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Hyland, 2006) and establish minimum standards of acceptability and the necessary time-frame/teaching hours and group sizes to achieve them. Even, as suggested earlier, replacing the dominance of the essay with factual reports or instructions could widen topic choices without disturbing

cultural norms. The emotional engagement and motivation of the students can come from their choice of subject and the wish to share knowledge.

This study suggests in-service training courses could empower teachers with up to date concepts, methods, materials and objectives so that the significance of writing at tertiary level could be better understood, and the intellectual and cognitive aspects of learning/teaching to write in English within an academic context are recognized. The findings indicated that teachers are used to focusing on the surface features of language when teaching writing. They need to be empowered and trained to move the focus from the surface features of language to the appropriate, communicative language use. Teachers need to become accustomed to using various techniques, practices and methods of teaching writing in English at the tertiary level to teach the skills needed by the academic process (BALEAP, 2008). Teachers therefore need to be able to employ more effective approaches to teaching writing and may themselves need to learn how to work in pairs so that they can organise pair or group discussions in class, perhaps by discussing teaching material with colleagues. They may compare what material worked well and what did not and each experience can inform the next. They need timetabled periods outside their teaching commitments to do this. Institutions need to provide the context for the inputs of a range of actors to set the standards, means and systems for teaching academic writing at university level in the most dynamic, fruitful and student-centred ways.

The study points to the importance of offering teacher-training courses for teaching writing in English. One of the representatives of the macro level mentioned the need for teachers trained in teaching writing to empower Saudi pedagogues and students and subsequently empower the state. Undoubtedly, some teachers need to attend in-service training courses to upgrade their skills with the latest developments in ELT methodology. Therefore, training courses in teaching writing in English have to take place in Saudi Arabia, maybe using the waterfall effect (those trained, train others). Teacher training courses aim to provide teachers with teaching knowledge and enhance their teaching practices in English. The improved training of Saudi teachers could be a more sustainable solution to the current lack of experienced teachers in the long-term.

More significantly, students have to engage in writing for different types of activities similar to their future subjects to raise their awareness of knowledge construction and the community within which it is practiced. Through exposure to the different ways in which knowledge is constructed and the different types of genres, students will be able to access the linguistic and analytical tools required for them to become active participants in their academic subjects. Writing for academic purposes - report-writing as a genre, for example, with students choosing their own topics to research, asking real people real questions and compiling answers - could make the class into a community of writers in a weaker version of Academic Literacies. Students could interview each other about their favourite/food/games/ music, leading to the co-construction of meaning, interactions between learners as well as learners and teachers - as either task helpers or participants -, group writing tasks or group editing/marking of each other's work, writing diaries or similar tasks, sharing and transferring skills/experience in order to learn co-operatively. Classes can be also organised around the same discipline/subject, so all the students in one group have some shared disciplinary knowledge they could investigate together - even on a simple Arts/Science basis - and thus create their own dynamic community within the academic writing classroom. Students should be encouraged to carry out research skills in the writing class, to use sources and their own synthesis of knowledge. If students have not yet begun their studies, then their disciplinary knowledge will be limited, but could be supplemented through research using the Internet, or the subject discipline library, for example. If it is argued that student's English proficiency is insufficient to tackle reading sources in English, then diagrams, charts, maps, tables, symbols and other visual forms can provide the necessary prompts for discussion and then writing.

To make progress towards Academic Literacies basic principles in the Saudi EFL context, the study suggests an information/communication flow which is bottom up, instead of only top down, as in the present situation, between the three levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro) has to be established, as suggested in the organogram of possible linkages. The three levels have to communicate with each other to find out what writing the students will need to know how to do or be competent in for their courses at tertiary level. This can provide better motivation for teachers as well as guidance for students in the language class. Interestingly, the above require some re-orientation

of attitudes away from the strict hierarchical structure, to valuing inputs and contribution from all the levels and seeing them as necessary to improve the education system. The lens of the Academic Literacies approach makes a valuable contribution in identifying these issues and questioning the taken-for-granted separation of writing from its subject content as they claim the so-called Study Skills approach does, and is exemplified by the course book's fixation with surface structures.

9.7 Researcher reflections

As a teacher in a university in Saudi Arabia, I was concerned with the writing challenges and constraints experienced by Saudi EFL students because I was certain that the ability to write well in English was highly significant for students' future studies and careers. Therefore, this ethnographic study has enriched my knowledge within the field and developed a deeper understanding of student writing practices at tertiary level, allowing me to help my future students to improve their writing practices. I hope this thesis has indicated potential ways to make changes to the ways in which writing in EFL is taught/ learned at tertiary level in the Saudi EFL context.

As discussed earlier in chapter one, this research was also motivated by my personal learning experiences as a postgraduate student at the University of Nottingham. Through my master's studies, I was motivated by writing topics but with very few constraints. The positive impact of being an active learner who is trusted to cope independently with wider essays topics, motivated me to learn more about student writing practices at the tertiary level in the Saudi EFL context.

When I began my doctoral studies, I was a novice researcher who had limited knowledge of research within the field of education. Gradually, I enhanced my research knowledge and research skills through reading and engaging with other studies and colleagues. I also attended the university methodology classes, which are mandatory in the first year of PhD studies. Classes were useful to enrich my knowledge of education research, such as research design, procedures and ethics. As a result, my knowledge of research widened and my research skills developed as I became a mature researcher capable of conducting further research.

During my PhD studies, I reviewed a wide range of literature, which has been presented in the study. This experience has enriched my knowledge within the key theories, approaches and methodology in the area of academic writing. This helped me to understand more fully, student's writing practices at tertiary level in the Saudi EFL context.

When I started this research, I had the view that research was a linear, clear and straightforward activity which I would plan and conduct in a certain way within a defined period of time. However, this was not the case; the process was interpreted by unavoidable challenges. For instance, my main supervisor left the University of Nottingham for a different work opportunity. The University of Nottingham set another supervisory team to supervise my work, but, unfortunately, one of those two supervisors left the University of Nottingham. While adjusting was difficult as can be expected, the changes have actually enhanced the quality of the thesis by bringing in relevant wide-ranging expertise and knowledge from all the supervisors I have had. I therefore became a researcher who can cope with challenges and work under pressure. I learnt how to socialise (in the Academic Literacies sense) with my new supervisors and to accommodate any further necessary changes suggested by them to build a better piece of work. As I noted, I became a stronger academic having gone through the tough times.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant's information form and consent form

School of Education
The University of Nottingham

Participant Information Form

Research Project

Investigating Student Writing Practices in Higher Education in the Saudi EFL Context

Researcher

Dania Abumansour (ttxda12@nottingham.ac.uk), doctoral student at the School of Education, The University of Nottingham.

Purpose of study

This research aims to examine academic writing practices in the Saudi higher education context and their impact on the undergraduate students at a university in Saudi Arabia. The aim is to achieve in-depth understanding of the Saudi Arabian writing experience, and hence, promote active writing practices.

Statement of participation

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point and without any consequences to you.

Participation details

Participants will be interviewed once for a maximum of 30 minutes and these interviews will be audio-recorded. The information collected will be held securely and confidentially and accessed only by the student and her supervisors. Anonymity, confidentiality and non-traceability is guaranteed. The information obtained will be used for academic purposes and data will be anonymised before being used for the study and in possible future publications.

Contact details

If you have questions or concerns about participating in this project, please feel free to contact me at ttxda12.@nottingham.ac.uk, The University of Nottingham, School of Education, Dearing Building, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, NG8 1BB, Uk. Alternatively, you could also contact my lead supervisor: Dr. Julio Gimenez Julio.gimenez@nottingham.ac.uk, School of Education, The University of Nottingham, Dearing Building, Jubliee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, NG8 1BB, UK.

If you wish to make a complaint resulting from your involvement in the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham at educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

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The University of Nottingham

Participant Consent Form

Project: Investigating Student Writing Practices in Higher Education in the Saudi EFL Context: A Case Study Taking an Academic Literacies Approach

The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself

	Please confirm the statements by putting your initials in the box below
I have read and understood the participant information sheet.	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.	
I have received enough information about the study.	
I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study: At any time Without having to give a reason for withdrawing.	
I understand that any information I provide, including personal details, will be confidential, stored securely and only accessed by those carrying out the study.	
I understand that any information I give may be included in published documents but my identity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms.	
I agree for my participation to be audio-recorded.	
I agree to take part in this study	
Participant Signature: Date	
Name of Participant:	
Researcher Signature : Dania Abumansour Date	
Name of Researcher: Dania Abumansour	

School of Education

The University of Nottingham

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

Project title: Investigating Student Writing Practices in Higher Education in the Saudi EFL Context

Researcher's name: Dania Abumansour

Supervisor's name: Dr Julio Gimenez

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.
- I understand that data will be stored in electronic copies of transcripts, video or audiotapes. Data will be confidential, stored securely and only accessed by those carrying out the study.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or her supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ..... (research participant)

Print name ..... **Date** .....

Contact details

1. Researcher: Dania Abumansour

ttxda12@nottingham.ac.uk, a research student at The University of Nottingham, School of education, Dearing Building, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, NG8 1BB, Uk.

2. Supervisor: Dr Julio Gimenez

Julio.gimenez@nottingham.ac.uk, School of Education at The University of Nottingham, Dearing Building, Jubliee Campus, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, NG8 1BB, Uk.

3. School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Sample of interview questions

Guidelines for questions in participant interviews

Level	Interview questions
1- Macro level: Representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education	What is the Ministry of Education's view of the importance of writing in English? Have there been any educational changes concerning writing in English? If so, when and what are they? What is the rationale behind these changes What are they trying to achieve? *these 2 covered by 'rationale'*
2- Meso level: Heads of ELI	How do you interpret/ understand regulations by the Ministry of Higher education in relation to writing in English? What is the nature of these regulations? Are these regulations compulsory? Do you agree with them How do you/they turn these regulations into actions? What is the nature and purposes of these actions? What are the SWU objectives and goals concerning the writing experience? Do you believe writing in English is important for students for various educational purposes? Do you promote writing as an important part of the higher education system? Do you consider it as a very good tool to help graduate students gain a scholarship or employment? (extrinsically useful) Do they encourage writing practices in English?
3-Micro level : a- Teachers	• Why do students produce written texts? • How do they produce written texts? • Is the purpose for producing a written text to improve their writing in English? Or Do they do this just because it is part of the syllabus? • What kind of writing activity/ies take place in the classroom?
b-Students	• Do students write for social purposes and/or for personal interest? • Could you outline your previous writing experiences? • How have these experiences shaped your current writing practices? • Did you study in a public or private school or both? • Could you tell us more about your learning experiences? • Why do you want to learn English? • Do you want to learn how to write in English? Why / Why not?

Level	Interview questions
1- Macro level - Representatives of the Ministry of Higher Education	• What is your educational background, area of subject specialty and years of experience? • Do you think there are any cultural restrictions on teaching writing in EFL in Saudi Arabia? • What are these restrictions? • How do they influence the formation of the higher education system? • To what extent do they influence the teaching of writing in English in Saudi Arabia? • Do you think cultural constraints still play a role in forming educational regulations? • In recent years, do you think there has been a western influence on policy formation related to teaching writing in English? If so, what? • Do you think the two types of school - namely, public and private offer the same quality of teaching writing in English? why/ Why not? • Do these schools have the same teaching facilities and technologies such as English language labs, and computers? • Which students do you think perform better in writing tasks at a tertiary level? Private or public students? Give your reasons? • Why do students demonstrate different levels of language proficiency? • What is the possible link between types of school and level of English? • Does the Ministry of Higher Education deal with public and private schools equally or are there any kind of differences? • Are they expected to follow same level of instruction? • Does the government offer any local or international scholarships for students to complete their education? • Is mastering writing in the target language considered a requirement for gaining such a scholarship? Why or why not? • What is the significance of teaching writing in EFL? • Why is writing in EFL important in Saudi Arabia? • How could we develop positive writing experiences in EFL for the students? • Are there any regulations which aim at developing good writing experiences in EFL?
2- Meso level - Heads of the ELI	• What is your educational background, area of subject specialty and years of experience? • To what extent does eastern culture play a role in the Saudi education system? • Are there any cultural restrictions on teaching writing in EFL in Saudi Arabia? Yes/no? • Are there any documents with cultural instructions in teaching writing in EFL? If yes, what are these? *Do you mean like the old Crescent series?* • How could you turn these regulations into action? • To what extent do they influence your decisions with regards to teaching writing in English? • For example, do you choose a curriculum that achieves the educational policy or one that meets the students' needs? • Are the learning materials related to familiar, every day topics?

	• How could the curriculum support the student writing in English experience? • Have you ever considered the diversity of the pupils' proficiency in learning to write in the higher education system? • How do you deal with this situation? • What are the reasons for the diversity of students' English language proficiency? • Do you think writing in EFL is important? • How do you assess the significance of writing in English? • Why has writing in EFL become more significant at university level? • What is the university's philosophy of learning and does this include developing positive writing in English experiences? • What is your role in developing the writing experience in English? • Do you think that teachers have the power to choose the material that suits their students' needs?
3- Micro level – 3 (a) Teachers	• What is your Educational Background, nationality, years of experience and teaching beliefs? • Are there any cultural restrictions on teaching writing in EFL at SWU? • To what extent does culture play a role in what you teach at SWU? • Do you think the English writing curriculum promotes good writing experiences in EFL? • Why do you think this? • Do you think the writing classes and activities at SWU are useful for students to develop good writing experiences? • Have you ever taught in a private school? • Could you please reflect on your teaching experience concerning the quality of teaching writing in English • Have you ever taught in a public school? • Could you please reflect on your teaching experience? • Compare and contrast your teaching experiences in private and public schools? • Why do students produce written texts? • How do they produce written texts? • Is there a purpose for producing a written text? Or • Do they do it as a part of the syllabus? • Do you think writing in EFL is important or it is just a part of the syllabus which needs to be followed? • How important is your role in teaching writing? • What topics do you ask your students to write about? • Do students write about their needs or do they write about topics generated from the curriculum? • Are the writing topics related to the students' everyday life experiences? • Do students write for social purposes and/or personal interests? • Do you think the learning process takes place inside and/or outside the classroom ? Give your reasons? • How do you perceive your relationship with your students? • Reflect on your relationship with your students? • Do you adjust your plans in order to meet your students' needs?
3 (b) Students	• How do your previous writing experiences affect your current writing practices? • Could you describe these experiences? • What expectations do you bring into the classroom? • Do you understand the importance of studying how to write in

	the EFL classroom? • What topics do you like writing about? • Give your reasons? • Do you feel the writing classes are applicable to your everyday life? • Did you study in a public or private school or both? • Could you tell me more about your learning experience? • How did this shape your writing experience in English? • Have you ever received any government scholarships to study either in Saudi Arabia or abroad? If yes, what were the requirements for these scholarships? • Was mastering the target language one of these requirements? • Why do you want to learn English? • Do you want to learn how to write in English? Why / Why not? • When do you think you will need to write in English ?Why? • How could you develop your writing skill in EFL? • Are the teaching materials related to your everyday life experiences? • Describe your writing experiences in EFL inside and outside the classroom? • What kind of self-study do you do in order to improve your writing practices? • How do you assess your relationship with your writing tutors?

Appendix 3: Observation schedule

Observation protocol

1.Teaching Practice and Methodology

Checklist

Procedures	A	N/A	No evidence	Evidence	Theme
1.How does the teacher introduce the writing task? • Does the teacher state the expected learning outcomes? • Does the teacher introduce to the topic? • Does the teacher discuss of the topic with the students?					
2. How does the teacher contextualise the writing topic?					
3. How does the teacher achieve the academic goals?					
4. How is the writing task/s set up?					
5. How is the writing task run?					
6. How is the writing task /s concluded?					
7.What kind of writing activity/ies take place in the classroom?					
8. Do students write for social purposes and/or personal interest?					
9. Are the writing topics related to the students' everyday life such as make a hotel reservation, book an appointment ?					
10.Have the writing topics been purely generated from the curriculum?					
11. Does the teacher adjust her plans in order to meet her students' needs?					
12. Does the learning process take place inside and/or outside the classroom?					

2.Interaction in the learning process

The dynamic-on-going relationship between teachers and students

Checklist

Procedures	**A**	**N/ A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
A) Teacher- learner interaction					
1. What kind of interaction takes place between the students and teacher?					
• Students respond to questions from teacher					
• Teachers ask questions and elicit feedback from students					
2. Do the students gain substantial support in order to independently complete the writing task/s?					
3.Do the teachers respond to students' questions and comments?					
4. What type of feedback does the teacher give?					
5. How often does the teacher give individual attention and Feedback?					
B) Learner-learner interaction					
1.Do students discuss the topic with their teacher and peers ?					
2. Do the students provide any peer writing feedback?					
3. Do the students responding to questions from their peer?					
4.How often do the students exchange ideas with their peers?					

3.Authentic Material

Authentic material: topics have to be relevant to students' real-life situations.

Checklist

Procedures	A	N/ A	No evidence	Evidence	Theme
1.What type of writing tasks are learners asked to do?					
2.Are the teaching materials related to the students everyday life experiences ?					
3. Have the writing topics been purely generated from the curriculum?					
4. Are the writing topics related to the students everyday life experiences?					
5.Do students write for social purposes and personal interest?					
6.How motivated do the students appear?					
7. Are the learners engaged with the learning task?					
8. Do the students seek for teacher clarification?					
9. Do the students ask open-ended questions					
10.What are the teachers' main concerns about writing the text, for example meaning or correctness?					

4.Learning inside and outside classroom

Checklist

Procedures	A	N/ A	No evidence	Evidence	Theme
1.Do students write in the class?					
2. How effective are the current writing practices?					
3. How could these practices be further promoted and improved?					
4. Do the teachers sit writing tasks for students as a homework?					

5.Learning outcomes

Checklist

Learning outcomes	**A**	**N/ A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
1. What learning outcomes are planned?					
2. Are these learning outcomes achieved?					
3. Do the teachers adjust their plans to suit their students' need?					

Appendix 4: List of documents

#	Type of document	A	N/A
	Official documents and reports that may give an indication of the value, purpose, principle and nature of the implementation of the regulations set by the Ministry of Education in relation to writing in English.		N/A
	English Language Institution policy and procedures	A	
	Student worksheet	A	
	Examples of student essays	A	
	Examples of teacher feedback on student written work	A	
	Example from *Headway Plus Intermediate Writing Guide*	A	
	Instructor's pacing guide	A	
	Writing assessment goals and levels	A	
	Examples of writing error correction codes	A	
	Examples of rubrics for writing folder assessments	A	

Key: A = applicable N/A = non-applicable

Appendix 5: Samples of interview transcripts

3.1 Macro - government level

Researcher: Hello!
Representative: Hello!
Researcher: How are you?
Representative: I am fine. How about you?
Researcher: Fine, thank you. My first question is: Why is writing in English important in Saudi Arabia?
Representative: Writing in English in Saudi Arabia is very important for many reasons. First, all academic scientific branches depend on English. All communications between multi-national companies are in English. Also, for spreading Islam, we need perfect English writers to do this job.
Researcher: What are the goals of teaching writing in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia's universities?
Representative: These courses have to enable students to write simple paragraphs; to enable students to write up theoretical and scientific research well; and to enable them to summarize and paraphrase their reading research.
Researcher: Have there been any changes in teaching writing in English?
Representative: Of course, yes. We notice a lot of work in developing new strategies to facilitate the process of teaching writing in English using new concepts in the follow up process.
Researcher: Are there any difficulties in teaching English writing?
Representative: Yes, there are a lot, of course. The main difficulty is that students don't acquire new vocabulary, phrases or even understand grammar well. The problem is that we don't give them the opportunity to improve their reading and listening skills first in the pre-tertiary level.
Researcher: Are there any Cultural restrictions on teaching English writing at universities?
Representative: Saudi society is an eastern one. Each eastern society has its own culture, customs and traditions that no one can oppose or ignore. Even in the process of teaching writing at school, institutions and universities, teachers, professors and instructors should consider cultural factors. Teaching writing as a subject or a language skill at Saudi universities isn't restricted in any way that stops students learning. Its only restriction is to maintain the culture of Saudi society. These restrictions are completely based on the piece of writing presented by the writer not on the teaching of writing in English as a subject. You can write as you like but before you write you have to choose your subject and decide whether it is suitable within Saudi society or not.
Researcher: Are there are any restrictions on teaching writing in English at institutes of High Education?
Representative: I think that the Ministry of Higher Education doesn't put any restrictions on teaching writing in English as long as it doesn't oppose the culture and

religion. It‘s the Ministry of Higher Education that encourages students to learn writing in English. It offers them scholarships to study abroad. As we mentioned before, restrictions are set on a piece of writing not teaching writing as a subject.
Researcher: Does the Ministry of High Education have any role in teaching writing in universities?
Representative: There is no doubt that the Ministry of High Education has an essential role in teaching writing in English. It's the organisation that is completely responsible for encouraging or even discouraging students from studying. It's the organisation that provides all educational links to different techniques, approaches and aids which can help in learning such a skill. We can't forget or ignore the role played by the Ministry of Higher Education in setting the rules for teaching everything at universities.
Researcher: Do you think that public and private schools are equally competent to provide the same quality of education, especially in teaching English writing?
Representative: I think that the private schools provide a higher quality of education than public schools do. The private school teachers and administrators are accountable for themselves and their students. They provide the best quality of education in general and teaching English writing in particular. Private schools are more able to adapt to changes in education practices and technology.
Researcher: Do you think that public and private schools' students have the same quality or competence in writing skills?
Representative: The outcome of high quality writing by students depends on the quality of the input they receive at school. According to the better quality of education and teaching of writing in private schools, their students perform better and have better competence levels than public school students.
Researcher: Does the Ministry of Education apply the same rules to public and private schools equally or are there different expectations?
Representative: The same rules are applied to both public and private schools by the Ministry of Education but it is more strict with private schools than public schools.
*Researche*r: What is the relationship between the Ministry of Higher Education and under-graduate education in general, and teaching the English language in particular?
Representative: The relationship is divided into two essential parts: the academic and the official one. Concerning the academic one, it is represented by the supervision of curriculum implementation. The Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for choosing the educational materials for each university and also the criteria for the syllabuses. This means laying down the procedures and also the assignments within each curriculum. Concerning the official part, the Ministry of Higher Education has the role of overseeing each university for selecting the best staff. The Ministry of Higher Education spares no effort to identify the best professional and well-trained staff to teach in universities. This role generates new responsibilities such as sustaining excellence and high quality in each profession, and that must be maintained.

Researcher: Who is in charge of selecting the English Language teaching material/curriculum at university level?
Representative: As for the English language, the Ministry of Higher Education determines the levels needed by each English department to improve their students' standards in almost every skill.
Researcher: Is the perfection of the English Language especially, writing skills, one of the requirements for learning at university?
Representative: Learning at university level is not an easy task; it requires a lot of skills. Among these skills is the perfection of the English language, as English is considered the most internationally used language. One of the most important skills the student at the university level needs to have is writing. The students are supposed to perform some tests and to do some research and this, for sure, would need good writing skills. Here we are concerned with academic writing which helps the students to document their pieces of work. Academic writing relates to giving information or illustrating ideas, so when it comes to research, the student can fully manage the way to write up such work.
Researcher: What are the reasons behind the neglect of teaching writing in English at university level?
Representative: Students think that English isn't important at this stage so they don't like learning any skills. Also, they think that learning English at university is just speaking and knowing how to communicate with others orally.
Researcher: How can we promote students' writing skills and experiences at university level? What would you recommend?
Representative: In my opinion, to improve students' writing, firstly, they should have written exams throughout the university year. They should do research especially into their handwriting.
Researcher: Does the Ministry of Higher Education aim to prepare students for the job market and work skills?
Representative: It is understood that the Ministry of Education has plans to prepare students, especially after their graduation; jobs need employees with skills and experience. I think the Ministry should do their best for this. The Ministry should inform students that they need English in their work, in their communication in everything. They should equip them for a lot of jobs at university. They should give them a series of courses in English.
Researcher: Why have the ministries of Education and Higher Education been merged?
Representative: There needs to be coordination between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education because the output is the same. The Ministry of Education prepares the student at different levels and stages to ultimately enter university, so the decisions should be unified and produced by one Ministry.
Researcher: What is the role of the Ministry of Higher Education at university level?

Representative: To provide modern curricula that match new methods; to provide professors, teachers and instructors and to limit the number of workers that are needed in the labour market.
Researcher: Finally, I'd like to thank you so much for this enjoyable interview.
Representative: It was my pleasure.

3.2 Meso - institutional level

Researcher: Good morning!
Director: Good morning!
Researcher: How are you?
Director: I am fine. How about you?
Researcher: Fine, thank you. Could you give me some information about your education background, teaching beliefs and years of teaching experience?
Director: 25 years of experience. My Educational Background: Ph. D. Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature. M.A. English Literature and B.A. English and Education.
I think in order to help students to gain knowledge and become involved in the learning process, teachers must assign sufficient time to developing the relationships within the classroom. This will help them to promote a learning environment in which students feel comfortable exchanging ideas. Several factors, such as students' background experience, differences in their academic ability, motivation, values, and attitude have significant influences on students' learning. Therefore, it is our responsibility to use different teaching strategies and methods. Creating a classroom environment that makes students passive bystanders is undesirable and detrimental to student learning. Thus, to engage our students in the learning process, we should strive to creatively design lesson plans that implement student-directed rather than teacher-directed learning (like lectures). We should remain up to date with research within the field and try to apply new methods and strategies and heed findings that might lead to adjusting teaching strategies. We should admit that our job is not only to teach lessons, but also to teach students how to behave appropriately when they encounter problems. Teachers should convey the feeling of caring for students and protect their dignity.
Researcher: What do you see as the significance of writing in English?
Director: Crystal clear, structured, and correct writing can effectively convey one's thoughts to the reader. Writing in English requires students to have a good amount of vocabulary and considerable knowledge about the grammar and language structure. Effective written English helps ideas, feelings, and opinions to move smoothly through without the writer being confused. Effective writing reflects positive traits such as clear thinking, an analytical mind, and self-confidence. It is also the mental organisational skills of the person which come into picture at this stage. Good written English enhances and organises the thinking process, which enables the writer to speak in a better way. Written English is helpful while giving presentations as concepts, knowledge and future strategy should be noted down by the presenter to make sure others can understand.
Researcher: Do you believe that writing in English is important for students for various educational purposes?
Director: Yes.

Researcher: Do you consider it a very good tool to help graduate students gain a scholarship or employment?
Director: Yes, students' skills in writing are considered as a key factor to language learning success and better college grades and greater academic achievement in the university. Few techniques can be applied to improve writing skills for college success. There is an overwhelming opinion that writing skills are critical to educational purposes and academic success. University students will be considered to pass or fail in their courses depending on their exams results. Then, when exams turn out to be essay tests, then one way to raise their grades in those exams is simply by employing the principles of good writing. Good writing skills are important when a profession requires written communication. In everyday communication most people communicate via the written word. This happens when they use emails, notes, letters, texts and tweets. Whether you are writing a message to a colleague, writing to your boss, or making a newsletter, your writing skills may either improve or impede your career path easily, even though you are not a writing professional. Mainly, writing abilities can make a difference to how one comes across. People are generally seen as more credible when they have good writing skills.
Researcher: What is the value of writing in English at SWU?
Director: When Saudi students enter the university, writing poses the most significant challenge which needs to be strengthened. This is because a writing task at this educational level usually takes on a different and challenging dimension. Despite the fact that at secondary schools students studied several aspects of the type of writing required of them at the tertiary level - where they were taught how to analyse different texts and then to add their own ideas to them - very often university students find that a quite new kind of writing is demanded of them rather than what they have been taught. They realise that they have to navigate across a much more demanding terrain of writing skills at University level. It is crucial for our students to improve their writing skills to find their ways to success.
Researcher: Are there any cultural restrictions on teaching writing in English at SWU? Elaborate, please.
Director: Culture, as an ingrained set of modes of perception and behaviours, is essential in learning a foreign language. At Saudi Western University, we try to introduce culturally suitable topics while teaching writing skills. This approach is suitable to match learners' needs to their customs and culture without offending anyone. SWU students struggle to acquire English writing skills in relation to how they view the culture presented in the target language they are learning. It is noted that students are more highly motivated when they have positive attitudes which encourage a variety of students' desired behaviours to happen. This includes better class participation, better retention of writing skills, and continuation of language study.
Researcher: Are there any documents outlining the cultural instructions for teaching writing in English? If yes, what are they?
Director: Yes. In fact, the curriculum adopted for teaching at SWU has undergone

under several changes and modifications
Researcher: How do you put these regulations into actions?
Director: There is nothing specific concerning the teaching of writing. There is also a faculty handbook online, which all the teachers can access and find out about the cultural instruction.
Researcher: As an example, do you choose a curriculum that achieves the educational policy or one that meets the students' needs? Elaborate please *Director*: The selection of curriculum inputs aims to provide students with a range of different ways to process information and show what they have learned, so as to 'match' the way in which each student learns most successfully. There is some discretion at the top administration level of the university in terms of curriculum content and pacing. Curriculum proposals are presented, discussed and a final decision is made to select *an appropriate curriculum*.
Researcher: Have you ever considered the range of the pupils' proficiency in learning to write in English at SWU? Elaborate, please
Director: Yes, all writing skills are taught in relation to the diverse preferred learning styles of the students at SWU. The Four Modalities: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic and Tactile
Researcher: How do you deal with diversity in this situation?
Director: We select topics and teaching techniques that target students with multiple learning styles. Visual: We use many visuals in the classroom. For example, wall displays posters, flash cards and graphic organizers.
Auditory: We use audio tapes and videos, storytelling, songs, jazz chants, memorization and drills
Kinesthetic: We use writing competitions, board games etc.
Intersperse writing activities which require students to sit quietly and write
Tactile: We use board and card games, demonstrations, projects etc.
Researcher: What are the reasons for the diversity of students' English language proficiency?
Director:

- Cultural differences
- Diversified instruction medium
- Varying educational experiences
- Urban or rural settings
- Special disabilities to challenge the learning styles

Researcher: What is the university's philosophy for learning and does this include developing positive writing in English experiences?

Director:

- Educational experiences should be developmental and individualized.
- Educational experiences should be experiential, life-centred, and relevant to the learner.

- Educational experiences should move the student toward self-directed learning.
- Life experience of learners should be valued as an educational resource.
- Learning should be driven primarily by internal motivators rather than external motivators. Yes, all above mentioned points favour positive writing in English*Researcher*: Do you think the writing classes and activities at SWU are useful for students to develop good writing experience? Elaborate
Director: Yes, all teaching settings for writing skills are suitable for our students. We have writing booklets for uniform practice. Freer practice sessions in the form of first and final drafts give students equal opportunities to improve their writing skills. We select topics and teaching techniques that target students with multiple learning styles. Teachers who assess their students' knowledge and preparation levels are asked to give opinions to adjust weekly lessons and semester plans to best teach their students the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in class.
Researcher: Do you think that teachers have the power to choose the material that suits their students need?
Director: Yes, this selection power has been given to teachers. We have introduced the idea of Portfolio where teachers can select their own freer practice writing sessions. All writing samples after peer checking and teacher's scrutiny are kept in portfolio files.
Researcher: How could you promote and support writing practices in English at SWU?
Director: By implementing the literacy instructions based on understanding and adding new and challenging writing tasks, by enhancing the writing opportunities because both the writing process and discipline stimulate students' thinking; we can help them to develop their thoughts and ideas about the topic. We need to raise our students' awareness about the fact that to write is to think, and it is part of the academic path. It is important to have satisfactory and meaningful tutorials and supervision to talk about a student's written task which has been submitted and checked in advance. This will help teachers to identify and diagnose any potential language problem that may block or influence the student's understanding related to academic integrity.
Researcher: Finally, I'd like to thank you so much for this interesting interview.
Director: You're welcome.

3.3 Micro - classroom level
3.3.1 Teaching staff

Researcher: Hello!
Teacher: Hello!
Researcher: How are you?
Teacher: I'm fine. How are you?
*Researche*r: Fine, thanks. I'd be grateful if you could start by giving me some information about your education background, and years of teaching experience.
Teacher: With pleasure. My name is xxxxxx. I've my E.D. (Doctorate of Education)

from Exeter University, U.K. Concerning my experience, I have 20 years of teaching experience.
Researcher: My first question is: How do you see writing in English?
Teacher: Of course, we know that writing is a productive skill through which students express themselves and ideas: writing is production, like speaking. Sometimes students express their ideas through speaking but writing is more restricted. It's different from speaking, since when you write, you have to follow certain structures, procedures and so on. You also have to follow certain formats in writing because we have different forms of writing, for example, we have a paragraph, an essay, an article, an e-mail or a letter.
Researcher: Ok: Concerning these forms of writing, in your point of view, what is the importance of writing?
Teacher: In general, writing is, of course, important. Do you mean for students?
Researcher: Yes, to be more specific.
Teacher: Ok!! Writing for students depends on being practical. In terms of - it depends on what they want to study. For instance, if they're going to a college where the medium of study is English, then writing in English will be essential for them. But if students are going to study psychology and the medium of instruction is Arabic, I don't think then writing is important. Ummmm it doesn't mean anything to them at that time. It only means something which they have to do to pass the exam. It's not something they will be eager to understand, they will just be eager to know and master enough of it in order to continue their studies and nothing else. To sum up, it depends on which direction students are going in.
Researcher: Ok! The question is why do students want to learn how to write in English?
Teacher: Actually, they don't want to write. That's to be frank. They don't want to learn. I think we force them to learn. Hhhhhhh. Frankly, this skill - I mean writing - is the one that students find the most difficult.
Researcher: Yeah, that's completely right and they themselves told me that. *Teacher*: They don't really like it. When you ask them to write something, they always say " Oh!! Teacher: Let us do it at home/ let us do it tomorrow". The students try hard to find a way out of doing it. To be honest, I'd say that there are very few students who really like to write. I think those are the students who have studied either at international schools or maybe they have the skill or a talent for writing. Generally, students don't want to write, they don't like writing as they find it really difficult, regardless of how much you want or would like them to write. Even sentences: if you ask them to write some sentences, they won't write what you asked them to write. They may write some words and then when they speak, they try to form sentences. Really, I don't know why it's a serious problem for them to write. That's why we need somebody to study the students' attitudes towards writing and to find out what's behind their hatred of - it, what the reasons for all these things are. I think it has something to do with their school system: I mean their early education. In addition to that, in our [Arab] culture, writing is not given great importance. I mean that it's something that you have to get used to do and practice for a long time and then you can master the skill. This is because when we come to write essays, we find it really demanding and not simple to write. Writing essays is a demanding task, including syntax, layout and organisation. Also, the process of putting down your ideas in a piece of writing isn't simple or easy. For these reasons I think students find it hard and difficult to write. In my point of view, the main problem for Saudi students is that they didn't learn how to write.

Researcher: I'd like to add something: the students told me that during their intermediate and secondary school education; most of their teachers focused only on speaking and grammar and ignored writing.
Teacher: Another thing, when I asked many of the students who got high marks in their secondary school exams but don't know how to write, and those whose writing is poor, they all said, " Teacher! We got used to being given a paragraph or two then memorizing the one that we were going to write."
Researcher: Unfortunately.
Teacher: Students had no creativity, in that case. They just memorized and wrote. They didn't express their own ideas; they just expressed someone else's ideas. I call it something mechanical for them, not creative at all. In fact, writing is one of the skills that really needs creativity: you have to use your own ideas, you have to know how to express yourself, you have to know which words you are going to use and which not. It isn't simple, but complex.
Researcher: Yeah. I think that's true.
Teacher: I'd like to say in writing you combine different skills; you add your thinking to your feelings to the structure, grammar, ideas….. and a lot of things together to produce a good piece of writing. You need everything to be able to write a sentence. In my point of view, the main problem for Saudi students is that they haven't learned how to write.
Researcher: What is the value of writing in English at SWU?
Teacher: Actually it's a part of their assessment. They have to pass a written assessment to pass the English language course. I'm just talking about the foundation year, Ok? So the foundation year students have to write to pass their English exam. We have writing and we of course encourage students to write: there are students who can write poems and short stories. Some do write, but are few compared to the number of students, the large number that are in the foundation year, and most can't write. According to the majority, the main reason for writing is to pass the exam and nothing else.
Researcher: Do you mean to say that we don't have any plans to prepare students for their higher education or employment?
Teacher: No, No, not those things. I mean, they can learn these things somewhere else, not in the foundation year. The reason for this is that what the students write in levels (1) and (2) is very simple, as you know. They write about themselves, their age, their names, and their family, and then they go to level 4 which is the highest level in which they are asked to write an essay of 4 paragraphs including 150 words or more. They are going to write about describing a friend, a family or one of their relatives; I mean describing somebody - whoever. Even writing at this level (4) is not varied but limited to only 2 topics.
Researcher: There is no creativity since we decide the topics for students and we also list the words that they're going to use. In this way, the students are controlled not creative at all. Now, that's not considered writing since they are given everything they need to use to produce writing.
Teacher: Even the structure. They have to follow certain structures.
Researcher: It seems students keep memorizing paragraphs to pass exams.
Teacher: Of course, they do. They do memorize. For example, when we ask them to write about trains or planes, they just memorize the structures they had in writing about cars, then replace the word car by plane without adding anything. They don't use their own words. As you mentioned, there is no freedom, it's not free writing. It's very controlled. Returning back again to your point concerning that we don't prepare

students for their future study. That's precisely happens because we only prepare them for the exam.
Researcher: Do you think that writing is influenced by cultural factors?
Teacher: I don't think it's affected by the social life but it's affected by the school culture. I mean the ways and techniques used in teaching writing in schools. I don't think it has anything to do with Saudi culture.
Researcher: What do you mean by the school culture?
Teacher: The school culture is the methods or techniques applied in our schools. As we said, the process of memorizing isn't a good way of learning the writing process. Almost all schools have the same problem. That's why it's the school system which is responsible for the students' level in writing. The social life and the culture in my opinion don't affect the process of writing. I don't know but maybe, why not?
Researcher: I'd like to tell you that I was surprised by the topic " Describe one of your relatives".
*Teache*r: Aha!!! You mean this?
Researcher: Yeah, I mean the materials, the topics and the ways of teaching as well.
Teacher: You know that the book we teach here is '*Headway' [New Headway Plus, Special Edition,* Oxford University Press with *Headway Plus Writing Guide* for additional writing support]. This book's material is suitable to be used in the Middle East. Maybe that's what you were talking about. But I'm talking about the students' attitudes or students' behaviour. I think cultural factors don't reflect, I think what it reflects is the way they were taught how to write at school. But if you're talking about the topics, Ok!! The topics are related to society.
Researcher: I think we have certain topics to write about, we have to teach in a specific way, we couldn't try different ideas, there are a lot of constraints that I think influence the outcome in one way or another.
Teacher: I think so. You're right.
Researcher: I was surprised when I attended a class of level 4 students. The teacher asked them to describe one of their relatives. Maybe 7 or 8 students decided to write about their mothers and 5 students decided to write about their brothers. What I want to say here is that they're at a high level, they have to prepare students to write about things like global warming, advertising and similar topics.
Teacher: No, No. If you think students can write about such topic as "Global W.." , They can't write at all since they don't have the vocabulary, they don't have the ability to express themselves and write about such complex topics. These topics need a very high level of vocabulary. Students know very simple words like beautiful, handsome, kind, short, tall ……etc. On the other hand, a topic such as " Global Warming" can't be written about by this level of student because they don't have enough vocabulary. I'm sure, if they had the language, we'd ask them to write about such global affairs " Global Warming/ Pollution/Space invasion…etc. These are important topics to write about because the whole world witnesses them.
Researcher: So is it correct if I said that you choose the topics that suit their level of language?
Teacher: Yes, yes.
Researcher: Ok!! What kind of expectations do you have from high school students? You know that most of the foundation year's students come from secondary schools.
Teacher: Yes, they came from secondary schools. At the beginning, I thought that they'd be able to write at least a paragraph, write a paragraph with the correct format, correct topic sentence, appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar. Believe it or not, we're suffering from a lack of all these things that I mentioned. When those students

came to us, we taught them how to construct a simple sentence: " My name is ……./ My sister's name is …… /They don't know how to write such sentences. I'm just talking about the majority. Sometimes we have students after the placement tests, they'll be level 4 and such students are exceptions and some of them can be classified as level 4 students. But now I'm talking about those who will start from level (1) - such students have problems constructing very simple sentences. At least we expect that those students know to begin a sentence with capital letter and put (.) at the end of each sentence and write correct grammar or simple verbs. I don't need them to use the perfect tenses but the simple ones. Really Mmmmm. No comment.
Researcher: Do they fail to do such simple things? Oh!!! Unfortunately.
Teacher: Yes, unfortunately.
Researcher: So can I say that students don't achieve your expectations?
Teacher: Not all of them but the majority.
Researcher: You told me about the students that can be classified as level 4 students. I want to say that some students are excellent because they want to be at this level and they are careful to be good students. The question is: Do you think such excellent students came from international schools?
Teacher: I had such a group. They started from level 3. I didn't teach any of those who started from level 4. I was not so lucky. Hhhhhhhhh.
Researcher: Next semester, Insha'Allah.
Teacher: Insha'Allah. I taught those who started from level 3 and I taught them also in level 4 in the second module. Really, I was amazed by their level of language, their ability to express themselves, their open minds and way of thinking. In addition to all these good things, their accents and pronunciation were different. *Researcher*: And how about their writing?
Teacher: Incredible.
Researcher: Wow!!!! Fantastic!!!!!
Teacher: I asked them " Where did you study?" They replied that none of them studied at private schools. All of them came from public schools. Then I asked them " How did you develop you language skills?" They simply replied that their parents always encouraged them to learn, they listened to a lot of English on the radio, they also watched English movies. They told me also that they always tried to imitate the accent of English people. Believe it or not: They do have an accent, a really beautiful accent. They managed to imitate the accent of native speakers.
Researcher: This was because they wanted to.
Teacher: They wanted to do it. They were all science students. I met them after a year; they're either in pharmacy college or in the faculty of medicine. They're really good students.
Researcher: Can we say it's the parents' role to encourage them to learn the language and demonstrate the significance of learning it?
Teacher: Sure. Something else is that it could be due to well-educated parents. Such parents understand well the importance of the language, which makes them help their children to learn the language.
Researcher: They motivate and encourage them to learn. That's why those students become aware of the significance of the language?
Teacher: Yeah.
Researcher: I have a question that you've answered in one way or another but let me ask it again: Is the learner's knowledge of the target language adequate to produce a solid piece of writing?
Teacher: No, they have very simple background knowledge.

Researcher: Yeah. I remember that you mentioned they can't even construct a simple sentence.
Teacher: This is a great problem. You know when the student loses a mark, she becomes frustrated, and says " Teacher!! I wrote a good paragraph, why did I lose these marks?" Hhhhhh. But when she sees the red circles and the red underlined words, she doesn't speak..Hhhhhhhhh.
Researcher: Do you think students don't want to learn the language or is it that they do not want to make the effort to learn it?
Teacher: No, many of them want to learn, but I don't know, there is something wrong at school, I think. When the students enroll at university with a low level [of English writing knowledge], we don't have enough time to rectify the problems they had at school. It's only a year and there is another problem, which is the system we are following. For example, if I teach a group of students a certain module, I become aware of their problems, I become aware of their needs. As soon as I realize these problems and needs, they go on to another group with another teacher. Thus if I were with them for 2/3 modules, I could help them more and give each one of them a task that can help her develop her language to reach the best level. On the other hand, the same thing happens with the other teacher in the other group. I want to say if we taught those students for at least one semester, we could do something to help them develop their writing. Let me say what has not been taught at school for 7 years can't be rectified in a year. It needs a lot of effort and concentration.
Researcher: At the end of this helpful interview, I don't know how to express my great happiness after having such beautiful interview with you.
Teacher: Thanks my dear. It's kind of you to say such beautiful words.

3.3.2 Student

Researcher: Hi! How are you?
Student: I'm fine.
Researcher: How do you perceive writing in English?
Student: Ok! Actually, I think writing is the hardest part of learning English at the university level. I don't like it. I don't even like the way my teachers ask me to write about things […]. Indeed, It's very difficult for me to join the sentences together and generate the ideas. It's easier when we talk. I think so, because when we come to write a good piece of writing, it should be in perfect English but when we come to speak English, it's not important to be perfect. I mean writing needs more vocabulary, expressions, structures, grammar, ideas…..etc.
Researcher: That's true.
Student: I think writing shows how good your English is.
Researcher: Excellent! Do you think writing in English is significant nowadays or not? Can you elaborate?
Student: Of course, it's very important. I mean that we have to learn how to write in English in order to be able to do a lot of things such as applying for a job, studying. There are a lot of things we have to do by writing in English.
Researcher: You mentioned that writing is a reflection of something we have; how?
Student: Yes, writing shows how good your English is. If you know how to write, apparently you know how to speak.
Researcher: A good point. Why do you want to learn how to write in English?
Student: Writing is my weakest point that's why I want to learn how to write. I really know how to write in English but not in a professional way. As you know, writing is

important for school, university….etc. I think if I stay at my current level of writing, it won't be helpful for the future.
Researcher: Could you tell me about any experiences you had in learning English and tell me if these experiences were good or bad ones? And how much did these experiences encourage or discourage you from learning the language? *Student*: Actually, I loved my high school teachers. They all encouraged me to learn the language in many ways. I loved them when they talked about songs, movies, music….so on. I think they taught us the language not in a traditional way but in a way that made us have fun and be happy. I really hate the traditional methods of teaching. They're so boring.
Researcher: Can you tell me about your writing experiences in English and how these experiences shaped your writing skill?
Student: I'll tell you something funny. When I listen to songs, this helps me devise my sentences and grammar too. Thus, when I come to write, I found it a little bit easier too. I realize that when we come to speak we don't focus on what we say, so most of our speech isn't grammatically correct. On the other hand, when we come to write, we have to write something which is grammatically accurate. I want to say that songs helped me a lot to work on that.
Researcher: A good way. What are your future expectations and plans regarding English?
Student: Since English isn't my mother tongue and since I'm not perfect at English, I'd like to study English as far as I possibly can.
Researcher: So you need to develop your English?
Student: yes, of course.
Researcher: Ok! That's good. Do you feel writing classes are useful for your everyday life in future?
Student: Not really. I could use some 'grammar', listening but I don't think that writing classes are really useful.
Researcher: Can you tell me why you think that?
Student: They aren't useful because our teachers always give us the subject which we're going to write about. It's not something I'm going to write because I want to, but something I have to do just to get a mark. To be honest, if we do something or even write something just for a mark, I think it won't be useful at all.
Researcher: That's your point of view and I appreciate it. In which kind of school have you studied; private or public school?
Student: In both kinds of school.
Researcher: Can you tell me more about your experiences in such schools, regarding your teachers, the books, content and time?
Student: To be honest, I had time to practise the language at home with my dad, brothers and sisters.
Researcher: Do you mean to say that you used to practise the language at home?
Student: Yes, at school I practised it with my friends.
Researcher: Ok! What about the curriculum; was it good or bad?
Student: It was not bad.
Researcher: Have you learnt anything from the curriculum you studied?
Student: I like my books here at SWU. They're good because they are of a high quality, the colours are bright. I really hated my school books since they were black and white. They weren't of a very good quality, no pictures… nothing in them.
Researcher: I'm not talking about such things. Hhhhh.
Student: You mean the quantity and content?

Researcher: Yes.
Student: Ok! I was silly then. Hhhhhh.
Researcher: Never mind.
Student: My school was fine but I hated the book's order of lessons. There was reading, listening and writing, all in one class.
Researcher: I get your point. Do you like the teacher to focus only on one skill during each class?
Student: Yes, it has to focus on one thing.
Researcher: What about the teachers? Did they speak Arabic or English during the class?
Student: I think my teachers were well qualified but I always hate it if anyone speaks Arabic during my English class. I know that there are some girls who are weak but what can I do about them? Let me say that my teacher tried her best not to speak in Arabic during the class.
Researcher: How did this shape your writing experience in English?
Student: My teacher has never focused on writing.
Researcher: Never?
Student: Not never, but really most of the time, she doesn't.
Researcher: Did she only cover the writing tasks given in the book?
Student: Yes, that's it. That's what I mean by never.
Researcher: Did the teacher ask you to write things at home?
Student: Yes. Once we had a teacher, she was the kind of person who liked us to write anything; how we felt, what we thought…..etc. Every morning, she asked us to write a small paragraph about what we felt that day. It was so nice to do such (diary) writing.
Researcher: Do you like this kind of strategy?
Student: Yes, but I've a question; is that considered to be writing?
Researcher: At least you practised something. There are some teachers who ignore the whole skill. Tell me! What about the exam?
Student: This was the silliest part ever. The teacher used to give us a couple of paragraphs and we had to memorize one of them to write in the exam. *Researcher*: Oh my God! Girls from different schools have told me that writing was just a process of memorizing and nothing else.
Student: Sometimes, they gave us 3 paragraphs to memorize to write down. It was so easy for students at high school to write about something they had to memorize. It was only about the advantages and disadvantages of the internet, travelling abroad and such easy topics.
Researcher: Do you think that your knowledge of the target language (English) is enough to produce a good piece of writing?
Student: Yeah. But I need to work more on it. I need 2 or 3 hours to write a paragraph. My writing is not that bad but I hate spelling. I always struggle with writing due to my bad spelling.
Researcher: Have you ever received any scholarship to study either here in SWU or abroad?
Student: No.
Researcher: Ok. When do you think you need to write in English?
Student: When they ask me to write, Hhhhhhhhh. You know that I'm still a student so I use writing only in my study. Here in SWU, speaking English is more important than writing English.
Researcher: Do you think speaking is more important than writing?

Student: I don't mean this but I mean here in SWU we need speaking more than writing.
Researcher: Ok! Do you like to write in English in your spare time?
Student: No, I don't like writing at all. It's not just about English but in general, I hate it.
Researcher: Do you like what you are learning in the English language classroom at SWU?
Student: We have subjects that are interesting and we have subjects that are boring. The teacher of interesting subjects knows how to teach her subject well; she helps students to enjoy her class, helps students to interact during the class. Such teachers don't use old fashioned methods of teaching.
Researcher: Ok!! That sounds great. Back again to your point, which is that you hate some subjects and like others?
Student: Ok! You know that you always have some things you hate and other things you don't love. I mean that some of our teachers' classes are not interesting.
Researcher: Why do you think that?
Student: It might be the teaching methods they use or follow.
Researcher: Concerning this point, are the teaching materials related to your everyday life?
Student: I think they're well related to our everyday life.
Researcher: That's good. Tell me, what topics do you like writing about?
Student: I'd like to write about my daily life. I don't like being asked to write about things I don't know about.
Researcher: Do you like the writing task to be controlled by the teachers at SWU? I mean would you like your teacher to choose the topics you are writing about or even give you everything such as vocabulary and structures that you're going to use in you writing?
Student: No, I don't like that.
Researcher: Why?
Student: Because if they do so, it will be just the same as the teachers did at high school. It won't be much more different than school. I think if they did that, it would be boring.
Researcher: Can you describe your writing experience inside and outside the classroom?
Student: As I told you, I've never found anything to write about at school or even in class. We just wrote for the mark and nothing else. It's shame, isn't it? *Researcher*: Hhhhh. What about outside? Do you not like to write in English? *Student*: I used to write in my school magazine at high school. It was really nice because my teacher asked me to write about things I liked to write about. These subjects or topics were interesting because I found something to say and write about. Thus, it was easy and I felt comfortable writing about my favourite topics; writing about my pet, writing about what I like and dislike…etc.
Researcher: Good. Do you think writing should be only taught inside the classroom?
Student: No. Writing should be taught everywhere, inside and outside the classroom.
Researcher: The last question; how could you develop your writing skills? *Student*: Reading a lot, practice writing a lot, keeping vocabulary lists and such things.
Researcher: Do you want to add anything?
Student:: No, thanks.
Researcher: At the end of our interview, I'd like to thank you a lot my dear student and I wish you the best of luck.

Student: You're welcome. I hope the same thing for you. Good bye.
Researcher: Good bye.

Appendix 6: Observation protocol

Learning and teaching discourse

Course Objectives:

- Write an "advantages and disadvantages'' essay.
- Write a coherent and cohesive essay.
- Prepare students for their writing exam.

1. **Teaching Practice and Methodology**

Check list

Procedures	**A**	**N/A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
1. How does the teacher introduce the writing task*? (e.g. Does the teacher state the expected learning outcomes?)* *A. Introduction to the topic* *B. Discussion of the topic* *C. Contextualising the topic*	 √ √ √				
2. Does the teacher contextualise the writing topic?	√			She introduced the writing lesson by asking students to write about the advantages and disadvantages of driving a car. She discussed all the transportation means and used the booklet	Teaching technique was Brainstorming

				exercise.	
3. How does she achieve this?	√			She warmed up students and brainstormed their thoughts. She used the projector to introduce the writing topic, and new vocabulary. She also revised certain grammatical items from their previous grammar lesson, such as conditional clauses, time clauses and subject verb agreement. She also presented linking words and expressions used in each paragraph.	Interaction Technology Facilities Projector used to show word lists, and pictures of cards)
4. How is the writing task/s set up?*	√			Well done. She mainly followed the exercise in the students' writing booklet.	Controlled task
5. How is the writing task organised (pairs, groups or individual)?	√			Students were engaged with the writing task.	Good Pair work Engaged students
6. How is the writing task/s concluded?*	√			Students practised the writing skill.	
7.What kind of writing activity/ies take place in the classroom?	√			Doing the booklet	*Completed the

				exercises, which include vocabulary and grammar section. The Students had the opportunity to write their sentences and produce their own essays.	following *Fill in blanks *Write about the advantages and disadvantages of driving a car''.
8. Do students write for social purposes and/or personal interest?			√	Topics are generated from their book.	Lack of interest Controlled task
9. Are the writing topics related to the students' everyday life *such as making a hotel reservation, booking an appointment?*			√	No, not much	Motivational Interesting
10.Have the writing topics been purely generated from the curriculum?	√			Yes. They have.	Controlled task
11.Does the teacher adjust her plans in order to meet her students' needs?			√	No, she cannot; she can only choose the teaching approach that suits her students' abilities. However, students are supposed to write an essay about the ''advantages and disadvantages of the car''. The teacher asked students to use an advantages and disadvantages essay format, but gave them permission to choose a topic that they wanted to write about. She	Followed policy

				tried to adjust her plans to suit the students' interests but in a very limited way.	
12. Does the learning process take place inside or/and outside the classroom?	√			It mainly takes place inside the classroom. Teacher asked students to complete the draft at home. She said: "we do not have enough time, so complete it at home.	Inside and outside Students needed extra time and more practice.

2. Interaction in the learning process

The dynamic-on-going relationship *between tutors and students*

Check list

Procedures	**A**	**N/ A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
A. *Teacher- learner interaction*					
1. What kind of interaction takes place between the students and teacher?	√			Discussion, argument laughing, interacting and participating. They communicated effectively.	Engaging students
a. *Responding to questions from teacher*	√			Yes, all the time	Participation
b. *Asking questions and eliciting feedback from learners*	√			Brainstorming.	Engaging students
2. Do the students gain substantial support in order to independently complete the writing task/s?	√			The teacher offered students comprehensive support. She listened to	- Motivation - Educational support

				their ideas, thoughts, and answers, and responded to their reasons and arguments.	
3.Responding to students' questions or comments	√			Yes, she responded to her students' questions.	Positive feedback
4. What type of feedback does the teacher give?	√			Positive feedback and grammatical feedback	Support Encouragement Motivating students
5. How often does the teacher give individual attention and Feedback?	√			Whenever, the students needed help, during the writing process, the teacher walked around to guide and direct them.	Feedback
B. Learner-learner interaction					
1.Discussing the topic with the teacher and peers	√			Yes, they discussed the topic, ideas and essay layout.	
2. Do the students provide any peer writing feedback?	√			Yes, after writing the first draft, students worked in pairs. Students checked their partner's draft and gave oral and written feedback.	Engaging Interacting
3.Responding to questions from their peers	√			Yes, students have been asked to work in pairs to do their book exercises. Students exchanged knowledge, helped each other and	Pair work Seek help Support

				shared their answers.	
4.How often do the students exchange ideas with their peers?	√			All the time.	Seek help

3. Authentic Material

Authentic material: *topics have to be relevant to students' real-life situations*

Check list

Procedures	**A**	**N/ A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
1.What type of writing tasks are learners asked to do?	√			Students did the writing exercises in their writing booklet, such as: filling in gaps and completing sentences. Then, they started making their own sentences and building their own paragraphs.	Writing tasks
2.Are the teaching materials related to the students' everyday life experiences?			√	They are only generated from the book**.**	Controlled -task
3. Have the writing topics been purely generated from the curriculum?	√			Yes. They have.	Not beneficial Lack of interest
4. Are the writing topics related to the students' everyday life experiences?			√	Their writing topic was "write about advantages and disadvantages of driving a car".	-Lack of interest

5.Do students write for social purposes and personal interest?			√		
6.How motivated do the students appear?	√			Students were highly motivated and engaged actively in the writing tasks. The teacher played a major role in achieving that.	Motivated Active learner
7. Are the learners engaged with the learning task?	√			Yes, she encouraged them to participate and write something. The students were engaged in the learning process.	Participation Interacting Motivation
8. Do the students seek for teacher clarification?	√			Yes, they asked her many questions regarding the writing process.	Seeking help Seeking clarity Seeking clarification
9. Do the students ask open-ended questions?			√		
10.What are the teachers' main concerns about writing the text, for example , meaning or correctness ?	√			She tried to motivate her students to write something. Later, she started to correct their mistakes.	Meaning and accuracy

4. **Learning inside and outside classroom**
5. **Learning outcomes**

Check list

Procedures	**A**	**N/ A**	**No evidence**	**Evidence**	**Theme**
1.Writing in class.	√			Students practised the writing skill. They first completed the writing exercises in their booklet. Then, they produced their own essay.	Practicality
2. How effective is this current writing practice?	√			Students were prepared to write their own essays.	Writing tools Exercise
3. How could this practice be further promoted and improved?	√			Extra writing classes and time are provided.	Practice Extra time
4. Do they set writing tasks for homework?	√			Yes, the students were asked to complete their first draft at home.	Inside and outside class
Learning outcomes					
1. What learning outcomes are planned?				Writing an advantages and disadvantage essay.	Writing Practice Exercise
2. Are these learning outcomes achieved?	√			Yes, they are.	

3. Do they adjust their plans to suit their students' need?	√			She asked the students to write an advantages and disadvantages type essay but they had the opportunity to choose the subject/topic.	Controlled task

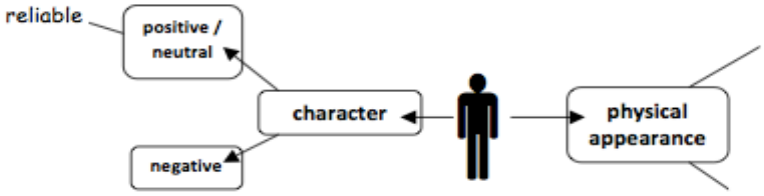
Appendix 7: Sample of a writing task

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UNIT 9
Writing Task: Describe one of your relatives
Worksheet 1: PRE-WRITING

Exercise 1
Write the adjectives on the spider chart.

reliable	talkative	optimistic	cruel	sociable	rude	boring
active shy	patient	ambitious	fat	generous	hardworking	
moody	slim	tidy	short	overweight	easygoing	
attractive	stupid	beautiful	ugly	tolerant	cheerful	calm
sensitive	contented	good-looking	tall	dependable	happy	lazy



Exercise 2
Circle the strong (negative) words in Exercise 1. Write the same thing in a more polite way.
Which adjectives has a opposite meaning when you add 'un', 'im' or 'in'? Write them in the box on the right.

strong adjective	more polite
rude	not very polite

strong adjective	more polite
ugly	

un / im / in
unattractive

Exercise 3
Match the adjectives to the different parts of a person's appearance. Can you think of more?

dark	lined	kind	friendly	large	bright	long	short
dyed	straight	grey round	fair dark	oval	pointed		white
black	wavy	smooth	small	freckled		blue	curly

eyes	hair	face	skin

UNIT 9
Worksheet 2: PRACTICE

Exercise 1
Add all the information about your relative from Worksheet 1, Exercises 1 to 3 to the diagram.

What he/she is like . . .

not very .....

What he/she looks like . . .

..... eyes



Write five sentences about your relative.

1. He/she is quite.....
2. He/she has.....
3. .....
4. .....
5. .....

Exercise 2
Complete the sentences with the correct verbs.
1. Ali _____ (like/is like/is liking) his father because they are both very generous men.
2. Juma _____ (looks like/likes looking/looks) his uncle – they have the same eyes and hair.
3. My daughter _____ (looks/looks like/like) me but my son is more _____ (likes/liking/like) his father.
4. My cousin really _____ (like/likes/is like) going fishing when the weather is cool.
5. My brother _____ (doesn't/isn't like/likes) me at all because he _____ (doesn't like/ isn't like/ not like) playing sport.

Exercise 3
Write sentences about Khalid's habits, and what he likes and doesn't like doing.

What adjectives can you use to describe Khalid?

Use the words in the box.

like	love	hate	really
also	quite	at all	dislike

Things Khalid likes and dislikes:	
helping other people	✓✓
going for an early morning run	✓
driving in the desert	×
playing computer games	×××
learning new things	✓✓✓
travelling abroad	×
spending time with his family	✓✓✓
shopping for clothes	××

Khalid really likes .....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

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Name: ..... **ID:** ..... **Section:**.....

UNIT 9

Worksheet 3: WRITING

Exercise 1: Writing a First Draft

Describe one of your relatives.

- ☑ Start with an introductory paragraph.
- ☑ Write two body paragraphs.
- ☑ End with a concluding paragraph.
- ☑ Use adjectives practised in the unit.
- ☑ Write about 150 words.

Title: .....

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With your partner, read your paragraph and check	✔
The first sentence in each paragraph is 2-3 centimetres from the margin.	
Clearly stated thesis statement for the whole essay	
Capital letters at the start of sentences. (**M**y father comes from Dundee in Scotland.)	
Start with an introductory paragraph. **Paragraph 1:** Who is the person? Why did you choose to write about him/ her? His/ Her age? What does/ did he/ she do? How long has he/ she been in the same position?	
Two body paragraphs : **Paragraph 2 (Physical appearance):** What does/ did he/ she exactly look like? How far has he/ she changed since he/ she was younger? **Paragraph 3 (Personality and likes/dislikes/ habits):** What's he/ she like? What does he/ she like/ dislike? His/ Her influence on you. Describe an incident to support what you say.	
Concluding paragraph: **Paragraph 4:** What do you think of him/ her?	
Capital letters for days, months, names, cities, countries, and places. (**A**hmad, **S**eptember, **F**riday, **M**r, Jeddah, **S**audi **A**rabia, **K**ing **A**bdul **A**ziz **U**niversity, **E**nglish, **S**tarbucks, etc.)	
One verb (or more)in every sentence	
Correct word order (They live in a big house in Jeddah.) (~~**live they**~~ in a big house in Jeddah.)	
ONLY ONE subject in a sentence . (*My family* ~~***they***~~ *eat in a restaurant every day.*)	
No run-on sentence. (On that particular day, she was exhausted**,*** she went to bed.)	
Linking words and phrases to organize writing: who/ that/ *and / but/ because/so / First of all/ However/On the other hand,/ for example/ for instance /also / moreover/ / Finally/*	
Topic Vocabulary: Adjectives: (for example Worksheet 1, Exercises 1-2) Verbs: (for example verbs in Worksheet 2, Exercise 3)	
Past tense for **specific time**; past continuous for **background scene**; present perfect for **achievements**.	
Spelling (use a dictionary)	
Full stops at the end of sentences.	
Concluding sentence	

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Name: ..... **ID:** ..... **Section:**.....

UNIT 9

Worksheet 4: WRITING

- ☑ Start with an introductory paragraph.
- ☑ Write two body paragraphs.
- ☑ End with a concluding paragraph.
- ☑ Use adjectives practised in the unit.
- ☑ Write about 150 words.

Exercise 2: Writing a Final Draft

Make corrections and write out the description again neatly. Describe one of your relatives.

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With your partner, read your paragraph and check	✔
The first sentence in each paragraph is 2-3 centimetres from the margin.	
Clearly stated thesis statement for the whole essay	
Capital letters at the start of sentences. (**M**y father comes from Dundee in Scotland.)	
Start with an introductory paragraph. **Paragraph 1:** Who is the person? Why did you choose to write about him/ her? His/ Her age? What does/ did he/ she do? How long has he/ she been in the same position?	
Two body paragraphs : **Paragraph 2 (Physical appearance):** What does/ did he/ she exactly look like? How far has he/ she changed since he/ she was younger? **Paragraph 3 (Personality and likes/dislikes/ habits):** What's he/ she like? What does he/ she like/ dislike? His/ Her influence on you. Describe an incident to support what you say.	
Concluding paragraph: **Paragraph 4:** What do you think of him/ her?	
Capital letters for days, months, names, cities, countries, and places. (**A**hmad, **S**eptember, **F**riday, **M**r, Jeddah, **S**audi **A**rabia, **K**ing **A**bdul **A**ziz **U**niversity, **E**nglish, **S**tarbucks, etc.)	
One verb (or more)in every sentence	
Correct word order (They live in a big house in Jeddah.) (~~**live they**~~ in a big house in Jeddah.)	
ONLY ONE subject in a sentence . (*My family* ~~***they***~~ *eat in a restaurant every day.*)	
No run-on sentence. (On that particular day, she was exhausted,* she went to bed.)	
Linking words and phrases to organize writing: who/ that/ *and / but/ because/so / First of all/ However/On the other hand,/ for example/ for instance /also / moreover/ / Finally/*	
Topic Vocabulary: Adjectives: (for example Worksheet 1, Exercises 1-2) Verbs: (for example verbs in Worksheet 2, Exercise 3)	
Past tense for **specific time**; past continuous for **background scene**; present perfect for **achievements**.	
Spelling (use a dictionary)	
Full stops at the end of sentences.	
Concluding sentence	

Appendix 8: Teacher_11's letter

Letter from the ELI curriculum unit in response to teacher's_11 request to use her own material and methods. She got permission to use her own ideas - from the men's side, that is, the Unit in charge of teaching the male students.

Dear Ms ……..,

Many thanks for your feedback and suggestions. Just to clarify, the writing guide exercises (the grammar exercises you refer to in your feedback) have been included only as an option. They are not mandatory. If you want to use your own writing process and your own resources and activities, that is absolutely fine. The important thing is that the learner's get the chance to self and peer correct and edit and improve their work, and that the instructor gives input and support to enable them to improve.

Regarding how many drafts they should write, "officially", I believe this is two - a first and a final draft - however, I think this should be at the instructor's discretion depending on the needs of the particular class they are teaching. Two drafts isn't really enough for the learners to develop their skills and improve their piece of writing. I did three drafts this module with my class. However, I do realise that we do not have all the time we need to devote to writing skills with the current pacing guide - the Curriculum Unit proposed extending the level 103 course over two modules to free up more time for this (and other practice) but this was rejected.

At least next module will be one week longer than this module, which should slightly improve the situation.

Best wishes

ELI Curriculum Unit