



**An investigation into the academic writing:
Difficulties of Saudi Postgraduate Students**

Submitted by

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Signature:

Dedication

To my parents, sisters and brothers who lovingly and patiently supported and encouraged me through this endeavour. To my husband for his sacrifice, kindness and encouragement. To my daughters, Farah, Saba and Reem for their endless love and support.

Abstract

This interpretive study aims to investigate the difficulties in English academic writing as perceived by Saudi postgraduate students and their English supervisors in an English-speaking country. In accordance with the exploratory nature of the methodological approach adopted in this study, the research design of the current study employs a sequential mixed-methods design.

The quantitative phase is represented by the questionnaire whereas semi-structured interviews and document analysis constitute the qualitative phase. From the sample, 275 students were asked to fill in the prepared questionnaire whilst 15 students, of both genders, and 9 supervisors were asked to participate in an interview. Ten samples of students' written feedback from their supervisors were provided. Data were analysed quantitatively using SPSS descriptive statistics and qualitatively using MAXQDA software.

The findings of the current study revealed that Saudi postgraduate students face the following difficulties in their English academic writing: not having sufficient academic vocabulary, avoiding plagiarism, using cohesive devices properly, constructing logical arguments, making coherent links between ideas, and demonstrating critical thinking in their academic writing. Furthermore, the current study highlighted that the difficulties could be attributed to a number of factors, including those related to learners, context, and instruction. Several strategies were proposed that could assist Saudi students in improving their academic writing. Additionally, the lack of academic preparation in the KSA had a negative influence on the proficiency of Saudi postgraduate students in their English academic writing, resulting in disparities between the expectations placed on students in their postgraduate studies in the UK and the actual results achieved

by Saudi students. The findings also revealed that EAP courses in the UK often aided students in learning writing techniques; however, these courses have certain limitations.

According to the findings of the current study, a theoretical model is suggested to help Saudi postgraduate students in their English academic writing. Based on the study findings, implications are drawn for policy makers and for practice in the education system in Saudi Arabia. Finally, suggestions for further research are provided.

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List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a second Language

EAP English for Academic Purposes

ELC English Language Centre

ELT English Language Teaching

EMI English medium instruction

MoHE Ministry of Higher Education

MoE Ministry of Education

L1 First Language

L2 Second Language

KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

IELTS International English Language Test System

TOEFL Test of English for Speakers of other Languages

1 Chapter One: Introduction to the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the current study. An explanation of the research problem is highlighted and the rationale and aims of the study are presented. This is followed by the research questions, the significance of the study and its contribution to knowledge, and finally, the structure of the study.

Like many countries, educational improvement has been at the forefront of the educational scene in the Arab world including the. KSA. Within these concerns of educational development, and because of its need for a well-educated population to contribute to the Socio-economic development of the Kingdom, the government of Saudi Arabia started to show an awareness of the demands of education in general and of higher education in particular. In 2005, for instance, the Saudi government started a sponsorship scheme or programme called “the King Abdullah Scholarship” for Saudi students who aspire to study abroad in English-speaking countries, mainly the USA and the UK (MoHE, 2006).

According to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), in 2011, approximately 75,000 Saudi students were studying abroad in the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia (MoHE, 2011). In fact, 7,000 Saudi students were enrolled to study for a British degree in the UK, the context of this study (Royal Embassy of KSA, Cultural Bureau Attaché in London). This confirms both the desire of Saudi students to study in the UK and the government’s decision to provide funding for them.

Like many other non-native speakers of English who are pursuing their higher degree(s) in the UK, Saudi students face several challenges and difficulties in

their studies. These include socio-economic, academic, and individual challenges (Al-Zahrani, 2016). One of these challenges are related to the difficulties students face in English academic writing, and this is the focus and the area of investigation of the study. That is because assessment in many academic disciplines is based, to a large extent, on students producing “good writing texts in the form of essays, assignments, term-papers, or dissertations” (Al-Badwawi, 2011, p.2). Furthermore, academic writing in most academic disciplines at university level is quite a complicated skill to master. It requires from students both proper use of the language (linguistic knowledge) and adequate knowledge of the subject matter (disciplinary knowledge).

The challenges of academic writing in a second language among Arab students, including Saudi students, are well documented in the existing literature (Al-Mansour, 2015; Ankawi, 2015; Al Fadda, 2012). There are a number of possible factors that might affect students’ performance in writing, for instance, writing style, anxiety, motivation, poor language proficiency, and lack of confidence (Al Fadda, 2012).

Furthermore, negative L1 transfer into L2 writing and students’ cultural background are other factors contributing to writing difficulties (Shukri, 2014). Additionally, the educational system in KSA, broadly speaking, does not grant the process of English writing the attention it requires. For example, most state teaching curricula do not dedicate enough teaching hours to writing classes; therefore, “students do not receive enough training in the academic context, which reflects negatively on their finished product” (Alharthi, 2011, p.22). Thus, this research focuses on exploring students and supervisors’ views of these academic writing challenges.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As discussed earlier, academic writing is a major obstacle not only for Saudi postgraduate students studying in the UK, but also for many students worldwide. In addition, many studies in the literature deal with the writing challenges of Arab and Saudi students. However, these studies focus only on the writing challenges at the language level (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Al Fadda, 2012; Al-Kairy, 2013; Al-Mansour, 2015; Ankawi, 2015). The literature regarding the challenges facing Arab students in general, and Saudi students in particular, concerning their written assignments and/or theses are rather limited and do not consider the difficulties of Saudi postgraduate students at the university level in the UK.

Therefore, the current study is concerned with exploring the academic writing difficulties that Saudi postgraduate students encounter in their research while doing their postgraduate studies in the UK. It presents the difficulties as perceived by Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors; in this way, the neglected views of the Saudi participants are examined, yielding suggestions for overcoming these difficulties.

1.3 Rationale of the study

Saudi postgraduate students come to study in the UK from different Saudi universities, under the auspices of the Saudi MoHE. These students are given different scholarships in different specialisations to strengthen the Saudi higher education system with qualified staff. According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau, there are more than 10,000 Saudi students studying in different parts of the UK and of these, just very few attain the required scores in the Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) or International English language testing system (IELTS) test (Grami, 2010; Alsagoafi, 2013). As a result, many students need to

take these tests several times before they achieve the required scores. Those students who fail to achieve them get the chance to study the English language with native speaker teachers at pre-sessional courses that are offered at various British universities. As a Saudi postgraduate student, I realized that some of my peers struggled to express themselves clearly in English academic writing, and this naturally had an impact on their ability to develop well-written pieces of academic research. This is because “the purpose of the dissertation or thesis is to show the ability to effectively communicate the information on a given topic on a professional level. Unlike other forms of scholarly writing, the audience is that of a professor, department, or college” (Kemp, 2007, p.29).

This difficulty with writing skills identified by Kemp (2007) increases if English is not the students' first language. This is because writing in a foreign language is a difficult process, which involves "cognitive (linguistic competence of composing), meta-cognitive (awareness of purpose, audience and style), social (being communicative and interactive with peers and the target reader) and affective (being expressive of feelings as well as ideas) factors" (Xiao-xia, 2007, p.31); this makes writing skills particularly difficult to acquire compared to other language skills.

Given such an understanding of the academic writing difficulties faced by Saudi students who are pursuing their higher studies in UK, the rationale for conducting this study, therefore, has its origins in a number of factors.

First, I conducted informal interviews with some Saudi postgraduate students regarding the challenges they encounter with academic writing in their assignments and theses. Most of their responses revealed that they had difficulties constructing well-developed arguments, linking ideas, finding accurate

vocabulary to express their ideas, providing reasonable justification for the obtained results in the discussion chapter, and paraphrasing and writing critically (i.e. describing rather than evaluating and analysing).

Second, most research that explored the difficulties of academic writing for Arab and Saudi students revealed that they have difficulties in both content and form in academic writing (Rabab`ah, 2003; Mourtaga, 2004; Al-Zubaidi, 2012; Al Fadda, 2012; Ankawi, 2015) .

Such difficulties range from introducing a topic, achieving cohesion and coherence in texts, constructing a strong argument, using academic vocabulary, and using the relevant literature. However, the majority of these studies did not explore the challenges of academic writing for postgraduate students in particular; instead, they focused on either writing an essay around some given topics and the analysis adopted on various taxonomies or intervention training programmes to develop the writing capacity for students. Finally, to the best of my knowledge, no previous study has used Saudi postgraduate students and supervisors as a sample to explore their perceptions regarding the difficulties of English academic writing.

Thus, exploring the academic writing challenges could help in providing a better understanding of these difficulties and suggest possible solutions to overcome them. It could also assist in finding the gap in the academic preparation programmes offered for postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia.

1.4 Research aims

This study attempts to achieve the following aims. Firstly, it aims to explore Saudi postgraduate students' views about the difficulties posed by their academic writing learning experiences. Secondly, it endeavors to explore their supervisors'

views about the academic writing difficulties of Saudi postgraduate students. Thirdly, it attempts to provide suggestions and implications for Saudi postgraduate students to improve their academic writing.

1.5 Research questions

Based on what I discussed earlier regarding the statement of the problem, which underpins the purpose of the study, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What difficulties do Saudi postgraduate students encounter in their English academic writing in their postgraduate studies?
- 2- How are academic English writing difficulties viewed by Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors?
- 3- What impact does the lack of EAP preparation in Saudi Arabia have on the proficiency level of academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students?

1.6 Significance of the study and contribution to knowledge

This study is significant because it has the potential to improve Saudi students' English academic writing. It provides an understanding of the difficulties encountered by Saudi postgraduate students in the English academic writing context. This is significant for Saudi postgraduate students because it intends to offer useful suggestions for developing their academic writing skills. Furthermore, the exploratory methodology used in the current study is useful because it employs various methods that explore the participants' perceptions in more detail by employing questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and analysing them both quantitatively and qualitatively, as this methodology has not been extensively used in Saudi Arabia. It is hoped that the findings of the

current study will yield useful data for policy-makers in Saudi Arabia to guide their decision-making with regard to English language academia.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters as follows:

This chapter introduces the background of the research, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, the aims of the study, and the research questions.

Chapter two is intended to familiarize the reader with the Saudi context. This includes the nature of the education system in Saudi Arabia, and the English language teaching system at the pre-university and university stage, which are described with reference to English writing in higher education. It also includes a review of the programmes offered in Saudi Arabia King Abdullah Scholarship. Finally, the use of English for academic purposes (EAP) courses to prepare international students in the UK is highlighted.

Chapter three reviews the related literature in two parts. The first part addresses theories of writing and approaches to teaching academic writing. The second part deals with an overview of research into EAP. The third part covers the difficulties that Saudi postgraduate students face with academic writing while the fourth part discusses the factors that affect the development of academic writing: student-related factors, instruction-related factors, and context-related factors.

Chapter four offers a description of the methodological issues of the study. It begins with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the study as well as the theoretical framework. This chapter also presents the research design, the data collection methods, the analysis procedures, and the

sampling approach. Finally, it sheds light on the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents a detailed analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data from the three research instruments that are used in the study, namely, questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. This involves the analysis of statistical data and the interpretation of the qualitative findings.

Chapter six presents the discussion of the main findings, which are drawn from the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, and it links these data to the context of the current study and the related literature.

Lastly, chapter seven summarises the findings of the study. It also presents the theoretical and pedagogical contribution to knowledge and the implications arising from this study. The chapter ends with suggestions for further research and reflections upon my PhD research journey.

2 Chapter Two: Context of the Study

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with establishing the background and the context of the study. It starts with an overview of the background information about Saudi Arabia. Then, the administration of education is discussed. Next, English language teaching at the pre-university and university stages are described with reference to English writing in both English and non-English departments. Moreover, the King Abdullah Scholarship is presented. Finally, EAP courses in the UK are highlighted.

2.2 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: an overview

The KSA extends to approximately 2,250,000 square kilometres (868,730 square miles) between the Arabian Gulf on the east and the Red Sea on the west. With the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain to the east, Saudi Arabia also shares borders with Kuwait, Iraq, and Jordan in the north and with Yemen and Oman in the south (MOEP, 2011). Saudi Arabia occupies four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula, and the capital city is Riyadh City. The population is "more than 27 million. Among this number, more than 18 million Saudi citizens all share both the Arabic language and Islam as their only religion" (Alfahadi, 2012, p. 23). Additionally, the existence of the two holy cities, Makkah and Medina, in the western region of Saudi Arabia means more than one million pilgrims come from around the world to perform a pilgrimage every year as part of their religious observance. The Kingdom is considered as the heart of Islam; therefore, the government policy is based on two sources: *Holy Quran* and *AlShura* (Islamic

Holy Law). In addition, all the social and cultural aspects of life, including education, are influenced by the Islamic religion.

Accordingly, the education system is rooted in Islam, which gives the nation its doctrine, worship, ethics, law, and judgment as well as an integrated system of life, which is an essential part of the public policy of the KSA. In the past, there were no school buildings, and mosques were the only sources of knowledge. Moreover, the method of instruction and teaching was limited to what was called the '*kottabs*'; this was a place where children used to memorise the Holy Quran under the supervision of a religious teacher called a '*sheikh*' (Al-Nafisah, 2001). This means education was not based on a systematic and structured curriculum, but was based only on recitation and memorising (Alfahadi, 2012). Thus, this sort of teaching can be considered as the basis of the education system in Saudi Arabia (Al-Nafisah, 2001).

2.3 The Education System in Saudi Arabia

All educational policies are under the supervision or control of the Saudi government. Furthermore, the government is the main sponsor for education and its management duties, for instance, offering tuition and providing free textbooks for all the residents at all levels of learning. The syllabuses, textbooks, and curricula are uniform throughout the country. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is considered the main agency that controls the system of education in Saudi Arabia.

The organisation and aspects of the education system in Saudi Arabia are all designed to promote the objectives and principles of Islam. Further, a key component of the education system in the KSA is allowing students to acquire habits conducive to autonomous learning. Education should also comprise social

and personal learning, allowing students to contribute positively to the nation later in life (MoE, 2007).

2.3.1 The Ministry of Education

The administration of the public education system in Saudi Arabia is highly centralised. The Department for Curriculum, which is part of the MoE, is responsible for the development of the curriculum and the planning of subject textbooks because the curriculum is standardised throughout the Kingdom. There is a textbook for every subject at every grade, which should be taught throughout the schools of the Kingdom. In recent times, “Public education has been the subject of a major development project of which curriculum reforms received the largest share of attention” (Habbash, 2011, p. 33).

In light of the evident need for education reforms, in 2008, the Saudi government launched a national project, namely, the Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Project for Developing Public Education and established additional development programmes known as Tatweer. The main aim of these projects was to improve public education and to ensure that students acquire the skills necessary to allow them to participate in an increasingly globalised society and to be involved with the complex problems that globalisation brings, while at the same time preserving the ideology and values underpinning Saudi society (King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Public Education Development Project, 2010). This project, which cost US 3.1 billion dollars, was forecast to end in 2013. One of the significant purposes of this project in the field of pedagogy was to help teachers to learn the methods and the implementation of critical thinking. However, there was not much development in the education system after the implementation of the Tatweer project. This is because there was no change in the level of students’

achievement due to the lack of human resources and technical provisions for schools (Alyami, 2014).

2.3.2 The Ministry of Higher Education

The MoHE was established in 1975 to take over the implementation of the policy of the Kingdom in higher education; previous to this, universities had been under the supervision of the MoE. In addition, the MoHE is responsible for education offices abroad, international academic relations, and scholarships.

In addition, universities continue to receive great support from the government, including the establishment of new universities. The number of universities in the Kingdom in 2004 increased from eight to twenty-one public universities, six private universities, and eighteen community colleges. In 2011, the number of universities further increased to thirty-two universities. Those universities that offered scientific disciplines were independent in their finance and administration though they remained under the supervision of the MoHE.

Recently, all universities accepted students according to their grades in tests provided by the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education to create both equality and fairness in the process of admission and to promote proficiency in the higher education system (Alebaikan, 2010). In Saudi Arabia, institutions and universities offer four types of degrees, namely, diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate. Students normally spend four years to achieve a bachelor's degree in arts or social sciences and longer in other sciences, for instance, medicine or engineering. Furthermore, the medium of instruction in the fields of medicine, science, and technology is the English language, whereas the Arabic language is the medium of instruction for most of the other fields (MoHE, 2010).

Higher education in Saudi Arabia has undergone some developments due to reforms in the last three years (Allamnahrah, 2013). Accordingly, another project, called 'Afaq', was launched to reform education at the higher education stage. This project took these developments into consideration. Afaq started in 2006 and will continue until 2030. The purpose of this project is to improve the standards of higher education in Saudi Arabia, with one of its main goals being to enhance the skills of learners at the tertiary level to standards comparable with their international peers (Afaq, 2007). The Afaq project has a long-term vision, as the aim is to design an education system that will "satisfy the coming twenty five years"(Allamnahrah, 2013 p. 35). However, although there are funds to finance these projects, they will fail if they are not implemented adequately (Al-Essa, 2010).

These changes have been key in furthering the development of the English language in the KSA, due to its increasing popularity and use in academic settings (Habbash, 2011). Therefore, the following section will explain the status of the English language in the Saudi education system in more detail.

2.4 English language teaching in Saudi Arabia

2.4.1 Teaching English at the pre-university stage

Language is the fundamental means of communication between humans of different tongues and dialects, and is considered a means of expression for human rights, to transfer people's ideas and to share experiences with others.

English particularly is an important foreign tool of communication with people from across the globe. This is true in Saudi Arabia in particular because "throughout the year, Muslims from all over the world visit the country to perform Umra (a religious rite); nearly two million worshippers arrive annually to participate in the

ritual pilgrimage. Therefore, it has become essential for Saudis to be taught English so that they can interact with the large number of English-speaking visitors to their country" (Al-Seghayer, 2005, p. 158). Furthermore, Alfahadi (2012) stated that the Saudi government considers English as a medium of diplomatic relations and as a means of bringing modern technology to the country.

With regard to the curriculum and English textbooks in Saudi Arabia, they have shown a significant improvement during the last sixty years.

However, these curricula have been criticised by educationalists in the field for many reasons. First, some curricula show a "heavy reliance on old teaching methods such as grammar, translation and audiolingual methods" (Habbash, 2011, p. 40). Second, other curricula represent the Saudi culture with western concepts (AL-Hajailan, 2003). Third, Al-Hazmi (2005) mentioned that students' "inability to achieve the target level of English language proficiency is attributed to the absence of emphasis on students' academic and occupational needs, as stated in the intended objectives of teaching English in Saudi Arabia" (as cited in Habbash, 2011, p. 41). Fourth, teachers in the KSA have reported receiving limited help from the MoE and very little advice from those meant to be advising them to ensure that they are performing well and keeping up to date with modern teaching methods (Alfahadi, 2012); this has contributed to making the audio-lingual approach the most prominent teaching approach used in Saudi Arabia. Fifth, teachers always ask the questions and expect the students to give a correct answer, or they show students examples for memorisation to reproduce a controlled product (Al-Hawasawi, 2004). Sixth, teachers are still advocating the use of individual repetitions as teaching methods in their classes (Al-Seghayer, 2014; Alrashidi & Huy Phan, 2015), and this leads students to have a passive

role in the English language classroom without them having the opportunity to express their views. Seventh, with regard to the current practice of teaching writing skills in the Saudi classroom, the focus of my study, “Saudi teachers emphasize linguistic accuracy, which is at the forefront of their instruction, as well as proper grammar, accurate spelling, meaningful punctuation, and range in vocabulary and sentence structures” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p. 94). This means that the focus is only on the product-based approach in their teaching of writing skills.

For the above reasons, parents, teachers, and specialists in the MoE agreed that students were graduating from secondary schools with unsatisfactory levels of English proficiency (Alfahadi, 2012). This also has been confirmed by many researchers (Al-Tuwaijri, 1982; Al-Ansary, Al-Oadi & Al-Mashary, 2006). In the same vein, Habbash (2011) found that students are incapable of conducting an easy conversation or producing a basic written passage.

Thus, Saudi universities decided to offer students who had graduated from public school programmes an opportunity to improve their English language competence before starting their first year at the university. The following section presents these programmes in more detail.

2.4.2 Teaching English at the university stage

2.4.2.1 Academic English courses

Some universities in Saudi Arabia, for instance, King Fahad University (KFU), King Saud University (KSU), and King Abdul Aziz University (KAU), provide intensive English courses for students who have graduated from secondary schools to improve their English language skills in order to help them in their academic courses at the university stage.

KFU, which uses English medium instruction (EMI), provides a programme for English language teaching before the students enrol in their academic courses. The aim of this programme is to prepare the students to speak English accurately and fluently because all the courses are taught in English, and they will require English for their future employment (Alqahtani, 2011). Furthermore, KSU started a language centre in 1975 to prepare students before they start their academic studies. There are now more than 2,000 students in this centre (Alqahtani, 2011). The aim of this language centre is to develop students' proficiency in English and to provide them with the basic language skills they need in their academic and professional lives in the future.

Then, in 1975, KAU established an English language centre in conjunction with the British Council for students who are enrolled in the faculties of Medicine and Engineering. According to the university website, the language centre aims to prepare students to be qualified for the job market to fulfil their roles successfully in society. Furthermore, according to Mursal (2005), in 1994, the English language centre became an independent centre of the university, and it was attached to the faculty of Arts and Humanities only for administrative and academic purposes.

In Saudi Arabia, there are many English courses that aim to teach general English and English for specific purposes (ESP) which deal with teaching the basic knowledge of the language system, rather than specific courses, such as EAP courses. However, many Saudi students have shown dissatisfaction with these courses, as they do not meet their needs or interests. In addition, these courses adopt a teacher-centred approach rather than learner-centred methods (Alqahtani, 2011). Additionally, the teachers fail to transfer the best skills to their students in the practice of teaching (Al-Ansari, 1995).

Therefore, I would argue that the English academic courses that are provided in Saudi Arabia are not practical in real English-speaking environments. However, we cannot blame the English language programme alone because responsibility for the lack of success of these programmes (Alqahtani, 2011) should be shared among the students, the instructors, and the material that is taught, as each has a role to play in the learning progress.

2.4.2.2 The Preparatory year Programme

In 2007/2008, the MoHE developed a new university system called “the preparatory year programme”. Thus, students, after finishing secondary school and prior to entering university, need to be enrolled in this programme. They should complete the requirements of the preparatory year in one academic year. Most Saudi universities attempt to provide an opportunity for their students who are enrolled in the preparatory year programme to achieve the following objectives:

- to bridge the gap between the public education system and the requirements of university studies
- to prepare students for university education
- to guide the students academically towards the college appropriate to his or her abilities and inclinations
- to rationalize the use of the potential of the university
- to improve the inputs and outputs of the university
- to develop learning and thinking skills and scientific debates
- to increase the number of students admitted to the university
- to prepare graduates with the necessary skills for the labour market and development plans (MoHE, 2008)

2.4.2.3 The English Language Centre (ELC)

In most universities, the MoHE has created a centre for teaching English, in particular in the preparatory year. This centre is called (ELC), and its aims are as follows:

- to provide a preparatory general curriculum and ESP teaching services to all university students
- to provide general English literacy and specialised courses for university teaching assistants and administrative staff
- to provide customised courses for TOEFL and graduate studies scholarship for local applicants
- to provide language teaching services through the use of the latest educational technologies particularly Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and E-Learning (Mursal, 2005)

Furthermore, the MoHE provides the ELC with the support they require in terms of employing qualified faculty members from all over the world, constructing a language laboratory, and signing contracts with English language teaching (ELT) publishers for composing book series. These series follow a new approach to teaching the English language, which depends on a modern method of education in that it integrates the traditional approach with an advanced technical one. This approach is based on media and learning management systems and on the use of the interactive and communicative curriculum to develop students' self-learning abilities. Additionally, these series show an awareness of the Islamic morals and customs of the local community. Additionally, at the beginning of the preparatory year, the ELC offers each student a placement test of general language-learning needs to classify them into different levels according to their English language proficiency.

The Saudi government has made many efforts to improve English language teaching and has provided a huge budget to be spent on education (Javid, Farooq & Gulzar, 2012). However, the level of Saudi students' English proficiency is still weak; according to the Cambridge Examination Centre, they have been "ranked 39 out of the 40 nations participating in general and academic training tests" (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 45).

Despite the advantages of the above programmes, many students who graduated from the public education system have criticised them, arguing that all the subjects are taught in English and do not relate to disciplines that can contribute to helping students in determining their orientation (Al-Hussiani, 2012). Students have also complained about excessive amounts of homework as well as the duration of the course, claiming that four hours of English every day is both exhausting and boring, and thus, they cannot focus on and understand all the given information.

As a lecturer in the preparatory year programme at an English language department in Saudi Arabia, I would argue that the success of these programmes depends on identifying the disadvantages and listening to students' views to re-evaluate these programmes, which could help in avoiding these kinds of criticisms in the future.

2.4.2.4 The structure of the academic component in English departments

The significance of English as a global language has led the Saudi government to offer it a higher status within higher education. For instance, in the undergraduate stage, during the first semester at all universities, the English language is a compulsory subject in all departments for students to pass to the second semester. The general aim of ELT at this stage is to provide a directed

review of English language skills with an emphasis on the expansion and reinforcement of understanding through practice in reading along with supplementary activities in speaking, writing, and listening skills. Besides, English is “used as the medium of instruction in technological and scientific fields, while all other subjects are taught in Arabic” (Alebaikan, 2010, p. 19). However, in most departments, the only method of teaching is lecturing, even in English departments. This is because of the large number of students, where lecturing can be considered the most appropriate method to spread knowledge. However, Scrivener (1998) revealed that, in large classes, the students’ understanding of instructions cannot be checked by the instructor, who may not be able to hear what the students say. In addition, in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes specifically, the lecturer cannot check the accuracy of students’ language use. The course materials in most English departments in universities do not involve specific books because there are no unified curricula for these courses, and every lecturer or professor suggests various books for his/her course.

Students can join the English department at any of the Humanity and Social Science faculties around the Kingdom and be an English teacher at the elementary, intermediate, or secondary stage. The duration of study in an English department normally lasts four years, with each year consisting of two terms. During these four years, students are taught different English courses every year that amount to 15 hours per week; the total number of hours for these academic courses is 120 hours and consist of translation, applied linguistics, English language skills, and English literature. Furthermore, students’ proficiency level is evaluated by a written examination at the end of the term. These courses follow different orders because they are based on each university’s policy.

According to my experience as an undergraduate student at the faculty of Arts and Humanities, most of the English departments focus on English literature, translation, literary criticism, and applied linguistics and ignore the methods and theories of teaching a foreign language. Habbash (2011) notes that "students take only one course on ELT methodology and spend only the last semester of their programme in intermediate and secondary schools as novice teachers, which is insufficient preparation to meet their diverse needs as ELT teachers" (p. 42).

Regarding the postgraduate stage in English departments, the system and teaching methods are the same as for the undergraduate stage. The duration of study is four years; the first two years, which consist of four terms each, are allocated to studying subjects that are divided into general and specific English, and at the end of each term, students take a written examination. The second two years are allocated for writing the thesis.

2.5 English Writing at the university stage in Saudi Arabia

2.5.1 Writing in English Departments

The writing courses for the undergraduate students in English departments at the faculty of Arts and Humanities in Saudi Arabia are divided into four levels: writing 1, writing 2, writing 3, and writing 4. Each level is allocated 3 hours and is given in one or two lectures per week. The general objectives of the writing courses are to train the students to apply the methodology based on sound writing in a foreign language and to apply accuracy in organising their thoughts in order to produce a text that integrates coherence with a logical structure. This should be based on harmony between the elements of the topics, particularly the relationship

between the main idea and supporting ideas according to the requirements of the text.

The teaching approach to writing can be explained as the following based on my experience as a student in an English department at the faculty of Arts and Humanities in Saudi Arabia. At the beginning of the course, the lecturer asks students to photocopy the material that s/he provides them with or some texts from other suggested books.

It is noteworthy that some instructors are “undertaking to design their own teaching aid materials which, since they lack a professional touch, are less effective than they could be” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 20). In addition, there are no specific books or materials for the writing courses, which means there is no particular syllabus that may direct and help students to know the procedures of how to write correctly.

During the writing class, the lecturer asks students to read a text and to highlight any vocabulary which they do not know. After that, the lecturer clarifies any ambiguous vocabulary and starts explaining the text. “The classrooms are usually quiet, as students usually take upon a passive role in their learning process” (Alkubaidi, 2014, p. 84). Then, the students are divided into groups and asked to do the exercises. Sometimes, the lecturer reads the text for the students and asks some volunteers to read it again. The lecture should last for 90 minutes, but most lecturers finish before the allotted time, and they leave the rest of the exercises as homework to be answered by the students with the corrections to be done in the following lecture. In addition, most of the lecturers depend on oral discussions, and they deal only with participating or excellent students who give the correct answer(s), but ignore the weak ones. This was also confirmed by

Alkubaidi (2014), who mentioned that instructors at times “have a group of students with whom they have a great rapport while with others may not “(p. 84).

Furthermore, lecturers in teaching writing base their teaching mostly on the product approach. To clarify, “the students study model texts and attempt various exercises that enable them to draw attention to relevant features of a text, and then replicate them in their own writing” (Al-Khasawneh, 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, the main criterion of good writing for lecturers who use this approach is based on correct writing (i.e. without errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and structure), and this is the only way of assessing students’ writing. Therefore, “by focusing on paragraph writing, English departments ignore the students’ need for writing as a communicative event” (Ezza, 2010, p. 6).

Sometimes, lecturers give oral feedback on the common mistakes because there are more than a hundred students in each lecture, and they cannot deal with the mistakes of every student, or sometimes they ask students to do peer feedback. Furthermore, lecturers are responsible for the grades and the results of the exams.

For postgraduate students in the English department, the situation is the same as for undergraduate students. In the first two years, they do not take any particular course that teaches them how to write academically. Lecturers are responsible for grades or results, and the official assessment of students is by a written examination at the end of each term. This is because the importance of writing comes from the fact that it is the only way to evaluate the students’ performance (Ezza, 2012). Nevertheless, undergraduate and postgraduate students receive their marks without any feedback or without even knowing the criteria used for marking their writing, and if any student fails the course, they

need to repeat it because this is the policy in most of the universities. Postgraduate students in the last two years of study are required to do their theses to get their master's or doctoral degrees.

The lecturers in the English department have either a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree. Some lecturers are from Saudi Arabia, while others are from other countries. However, not all the lecturers have the skills that are necessary to teach academic courses effectively, including writing courses. In addition, some of them use a very traditional way of teaching, which is not associated with the varied methodologies in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

From the above description, it is obvious that lecturers' procedures in teaching writing skills in English departments fail in a number of aspects. First, English departments in Arab countries in general "irrationally copy British and American universities concerning what is to appear in the curriculum; they accumulate their programmes with linguistics and literature courses, leaving little room for skills courses in general and writing courses in particular" (Ezza, 2012, p. 6). Second, "the existing writing curriculum does not treat writing as a communicative event" (Ezza, 2012, p. 6). This leads lecturers to consider the success of students' writing based only on their application of efficient grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation rules in the text. Third, the lecturers' techniques in the class are the main methods of controlling the process of teaching writing, though this involves ignoring students' voices and encouraging students to be passive receivers rather than to experience two-way communication. Fourth, the nature of the written examination, based on recalling what students have learned, contributes to there being no attempt to improve their critical thinking skills while writing (Ahmed, 2010).

2.5.2 Writing in non-English departments

Non-English departments in Saudi Arabia, for instance, engineering, science, medicine, and computer science, use EMI (Alebaikan, 2010). Thus, undergraduate and postgraduate students in non-English departments are forced to do assignments and examinations in English because this is the policy in most of the universities (Ebad, 2014). However, students' writing in English is restricted to writing formulas as in chemistry, theories as in physics, medical terminology as in medicine, or multiple-choice answers; there are few opportunities for students to write descriptions or explanations. Furthermore, most lecturers in these departments hold a master's or a doctoral degree. They are the only ones who are responsible for choosing the materials or references of the courses and for students' assessment.

Moreover, their teaching approach is very traditional and is based on a teacher-centred approach, which completely neglects the students' role in the class (Alkhatib, 2015). Moreover, most of the syllabuses do not include any particular procedures to teach students how to write correctly in English for their assignments or examinations. However, in reality, using English mostly depends on the lecturers' qualifications: if they are proficient in English or their native language is English, students will receive their lectures in English. In contrast, if the lecturers are not proficient in English, the lectures will be in Arabic, but students will still need to do their examinations and assignments in English. Therefore, some students, while doing their assignments, ask personal tutors or colleagues to help them, while others students use translation websites or dictionaries.

The official way to assess students is the written examination at the end of the term, and most of the lecturers' emphasis is on correcting the content whether it is formulas, diagrams, medical terminology, or theories. Thus, they ignore students' mistakes in sentence structure (grammar), spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary and in achieving harmony within the text, which affects students' ability to write academically in the future. Thus, after graduation from university, the majority of students do not acquire the ability to write, explain, express opinions, or publish an academic paper in English.

Accordingly, the weakness of English writing in non-English departments might be because some universities assume that students who have finished the preparation programme have gained the basic skills in the English language, but the truth is that most students have difficulties with English skills in general and in writing in particular, for instance, paragraph, structure, capitalisation, spelling, and punctuation (Khan & Khan, 2012). Khan and Khan (2012) claimed that there are a number of reasons for these difficulties. The first is the weak foundation, which includes students' lack of motivation and teachers' lack of interest. Second, there are environmental reasons regarding the interference of students' mother tongue and the lack of opportunities for students to use English in their daily life. Third, students are taught a lower level of English writing, which does not focus on generating, discussing, and evaluating views, and which contributes to students not having sufficient practice in colleges/schools and to teachers not applying new techniques for teaching writing. The fourth reason is students' low proficiency in mastering writing skills in Arabic.

In Saudi Arabia, there are no courses at the university stage that teach postgraduate students English writing for academic purposes, and a written examination is the only form of assessment in these courses. Therefore, most

students face many challenges when it comes to succeeding in writing academically in English. Thus, through the "King Abdullah Scholarship", the Saudi government has provided students with the opportunity to study abroad in a foreign English native-speaking country to improve their English language academic skills to succeed in the academic courses.

2.6 King Abdullah Scholarship

There are many challenges during the educational process in higher education in Saudi Arabia. One of these challenges is the need to improve the quality of education and to adopt international academic standards to increase graduates' level and develop their abilities. To meet these challenges, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques (King Abdullah) launched in 2005 the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship programme to support Saudi universities in both the state and the private sectors.

The aims of the King Abdullah Scholarship are as follows:

- Sponsor qualified Saudis for study in the best universities around the world.
- Establish a high level of academic and professional standards in the Kingdom through the foreign scholarship programme.
- Exchange scientific, educational, and cultural experiences with countries worldwide.
- Build up the number of qualified and professional Saudi staff in the work environment.
- Raise and develop the level of professionalism among Saudis. (MoHE, 2009)

Initially, the King Abdullah Scholarship programme was applied for only five years; however, it was then extended until the year 2020 (Alzahrani, 2016) .

In addition, the Saudi government allocated to the King Abdullah Scholarship programme more than seven billion riyals (£120, 000, 0000) to send students to universities in a number of countries, for instance, the UK, the US, Australia, Germany, Singapore, and Malaysia.

The scholarship programme provides funds for living expenses and tuition fees for up to 4 years (MoHE website, 2011), and it has offered scholarships to more than 75,000 students during the last 5 years (MoHE, 2011). Candidates must be Saudi Arabian citizens in order to be eligible for the scholarship programme. Secondly, they must have a high Grade Point Average. They must also be a full time student and agree to reside in the country that their scholarship is issued to. While the scholarship is awarded to both male and female Saudis, a female student must have a male guardian to travel with her. The guardian is required to stay with her through the completion of the scholarship programme. Guardian expenses are covered by the programme. In addition to these requirements, there are also specific requirements based on the type of degree being sought. For example, in order to apply for the bachelor degree scholarship, the applicant cannot be older than twenty-two years. For the doctoral degree scholarship, the applicant cannot be older than thirty (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). However, these scholarships are given without previously measuring the students' English speaking and writing ability, whether through direct examination or through previous English results; consequently, many of the students receiving scholarships to study in English-speaking nations struggle due to a lack proficiency in English (Alzahrani, 2016).

In the UK alone, which is the context of the current study, there are 7,000 Saudi students benefitting from this scholarship (Royal Embassy of KSA, Cultural Bureau Attaché, London). However, those students "have experienced learning

loss and have to start English instruction at very low levels upon arrival” (Alzahrani, 2016, p. 3). Therefore, students enrol onto EAP courses to improve their English language proficiency level in general and to obtain the essential research skills they require for their university studies. However, it is important to examine the EAP courses for academic preparation that Saudi postgraduate students have undertaken in the UK to ascertain their efficiency to help Saudi students overcome the difficulties that might prevent them from realising fully their academic writing potential. This will be the subject of the following section.

2.7 EAP Courses in the UK

Many UK colleges and universities have set up university English centres that offer EAP programmes. These programmes might offer two types of credit-bearing courses. The first type is non-credit-bearing courses before university admission, for instance, ‘pre-sessional’ courses, where students’ proficiency is ‘fine-tuned’ in preparation for university study, or intensive programmes, which offer a range of proficiency levels, to prepare students for the requirements of university admission. The second type is credit-bearing courses within the university curriculum. The current study focuses on pre-university intensive EAP programmes offering non-credit courses.

The broad aim of EAP courses is to improve the language proficiency of learners as a whole and help them to become competent in the academic skills that will be required in their studies at the university stage (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011).

The aim of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is to improve the communicative competence of students by encouraging them to participate in communicative activities (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2007; Thompson, 1996). Meanwhile, in EAP courses, the teacher becomes an advisor or monitor rather

than an authority or source of knowledge (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 167). The curriculum design of any EAP course should take account of the various needs of prospective university students in using the language (Shing & Sim, 2011). Alqahtani (2011) revealed that needs analysis will assist EAP instructors and teachers to explore learners' needs by using a range of activities to meet these needs. For instance, one of the skills that international students are required to master is the ability to write academically to demonstrate their ideas successfully (Horowitz, 1986; Johns, 1991). Therefore, "needs analysis in this case will help teachers of EAP to choose a topic that will interest learners from different disciplines" (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 181). Moreover, EAP curriculum planners and teachers should take into consideration the inconsistency between the requirements of IELTS writing tasks and the needs of academic literacy to help learners to succeed in higher education (Moore & Morton, 2005; Green, 2007; Hyland, 2007).

Most UK universities run three different EAP courses. The first of these is a long course, which lasts between 6 months and a year and which begins just after the student enrolls. The second is a pre-session course, which lasts an average of two months beginning in July, while the third is an in-session course, which targets those who meet the language standards expected for new students but who still need to work on their application of the English language, particularly as pertains to academia (Teaching Quality Assurance Manual, 2014).

For instance, the EAP programme in Exeter University, which is accredited by the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP), is normally provided to international students to prepare them academically to guarantee them a place on British tertiary postgraduate courses. However, EAP courses may not be the only option available to those studying in the UK, as more

specific qualifications for business or law based courses are also available (Alqahtani, 2011).

Regarding Saudi postgraduate students, the majority of them, when they enter UK universities and even after their completion of the EAP course in the UK, still face some difficulties in their academic skills in general and in their academic writing skills in particular. This is because these courses focus more on general language skills without considering what students actually need in their academic research; for instance, in writing programmes, students do not practise how to deal with a literature review or how to engage critically with the theories and the theoretical framework that they need for the postgraduate stage. There is no doubt that the differences in the education system and culture between the UK and Saudi Arabia and students' English language proficiency are all factors that affect the students' progress in these courses.

There is a lack of communication from the EAP tutors regarding the proficiency and previous knowledge of Saudi students travelling overseas for study, as well as frustration with the absence of EAP courses in the KSA to induct students adequately into learning in English (Alqahtani, 2011).

Therefore, it is hoped that the current study, by understanding the specific needs of Saudi students on their arrival in the UK, can assist in bridging the gap in the academic preparation programmes offered for postgraduate students from Saudi Arabia.

2.8 Summary

This chapter presented the context of the current study by providing an overview of the KSA. Then, it focused on the Saudi educational system in general. After that, it presented how the English language is taught at the pre-university and

university stages. Following this, a brief review was given of the teaching of English writing at the university stage in English and non-English departments. Finally, an overview was given of the King Abdullah Scholarship programme as well as the academic English preparation programmes offered to Saudi students in the UK to assess their ability to overcome these difficulties. The literature review, which represents the various aspects of EFL academic writing, is given in the following chapter.

3 Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature pertaining to EFL academic writing, with special reference to the Arab world and the Saudi context. It will be divided into four sections; the first section will discuss theories of L2 writing and approaches to teaching English academic writing. The second section will present an overview of research into EAP, while the third will deal with the difficulties that students face when tackling academic writing. The fourth section will discuss the factors affecting the development of academic writing, including student-related factors, instructional-related factors and context-related factors. Each section will begin with the significance of those particular issues in relation to academic writing, which will be followed by a review of studies in the international context. Finally, more specific local studies done within the Saudi Arabia context will be reviewed.

Academic writing in education is defined as “the style of writing found in academic and scholarly journals in education, dissertations and master’s theses and other professional publications in education” (Kemp, 2007, p. 9). Academic writing is essential for several reasons. First, it is a type of creative writing that can be taught to EFL/ESL students because it provides them with the opportunity to express their own ideas in L2 and “academic English in particular gave rise to exponential growth in the activities of language teaching, materials publishing and research that further informs these activities” (Bruce, 2008, p. 1). Additionally, academic writing has a number of benefits for students, including the following: it improves their creative abilities to communicate, develops their productive writing skills, and offers them the opportunity for self-expression by means of the target

language, which contributes to improving the overall potential of their creativity (Tarnopolsky & Kozhushko, 2007).

In relation to the context of the current study, learning about academic writing is essential for Saudi postgraduate students because it helps them to understand how to write an essay or a thesis in English. This will help learners to master the required skills, to be able to write critically, express their own ideas, develop arguments and counter-arguments and achieve coherence and cohesion in their texts. Moreover, being proficient in academic writing in English will enable Saudi students to succeed in their academic courses and examinations. Further, competence in English academic writing will help Saudi students to conduct research and publish papers in the future. Therefore, learners should follow specific rules in order to produce good academic writing. Accordingly, Yugianingrum (2010) identified four characteristics and conditions of adequate academic writing:

- Writing should play a significant role in the related community.
- The topic should be interesting for the writer, who believes that there is more to discover about it.
- The writer must care about the aesthetic quality of the text he/she writes.
- The community should help writers in accessing relevant resources and finding support and guidance (pp.40–41).

However, Al Fadda (2012) revealed that academic writing in English at higher levels presents a dilemma for non-native English speakers and even for English native speakers. She added that “success at the postgraduate level depends on the students’ ability to access, evaluate, and synthesize the words, ideas, and opinions of others in order to develop their own academic voice” (p. 124). Saudi postgraduate students encounter challenges and difficulties when they write in

academic English; these difficulties might be due to various reasons, such as “writing style, motivation, anxiety, over expression, writer’s block, and other emotional factors” (Al Fadda, 2012, p.123). Furthermore, Saudi postgraduate students use writing because it is the sole means of assessment at the end of any course. They thus regard writing solely as a way to pass tests rather than being interested in writing itself (Ahmed, 2010). In the same vein, Hyland (2003) highlighted that ESL/EFL students have experienced traditional product-centred instruction with an emphasis on correctness; hence, learners only focus on teachers’ feedback that addresses the grammar and mechanics of the texts. The previous approach tends to make writing decontextualized and artificial, and does not provide learners with a true sense of the purpose of writing for a target audience (Ahmed, 2010). Furthermore, in many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, the practices of education are formed by the cultures in which they operate. That is to say, those students are stimulated to imitate and memorise what they study instead of learning to express their personal voice, give their opinions, and develop creative and critical thinking processes.

3.2 Theories of L2 Writing

Learning theories related to L2 writing can assist teachers in making connections with other ideas that lead to better understanding of students’ needs. Regarding academic writing in particular, learning theories help teachers to know their role in assisting learners to be competent in their discipline (Pleschova, 2010). Combining theories with the practice in teaching L2 writing also helps teachers reflect on and evaluate their teaching methods (Ahmad, 2011). This section provides an overview of the theories associated with L2 writing: social constructionist theory, contrastive rhetoric theory, cognitive developmental theory

and audience theory. Each theory will be presented separately to clarify what it mentions about writing in L2.

3.2.1 *Contrastive Rhetoric*

The theory of contrastive rhetoric was first proposed by Kaplan (1966) in his article about the 'Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education'. His essential interest was in the interference of culturally bound first language thought and writing patterns on writing in a second language. Furthermore, contrastive rhetoric theory is one of the earliest theories, which concentrates on L2 writing (Mutsuda, 1997); also, it emphasises the text instead of the writer. According to this theory, the writing of the text will be structured to join information within acceptable sociological, psychological and linguistic principles (Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008). Moreover, "the notion of the text is a multidimensional construct where linguistic features vary across age, gender, social class, occupation, social role, politeness, purpose and topic" (Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008, p. 4). The focus of contrastive rhetoric theory has provided teachers with a practical framework for evaluating and analysing L2 writing to assist students to identify the rhetorical differences between their native language and English, such as matters of social convention (Kennedy, 1998).

However, since its emergence, contrastive rhetoric theory has met with various criticisms for its prescriptive, reductionist, deterministic and essentialist orientation (Leki, 1997). Kubota (1992) criticised the contrastive rhetoric theory because of its tendency to "construct a homogenous representation of the 'Other' while legitimating a certain kind of rhetoric as a canon" (p. 20). Furthermore, focusing on the text only will not guide the development of the fluent writing models that are needed to support developments in the instruction of writing (Al

Kamil & Troudi, 2008). Another criticism is that contrastive rhetoric theory considers learners as human agents and views their L1 as a deficiency (Kubota, 1992; Spack, 1997). To conclude, it can be argued that there is a need to learn the performance of the writer in the process of L2 writing. Thus, rhetorical strategies must be identified as tools that L2 writers can use to help them to demonstrate organisation in their views in writing conventions that are satisfactory to English native speakers (Congjun, 2005, p. 2).

3.2.2 Cognitive Developmental Theory

The main focus of cognitive developmental theory is on the cognitive processes of the writer rather than the reader. This theory was first proposed by Piaget. The major assumption of this theory, according to Piaget, is that "knowledge is highly organised; learning involves the assimilation of new ideas to previous knowledge, and intellectual development is an active construction on the part of the knower" (Kennedy, 1998, p.27). Furthermore, Kennedy (1998) mentioned that cognitive developmental theory has made a significant contribution to the learning of writing as a process. In this respect, it is useful to mention two models that have had a great impact on research in L2 writing (Beare, 2000). These models are Flower and Hayes' (1981) model and Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) model (Congjun, 2005). The first model, suggested by Flower and Hayes (1981), is a comprehensive model of composing, which has been criticised because it does not account for the individual differences between poor and good writers and assumes that all writers have only one writing process (Congjun, 2005). On the other hand, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), based on experimental research, think-aloud protocol analyses, and direct observation, suggested two models of writing: knowledge telling and knowledge transforming (Congjun, 2005). Nevertheless, their model has been criticised because "it is purely cognitive in

nature and does not give credit to the social factors involved in writing” (Congjun, 2005, p. 2). According to cognitive developmental theory, classroom procedure should be based on the writer in terms of using metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, creation of different drafts, and revising and editing tasks (Ahmed, 2011). According to this theory, writers have the opportunity to select their topics and undertake their writing tasks without any intervention (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). However, the exam oriented techniques used in Saudi Arabia do not give students the opportunity to think for themselves.

3.2.3 A Theory of Audience

The nature of this theory is based on the interactivity between the text and the reader (John, 1990) because an “audience is essential to the creation of text and the generation of meaning” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 207). To understand the concept of writing, it is necessary to understand the nature of the reader in terms of “whether the reader is known individually and from the same culture, and whether the background information and the topic are shared between the reader and the writer” (Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008, p. 4). Furthermore, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) revealed that the writer’s text can be read by different audiences who have different purposes, which can lead to challenges in organising and generating ideas. Thus, “L2 writers should take into consideration the advanced level skills of organisation and planning as well as the lower level skills of punctuation, spelling, and word choice” (Richards & Renandya, 2002, as cited in Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008, p. 5). Moreover, Hyland (2002) placed emphasis on the idea that “culture plays a role in an interactional writer-reader dyad and that there is the possibility in L2 writing transfer of rhetorical features from the writer’s L1” (p. 37). Consequently, when teaching writing as a second language, there should be an awareness of the various ways one can organise ideas among various speech

communities (Hyland, 2002), especially if there is not a shared culture between the reader and the writer, as is the case with the current study. In addition, Al Kamil and Troudi (2008) recommended that knowledge of the social and cultural background of the reader and writer is needed to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstandings in L2 writing.

3.2.4 Social Constructionist Theory

The concept of the social constructionist theory is based on Vygotsky's (1978) psychological studies, which state that thinking skills are developed via interaction with others, such as teachers, caregivers, and peers. Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural theory described how "human minds develop in relation to their interaction with their culture, which seems to be valid to all societies" (cited in Kamil, 2011, p. 59). Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001) stated that "language and culture are bound up with each other and interrelated" (p.14). Accordingly, reality, facts, knowledge, text, and thought in the social constructionist theory are constructs developed by communities (Lo, 1998).

Social constructionist theory is currently a common perspective that is widely used among educators and social scientists (Chaisuriya, 2003). This is because "when learning/teaching takes place under different cultural contexts, the physical and the psychological means will certainly be unlike, and it is realistic to predict dissimilar outcomes" (Kamil, 2011, p. 59). Many researchers (Cazden, 1996; Ellertson, 1999; Markel, 1993; Storch, 2005) have mentioned that the social constructionist theory has been widely used in the field of composition and writing. This is because it concentrates on the creativity and subjectivity of writers in the process of writing. Moreover, teachers of social constructionist writing emphasise that writing creates a communication mode in discourse or an

academic community because it is socially constructed (Mu, 2005). This perspective has been further clarified by Kennedy (1998). He mentioned that the focus is on how each community defines writing and writers, how the community is represented by texts, how knowledge is constituted and reconstituted and how participants are formed within these discursive practices.

On the other hand, social constructionist theory does not ignore the individual student as an effective element in constructing knowledge, as each student gives different answers to the context; each student internalises it in a distinctive way based on her/his own existing knowledge, experiences, and characteristics (Kamil, 2011). Overall, researchers who adopt the social constructionist approach regard their communication with their subjects as a main element of social reality. This social interaction and the process construct knowledge (Dowd, 2003). In the same vein, Dixon-Krauss (1990) asserted that the development of writing happens when students involved in a difficult task do it independently, forcing them to ask for help from proficient peers for their operation and performance of writing

After reviewing the literature on the main theories for EFL/ESL writing, I will now justify my choice of the conceptual framework for this study based on the above mentioned theories and the context of this particular study. In this regard, I have decided to follow social constructionist theory for the following main reasons: First, I see this theory as the most appropriate one that can be applied to the case of L2 academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students, as according to this theory, the students can participate with peers and teachers in a social setting to improve their critical thinking and thus to reflect this criticality in their academic writing and analysis. Second, I see social constructionist theory as specifically applicable to this context because of its particular focus on the writer (student),

text, and reader at the same time, unlike other theories, such as contrastive rhetoric theory, which focuses on the text, or cognitive developmental theory, which focuses solely on the writer's creativity. Third, the concept of writing in social constructionist theory is considered as "chains of short- and long-term production, representation, reception and distribution" in which writing is "a dialogue and collaborative processes between the writer and the reader" (Prior, 2006, p. 58). Finally, social constructionist theory is especially important in this study to help Saudi postgraduate students socially construct the difficulties they encounter in writing their theses or assignments. That is, these difficulties will be investigated through different perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors in a socially constructed way to give a significant explanation and understanding of what the difficulties of academic writing are and why students in this particular context have these difficulties.

The act of teaching writing is a complex process, as writing entails standard forms of syntax, vocabulary, and grammar, to a greater extent than other methods of communication. Writing is planned, and it cannot depend on rhythm, body language, and/or stress to transfer meaning (Raimes, 1983). There are many possible approaches to teaching writing, a number of which will be presented in the following section.

3.2.5 Approaches to Teaching Writing

This section will focus on the most popular approaches: the product approach, the process approach, the genre approach and the post-process approach. Each of these will be briefly explained in turn.

3.2.5.1 Product Approach

The product approach has emerged since the late 1970s and sees writing as being primarily about linguistic knowledge. In this approach, students are asked to write an essay imitating a given model text provided by the teacher; then they are expected to track the standard to reconstruct a new piece of writing. According to Ferris and Hedgcock (1998), this approach considers the students' written products as "static representations of their knowledge and learning" (p. 3). Teachers focus on the correctness of the final piece of writing, and the assessment is based on vocabulary use, grammatical correctness, and mechanical considerations, such as punctuation, capitalisation and spelling (Holden, 1994). In the same vein, Yan (2005) stated that the product approach mainly emphasises linguistic knowledge, cohesion devices, syntax, and vocabulary. As a result, it is teacher-centred, because the teacher becomes the arbitrator of the models used (Brakus, 2003). In this approach, the main criterion of good writing is correct writing, without reference being made to structure and grammar mistakes. In addition, some writing procedures, such as planning and drafting, are allotted a small role in the product approach (Badger & White, 2000). In reference to teaching writing skills in Saudi English classrooms, Al-Seghayer (2015) mentioned that the current practice of the disciplines is heavily based on the product approach, through which "teachers emphasize linguistic accuracy, which is at the forefront of their instruction, as well as proper grammar, accurate spelling, meaningful punctuation, and range in vocabulary and sentence structures" (p. 94).

According to Yan (2005), the product approach has been criticised because it "requires constant error correction, and that affects students' motivation and self-esteem" (p. 19). Besides, this approach devalues the process of writing because

students' errors in writing are more likely to continue if they are not exposed to native-like models of written texts (Myles, 2002). Moreover, the overemphasis on the linguistic forms in this approach contributes to students rarely acquiring the skills required to shape and create their work (Robertson, 2008). Additionally, using the product approach ensures the exclusion of any opportunities for interaction between teachers and their students or between the students themselves (Al-Seghayer, 2015).

3.2.5.2 Process Approach

The criticisms that the product approach has received in writing skills have led many researchers and teachers to re-evaluate the nature and the process of teaching writing. This has contributed to a revolutionising shift in the teaching of writing, known as the process approach (Prodromou, 1995). Kroll (2001) defined the process approach as follows:

The 'process approach' serves today as an umbrella term for many types of writing courses What the term captures is the fact that student writers engage in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach rather than a single-shot approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts (pp. 220-221).

Therefore, the process approach places emphasis on several stages of writing; for instance, brainstorming, drafting, revising and editing. These stages can be discursive and non-linear (Yan, 2005). The notion of the process approach considers writing as "a complicated cognitive process [that] involves multiple stages: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing" (Zeng, 2005, p.67). In this approach, the teacher as facilitator guides and gives feedback during these stages, but does not emphasise correctness. Emphasis on the final product comes only towards the very end of the writing process.

Hasan and Akhand (2010) clearly stated how the process approach differs from the product approach, demonstrating that the product approach focuses on imitating tasks in which the students use the vocabulary and structure they have been taught in the classroom to produce the final product. In other words, students in this approach are taught to “develop competence in particular modes of written communication by deconstructing and reconstructing model texts” (Christmas, 2011, p. 1). In contrast, the process approach focuses on the activities for developing the text through many stages rather than focusing on the product. Moreover, it "emphasizes personal and expressive writing at the expense of the skills and attitudes needed by academically bound ESL students with limited lexical and linguistic repertoires" (Carkin, 2005, p. 89).

According to Donovan and McClelland (1980) and Williams (2003), through the use of the process approach, classrooms become workshops for writing. In such classrooms, writing is not taught but learnt. Students focus on conveying a written message through classroom activities that are based on several stages, such as prewriting, drafting, revising and editing, in order to master the characteristics of good writers. However, "it is difficult to conceptualize the effective teaching of different kinds of writing at the university level without these stages" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 11).

Numerous studies in the Arab world (Abdel-Latif, 2009; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Alhosani, 2006; Al-Sharah, 1997; El-Shafie, 1990; Ghannage, 2000; Mansor, 2005; Mohammad, 1993) confirm the effectiveness of the process approach in improving the EFL writing skills of Arab students. However, the process approach has been criticised because it has a somewhat monolithic view of writing (Badger & White, 2000). Within this approach, the writing process is regarded as being the same for all audiences and does not take account of the content of the text.

Moreover, Atkinson (2003) revealed that the process approach concentrates only on the writing process and skills in the classroom and thus fails to take into consideration the cultural and social aspects which have an influence on various types of writing. Accordingly, these criticisms of the process approach have contributed to the appearance of the genre approach.

3.2.5.3 Genre Approach

The third approach to teaching writing is the “genre” approach. Hyland (2003) defined genre theory as "a socially informed theory of language offering an authoritative pedagogy grounded in research on texts and contexts, strongly committed to empowering students to participate effectively in target situations" (p. 23). Moreover, the writing pedagogies in the genre approach provide students with systematic descriptions of the functions of language in social contexts, which are considered to be at the heart of this approach (Hyland, 2003). In addition, Swales (1990) focused on the genre approach in teaching academic writing. He emphasised analysing the texts in terms of communicative purposes. Students in this approach learn to write their own texts by choosing the most expressive and appropriate language when attempting to accomplish similar communicative purposes.

The underpinning theory of this approach, according to Vygotsky (1978, in Hyland, 2003), focuses on the cooperative nature of learning between students and the teacher. The role of the teacher is to support learners and give clear instructions to move gradually with the models through analysis and discussion until learners produce independently a text parallel to the model (Hyland, 2003). According to Flowerdew (2002), the genre approach is viewed as a dynamic approach that is diverse across instructors in particular disciplines, across

disciplines, and across time. Therefore, the aim in writing is to assist students to achieve the genre form that is related to their situation (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). Moreover, there are three stages to the genre approach to writing. First, the presentation of a model text is analysed in terms of social purposes and linguistic knowledge. Second, the teacher helps the learner to construct a text that includes collecting information and conducting research. Third, based on the knowledge that the learners have gained, they produce their own text (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1997). This helps them to obtain knowledge of the way language works and its role in the texts (Hyland, 2007).

In ELT in general, the genre approach is becoming more common, and teaching writing in particular is regarded as dominantly linguistic in this approach (Badger & White, 2000). So, there is "a range of kinds of writing that corresponds to different social contexts, for different purposes, such as sales letters, research articles and reports linked with different situations" (Flowerdew, 1993, p. 307). In short, this approach guides students step by step to construct a written text independently, and helps them to be critical in their writing and self-confident in their skills.

However, the genre approach has been criticised because it is not always possible to achieve cooperation with instructors from different disciplines (Flowerdew, 2002). Furthermore, learners in this approach are largely passive and the skills required to produce a text are undervalued (Badger & White, 2000). Swales (1990) added another problem, that is, "how to move from the analysis of the genre to the classroom teaching of the features found to the learners" (as cited in Tuff, 1993, p. 707). Even after the analysis stage, the genre is not explicit and does not yield its secrets, which limits its pedagogical usefulness (Tuff, 1993).

Accordingly, I do not favour one approach over the other, as the process approach may help students in their planning and revising stage in particular. Furthermore, the genre approach helps students to deconstruct the way in which the literature review or argument is written. The product approach may also offer help and support to students in choosing academic vocabulary and developing coherence. I believe that this is not about an eclectic mix from each approach but instead a strategic one; in order to teach writing efficiently, it is not appropriate to choose randomly from the available approaches. In fact, thinking about students' needs and the sequence of learning, it is expected that teachers might start with identifying the genre (i.e. academic writing) progress, moving on to the planning process, then finishing with the product.

In relation to the Saudi context, the teaching of writing skills in the KSA is still predominantly rooted in the traditional product approach. This is due to the “time constraints, large class sizes or overcrowded classrooms, teachers’ lack of experience teaching L2 writing, and students’ lack of ability to write in their own language, Arabic, and lack of adequate training in writing English” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p. 94). He adds that the current practice of teaching writing is that Saudi English teachers focus on the linguistic accuracy (i.e. accurate spelling, sentence structures and appropriate grammar); this, perhaps, explains why their feedback and grades focus on surface level errors and the mechanics of the language.

The current study focuses on writing difficulties with regard to the final text and, therefore, looks at writing as a product, though one could choose to look at writing difficulties within revising or planning a text, which could mean looking at writing as a process. This is not because I believe it is essential to focus on the product only, but because first, it is necessary to see the actual writing difficulties from a sample of students by studying the sample of feedback they have received from

their supervisors. Secondly, the only official way to assess and grade student's ability in writing at postgraduate level in the UK is to produce a written text because the form is important at this stage. Third, due to the restraints of the study, this approach is less time consuming.

Being proficient in written English, and mastering the other language skills (speaking, listening, and reading), would allow Saudi students to succeed in their academic courses and examinations, and to function within English-speaking societies. To this end, the Saudi government decided to send students abroad for study, due to the perceived need for well-educated people to contribute to the improvement of the Kingdom.

Therefore, many overseas universities have designed EAP courses for international students to develop their writing skills, including the development of sophisticated and highly accurate academic language use (Storch & Tapper, p. 208). In the following section, I will address studies relating to EAP courses, which refer to the classes in which international students enroll when they study abroad, and the impact these courses have on the English language proficiency of students in general, though with a later focus on writing skills.

3.3 Research into English for Academic Purposes

A considerable number of studies have underscored that many international students experience challenges in their academic study when they travel abroad to attend western universities where English is the medium of instruction (Andrade, 2006; Berman & Cheng, 2001; Evans & Green, 2007; Grundy, 1993; Holmes, 2006; Kaldor & Rochecouste, 2002; Melles, 2008; Morita, 2004; Swales et al, 2001). These difficulties involve the demands for academic writing in their disciplines (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Evans & Green, 2007; Kaldor &

RocheCouste, 2002), being capable to grasp and read an academic English context (Blue, 1993), the requirement to use academic vocabulary (Woodward-Kron, 2008), and being capable to analyse the texts and think critically (Melles, 2008). I would argue that progress in these academic skills depends on the language proficiency level of learners. Success and understanding in these skills have fundamental implications for intercultural education (Andrade, 2006; Grundy, 1993). This has led to studies that have shown how international students' proficiency is affected by their level of English proficiency (Farnhill & Hayes, 1996; Storch, 2009).

Some studies on the influence of EAP courses on the English proficiency of international students have emphasised that EAP courses lead to improvement in learners' overall language competence (Elder & O'Luighlin, 2003) or in their writing proficiency (Green & Weir, 2003), while others have found no improvement (Brown, 1998; Green, 2005; Hu, 2007; Read & Hays, 2003) .

Storch and Tapper (2009) revealed that very few researchers have provided empirical evidence for the usefulness of EAP courses, although various studies have advocated teaching it. At the same time, some studies have not found significant changes in learners' language competence in terms of complexity and accuracy; however, they have reported progress in other areas.

To explore the impact of EAP courses on students' English language proficiency, Storch and Tapper (2009) conducted a study to investigate the impact of EAP on one specific area, namely, postgraduate writing. Sixty-nine learners in the engineering stream from different backgrounds were involved in the study. The results showed that the EAP courses in Australia did not meet learners' needs in terms of writing, as they discovered that the learners had difficulties in using good

text structure, an academic vocabulary, and accurate language. Conversely, Hu's (2007) results showed that the curriculum did assist Chinese learners to achieve the required level of competence and confidence to let them perform their written tasks at the university stage. Furthermore, Spack (1988) argued that EAP learners have a variety of needs that cannot all be taught and covered in EAP courses. In this respect, it is essential to indicate that the use of TOEFL or IELTS exams to assess the effectiveness of EAP courses is a fundamental problem, because these exams cannot cover all the study skills needed in the classroom (Green, 2006; Puspawati, 2012; Suryaningsih, 2014).

Essentially, these exams place emphasis on grammar, organisation and vocabulary instead of the quality of content. In the same vein, Green's (2005) study of scores gained on the IELTS test raises doubts regarding the conventional wisdom about the amount of language support needed by EAP learners at various levels of proficiency to allow them to achieve the minimum standards required for English medium tertiary study. Additionally, Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) highlighted that certain factors might influence the scores gained by international students, such as their motivation, the extent of their use of English outside the classroom, and their self-confidence.

Some studies have highlighted the improvements of EFL/ESL learners' language proficiency after enrolling in EAP courses (Dooley, 2010; Hyland & Archibald, 2001; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). For instance, studies by Dooley (2010) and Terraschke and Wahid (2011) revealed that EAP courses helped learners to have a better understanding of the course needs and more confidence in dealing with the requirements of their tasks in the course.

In the same vein, Polio, Fleck, and Leder (1998) argued that preparatory EAP writing classes contribute to the improvement of learners' linguistic accuracy because during the class, learners receive feedback on their writing. Littlewood and Liu (1996) also found that a large proportion of the subjects faced difficulties in meeting the English-language needs of university study in Hong Kong, and suggested that language enhancement measures must be developed and reviewed as "a matter of urgency" (p. 106).

Therefore, it was suggested that EAP courses are essential in bridging the gap between the style of education and the level of English of international learners on their arrival in the country where they are to study, and in assisting students in acquiring the required level of English competence to study in western universities (Alqahtani, 2011; Evans & Green, 2007; Nomnian, 2008; Park, 2006).

Saudi students who are pursuing studies at the postgraduate level in UK universities often enrol in EAP courses first, to provide them with the required academic English language skills (Alqahtani, 2011). However, Saudi students often arrive in the UK with a different background in terms of culture and language, and this can limit their academic achievement in western countries (Edward & Ran, 2006). Thus, one could argue that if EAP instructors and teachers in the UK take into consideration the difficulties of language and culture transition, this could contribute to efforts to provide Saudi students with adequate preparation for their academic studies at the university level. These challenges will be the subject of the following section.

3.4 Academic Writing Difficulties

This section offers a review of some of the academic writing difficulties that Saudi postgraduate students encounter while writing their theses and assignments.

These difficulties include coherence, cohesion, arguments, plagiarism, citation, referencing and lexis.

Academic writing is essential in the context of research and education, and it differs greatly from everyday writing and journalism. Some features of academic writing involve vocabulary, such as a shift from normal to technical terms and adequate academic vocabulary, while others involve complex sentence structures, such as the passive voice (Swales & Feak, 2004). Further aspects relate to responding critically to new information, appropriate use of mechanical writing rules, and meaningful arguments. To convey thoughts in a manner appropriate for scholarship, it is essential to learn academic writing. Learners at university and college levels, however, tend to find it difficult to write (Gourlay, 2009). Some reasons for these difficulties can be low motivation, lack of effective strategies, and receiving negative feedback, either from other students or from the teacher. Thus, the emergence of research areas within EAP can assist materials writers, teachers, and course designers in planning programmes for academic writing (Hyland, 2009) that are tailored to help learners convey their intended messages to a scholarly audience. The following section presents a review of the difficulties of postgraduate students regarding academic EFL writing.

3.4.1 Lack of Academic Vocabulary

Vocabulary is the core of any language and of English in particular, because without it, people are unable to communicate and express their views in both written and verbal form. Academic vocabulary refers to the high frequency words in academic writing that “carry full lexical meaning” and provide the writer with tools to describe complicated processes such as “linguistic acts” and “scientific

activities” (Coxhead & Nation, 2001, p. 258). Learning vocabulary is a crucial element of becoming proficient at other language skills, particularly writing and reading. This was shown in Grabe (2009), who claimed that the fluency of reading for EFL/ESL students depends on the diversity of their vocabulary. Moreover, Alderson (2000) mentioned that the measure of reading comprehension is often combined with the knowledge of vocabulary. Nation (2001) highlighted many reasons that justify why academic vocabulary is regarded as an essential and beneficial learning goal for students of academic English:

First, academic vocabulary is common to a wide range of academic texts. Second, academic vocabulary accounts for a substantial number of words in academic texts. And third, academic vocabulary is the kind of specialized vocabulary that an English teacher can usefully help learners with (as cited in Song, 2002, pp. 114-115).

Furthermore, Salager-Meyer (1990) emphasised that EFL/ESL students in an academic writing class must use words to describe the following: firstly, subject matter in scientific activities (including decline, current, change, etc.); secondly, scientific activities (for example, implementation, analysis, survey, etc.); and finally, linguistic acts (for instance, examine, claim, argue). Some studies have indicated that a lack of sufficient academic vocabulary in writing is problematic for ESL/EFL students (Hinkel, 2003; Paynter et al., 2006; Song, 2002).

Other studies have argued that there are a number of factors that could cause vocabulary problems. First, non-native speakers (NNS) do not have the oral knowledge of words to simplify the shift from oral to written language (National Reading Panel, 2000). Second, L2 students tend to depend too much on using a dictionary to find similar meanings of a word in English (Nagy & Scott, 2000). Third, unlike L1 students, L2 students, due to their lack of cultural background knowledge, are incapable of applying a theme-based strategy which is based on

choosing a theme from a reading passage then selecting the focus word for this theme to learn new vocabulary. Finally, as Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003) argued, L2 students experience difficulties in understanding the relationship between the letter and its sound in the English language because they are often not provided with an awareness of phonetics.

Since vocabulary is an important issue at an international level and in the Arab context, several studies have investigated the vocabulary difficulties that Arab students face in their L2 writing. For example, Rabab'ah (2003) found that Arab students suffer from incompetent vocabulary while involved in communicative situations such as speaking and writing. Therefore, learners were unable to present their ideas precisely and confidently. He suggested that these difficulties could be overcome by constructing more reading courses to encourage students to use extensive reading to increase their vocabulary and improve their academic writing. Such a suggestion is also expected in the context of the current study where reading is important for improving students' writing. Similarly, Hisham (2008) and Al-Khasawneh (2010) revealed that Arab learners encounter problems while carrying out their writing tasks; problems include grammar and referencing but the main problem is vocabulary. This is because "a reasonable vocabulary size is needed for students to function effectively in their programs" (Al-Khasawneh, 2010, p. 14).

Al-Akloby (2001) pointed out that the factors behind Saudi students' failure to learn English vocabulary include vocabulary learning strategies not being used effectively, the vocabulary presentation being restricted to meaning and pronunciation, and unsuccessful procedures for testing and recycling vocabulary. Further, the techniques applied to teaching vocabulary in KSA "reflect unsystematic and unplanned vocabulary teaching activities in which students ask

for the meaning of unknown vocabulary items and instructors provide the meaning” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p. 95). Therefore, learners need to place a priority on learning and assimilating the academic words that they find in English academic texts, in order to use them when they write their academic papers.

Exploring the factors that could contribute to students’ difficulties in academic writing, including academic vocabulary difficulties, will be taken into account in the current study, as this could help in understanding the difficulties students have with writing.

3.4.2 Using Sources

The appropriate use of sources is a necessary requirement for academic writing. In this section, light is shed on the various problems encountered by students when using sources, including plagiarism, citation, and referencing, with a focus on Arab and Saudi students. In addition, there will be an examination of the various causes of the issues encountered when using sources. Plagiarism occurs when cited works and sources are not referenced properly; therefore, plagiarism is the first issue to be discussed, followed by citations and referencing.

3.4.3 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as “the theft of words or ideas, beyond what would normally be regarded as general knowledge” (Park, 2003, p. 472). Another definition is provided by Anderson (2009), who stated that “plagiarism is a type of intellectual theft. It can take many forms, from deliberate cheating to accidentally copying from a source without acknowledgement” (p. 1). Much of this literature stresses that the issue of plagiarism is increasing. Recently, the literature has paid much attention to academic integrity in Higher Education (Carroll & Appleton, 2001;

Deckert, 1993; Dryden, 1999; Harris, 2001; Howard, 1993, 1995; Kolich, 1983; Lathrop, 2000; Myers, 1998; Pennycook, 1996; Scollon, 1995; Sherman, 1992).

Some studies (Abasi & Graves, 2008; Carroll, 2002; Chanock, 2008) emphasise that some learners do not understand the concept of plagiarism. This is also confirmed by other research that has indicated that many learners could not comprehend that what they had done in their writing was plagiarism (Harris, 2001; Hyland, 2001; Sowden, 2005). This is because learners consider that if they mention the names of other authors, they are not plagiarising their ideas (Harris, 2001). Therefore, university students need clarification of the concept of plagiarism to avoid it in their writing.

A number of studies have discovered that plagiarism is an issue that is found frequently among the writing of ESL/EFL students (Marshall & Garry, 2006). For instance, O'Connor (2003) examined 1,925 essays from twenty subjects in six universities that were submitted to 'Turnitin' software by Australian university students. The study results showed that 70% of the essays contained unacceptable levels of plagiarism, and unacceptable levels of unattributed materials were found in 14% of essays. However, this study applied a 'Turnitin' software only for detecting students' plagiarism without trying to understand or find the answers as to why students commit plagiarism, for example, by interviewing them, because plagiarism is an issue that is difficult to understand (Abasi & Graves, 2008). Therefore, the current study uses interviews to investigate the factors that lead students to plagiarise while writing because plagiarism is a sensitive topic, and interviews allow the researcher to obtain information about the participants that cannot be observed or that cannot be gathered from a quantitative study (Wellington, 2000).

Moreover, Deckert (1993) carried out a study to explore how well Chinese students at the university stage in Hong Kong recognized plagiarism in writing and how they evaluated learners who plagiarise. The main findings revealed that learners were not very familiar with the western concept of plagiarism, were unable to identify plagiarism in the text, expressed less attention to the rights of the writer, and thought that students who plagiarise are lazy and weak. Deckert (1993) claimed that Chinese students need explicit training and orientation in order to avoid plagiarism when writing in a western academic community. Additionally, the lack of training in the skill of paragraph development for Chinese learners in either their first or second language leaves them vulnerable to plagiarism in writing (Mohan & Lo, 1985). Another study, conducted by Buranen (1999) in Southern California, to discuss the issue of plagiarism among international students explains that plagiarism is "simply easier to identify in the writing of non-native speakers of English.... [The] passages copied or barely paraphrased from another source interspersed with the non-idiomatic usage of a second language writer of English [...] fairly leap off the page" (p. 70). Moreover, Carroll (2004) revealed that plagiarism is more usually observed among international students in the UK, and "the statistics confirm that international students are over-represented in the statistics of those being punished" (Carroll, 2004, p. 3).

In relation to Arab learners, Al-Zubaidi (2012) conducted a study to shed light on the academic writing difficulties of Arab postgraduate students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM). The results reveal that plagiarism is a crucial problem faced by Arab students in their academic writing, which could lead to their exclusion from their schools. The study concludes that Arab learners' unfamiliarity with the notion of plagiarism and with academic literacy in western countries lead

them to plagiarise. Additionally, Hosny and Shameem (2014) studied female students' attitudes in the College of Computer and Information Sciences (CCIS) at King Saud University in Saudi Arabia with regard to cheating and plagiarism. The findings showed that plagiarism and cheating are both common practices among students, although there is a belief that this is "unethical and against religious value" (p. 748). The same results were found among male Saudi students in Tayan's (2017) study, which investigated the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards cheating and plagiarism. These quantitative studies (Hosny & Shameem, 2014; Tayan, 2017) examined the perceptions and attitudes of students only; however, I would argue that instructors' or teachers' perception of students cheating needs to be taken into consideration to understand why they are cheating and plagiarising even though they are aware that such practices are not ethical.

According to the literature, there are various factors that might lead to unintentional and intentional plagiarism. Firstly, intentional plagiarism may be increased due to the lack of students' motivation to be responsible for their work. Most students go to college in order to guarantee a future career rather than for education itself. Thus, plagiarism can be considered as akin to a business outsourcing administrative task for learners (Bartlett, 2009). Moreover, learners exploit technological advances in finding information, and it is possible to simply copy and paste this information during the submission of their assignments (Auer & Krupar, 2001; Bartlett, 2009). Secondly, the cultural differences between native and non-native students heighten the risk. Furthermore, other studies have shown the influence of the cultural differences between non-native and native students on their awareness of plagiarism and of how it can be formed (Currie, 1998; Marshall & Garry, 2006; Pennycook, 1996; Sherman, 1992). Other

researchers (Angelil-Carter, 2000; Buranen, 1999; Carroll, 2004; Wilson, 1997) have commented that continual pressure to attain high marks or fail could lead students to plagiarise. Finally, larger class sizes “leave students with a feeling of ‘safety in numbers’ when weighing up the risks of being caught because, larger classes mean fewer opportunities for explaining, discussing and disseminating academic values” (Carroll, 2004, p. 5).

3.4.3.1 Citation

Citation is described as a rhetorical feature, which is “central to the social context of persuasion” (Hyland, 1999, p. 342). Appropriate use of citations is an essential element of academic writing, and it is considered a serious difficulty for novice student writers (Borg, 2000; Campbell, 1990). This is because academic writing requires students to combine the views of other researchers with their own arguments to explain what is already known about the subject of the study or to reveal weaknesses in the arguments of others. Consequently, neglecting the issue of citation could lead students to commit plagiarism or miscommunication due to the incorrect citation of information from other sources (Yugianingrum, 2008) or confusion of the cited author’s and the writer’s stance because of the incorrect phrasing of statements (Groom, 2000).

A number of researchers have examined citation practices in various disciplines as well as carrying out an analysis of citation practices in PhD theses (Charles, 2006; Hyland, 1999; Swales, 1981, 1985, 1990; Thompson, 2001). For instance, Hyland (1999) conducted a study to explore the types of citation in eight articles from different disciplines; he identified the differences between them and triangulated his textual analysis by interviewing “one experienced and well-published researcher from each discipline [...] about his or her own citation

behaviours and their thoughts on disciplinary practices” (p. 345). The findings of the study indicate that citation is a more manipulated and integral structure in the humanities and social sciences than in engineering and science. This is because of their contribution to the construction of knowledge and the influence of their epistemological and social conventions. Harwood (2009) carried out a study that identified the functions of citation in academic writing between two disciplines: computer science and sociology. The results revealed that” while the computer scientists more often used citations to direct their audience to further reading, the sociologists’ texts featured more cases of critical citations” (Harwood, 2009, p. 497). Moreover, intra-disciplinary variations were revealed in both fields. Findings such as those shown in Hyland’s (1999) and Harwood’s (2009) studies can raise students’ awareness of all possible types and functions of citation in different disciplines in general. This is of potential importance to the current study, because the students in my study context come from various disciplines.

Exploring the difficulties that non-native students encounter in learning to cite appropriately in their academic texts and examining the factors that govern citation practice in their academic writing, Pickard (1995), in her concordance study, used a corpus of applied linguistics articles to investigate why and how "expert" writers use citations and quotations, particularly the word ‘say’, and analysed the grammatical and lexical choices they make. Novice writers tend to overuse ‘say’ in their references due to their lack of vocabulary and lack of comprehension of the academic writing requirements in acknowledging sources. Moreover, Schembri (2009) tried to obtain insights through interview data to identify the factors that affect the citation practices for three higher- and three lower-graded undergraduate dissertations in Education in Malta University. Results revealed that those students who gained higher grades in their

dissertations integrated more source material, particularly journal articles, into their texts, superimposed their textual voice and used more paraphrases compared to students with lower grades in their dissertations. The study suggests that the two factors that influence the ability of students to master these skills are previous training in academic writing and language competence. However, I would argue that there are other factors that cause problems with citation, such as cultural factors (Connor, 1996; Fox, 1994), and students' incompetence or inadequate intellectual or cognitive development (Pennycook, 1996). Therefore, the current study aims to investigate these issues by exploring the views of both students and supervisors.

A number of studies conducted in the Arab world have shown that citation is another difficulty encountered by Arab learners in their writing (Al Badi, 2015; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2012). For instance, Al Badi (2015) carried out a study to explore the challenges faced by 20 postgraduate international students in their academic writing, including Omani students. The findings demonstrate that students have particular difficulties in citation and referencing when writing academically. Another quantitative study by Rabab'ah and Al-Marshadi (2013) was conducted to investigate citation practices among native English speakers and Saudi EFL non-native writers. The results indicated that Arab EFL students suffered from the lack of experience in citation practice and, consequently, needed to be taught "how such writers may cite different resources appropriately, focusing on different citation types and advanced, sophisticated writing skill" (Rabab'ah & Al-Marshadi, 2013, p. 85). Based on the suggestion of the above study, it can be understood that there is a need for the design and instruction of academic preparation to improve students' writing. Therefore, in the current study

I aim to provide policy makers with the implications in regard to English language academia.

3.4.3.2 Referencing

Referencing is another challenge that EFL students encounter in their academic writing. Students at the university stage should write their references based on a particular format (IEEE, APA, Harvard, etc.) to help them to use appropriate referencing for their academic discipline. According to Neville (2008), there are a number of reasons why referencing is important in academic writing:

First, tracing the origin of ideas, which means referencing, assists in knowing the idea's source, how to improve them, why and when. Second, to validate arguments that means to make different argument and perspective validation they should be complemented with reliable evidence. Third, to acknowledge the work of others that means many perspectives, arguments and ideas in the field of education want to be succeeded (pp. 5-8).

Furthermore, referencing informs the reader about other relevant publications in an area to enable them to observe different perspectives and find gaps in the knowledge about a specific subject (Oermann & Ziolkowski, 2002). However, "referencing per se is a rather neglected area of research" (Neville, 2008, p. 16). Therefore, Spivey and Wilks (2004) highlighted that errors made in referencing prevent the reader from retrieving references and affect the author's credibility and reliability. In a similar vein, Campion (1997) stated that the trustworthiness of authors and the way they use the context influence the value of referencing.

Kendall (2005) explored the difficulties of referencing and citation of bibliographic sources in students' assignments through an online tutorial in the UK to track their referencing errors. The results revealed that students made referencing errors in both e-documents (85%) and books (62%). These errors included missing publication dates, giving the author's first name in full, missing publisher details,

author's name/initials preceding the surname and missing place of publication. Furthermore, Maher and Al-Khasawneh (2010) investigated the writing difficulties reported by Arab postgraduate learners enrolled in business programmes in Malaysia. The findings demonstrated that writing references according to a particular format (APA, IEEE, etc.) might be challenging for international students. However, this study could have explored more writing difficulties of Arab students in various departments from a wider population if it had used complementary methods, such as a questionnaire, since it is argued that the questionnaire is a popular method that facilitates exploring the general trends regarding most students' views of writing difficulties.

Harzing (2002) argued that referencing errors may undermine the knowledge field and its trustworthiness: "When practitioners discover that academics fail to do so, that they resort to carelessly repeating what others have said [...] they are unlikely to value the academic's advice" (p. 145). She added that the heavy workloads in higher education contribute to careless referencing. Further reasons are the "lack of awareness about referencing techniques, lack of diligence in compilation of bibliography and lack of care by the researcher in ensuring their references are structurally correct" (Harinarayana et al., 2011, p. 326).

Neville (2008) claimed that to overcome referencing errors, it is crucial for academics and research students to grasp the 'why' and 'when to' of referencing, 'how' referencing can be provided and what are the appropriate instructions that should be given in order to have accurate references without errors in journals and theses. This is also confirmed by Harinarayana et al. (2011), who recommended "imparting training for young researchers to follow appropriate reference styles and maintain the accuracy of the references" (p. 326). In the

same vein, Maher and Al-Khasawneh (2010) suggested that the use of computer software could assist in solving reference-related problems.

The abovementioned research studies highlight the fact that using sources, (i.e. plagiarism, citation, referencing) is a problematic area in the L2 academic writing of students in different disciplines. It is also obvious that Arab learners find using sources a challenging area while writing in English (Al Badi, 2015; Al-Khasawneh & Maher 2012; Al-Zubaidi, 2012; Rabab'ah & Al-Marshadi, 2013). However, to the researcher's best knowledge, no single Saudi study has tackled the difficulties of using sources in L2 writing at the postgraduate level. It could be argued that this reflects the enormity of the gap that needs to be addressed; the current study could contribute to filling such a gap.

3.4.4 Argumentation

Argumentation is one of the main functions of writing. This means that "language users are expected to expose their ideas and argue persuasively" (Al-Abed Al Haq & Ahmed, 1994, p. 308). Toulmin, Reike and Janik (1984) define argument as "the sequence of interlinked claims and reasons that, between them, establish content and force of the position for which a particular speaker is arguing" (p. 14). Similarly, argument is "a connected series of statements intended to establish a position and implying response to another (or more than one) position" (Andrews, 1995, p. 3). Argument has a number of goals that might contribute to make academic writing more efficient. These goals are to demonstrate and illustrate the idea to the reader, and to convince the reader of the validity of this idea so that he or she can be satisfied about the writer's opinion (Reid, 1982). In addition, Eisenschitz (2000) emphasised that "argument forces students to become active learners, making them aware of the competing paradigms which organize

knowledge and requiring them to recognize and justify their own positions in the context of the range of social and political alternatives open to society” (p. 15). The ability to build an argument effectively in a context to demonstrate critical thinking can be considered as one of the criteria upon which to judge the value of an essay (Nesi & Gardner, 2006).

Constructing an argument is one of the challenges that students face in their academic writing at the university stage. For example, Hirose (2003) conducted a study to compare the L1 and L2 organisational patterns of Japanese EFL students in their argumentative writing. The findings demonstrated that the organisation of students’ patterns is influenced by the instruction, and Japanese students had problems in constructing an argument in their L1 and L2 writing. Moreover, Groom (2000) and Street (2009) mentioned that many EFL students are not successful in their academic writing because of their inability to make a stance and demonstrate their voice while writing an argument. In an attempt to investigate the challenges that students face with argumentation in their academic writing at the university stage, Wingate (2012) revealed that "many problems students encounter are caused by their lack of knowledge of what an argumentative essay requires, particularly of the need to develop their own position in an academic debate" (p. 145). Additionally, Zhu (2001) revealed that most of the Mexican graduate learners in his study considered the most difficult aspect of argumentative writing to be the rhetorical aspects of English argumentative writing.

Several studies have highlighted that Arab students face certain difficulties in using western-style argumentation while writing in the English language (Al-Abed Al Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Ankawi, 2015; Kamel, 2000). This is because in Arabic, many argumentative texts are not analytical, but descriptive, and this results in a

lack of clear counterarguments (Al-Abed Al Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Al-Jubouri, 1995; El-Seidi, 2000; Kamel, 2000).

To investigate possible sources of the problem of Arab learners' writing, Kamel (1989) compared argumentative essays in Arabic and English. Forty-four essays were analysed by graduate students at the doctoral and the master's stage and trained native speaker rates. The results indicate that the proficiency level in second language writing is attributable to argument structure and syntactic development in target language writing. Similarly, Ankawi (2015) carried out a study to explore the academic writing difficulties of Saudi students at a New Zealand university. The findings indicated that students have difficulty writing in a rhetorical style in English. However, Ankawi's study explored the difficulties of academic writing from students' perceptions only, while I would argue that it is important to include supervisors' views because they deal with students and can identify these writing challenges (Lessing & Schulze, 2002). This could contribute to deep understanding about the difficulties and the factors that cause these difficulties, therefore, the current study aims to explore both students' and supervisors' views regarding academic writing difficulties.

Additionally, Kamel (2000) added that "the comprehension of texts such as argumentation depends on training rather than language proficiency" (p. 224). Other researchers (Connor, 1987; Connor & Lauer, 1985; El-Seidi, 2000) have argued that L1 Arab students' need for guidance depends on the principles of argumentation, which might then be adjusted to the contexts of real life and the academic study of the learners.

It is clear from the above reviewed studies that argument constitutes a serious problem for ESL/EFL and Arab learners. This draws the attention to the need to

find solutions to these difficulties to assist learners in their academic writing. For instance, Swales (1990) puts forward the following argument:

Students need appropriate content and formal schemata in order to make 'allowable contributions' to a genre. The formal schemata concerns the rhetorical elements of the genre, such as structure, style and register, and are needed for the appropriate presentation of the writer's position (p. 84).

Moreover, tutors' feedback can be regarded as another tool that provides the students with strategies to improve their arguments in their academic writing (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

3.4.5 Coherence

In this section, I will review one of the academic writing difficulties that students often face while writing their assignments and theses, namely, coherence. Mastering this skill enables students to make the text meaningful and provide unity that will assist readers to comprehend the writer's meaning.

The notion of coherence is vague and difficult to learn, but is considered an essential element of academic writing at an advanced level (Connor, 1990; Connor & Johns, 1990). The term 'coherence' in general means the construction of meaning for readers through connecting ideas. Zor (2006) defined coherence as "the underlying semantic relations that allow a text to be understood" (p. 9). In other words, a text is perceived as coherent when it makes sense. Coherence has also been defined as "an outcome of a dialogue between the text and its listener or reader" (Tanskanen & Benjamins, 2006, p. 192).

A number of studies indicate that EFL students are incompetent in mastering coherence skills in their English writing. For instance, Lee (2002) investigated the effect of teaching coherence in writing on sixteen ESL students at the university level in Hong Kong. Findings revealed that students were competent in

demonstrating coherence in their writing after they had been provided with effective teaching of coherence. Furthermore, Buckingham (2008) explored how a group of thirteen Turkish scholars from the humanities faculty of a prominent Turkish university perceived the development of their discipline-specific second language writing skills. Findings indicated that students experienced difficulties at the sentence and paragraph levels in their postgraduate coursework papers. These difficulties were also seen to be challenging for postgraduate L2 students writing a thesis in English.

Additionally, Karuppiah (2008) pointed out that most students in Malaysia think that being proficient in grammar is sufficient to write a successful essay or composition. This causes many problems for students in constructing coherence in their writing. This was also confirmed by Lee (2004), who concluded that the cause of coherence problems in students' writing is because they focus more on matters of language instead of making meaning.

A number of researchers in the Arab world have highlighted Arab students' coherence problems (Elkhatib, 1983; Shamsheer, 1995). For instance, Elkhatib (1983) discovered that the wrong use of topic sentences and excessive use of coordinate sentences are the causes of improper quality and incoherence in students' writing. Similarly, Qaddumi (1995) argued that in written texts by Arab students, parallelism, repetition, lack of variation, misuse of certain cohesive devices, and sentence length were the main sources of textual deviation and incoherence. Other researchers have claimed that the unskilled use of rhetoric, inadequate linguistic skills, and differences between Arabic and English could be considered as causes for coherence difficulties for Arab learners (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Fitze & Glasgow, 2009; Khalil, 1989; Schofield, 2007).

Al Fadda (2012) carried out a study to explore academic writing difficulties from the perspective of postgraduate students in King Saud University in the KSA; questionnaire findings revealed that students experience difficulty with linking sentences while writing. This may be due to the differences between the Arabic and the English language in terms of the alphabet and writing style, as “Arabic tends to have more metaphoric phrases and lengthier sentences than English does” (Al Fadda, 2012, p. 127). Al Fadda’s (2012) work is one of the few studies which address the difficulties of academic writing in the context of postgraduate students. Therefore, the current study will address the difficulties academic writing poses for Saudi postgraduate students in a different context (UK) and in a range of disciplines considering the perceptions of both students and supervisors. This is because exploring the difficulties from different perceptions could identify the actual writing difficulties that students face and reveal the factors that cause them.

3.4.6 Cohesion

The term ‘cohesion’ refers to the connection of meaning that exists in a text, or it could be defined as linguistic devices that simplify the joining together of all the parts of a text (Halliday, 2000; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Similarly, Enkvist (1990) defined the concept of cohesion as "overt links on the textual surface that help the reader perceive the semantic integrity of a text" (p. 11). From a linguistic perspective, cohesion includes relationships among the various meanings within a text, and each relationship is known as a cohesive tie (Botley & McEney, 1996). These cohesive ties have been classified into eight categories: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, reiteration, synonymy, near-synonymy, and superordinate ties. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the first four categories are grammatical cohesion, while the last four are lexical cohesion.

With regard to the importance of text cohesion in academic writing, many researchers have acknowledged the significance of cohesion in text in academic writing as a mechanism that eases the flow of discourse, and they have also called for more emphasis on instruction for ESL/EFL students in constructing cohesive texts. For instance, Ting (2003) believed that "cohesion as an indispensable text-forming element plays a critical role in composing a text" (p. 1). Similarly, Hinkel (2004) mentioned that cohesion is considered as the connection of ideas in discourse and linking sentences together in a text to demonstrate unified information.

In addition, numerous studies have examined the role of cohesion in writing skills for international students. For example, Hinkel (2001) explored the differences and similarities among the corpus of NNS (non-native speakers) and NS (native speakers) in terms of using clear cohesion devices. The results indicated that the NNS attempted to construct a sequence of thought to move smoothly within the borders of their lexical and syntactic range. Thus, L2 writing needs further attention to the transition of a sentence concerning its appropriateness in academic writing in terms of creating cohesive discourse. Furthermore, Mojica (2006) carried out a study to examine the lexical-cohesive devices preferred by ESL students at the university stage in Manila. Students from English departments and from other departments were divided equally into two groups. The findings revealed that the most preferred type of lexical-cohesive device for 60 percent of both groups was repetition, which I would argue is not a valid academic writing technique. This study provides some useful insights to assist students in enhancing their opportunities to accomplish efficient lexical cohesion in academic papers. McCarthy (1990) also reported that NNSs face challenges in understanding the methods used to construct cohesive and logical ties in their

texts. The researcher concluded that instruction in L2 should address the lexical means of the relationship between causative and resultative, which learners could find ambiguous.

Other studies have indicated the impact of students' social-cultural backgrounds on the use of cohesive devices in L2 writing. For instance, Chen (1994) and Mohamed and Omer (2000) revealed that different uses of cohesive devices in two languages due to culture affects students' thought, content and writing style. In a similar vein, Castro (2004) claimed that the practices of writing are not only considered as a cognitive process to create a piece of writing but they are also shaped by social and cultural factors

In relation to the Arab world, some studies have drawn attention to the challenges of cohesion for Arab learners in L2 writing (Ahmed, 2010; Meygle, 1997; Qaddumi, 1995; Shamsheer, 1995; Taher, 1999). Qaddumi (1995) carried out a study to compare the English and Arabic writings of a group of Arab learners at the University of Bahrain. Thirty texts were analysed and 460 composition papers were reviewed in both languages to identify possible interference. It was shown that the linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical background of Arabic influenced the performance of Bahraini students' writing. The findings of the texts' analysis indicated that sentence length, repetition, lack of variation, parallelism, and misuse of certain cohesive devices were the main sources of textual deviation and incoherence. Another study, conducted by Taher (1999), analysed the academic texts written by Yemeni students in terms of coherence and cohesion. The results clearly demonstrated that students' writing suffered from a lack of vocabulary, a lack of language knowledge, and a lack of ability in using language consistent with situations, as well as inadequate linguistic practice and poor transfer of culture.

In addition, Shokropour and Fallahzadeh (2007) examined the EFL writing problems of Iranian medical students at the university level when writing their reports. Results of the analyses revealed that the students had difficulties in writing skills and language; however, the higher percentage of difficulties was in writing skills.

The following concerns the use of cohesive ties, including reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, reiteration, synonymy, near-synonymy, and superordinate ties. Ahmed (2010) explored the coherence and cohesion problems in EFL essay writing faced by Egyptian student teachers of English. Analysis of the findings reported that there were problems in using anaphoric references, substitution, ellipsis, and genre-related cohesive ties. Similarly, university lecturers referred to the overuse of certain cohesive ties like connecting devices, such as coordination and subordinators. Meygle (1997) revealed that Syrian students at the university level overused coordination devices in their L2 writing, but they did not use many subordinators. He confirmed that the students needed cohesive devices to improve their L2 writing because they were incompetent in using them.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there are no existing studies within this context investigating cohesion difficulties in L2 academic writing; this reflects a gap in the literature regarding cohesion issues for Saudi students at a postgraduate level. Therefore, the current study aims to explore these cohesion difficulties among Saudi postgraduate students, which may contribute to filling this gap.

3.4.7 Lack of Critical Thinking

The importance of critical thinking in education reforms has received much attention from scholars in recent years (Fisher, 2001; Halpern, 1998; Paul, 2011;

Siegel, 1988). These discussions have generated a number of definitions of critical thinking; the earliest definition was developed by John Dewey, who defined the term as an “active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (as cited in Daud, 2012, pp. 17-18). After many attempts to define critical thinking, the following definition was provided by Scriven and Paul (2004), who considered critical thinking to be “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (p. 1). Building upon this conception of critical thinking, Zeteroglu et al. (2012) emphasised that critical thinking is not a predetermined ability and is not just the fare of the creative, but is the process of cultivating independent thoughts within surroundings conducive to the aforementioned process.

There are many goals of critical thinking, one being that it will assist students in raising pertinent questions and in reasoning sensibly across all subjects. Creating fresh questions will allow them to develop their knowledge in any given field (Ljaiya et al., 2011). It is the view of Elander et al. (2006) that critical thinking can contribute to personal development and give individuals a sense of academic autonomy, as well as being a highly transferable skill. On the other hand, critical thinking cannot be considered merely a tool for achieving high test or coursework results, as students must understand the ways in which the process can enhance their future (Vynckep, 2012).

With regard to the relationship between academic writing and critical thinking, Condon and Kelly-Riley (2004) claimed that “writing is a tool of thinking” (p. 56).

Furthermore, Schafersmen (1991) clarified that “writing forces students to organize their thoughts, contemplate their topic, evaluate their data in a logical fashion, and present their conclusions in a persuasive manner” (p. 7). In the same vein, Daud (2012) explained that critical thinking in academic writing is a manifestation of an author’s capacity to analyse and comprehend ideas and assess and synthesise an argument using a variety of sources, before creating their final piece and presenting it to an audience. Therefore, good academic writing is an indication of good critical thinking; this allows students to follow the route of an argument so that they understand the progression (i.e. the groundwork already laid and the future trajectory of the argument) so as to provide conclusions and solutions (Al-Khoudary, 2015).

Implementing critical thinking in writing is a challenge that students often face in their English academic writing (Abdulkareem, 2013; Al-Khoudary, 2015; Huang, 2008; Vyncke, 2012); indeed, a number of studies have indicated that a lack of critical skill in writing is problematic for international students. For instance, Shaheen (2012) conducted a study to explore the challenges faced by international students in UK universities with regard to their approaches towards critical thinking in academic writing. Data collection included interviews, learner diaries, self-reports, and case studies, and the results revealed that international students in UK universities are unorthodox in their approach towards critical thinking tasks in terms of formulating and evaluating arguments, making judgements, and analysing critically. Vyncke (2012) also investigated the concept of critical thinking in academic writing from the point of view of international students at King’s College London and the factors that they identified as affecting their application of critical thinking. The findings revealed that international students had a lack of sufficient knowledge regarding critical thinking and its

implementation. He added that the challenges encountered by students in applying critical thinking to their work were largely due to “their uncertainty in demonstrating an argument, to insufficient subject knowledge, and to problematic issues surrounding the essay genre, such as authorial voice and assessment demands” (Vyncke, 2012, p. 3).

Furthermore, Fell and Lukianova (2015) put forward that international students had a notable disadvantage on this front, as critical thinking is widely considered the primary sign of quality academic work. In line with this finding, Egege and Kutieleh (2004) highlighted that South-East Asian students are generally ineffective at being critical in their approach to academic texts, which may be due to a lack of adequate knowledge surrounding critique and analysis.

Several studies (Fell & Lukianova, 2015; Shaheen, 2012; Vyncke, 2012) have provided important insights into the lack of understanding of critical concepts and the absence of English proficiency skills among international students, which obstruct them from applying critical thinking in their studies.

In the Arab world, several studies have emphasised the challenge for Arab students in thinking critically in their academic writing (Abdulkareem, 2013; Ahmed, 2011; Alwehaibi, 2012; Al-Zubaidi, 2012; Barnawi, 2009; Saba, 2013). For example, Al-Zubaidi (2012) carried out a study to investigate the main language problems experienced by Arab postgraduate students in their English academic writing. The findings revealed that Arab students were insufficiently prepared to synthesise information in the research or analysis of data, which can be considered an essential requirement of academic writing. This finding was also confirmed by Abdulkareem (2013), who reported that Arab Postgraduate Students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) were struggling, as they were

not used to writing authentically and originally using their own ideas, and could not identify ways to make their writing more suitable to academia.

Furthermore, Saba (2013) explored the difficulties that Saudi students encountered while learning English during a writing course that applies critical thinking and writing process pedagogy. The findings revealed that Saudi students suffer from a lack of critical thinking proficiency in their English academic writing. The cause of Saudi college students' inability to think critically is unclear, though it may be due to ineffective teaching methods, a lack of awareness of these skills, and inexperience in applying them to their own work (Alwehaibi, 2012). In the same vein, Allamnahrah (2013) found that due to the focus on rote learning and memorisation as the primary methods of teaching and a focus on the quantity rather than the quality of content, students claimed that they prioritised merely passing their exams, without attempting to gain a deeper understanding of their work.

The studies by Alwehaibi (2012), Saba (2013) and Allamnahrah (2013) are valuable, as they indicate that Saudi students experience difficulty in implementing critical thinking in their academic writing. Furthermore, they highlight the various factors that contribute to a lack of critical thinking skills amongst students. However, there seems to be a lack of academic writing research regarding Saudi postgraduate students; therefore, the current study attempts to explore the factors that cause academic writing difficulties in more depth.

The above section reviewed various difficulties associated with academic writing, focusing on criticality, argumentation, and organisation. On a related note, Bjork

and Raisanen (1997) mentioned the significance of writing skills in academic settings, generally and at the university level, stating:

We highlight the importance of writing in all university curricula not only because of its immediate practical application, i.e. as an isolated skill or ability, but because we believe that, seen from a broader perspective, writing is a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and, [by] extension, for learning in all disciplines (p. 8).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has extended beyond a consideration of language difficulties concerning writing difficulties at the postgraduate stage for Saudi students in the UK. This refers to the need to highlight a number of factors that might contribute to these difficulties, from which potential solutions can be identified to assist students in improving their writing; the following section will address these factors in further detail.

3.5 Factors Affecting the Development of Academic Writing

This section reviews some factors influencing the development of ESL/EFL writing for learners. The first group of factors are student-related factors and include psychological factors, prior knowledge, and low proficiency in L2 writing. The second include context-related factors, which focus on L1 transfer into L2 writing and cultural transfer. Finally, instruction-related factors deal with teaching large classes, language learning strategy, and teacher/peer feedback on students' L2 writing.

3.5.1 *Student-Related Factors*

3.5.1.1 Psychological factors

This section will focus on the psychological factors; these include self-confidence and motivation and what research reveals about these factors in relation to writing

in academic settings. These factors, which might affect the development of students' writing, will be discussed below.

3.5.1.1.1 Self-Confidence

Adalikwu (2012) defined self-confidence as “the belief that a person has in their ability to succeed at a task, based on whether or not they have been able to perform that task in the past” (pp. 5-6). In the same vein, Baggour (2015) proposed that when students believe in their abilities, this eases their learning and allows them to become involved in tasks without interference, as well as affording them the confidence to be certain about their abilities. Self-confidence is one of the factors that affects the writing quality of EFL learners in L2.

Several studies that have been conducted internationally have examined the relationship between self-confidence and writing in academic settings, and many have noted the positive effect of self-confidence on learning writing. For instance, Albertson (2006) confirmed that when college students possess high levels of confidence and are capable in their writing and reading skills, this creates adaptable students who are quick to pick up new learning/teaching methods. Similarly, Tyson (1997) revealed that encouraging students to write multiple drafts with the eventual aim to publish the work, and making frequent comments on the organisation and content rather than on the grammar and spelling, seemed to assist students in producing well composed essays and increased their confidence while writing.

On the other hand, some studies in the Arab context have revealed that the students' lack of confidence has a negative impact on their writing. For instance, Ahmed (2011) carried out a study to explore the essay writing difficulties of Egyptian students; the findings indicated that students' lack of self-confidence

was widely considered one of the factors that caused difficulty in essay writing, as it prevented students from expressing their views clearly while writing. Additionally, Al Fadda (2012) pointed out that Saudi students demonstrate low levels of confidence with regard to learning the English language in general.

Moreover, there may be many factors affecting the students' self confidence in writing, such as the lack of practice in written English, the nature of previous learning experience, and low language proficiency in L2 (Alhaysony, 2012; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Tahaine, 2010). In a similar vein, Ankawi (2015) asserted that "the lack of confidence among Saudi students, which may partially be due to their lack of preparation in their home country, might be made worse by the challenges in academic writing" (p. 22).

While the above studies (Alhaysony, 2012; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Ankawi, 2015; Tahaine, 2010) make strong claims, they did not report any socio cultural factors that may contribute to students' low self-confidence. This is the gap that needs to be filled; thus, the current study attempts to investigate if there are any socio cultural factors that could be the cause of Saudi postgraduate students' low self-confidence. The findings of the above mentioned studies reveal that the lack of confidence in the Saudi postgraduate student population may be due to their low level of language proficiency, a weak education system, and a lack of writing practice. Furthermore, it could be argued that the lack of confidence demonstrated by Saudi students in their writing creates the false belief that they cannot write well. This belief goes on to influence the quality of their writing, as well as their attitude and motivation towards writing.

3.5.1.1.2 Motivation

Ormrod (1998) described motivation as an internal state that stimulates humans to act or take action, drives them in specific directions, and keeps them involved in particular activities. In the same way, Brown (2000) indicated that motivation is an internal feeling that leads people to decide to perform particular actions. In the academic context, the concept of student motivation is used to describe the effort required to become involved in a different pursuit (Brophy, 1998). Motivation is another psychological factor that seems effective to increase students' competence in their academic writing. This is because writing is a complex task, which demands the mixing of mental and multiple physical processes in one effort to connect ideas and information (Scott, 2009). Therefore, in a complex task such as this, "the development of writing competence demands that students be motivated to success" (Shah et al., 2011, p. 8).

Before focusing on the studies looking at Saudi students and that have highlighted the relationship between motivation and writing, it can be noticed that many studies have been conducted internationally, which indicates the importance of motivation for the improvement of students' writing. In fact, several studies have highlighted that there is a significant relationship between motivation and student performance with regard to writing academically (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Potter, McCormick & Busching, 2001). On the other hand, several authors (Al-Khairi, 2013; Khand, 2012; Liton, 2012; Shah, Hussain, & Nassef, 2013) have emphasised that lack of motivation has a negative influence on English teaching in a Saudi context, as well as on those students learning L2 writing. This could be because motivation has a great effect on process and product (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Furthermore, Potter, McCormick and Busching (2001) underscored

that “students’ writing was shaped by how much they believed they were encouraged to write authentic personal texts whose messages were respected by caring teachers” (p. 45).

The above studies (Al-Khairiy, 2013; Khand, 2012; Liton, 2012; Shah et al., 2013) used only one instrument - either a questionnaire or interviews - to obtain some ideas in terms of the factors; the information they provide is helpful, but the current study differs from these studies in terms of using mixed methods at the postgraduate stage in different disciplines and in considering the perceptions of both students and supervisors.

3.5.1.2 Prior Knowledge

The concept of prior knowledge is “an interaction between what is already known and new experience” (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p. 6). Moreover, Tapinta, (2006) explained the concept of prior knowledge as the experience that students have in their lives, their beliefs and behaviours, their linguistic knowledge, and content-area knowledge. Prior knowledge is another factor that is related to students’ difficulties in academic writing and might influence their writing improvement. This is because prior knowledge plays a significant role in the comprehension of texts (Heller, 1999). Furthermore, Myhill (2005) highlighted that well-developed prior knowledge has an impact on students’ learning, confidence and production of written texts. In a similar vein, Hilgers (1982) revealed that “prior knowledge may exert a stronger influence on the students’ writing than any particular training programme” (as cited in Chesky & Elfrieda, 1987, p. 304).

A considerable number of studies have indicated that the lack of prior knowledge in terms of structure of the text, ideas, and topic have a negative influence on

students' comprehension of the text (El-Mortaji, 2001; Reid, 1993; Scordaras, 2003). For instance, Tawalbeh and Al-Zuoud (2013) carried out a study to investigate the impact of students' prior knowledge of English on their written research at the university stage in Jordan. The findings indicated that students with a high prior knowledge of English performed better in their written research than did those with a poor prior knowledge of English. Those who were previously relatively unfamiliar with the language made mistakes more frequently, as evidenced by the content, grammar, and structure of the work (Tawalbeh & Al-Zuoud, 2013). El-Mortaji (2001) found, in his study of Moroccan university students, that prior knowledge is one of the factors that may affect the success of students' L2 writing. However, the findings of these studies (El-Mortaji, 2001; Tawalbeh & Al-Zuoud, 2013) cannot be applied to the Saudi context because the teaching of foreign languages in Jordan and Morocco receives more attention compared to Saudi Arabia. Therefore, Saudi students' prior knowledge is completely different.

Additionally, Liton (2012) examined the obstacles students encounter when learning English language fundamentals and their poor performance in the preparation year level at Jazan University in Saudi Arabia. The researcher concluded that one of these obstacles is the poor background language skill demonstrated by Saudi students. This view is supported by Al-Shabanah (2005), who highlighted that instructors criticise undergraduate Saudi students' inability to apply the knowledge and skill required in academic writing, such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and outlining. Collectively, these studies (Al-Shabanah, 2005; Liton, 2012) outline a critical role for prior knowledge in the quality of undergraduate students' L2 writing; this stimulated me to investigate whether prior knowledge has an impact on L2 writing at the postgraduate stage.

3.5.1.3 Low Proficiency in L2

Another factor that affects the writing quality of EFL learners is their proficiency level in L2 writing. This is because L2 writing proficiency plays an essential role in improving learners' L2 writing products (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Cumming, 2006). Similarly, Larios et al. (2001) stressed that learners with high L2 proficiency are able to formulate the basic level of composition in English in a shorter time. Additionally, students with high proficiency in L2 have more awareness of metacognitive strategies in terms of focusing on elements of the rhetorical organisation (discourse), spending time on global planning, showing concerns for the issue of fluency of expression, and combining personal experience while composing in L2 to enhance their writing quality (Bosher, 1998).

On the other hand, the poor L2 proficiency of EFL learners influences the general organisation of texts (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). Additionally, low English language proficiency could cause difficulties for students in their writing in terms of having the ability to express complicated ideas because of their lack of the required technical and general vocabulary (Fukao & Fujii, 2001). Similarly, Kellogg (1996) noted that students who are not proficient in English make more lexical and grammatical errors while composing a text because this process demands a huge amount of working memory, and this is complex for students with lower L2 proficiency.

Some studies have addressed similarities and differences between L1 and L2 writing processes and the impact of L1 for EFL/ESL students on their proficiency in L2 writing. In the former, Petric and Czarl (2003) indicated that there is no similarity between L1 and L2 writing, although they both have the same general writing strategies. Therefore, "the development of L2 writing is not entirely

influenced by the transfer of culturally preferred rhetorical patterns from L1 but could be a combination of exposures and experiences in L2” (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012, p. 382). In the latter, Torress and Fischer (1989) found that there is a positive relationship between L1 and L2 for Spanish students. They added that if students were fluent in their native language, this would be guaranteed to increase their proficiency in their second language.

In the Arab context, Dweik and Abu-Al-Hommos (2007) explored the impact of Arabic proficiency on the English writing of bilingual Jordanian students. The results revealed that “those students who got high marks and were proficient in Arabic writing performed well in the counter skill (English)” (p. 3). Similarly, Alsamadani (2010) explored the relationship between Saudi students’ Arabic writing proficiency and their English writing competence. The sample included thirty-five students at university level in an English department who were asked to write argumentative essays in Arabic and English on the same topic through two different sessions. The ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981) was used to assess the essays; the results showed that “students who scored high on Arabic essays received very similar scores on English essays, and the opposite is also true” (Alsamadani, 2010, p. 58). However, as the participants were at the undergraduate stage and from the English department only, I believe the sample is not representative of all Saudi students. Therefore, the current study concentrates on Saudi postgraduate students studying abroad and from different disciplines.

In a study on the negative impact of L1 on L2 writing amongst students at Qatar University, Hussein and Mohammad (2010) noted that students with a lower language proficiency level in L1 encounter difficulties in using the appropriate vocabulary, identifying linguistic structures, and generating ideas in their second

language. On a related note, Al Fadda (2012) conducted a study to investigate the difficulties faced by students in their academic writing. This research took a sample of postgraduate students from King Saud University; the findings indicated that a low level of English proficiency amongst Saudi students affected their writing processes. One could argue that the reason underlying low proficiency in L2 for Saudi students may be the limited exposure to L2 writing opportunities and L2 writing during the pre-university stage. A related study by Al-Seghayer (2014) clarified that English proficiency levels for Saudi learners are still below what is expected of them, in part due to the pedagogical components of the curriculum in the Saudi educational system.

Together, these studies (Al Fadda, 2012; Al-Seghayer, 2014) highlighted that the low English language proficiency recorded by Saudi students is a crucial factor that adversely influences their abilities with regard to writing. This justifies the significance of rethinking the current approach and practice of teaching English language in Saudi Arabia to meet the needs of students, with regard to improving their writing skill.

3.5.2 Context-Related Factors

3.5.2.1 L1 transfer into L2 writing

Faerch and Kasper (1987) explained transfer as “a mental and a communicative process through which L2 learners develop their interlanguage skills by activating and using their previous linguistic knowledge” (p. 120). Transfer can be regarded as both a strategy and a learning tool to overcome communication difficulties in L2 writing (Karim & Nassaji, 2013). As Mahmoud (2000) pointed out, while composing a written piece, L2 students may use transfer from their L1 as a device to learn or to express their meaning. However, Arabic and English use different

orthographic and linguistic systems. Thus, it is supposed that Arab students will face difficulties when learning English as a second/foreign language (Al-Hammadi, 2011).

A considerable number of studies have examined the negative impact of the transfer of Arabic, as students' native language, on their overall improvement in English language and in L2 writing in particular (Atari, 1984; Dushaq, 1986; El-Sayed, 1982; El-Shafie, 1990; Kamel, 1989; Kharma, 1987). For instance, Mourtaga (2004) carried out a study to identify the reasons why Palestinian EFL students are weak writers. The results showed that most of the errors of Palestinian EFL students are in the use of articles, verbs and punctuation. Mourtaga argued that the interference of Arabic in the English writing of these students is the reason for these errors. This was also confirmed by Hamdi (2008), who asserted that the transfer from L1 (Arabic) of Arab learners of English causes problems in their L2 writing in terms of coordination and excessive repetition. Investigating whether the transfer of L1 (Arabic) might be the reason for problems in L2 writing for Arab learners, Radwan (2012) found that "transfer from the native language into the target language during the writing process decreases as the writers' L2 proficiency develops" (p. 365). Moreover, the use of direct translation of the Arabic pattern negatively influences L2 writing in academic disciplines. Tahaineh (2010) also stressed that "the interference of mother tongue was statistically significant which amounted to (67%) of the total errors in English-writing for Arab EFL students" (p. 81).

There is no doubt that the negative transfer of L1 to L2 writing contributes to difficulties in the latter for Arab students, including Saudi students (Hamdi, 2008; Mourtaga, 2004; Radwan, 2012). This negative transfer has a number of possible causes; the difference noted in the writing style of Arabic and English speakers

may play a part, as the Arabic style of writing usually includes elaborate phrasing, indirectness, and repetition. This style of writing may cause problems for Arab learners, who usually write without an audience in mind (Abu Rass, 2011). Finally, the interference of different units or structures of language when attempting to learn a second language may result in an incorrect production of the target language (Baloch, 2013).

However, other studies revealed that proficiency in writing in the native language (Arabic) can be transferred positively to writing competence in the target language (English). For instance, Mirahmadi (2011) carried out a study to examine whether successful L1 (Persian) students can be guaranteed to be successful in their second language (English) as well. The results showed that the transfer of first-language strategies to second-language writing was positive. Furthermore, Alsamadani (2010) explored the relationship between Saudi students' Arabic writing proficiency and their English writing competence. The results revealed that "students who scored high on Arabic essays received very similar scores on English essays, and the opposite is also true" (p. 58).

Overall, these studies provide evidence with regard to the impact of the transfer of the mother tongue on L2 writing for Arab learners. This confirms that the transfer of L1 plays a significant role into the quality of L2 writing. Therefore, this issue must be examined more in depth in relation to Saudi students. As to my best knowledge no previous research has investigated the impact of the transfer of L1 on L2 writing for Saudi students particularly at the postgraduate stage. Thus this area of research needs more exploration.

3.5.2.2 Cultural Transfer

The term 'culture' can be defined as "the framework of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that are used to interpret other people's actions, words or writing, and patterns of thinking" (Thi Le, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, Thi Le (2006) noted that the relationship between culture and writing is multi-dimensional and interactive. To clarify, writing and culture are considered as essential aspects of communication between humans where learners use writing as a tool to express themselves, their ideas, and their culture in their dealings with others, while on the other hand, culture forms learners' ideas, feelings, and writing and their concept of to whom their writing is directed. Therefore, EFL/ESL students should be aware of the cultural differences in order to convey messages in the target language correctly.

The transfer of some cultural elements often occurs when learners learn to write in English as a foreign or second language due to the impact of the first culture on their behaviour (Abu Rass, 2011). So, cultural transfer can be considered as an exchange technique between two different areas of culture, for instance, between Spanish and English or between Arabic and English. A number of studies have examined the impact of culture transfer on L2 writing for ESL/ESL learners (Ostler, 1990; Montan Æo-Harmon, 1991; Chen, 1994) and revealed that there are significant differences between their writing style in their L1 and English writing in terms of rhetoric, syntactic characteristics, and thought content. These studies were conducted in the United States and Mexico.

Because cultural transfer is also an issue in the Arab context, therefore, a number of studies have investigated how culture influences Arab students' L2 writing. For instance, Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000) carried out a study to examine writing

skills in Arabic and English in order to discern whether there is an association between poor standards of writing across languages among Jordanian students at a university level. One hundred and fifty university students were asked to write two essays on the same topic: one in Arabic and the other in English. The results showed that students' weaknesses in writing in Arabic and English were strongly associated. Linguistic weakness which includes lack of cohesion and coherence and subjects' mistakes which includes two types, low-level syntactic mistakes and high-level mistakes in using appropriate tense choices to express time concepts. This was attributed to the influence of culture transfer in students' writing. Similarly, Al-Khatib (2001) examined the impact Arab culture had on 120 personal letters written by Jordanian students. The analysis was based on modern linguistics, and the results revealed that Jordanian students transferred their Arabic style in writing personal letters into English and used language that reflected the thought patterns of Arab culture, which is characterized by indirectness and length. For instance, "the introductions are lengthy in terms of questioning (not concise) and are not to the point" (Al-Khatib, 2001, p. 188).

In harmony with Al-Khatib's (2001) findings, Feghali (1997) concluded that speakers of Arabic share the following common features of communicative style, which may clash with the styles of other languages: (a) elaborateness (b) indirectness, (c) affectiveness, and (d) repetition. This style of writing may cause problems for Arab learners, who, as mentioned earlier, usually neglect the idea of their audience during writing (Abu Rass, 2011).

Further, Shukri (2014) argued that Saudi students are not active or independent learners, but rely instead on dictated information; thus, they lack a predisposition towards questioning and thinking critically about what they are told. Shukri's study (2014) is significant in discussing the relationship between Saudi learners'

cultural context and their writing skill development in English because the quantity of literature concerning this topic is limited; however, these results were focused on Saudi students at the undergraduate level only and therefore are not representative of other Saudis in other sectors. Accordingly, this area still needs to be investigated.

3.5.3 *Instructor-Related Factors*

3.5.3.1 Writing Strategies in Second Language

There are a considerable number of studies relating to the process of L2 writing that highlight the various strategies employed by L2 learners. Here, the use of writing strategies is very important, as they can play a significant role in the improvement of learners' L2 writing (McMullen, 2009). On a related note, Alnooh (2015) adds that "writing strategies are actions, behaviours and techniques that are consciously selected by students to produce a competent and effective piece of writing" (p. 41).

Learners with different levels of proficiency tend to apply different strategies to their learning (Alkubaidi, 2014). Various studies have investigated the relationship between students' proficiency and strategy in their English writing (Alhaisoni, 2012; Chien, 2012; Raoofi et al., 2014; Sasaki, 2002). For instance, Chien (2012) investigated the relationship between the writing strategies used by Taiwanese undergraduate students and their English writing proficiency. Findings revealed that students with high writing proficiency used writing strategies, such as planning, revising and reviewing, more often. Furthermore, Raoofi et al. (2014) added that "the highly proficient student writers reported using more metacognitive strategies such as organizing ideas and revising content than less skilled ones" (p. 39).

In relation to Saudi students, Alhaisoni (2012) carried out a study to investigate the effect of writing proficiency on written planning strategy use among 197 Saudi students at the undergraduate stage in a Saudi university. A questionnaire, think-aloud report, and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The results showed that the students who had high English-language proficiency used planning strategies in L2 writing more than the less proficient participants.

However, other studies have found that there are no differences between the writing strategies demonstrated by high and low proficient students (Abdollahzadeh, 2010; Alkubaidi, 2014; Khalil, 2005). The key difference between the two seems to be related to the methods by which techniques are applied and their understanding or interpretation of learning techniques (Alkubaidi, 2014).

Most of the abovementioned studies in the international and the Arab context focus on one factor only, namely, writing proficiency and its relationship with the strategies that students use in their English writing and how this influences the quality of students' writing. However, I would argue that there are other factors, such as the learner-related factors and sociocultural factors (Alrabai, 2016) that need to be considered. Therefore, the aim of current study is to explore what other factors might contribute to students' academic writing difficulties.

There are various strategies, that students could apply during the writing process to improve their writing. For instance, one such strategy involves brainstorming, as this has been demonstrated to be helpful in "generating more ideas, stimulating new ideas, expanding the vision of thinking, activating previous knowledge, reviewing more words" (Wang, 2008, p. 75). In the same vein, Maarof and Murat (2013) stated that by using this strategy, one can simplify the process

of writing for the students, as they will put greater emphasis on conveying the actual meaning instead of looking for ideas to continue their writing. Abdulkareem (2013) asserted that teaching students how to brainstorm ideas may remedy their problems with academic writing. Furthermore, Al Fadda (2012) concluded that preparing an outline of their topics before starting to write, and following the three main stages (planning, writing, and editing) might assist novice writers in becoming successful in academic writing.

Other strategies may also help to improve their writing, including having a wide array of reading material. For example, Abdul-Rahman (2011) suggested that “reading widely was seen as making a key contribution to broadening vocabulary and the attainment of a greater fluidity of expression through obtaining a stock of functional expressions” (p. 53). Reading theses and scholarly articles is one of the strategies that various studies in the existing literature have recommended to improve EFL students’ English academic writing (Ankawi, 2015; Buckingham, 2008; Keong & Mussa, 2015). In the same vein, Fuqua (2015) commented that the 'read and copy' strategy may help Arabic speaking students to improve their English reading and writing skills. Using this strategy regularly could be effective in helping Arabic-speaking students to read in chunks and to use their eyes, rather than fingers, to follow the text. It could also be effective in improving writing skills, such as punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure. The practice of writing is another strategy that could be used to improve the quality of academic work amongst international students. With this in mind, Kellogg and Raulerson (2007) asserted the following: “

The effective use of knowledge will require that college students deliberately practice the craft of writing extended texts, in English composition courses and across the curriculum in all subjects. Without training to use what they know, their knowledge too often remains inert during composition (p. 238).

One effective way of encouraging the practice of writing is to ask students to write several drafts of their dissertation in the early stages of a doctoral research programme. On a similar note, Gurel (2010) noted that it is unlikely that a student will compose a dissertation of high quality without having first written at least one draft which has been reviewed by the student's supervisor. Accordingly, this process provides students with the instruments necessary to create a strong and solid dissertation. Writing for publication, is another way to encourage students to practise writing. Gurel (2010) argued that through this strategy, students will learn how to present their new knowledge to their audience in a foreign language, and thus gain an understanding of the fundamental requirements and rules for writing successfully in their fields.

Overall, the studies in this section provided important insights into the strategies that might assist students in their writing. This inspired the current study to investigate the strategies that can be used to solve Saudi postgraduate students' difficulties in English academic writing from the perceptions of both students and supervisors.

3.5.3.2 Supervisor Feedback on Students' L2 Writing

Feedback is one of the primary factors that influence student achievement in L2 writing. That is to say, feedback can help learners to investigate successful ways to present their ideas, convey meaning, and experiment with a range of linguistic apparatus (Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Liu & Hansen, 2005). Moreover, Ferris (2003) highlighted that feedback is an important element in improving the writing of students accurately and successfully.

There are a number of studies, which examined the impact of supervisory feedback on students' writing development (Bitchener et al., 2010; Caterall et al.,

2011; Idris, 2011). These studies have revealed that supervisor feedback has impacts on the quality of student writing. These impacts can be at the level of the accuracy of the linguistic elements, content knowledge, coherence and cohesion in constructing an argument, genre knowledge, rhetorical organisation, and structure.

By adding comments to students' work, supervisors act as mentors who aim to impart techniques and advice to the students so that they require less help in the future; the students may then, eventually, become proficient in academic writing and will be able to write independently (Bitchener et al., 2010). Caterall et al. (2011), in their research, highlighted the role of positive supervisory practices, including the provision of feedback on students' writing; this contributes towards a significant improvement in learning to write as "a pedagogical tool for teaching and learning research writing" (Caterall et al., 2011, p. 2). In the same vein, one of the essential factors that have been acknowledged to contribute to the success of PhD research is having effective supervision (Frischer & Larsson, 2000).

However, there exists a range of challenges that affect the quality of supervision for international students. These challenges relate to international students' language competence (Andrade, 2006; Park & Son, 2011; Walsh, 2010), their academic cultural adjustment in western countries (Handa & Fallon, 2006; Pant, 2009), and their relationship with their supervisors (Barron & Zeegers, 2006; Harman, 2003). The conflict between the learning experiences of international students and the western academic system has been noted as a cause of difficulty, as international students often struggle to meet the expectations of supervisors in the UK, in terms of responsibilities, roles, and particular demands (Brown, 2007; Todd, 1997). Furthermore, Pant (2009) mentioned that "in the case of PhD students, adjusting to a different academic culture may also involve finding

out how to do research in an unfamiliar culture” (p. 417). Moreover, Brown (2007) added:

The supervisor often meets a student who is ill-equipped to engage in critical discussion, either in writing, or in discussion with the supervisor of key concepts and theories, with the effect that extra time has to be spent on training their student in the art of critical analysis (p. 245).

Therefore, these challenges need to be considered in order to help postgraduate students in their academic success.

There are certain requirements that postgraduate students must fulfill during the supervision process. For instance, Lessing and Schulze (2002) identified students' demands in terms of identifying related literature, analysing and interpreting the data, and developing opportunities for collaborative learning. Similarly, Lovitts (2005) highlighted that graduate students are often not prepared to deal with the difficulties they encounter during their graduate studies. These difficulties include culture, language and academic studies difficulties. Furthermore, students “need support in balancing the demands of the different environment. They need enthusiasm, strength, support and commitment to keep on their study” (Abiddin et al., 2011, p. 213).

In order to generate successful supervisor feedback, it is important to consider the student-supervisor relationship as an important aspect for any postgraduate stage; a number of studies have asserted the importance of this relationship (Abiddin et al., 2011; Lessing & Schulze, 2002; Piccinin, 2000; Sidhu et al., 2014). However, Abiddin et al. (2011) argued that it is important for the students and supervisors to understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. The relationship between supervisor and student includes a discussion of the various aspects of the research stage, such as choosing the topic, finding resources related to the

field, identifying the relevant literature reviews, analysing and discussing the data, writing up the thesis, and encouraging publication (Piccinin, 2000).

Within this relationship, both supervisors and the students have their own role and responsibility. For supervisors, they “need to be friendly, open, approachable and supportive towards their supervisees so that the supervisory relationship can be smooth” (Sidhu et al., 2014, p. 153). Additionally, Phillips and Pugh (2000) commented that supervisors need to be accurate and clear while working with students, as this leads to the construction of mutual responsibilities, which simplifies expectation during the supervision process. Furthermore, “when the supervisors are experts in the area of their supervisees’ research, the supervisors can point out mistakes and give constructive feedback for improvement” (Sidhu et al., 2014, p. 153). The supervisors cannot be successful in any of the above roles unless they are available and accessible for students when needed. This was confirmed by Sidhu et al. (2014), who mentioned that supervisors should always be available for the supervisees to meet and get feedback on their research writing.

The role of postgraduate students during the supervision process requires them to “demonstrate professional knowledge and skills, which include technical competence, techniques for analysis of data, self-management in terms of time and personal responsibilities” (Lessing & Lessing, 2004, p. 77). Furthermore, students should make clear their interest, enthusiasm, effort and independence in their studies. Lessing and Lessing (2004) also suggest that students need to be aware of various issues in their field by reading theses of other students, which may help in improving their research skills. To conclude, it is important to note that the “lack of student-supervisor relationship will cause them to extend their

studies and have difficulty to finish their project. This situation will also lead to a poor quality of students' research" (Abiddin et al., 2011, p. 206).

As the above studies have shown, the impact of supervisory feedback on students' writing development and the relationship between student and supervisor is an issue which is therefore most likely to arise in the sample of the current study as well.

As a whole, this section has shed light on the factors affecting the development of academic writing. Providing possible solutions for writing difficulties in the current study could be an essential step to revolutionise the learning/teaching process of writing skills within the Saudi context; to the researchers' knowledge, a discussion of these factors at the postgraduate stage has never been previously reported upon in the literature.

3.5.4 Summary of the Literature Review

Overall, this chapter has drawn attention to the importance of an awareness of the difficulties that can prevent students, especially Arab students, from fully realising their academic writing potential. There has also been a focus on the importance of being aware of the factors that influence their progress in academic writing. Furthermore, it has illustrated a number of theories relating to L2 writing, and has addressed the research into English for academic purposes. The literature has assisted in investigating the nature of the academic writing difficulties that learners face in undertaking their theses or assignments.

Based on the literature review, the main distinction between this study and previous studies in the literature is that the current study involves exploring the difficulties of academic writing from the perspectives of Saudi postgraduate students and supervisors in the UK, while other studies have investigated a

similar issue from the perspective of postgraduate students not studying in the UK (Al Fadda, 2012; Al-Mansour, 2015; Ankawi, 2015; Younes & Albalawi, 2015). The researcher argues that exploring the issue from another perspective supports the findings' credibility and provides an in-depth understanding of the difficulties of academic writing. Furthermore, these studies deal with writing difficulties of Saudi students, at a purely linguistic level, whereas the present study encompasses more than just language difficulties, as writing at a high academic level has a larger focus on criticality, argumentation, and organisation. The deficiency of academic writing skills, then, prevents students from realising fully their academic writing potential and meeting the requirements of the postgraduate stage in the UK.

Secondly, the previous studies relied only on an investigation of the difficulties of academic writing and the factors that cause these difficulties; they neglected to discuss the academic preparation programmes offered to postgraduate students, if any existed in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the current study makes a contribution towards filling the gap in these academic preparation programmes by understanding the specific needs of Saudi students on their arrival in the UK to help them to cope with new academic environments. In short, students who are coming to study in the UK need the language skills and they need to be prepared for the fact that other studies give less consideration to students' needs and preparation courses.

Thirdly, the previous studies which investigated the difficulties of academic writing for Saudi students were either quantitative (Al Fadda, 2012; Al-Mansour, 2015) or employed mixed methods, using interview and questionnaire only (Al-Khairi, 2013; Ankawi, 2015). Thus, the current study utilises a mixed method research approach in a triangular technique, where the researcher employs three

independent research methods (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis) to explore the chosen phenomenon and provide an in-depth exploration of these difficulties. Mixed methods research has not been extensively used in Saudi Arabia. The use of mixed methods enables the questionnaire data to provide initial results from a large sample, while semi-structured interviews and document analysis present a clearer understanding of students and supervisors' views about academic writing difficulties.

Lastly, on an examination of the literature, the researcher believes that no previous studies have investigated the difficulties of academic writing among Saudi students at the postgraduate stage across different disciplines, as each academic discipline has its own specialist vocabulary, terminology, style, or academic voice which must be used in student writing. Thus, this issue has become the current study interest and will be explored through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, which will form the data collection tools of this study. The research procedure will be outlined in the following chapter.

4 Chapter Four: Methodology and Research Design

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the methodological issues of the current study, which explores the perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors regarding difficulties in writing in academic English. The chapter begins by discussing the philosophical and methodological assumptions underlying the whole research. Following this, a detailed explanation of the method used for sampling is provided together with the procedures for administering this method. In addition to this, the chapter describes comprehensively the selected methods of data collection, including the process of formulating the items of the questionnaire and interviews, and designing the employed research instruments, and explains the process of data analysis. The chapter further elaborates upon the strategies for ensuring the quality of the gathered data. Finally, this chapter ends by highlighting a number of issues regarding the ethical aspect of the study together with its limitations.

4.2 Philosophical Assumptions

4.2.1 Research Paradigms

The importance of detailing the researcher's theoretical perspectives with respect to their research object stems from the fact that these perspectives help to explain the researcher's opinion of the surrounding reality and the social life within it. Crotty (1998) viewed a theoretical perspective as "a way of looking at the world and making sense of it" (p. 8). He further added that every research study is informed by a theoretical perspective describing the philosophical attitude that underpins the study's methodology. Thus, determining and clearly formulating

their paradigmatic position is essential for researchers. Additionally, they should be aware of all other possible theoretical positions that may directly or indirectly govern their research. In this regard, Guba (1990) considered a paradigm framework to be a set of basic beliefs that guides our actions whilst Grix (2004) perceived a paradigm as "the understanding of what one can know about something and how one can gather knowledge about it" (p. 78). Having briefly outlined the general importance of understanding the concept of a paradigm framework, it is crucial to discuss the key aspects of the specific theoretical framework in which this study is positioned.

The current study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm can be considered to have the following essential characteristics: "sensitive to context, uses various methods to get inside the ways others see the world, and is more concerned with achieving an empathic understanding than with testing laws of human behaviour" (Neuman 2003, p. 80). As a whole, interpretivism was defined by Crotty (2003) as an approach that can "understand and explain human and social reality" (p. 67). At its core, the concept of the interpretive paradigm revolves around the notion that meaning does not exist in the vacuum, and thus cannot be simply discovered, but rather it is "constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Hence, understanding of this meaning needs to be approached within its social context (Crotty, 1998). This is, however, in stark contrast to the underpinnings of the positivistic paradigm maintaining that the view of reality is "out there to be studied, captured, and understood" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9). According to Creswell (2009), positivism holds that reality is in an external position to the participant, and it is the researcher's responsibility to discover this objective reality through observation or direct experience. On the other hand, the role of the researcher in

the interpretive paradigm is to uncover the “insider view” of the participants (Mason, 2002, p. 56), whose role is then to assist the researcher to construct the subjective reality. Additionally, the researcher’s role, according to the interpretive paradigm, is to seek understanding of “the world of the research participants and what that world means to them” (Radnor, 2002, p. 29). It is very important in this regard for the researcher to focus primarily on the contextual understanding of the cultural and historical settings of the research participants (Bryman, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, the current study adheres to various aspects of interpretivism as a research paradigm in order to better understand and interpret the perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and supervisors concerning the difficulties of academic writing in English. This is particularly important, as generally, the interpretative approach helps the researcher to explain the reasons for the existence of the studied phenomena from an insider’s perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A vital part of the process of developing such an explanation is the examination of relevant issues from different angles, analysing data either within well-defined categories or thematically, and, lastly, attempting to interpret correctly a given reality, both subjectively and theoretically (Wolcott, 1994).

Identifying the followed research paradigm and its essence is only the beginning of understanding the complexity of a specific theoretical framework that each research study is positioned in. In order to further this understanding, whether generally or with respect to a specific research study, it is crucial to discuss two key elements of the theoretical underpinnings of any research: ontological and epistemological assumptions.

4.2.2 Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is understood as “the theory of existence” (Ernest, 1994, p. 20), whereas Crotty (1998) defined ontology as “the study of being”, underlining that it deals with “the nature of existence, and nature of reality as such” (p. 10). Additionally, Anderson and Buddle (1991) used simpler terms when defining ontology as something that seeks to provide an understanding of reality by answering the question, what is there that can be known?

The two fundamental ontological assumptions that most commonly inform educational research are interpretivism and positivism. The positivist ontological assumptions maintain that “realities exist outside the mind” (Crotty, 2003, p. 10), thus rejecting the perception of reality being dependent on people’s interpretations within a specific society (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). The interpretivist ontological assumptions, on the other hand, assume that reality is indeed dependent on the shared meaning created by people within a society (Crotty, 1998). Pring (2000), who subscribed to interpretivism, further asserted that it is the negotiation of meaning that constructs and shapes the many realities that exist in this world. These multiple realities are then inevitably and essentially socially constructed, as Lodico et al. (2006) commented in this regard, “different persons may bring different conceptual frameworks to a situation based on their experiences, and this will influence what they perceive in a particular situation” (p. 8).

This study has adopted the interpretivist ontological stance, mainly because it attempts to discover a meaningful explanation of difficulties in academic writing from the perspectives of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors. Therefore, it is evident that such an explanation is dependent on the participants’

specific subjective and relativist reality, and it cannot be formulated without them being the centre of this research. To obtain pertinent perspectives and insights, this study employed questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, to identify the difficulties students face in their academic writing. The variations of participants' perceptions represent the foundation of multiple subjective realities concerning difficulties in academic writing; furthermore, this means that these realities are socially constructed, which corresponds with my aim "to understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 22).

4.2.3 Epistemological Assumptions

In a marked contrast to ontology, epistemology is defined as "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). It underpins "the nature of the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Additionally, Pring (2004) emphasised that epistemology in educational research is seen as a concept (theory) enabling the researcher to adopt different logical approaches to the examination and explanation of various aspects of reality.

Crotty (1998) highlighted the existence of a variety of epistemologies: objectivist, constructivist, and subjectivist. The objectivist epistemology provides a "view of 'what it means to know', understanding and values are considered to be objectified in the people we are studying and, if we go about it in the right way, we can discover the objective truth" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The constructivist epistemology, however, rejects this view, as it claims that meaningful reality "comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Although accepting the evident subjective character of reality,

as indicated by constructivist epistemology, subjectivist epistemology rejects the notion that meaning comes out of an interaction “between subject and object”, but rather it holds that this meaning “is imposed on the object by the subject” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). In other words, “the object as such makes no contribution to the generation of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

The epistemological stance adopted by this study is constructionism, where, as the term indicates, the meaning is not discovered, but has to be constructed. More specifically, in the case of this study, the researcher attempts to construct meaning concerning the difficulties of academic writing by obtaining and analysing different perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors. These perceptions are collected via questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, thereby providing valuable insights into students and supervisors’ perceptions. Therefore, a constructivist epistemology assists the researcher in answering the research questions and in processing the views and insights that emerge from the process of data collection; it also facilitates presenting these views and insights within their specific socio-cultural context.

The specific ontological and epistemological assumptions that this study has adopted governs to a significant degree the choice of research methodology. Its character and main aspects will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Research Methodology

In its essence, methodology is “the theory which leads us to the selection of suitable methods and techniques” (Ernest, 1994, p. 21). Crotty (1998), provided a more comprehensive definition, where methodology is understood as “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of

particular methods and linking the choice and use of the methods to the desired outcomes” (p.3). Hence, identifying the most suitable methodology for a given research study is crucial, as this later informs the selection of research tools that will be utilised in the study, particularly tools of data collection.

The nature of the current study’s research questions influenced the decision to utilise an exploratory methodology. This rationale can be supported by Creswell’s (2009) assertion that using an exploratory methodology "is useful for a researcher who wants to explore a phenomenon" (p. 212). By the same token, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) advocated using an exploratory methodology, as it allows the researcher to uncover the perceptions, cultures, and values of the participants whilst seeking to discover the true meaning of their participants’ words and behaviours. Therefore, I decided that using an exploratory methodology could provide me with a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is worth mentioning that the adopted methodology was implemented in two phases. The first phase comprised collecting quantitative data, whereas in the second phase, qualitative data were collected whilst being given special value when compared to quantitative data. The main purpose for the integration of both types of data was "to assist in the interpretation of the qualitative finding" (Creswell, 2009, p. 211).

4.3.1 Research Design

In compliance with the exploratory nature of the methodological approach adopted in this study, the research design of the current study employed a sequential mixed method design. In the literature, the use of mixed methods research has received growing attention from researchers in social sciences, who increasingly see mixed methods research as a legitimate research design

(Creswell, 2002, 2003; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003).

Creswell et al. (2003) defined mixed methods research as “the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research” (p. 212). Among the numerous factors that render the use of mix methods design particularly useful, Dörnyei (2007) highlighted the ability of this design to "offer a potentially more comprehensive means of legitimizing findings than do either QUAL or QUAN methods alone" (p.62). Additionally, Cohen et al. (2011) emphasised that the use of mixed methods research as a triangular technique provides the researcher with an opportunity to explain fully the complexity and richness of human behaviour by studying it from more than one angle; in doing so, it makes use of both quantitative and qualitative data. In the context of the current study, the use of mixed methods is useful, whereby more than one research method is employed in order for them to complement each other rather than contradict each other. This compensates for the weakness in some methods with the strengths of others (Brown, 2014).

With regard to the present study, this means that I employed three independent research tools - questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis - to investigate the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, using mixed methods can help to reduce the risk of research bias affecting the conduct and the findings of the research, insofar as this risk tends to be much higher if only one research method is utilised. This can also provide the researchers with new findings and allow them to explain contradictory results.

The current study follows a sequential mixed method design, in which the quantitative and qualitative phases were conducted in a sequence (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The qualitative phase is represented by the questionnaire, whereas semi-structured interviews and documents analysis constitute the qualitative phase. In a chronological order, the first to be administered was the questionnaire, followed by the semi-structured interviews with the participants whilst the document analysis was performed at the final stage. With respect to the use of mixed methods research and its effectiveness, this study has shown me that the use of mixed methods research can help to reveal aspects of the investigated phenomenon that I could not have identified had I used only one method. Moreover, the combination of various research methods has provided a more comprehensive description and analysis of the collected research data.

According to many educational research experts the philosophical justification for the use of mixed methods is made in relation to pragmatism and I am aware that mixed methods has been used by pragmatic researchers. In the literature, pragmatism provides the philosophical foundations for the use of mixed methods research (Biesta, 2010; Creswell, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Pragmatism has its historical roots in the ideas of John Dewey and others, and in relation to mixed methods, favours a 'what-works' approach to develop better understandings of phenomena (Smith, et al., 2012, p.13). Shaw et al. (2010) revealed that "pragmatism provides a strategy to integrate principles from each of a critical, interpretive, and scientific/positivist paradigm to more optimally inform practice" (p.512). In addition, Bryman (2007) noted that pragmatism has appeared as a main orientation to combining qualitative and quantitative research. Accordingly, the differences between ontology and epistemology

among paradigms do not actually matter. For pragmatists, the research question or problem is the 'central' focus (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) where the central concern is 'what works' (Patton, 1990; Morgan, 2014). In this way, researchers have the freedom to select the research methods and procedures that meet their purposes and needs (Cresswell, 2009). Thus, for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism in practice "opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009, p.11). However, the use of mixed methods in the current study did not aim to contradict each other. Indeed, I applied mixed methods to complement each other to provide comprehensive data. For example, I utilised the questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis as integrated methods to explore the phenomena under investigation from different angles. After discussing the methods utilised to collect research data, it is important to underline the main aspects of the research participants from which these data were gathered.

4.4 Sampling

The interconnectedness of a selected research paradigm and various research processes in general and sampling in particular can be documented in Mertens' (2010) assertion that sampling is "one area in which great divergence can be witnessed when comparing the various research paradigms" (p. 309). For this reason, among many others, sampling should be considered as an essential aspect of any kind of research. Moreover, the choice of a particular strategy used in sampling is of considerable importance also because it affects the research quality in terms of the data and its inferences (Cohen et al., 2011; Mertens, 2010).

The two types of sampling strategies employed in the present study were a non-probability and a probability sampling strategy. To distinguish between the two types of sampling strategies, Cohen et al. (2011) highlighted the fact that “in the probability sample every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample, whereas, in the non-probability sample every member of the wider population does not have an equal chance of being included”(p.153). The probability sampling as utilised in the present study involved selecting 275 postgraduate Saudi students randomly from different universities in the UK. These students were then asked to fill in the questionnaire (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Demographic Information about Students Participating in the Questionnaire

Age			Gender		Specialisation		Course of Study		
20-29	30-39	40+	Male	Female	English	Non-English	Master	Ph.D	Ed.D
87	162	26	183	92	67	208	124	136	115
Total			275						

On the other hand, convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling, was employed in the process of selecting 15 postgraduate Saudi students and 9 of their available supervisors for an interview. The purpose of using this type of sampling strategy lies in its relatively uncomplicated nature, which also largely eliminates any problems regarding gaining entry or access to participants (Wellington, 2000). The 15 interviewees (students) were selected based on whether they filled in the last section of the questionnaire and if they were willing and available to be interviewed. The students were asked to provide their contact details in the last section of the questionnaire if they wished to be interviewed. I was therefore able to contact and interview students based on their

availability and convenience (Wagner, 2010). The selection criteria for 9 interviewees (supervisors) were those who had supervision experience at a postgraduate level for students from Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries or Arab countries and were willing to be interviewed.

Although the most obvious criticism of convenience sampling revolves around its inability to produce completely unbiased findings, it is helpful for the researcher in terms of verifying the worth of a phenomenon that occurs within the chosen sample and exploring the relationships between various aspects of this phenomenon or between a number of the studied phenomena.

Furthermore, the students who participated in the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaires consisted of both male and female students studying at universities in the UK to obtain a MA, PhD, or an EdD degree in different specialisations; this created as representative a sample of Saudi postgraduate students as possible. The students shared some common characteristics, such as their age and their socio-cultural background. Regarding the former, most students were in their late twenties, thirties, or forties and they represented many universities across the UK, as well as many universities in Saudi Arabia (Table 4.2).

Moreover, the 9 supervisors were a mix of male and female supervisors from various universities in the UK, though only three supervisors were paired with three postgraduate students. Their subjects were computer science, biology, Islamic studies, business, and education (Table 4.3).

Table 4.2: Demographic Information about Students Participating in the Semi-structured Interviews

Students Name	Age	Gender	Major	Degree Specialism
Ahmed	35	Male	Finance	Ph.D
Ali	37	Male	Business Administration	Ph.D
Areej	28	Female	Human Nutrition and Food Science	Master
Fahad	29	Male	Marketing	Master
Hana	35	Female	Human Resource Management	Ph.D
Khalid	35	Male	Information Technology	Ph.D
Lina	32	Female	English Literature	Ed.D
Maha	33	Female	History	Ph.D
Mansour	40	Male	Linguistics	Ph.D
Mazin	38	Male	Engineering	Ph.D
Mohammed	29	Male	Special Needs	Master
Mona	28	Female	Arabic	Master
Noura	36	Female	Biological science	Ph.D
Omar	37	Male	Psychology	Ph.D
Reem	36	Female	Physics	Ph.D

Table 4.3: Demographic Information about Supervisors Participating in the Semi-structured Interviews

Supervisors Name	Gender	Specialisation
Dr.John	Male	Psychology
Dr.Andrew	Male	Business Administration
Dr.Helen	Female	English Literature
Dr.Peter	Male	Biology
Dr.Sarah	Female	Arab and Islamic Studies
Dr.Mike	Male	Physics
Dr.Sandy	Female	Computer Science
Dr.Sarah	Female	History
Dr.Steve	Male	Education

4.5 Procedure

The actual conduct of any kind of research and its related procedures are strongly influenced by the overall research design. As already discussed, a sequential exploratory design was employed in the current study, whereby the results of the quantitative phase were used to help explain the results of the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2009). The procedures followed throughout the current study can be divided into two stages. First, Saudi postgraduate students were asked to fill in the questionnaire online, which was then quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. Following this, students and their available supervisors were asked to volunteer to participate in semi-structured interviews in their free time. All interviews with supervisors were conducted in English, whereas students were interviewed in Arabic; these interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. I translated the Arabic audio transcripts into English, which were then

sent via e-mail to a translator for validation. Moreover, samples of students' written feedback from their supervisors were provided to identify each students' main weaknesses and difficulties concerning writing in academic English. The major research aims were used as guidelines for topic ordering and the construction of categories (Radnor, 2002). To illustrate procedures followed in the current study, see Figure (4.1) and (4.2) below:

Figure 4.1: The Sequential Exploratory Design (Adapted from Creswell et al., 2003, p. 225)

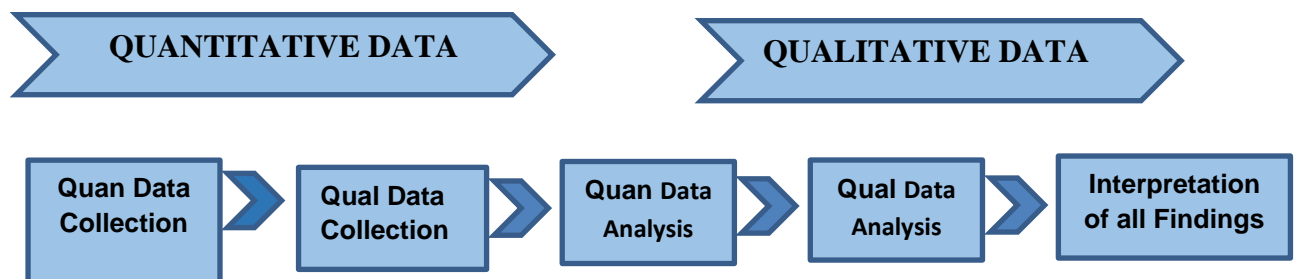
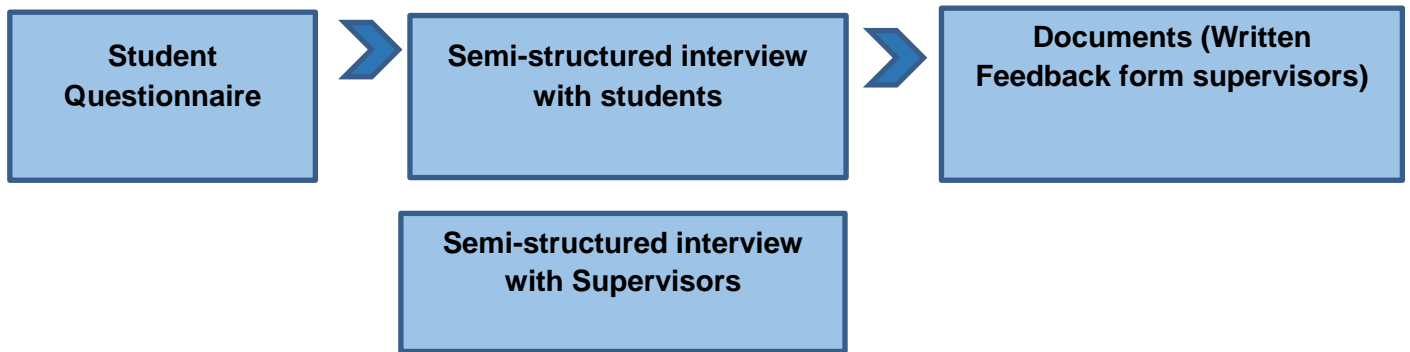


Figure 4.2: The Sequential Mixed-Methods Design Procedure of this Study



4.6 Data Collection Methods

Creswell (2009) defined methods and their usage as “the forms used for data collection, analysis and interpretation that researchers suggest for their studies” (p. 15). An alternative definition defines the purposes of methods as being “the range of approaches used to gather data for purposes of inference and interpretation, explanation and prediction” (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 47). Wellington (2000) argued that the research questions are the elements of the research that suitably outline the methods to be adopted, and they indicate whether these methods are quantitative or qualitative.

The current study used both quantitative and qualitative instruments of data collection to answer the research questions. The qualitative phase is represented by the use of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and open-ended questions in the questionnaires, while the use of quantitative measures can be seen in the structure of the questionnaire. There were two versions of the semi-structured interview: one for Saudi postgraduate students at universities in the UK and the other for their available supervisors. Additionally, one version of the questionnaire was only for Saudi postgraduate students. The following table

displays each of the research questions vis-à-vis the research instruments used to respond to each research question in the current study.

Table 4.4: Research Questions Vis-à-vis Research Instruments and Participants

No.	Research Questions	Research Instruments
1	1-What difficulties do Saudi postgraduate students encounter in their English academic writing in their postgraduate studies?	1- Document analysis 2- Semi-structured interviews (students)
2	2-How are academic English writing difficulties viewed by Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors?	1-Questionnaire (students) 2-Semi-structured interviews (supervisors/students)
3	3-What impact does the lack of EAP preparation in Saudi Arabia have on the proficiency level of academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students?	1-Questionnaire (students) 2-Semi-structured interviews (students)

The following sections will discuss the design for each of these instruments.

4.6.1 Questionnaire

Johnson and Turner (2003) maintained that the questionnaire is the most suitable method for collecting data. This is because using a questionnaire helps the researcher to “illuminate the research problem, to clarify the relevant concepts or constructs, then to identify kinds of measures” (Wilson & Maclean, 1994, pp. 8-9). The questionnaire, also provided a valuable descriptive account of the perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and gave a composite and versatile picture of the topic (Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, it allowed the interpretation of the findings from another angle, and additionally it triangulated the data

resulted from other tools (Oppenheim, 2001). Finally, the questionnaire data highlighted some areas which were further explored in greater depth during interviews.

In the current study, the structure of the questionnaire was adapted from other relevant studies (Ahmed, 2011; Alqahtani, 2011). However, the questionnaire items have been developed, reworded, and modified since Toth (2010) reassured that it is acceptable to adapt and develop items in the same questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed based on a deep reading of the literature review, similar instruments, my own perceptions working as a university lecturer, and issues raised by the students in the preliminary interviews conducted before the initiation of the study. The literature review indicated that academic vocabulary, developing an argument, using sources, coherence and cohesion, and style of writing were key areas of difficulty for students. Furthermore, the literature review showed that the EAP courses in English-speaking countries had an impact on the development of the academic writing of postgraduate students who used English as a second language.

The questionnaire was administered to students online because research has shown that "it enables a wider and much larger population to be accessed" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 280). It started with an introduction page presenting students with the purpose of the study and indicating any ethical considerations, including their right to withdraw from participation, their anonymity, data confidentiality, and my contact details for any enquiries or comments. All sections of the questionnaire were synthesised into one coherent questionnaire covering the core dimension of the research aims. The first section of the questionnaire contained four closed-ended items relating to students' details: their age, gender, course of study and their specialisation.

The second section of the questionnaire included two sub-sections. The first sub-section consisted of thirty-four closed-ended items related to the academic writing difficulties of Saudi students, with one final open-ended item. This section covered the technical and theoretical constructions of writing, such as academic vocabulary, developing an argument, coherence and cohesion, using sources and style of writing. Exploring the academic writing challenges faced by Saudi postgraduate students in an English academic writing context could help in providing a better understanding of these difficulties.

The second sub-section was concerned with the Saudi students' experiences of EAP courses in the UK regarding the development of their L2 academic writing, and involved ten closed-ended items, as well as one concluding open-ended item. This section attempted to fill the gap in the academic preparation programmes offered to Saudi postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia and provided suggestions conducive to effective academic preparation for postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia, with regard to academic writing.

The sequence of the sections within the questionnaire was guided by the sequence of the study's research questions (Cohen et al., 2007). A five-point Likert scale was used for the response fields, where participants were required to click on one of five responses, to show which they considered appropriate to their viewpoints. This format was chosen because of the wide usage of Likert scales, as "Likert scales are generally useful for getting at respondents' views, judgments, or opinions about almost any aspect of language learning" (Brown & Rodgers, 2002, p. 120). In addition, the questionnaire of the current study contained two types of questions, closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions can be coded easily and do not require much response time or deep thought. The use of closed-ended questions, as asserted by Cohen

et al. (2011), “can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis” (p. 382). All the items in the closed-ended questions were analysed quantitatively (Appendix A).

Open-ended questions were placed at the end of each sub-section of the questionnaire, along with a blank space where students were asked to provide further information regarding their writing difficulties and their experience of EAP courses in the UK. They were included so that participants could write freely and express their subjective views, thus exploring complicated issues and allowing their voices to be heard.

The overall number of students who responded to the questionnaire was 275, with 55% of students completing the questionnaire. This may be due to the researcher administering the questionnaire online to students and waiting for them to complete it. In total, 500 questionnaires were collected; 275 were valid, while 225 were invalid as they were incomplete. Furthermore, the 275 students are technically a random group, self-selection may have occurred in the process of responding.

The questionnaire was written in two languages, English and Arabic; each item in the questionnaire was written in English first and then provided with proper Arabic translation underneath (Appendix A). The reason for using Arabic was to allow students to have a better understanding of the questions, leading to more accurate responses. Experts in translation checked the validity of the Arabic version of the questionnaire. The last section of the questionnaire was optional, giving students the opportunity to give their contact details if they were willing to be contacted to participate in an interview related to the same study. The use of the semi-structured interview will be examined in the next section.

4.6.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) defined an interview as being “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge” (p. 3). Kvale (1996) added that the qualitative research interview aims to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1). Interviews allow researchers to comprehend the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 2009).

Therefore, an interview assists the researchers by helping them "understand experiences and reconstruct events" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). Moreover, an interview allows the researcher to obtain information about the participants that cannot be observed or gathered from a quantitative study, such as perspectives, feelings, and experiences (Wellington, 2000). Therefore, Marcyk et al. (2005) stated that an interview is considered an essential component associated with qualitative research, and is “the second major method of collecting data” (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 305).

According to Robson (2006), there are three major types of interviews: unstructured, semi-structured, and fully structured. The semi-structured interview comes between unstructured and fully structured, as “researchers usually prepare a list of questions to be asked but allow themselves the opportunity to probe beyond the protocol” (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 124). Semi-structured interviews were used as the main tool of data collection in the current study.

The semi-structured interview has a number of advantages. For example, it allows a researcher to have a deeper understanding of a subject or individual, as the interview can be used for “exploring issues, personal biographies and what is meaningful to, or valued by participants, how they feel about particular issues, how they look at particular issues, their attitudes, opinions and emotions” (Newby, 2010, pp. 243-244). Cohen (2006) also added that in a semi-structured interview, the interviewee has the opportunity to demonstrate their point of view in their own words. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to ask key questions and then do some further probing for additional information. Furthermore, Radnor (2001) stated that semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to understand the whole picture under investigation from the perspectives of the interviewees.

For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the second tool for data collection, mainly because of their flexibility in allowing researchers to delete, include, and modify items and questions according to what information is relevant. Also, semi-structured interviews give the participants the opportunity to explain issues they feel are priorities (Radnor, 2002). In this research, potentially rich data gathered from the interviews allowed for a deeper interpretation of both the topic and of the interviewees' perspectives regarding issues of academic writing difficulties, as well as the reasons that cause these difficulties, strategies for solving these difficulties and academic preparation in the UK and Saudi Arabia.

The use of the interviews was coherent with the current study's epistemological and ontological assumptions that knowledge is jointly created due to the interaction between the researcher and the researched. Moreover, as reality is constructed differently by different participants, interviews allowed access to these individual realities.

With regard to the semi-structured interview schedule, it was based on the research questions. The literature review of L2 writing, interview guides from previous studies, and the results of the questionnaire were all examined carefully before the final version of the interview schedule was produced. Then, the interview schedule was passed to the research supervisors; in this way, it was revised and refined many times.

The semi-structured interview questions for both Saudi postgraduate students and their available supervisors focused on exploring: (A) academic writing difficulties, (B) reasons that cause these difficulties (C) strategies for solving these difficulties and (D) academic preparation in the UK and Saudi Arabia. All the interview questions were open-ended, and they were followed by probing questions when and as necessary to encourage the participants to produce deeper interpretations of the research topic (Appendix B & C).

I conducted interviews with 15 students who provided their contact details in the last section of the questionnaire and 9 supervisors who had supervision experience with postgraduate students from Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries or Arab countries; both groups (students and supervisors) were willing to be interviewed. The interviews with students lasted between 30-60 minutes, and those with supervisors lasted for 30-45 minutes. Additionally, I used a digital audio-recording device to record each interview in its entirety to ensure that the participants' views were retained as objectively and accurately as possible.

4.6.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis is frequently used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation. It is defined as "the strategy and procedures for analyzing and interpreting the documents of any kind [considered]

important for the study of a particular area" (Wellington, 2000, p. 196). These documents might be private documents, such as letters, memoirs, diaries, school records and personal journals, or public documents, such as minutes of meetings, television scripts, or newspapers (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, as Merriam (1988) indicated, "Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 118). Document analysis is similar to other analytical methods in qualitative research, in that it requires the data to be examined and interpreted to obtain an accurate understanding, improve empirical knowledge, and elicit meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The procedures surrounding document analysis yield "data excerpts, quotations, or entire passages that are then organised into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis" (Labuschagne, 2003, para.7). However, these documents may not always be accurate or complete (Creswell, 2009). To combat this, Scott (1990) suggested four criteria to be analysed and examined in order to assess the quality of documents: "authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning" (p. 6). The procedures for recording the data from public or private documents may depend on the researchers who are taking notes (Creswell, 2009).

In understanding the qualities of document analysis as a method for collecting data, document analysis was implemented in the current study as a complementary method to support the questionnaire and interviews, and as a valuable method of triangulating the data collection methods. Furthermore, document analysis, as an instrument for collecting data, is considered necessary due to the nature of this study i.e. investigating the academic writing difficulties for Saudi postgraduate students.

The 15 interviewees (students) were asked to provide writing samples of feedback from their supervisors; only 10 volunteered to provide their samples while five students did not want to participate. As researchers anticipate data collection, they need to respect the wishes of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Each student provided one sample of feedback; each piece of writing was on the same genre and the length of feedback was either short or long. Furthermore, the samples revealed what supervisors perceive as writing difficulties for students. (Appendix D)

These samples provided an understanding of the nature of the difficulties experienced by Saudi postgraduate students in their assignments and theses while completing their postgraduate studies in the UK. They were also useful in formulating an in-depth understanding of the different areas of academic writing, including those which are considered the most challenging to students, as well as determining if there are any suggestions for how students may overcome these difficulties. These samples of written feedback were collected from the students who volunteered for the semi-structured interview.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is "a process that involves putting together, structuring, and interpreting the collected data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.150). Data analysis makes it possible to understand and analyse data and form overall perceptions and conclusions from the information supplied. It can be a long process and is often quite time-consuming for the researcher. As stated previously, the current study used three instruments for data collection: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The approaches used for analysing the data were dependent on the quantitative and qualitative approaches and results, and

were used to yield insightful views of the academic writing difficulties faced by Saudi postgraduate students while completing their studies in the United Kingdom.

The following section concentrates in more detail on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

4.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

In the quantitative phase of the current study, the results of the closed-ended items of the questionnaire were analysed through using SPSS descriptive statistical tests. According to Norusis (1990), the benefits of using SPSS are that it is "a powerful, comprehensive, and flexible statistical and information analysis system" (p. 1).

The researcher went with the assumption that the questionnaire reflects quantitative data for variables that are measured through an ordinal 5-points Likert scale. The ordinal scale reflects the level of difficulty of items that come under seven constructs: academic vocabulary; difficulties of using sources; difficulties with developing an argument; difficulties with coherence; difficulties with cohesion; difficulties with style and EAP. The difficulty scale is measured on a 5-points Likert scale reflecting: 1=very easy, 2= easy, 3=neither easy nor difficult, 4=difficult, 5=very difficult.

The practice of using ordinal level data appears to be common in educational settings, as it places participants' answers in a particular order where one end reflects a lowest order of the scale and the other end reflects the highest order of the scale. In the current study the lowest point is the answer "very easy" while the highest point is "very difficult". According to Field (2009) the best measure of central tendency for items or variables measured on an ordinal scale is the

median. If the scores of all participants are arranged from the smallest (1) to the highest (5) for all participants the middle score/point (for the middle participant) would be considered the median.

The median will be used as a measure of central tendency for each item within the research constructs, however, it should be noted that due to the close similar distribution of results across items, the median score might not enable me to see which of the items is more difficult than the rest in a given construct. Hence it was decided that the total difficult (difficult + very difficult) will be calculated for each item with the constructs. This value will determine which of the items is perceived more difficult by participants. The data are showed visually in tables in Chapter V.

4.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The three items which were analysed qualitatively were the semi-structured interviews, the samples of students' written feedback from their supervisors, and the responses to the open-ended section in the questionnaire. The process of the data analysis was initially challenging in terms of combining all of the data and organising and categorising them under particular themes. All the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews, the documents and the open-ended questions in the questionnaire were coded and labelled, reading line by line to make an initial list of themes and sub-themes. A constant comparison methods of the whole data was implemented by reading and rereading within and across the data (Lalik & Potts, 2001). After that, three files were created in the word processor Microsoft Word for the data from the semi-structured interviews transcripts, documents, and open-ended questions from the questionnaire.

Following this, I decided to use a data analysis software for analysing the data, instead of doing it manually. Thus, I chose MAXQDA software, which is a

multifunctional software system for managing and developing the data. After some training, I found the software useful, as it allowed me to easily make codes, retrieve segments, and create categories, which in turn assisted me in understanding the data more deeply. However, the software was not used as an alternative for the researcher's intellectual role. This was in accordance with suggestions in the literature, such as Ritchie and Lewis (2003), who indicated that “there is strong advice that these [software] should be seen only as an ‘analytic support’ to aid the process of analysis and not as a replacement for the intellectual role that is required of the researcher” (p. 217).

The next step, after preparing and managing the data, was importing the data from three files from Microsoft Word into MAXQDA software. In order to develop and refine the codes, a constant comparison of the data was made by reading and rereading across the data again. This was done following the opinion of various researchers, such as Denscombe (2007), that constant comparison entails “comparing and contrasting new codes, categories and concepts as they emerge-constantly seeking to check out against existing versions” (p. 99). As mentioned earlier, the use of MAXQDA brought a number of advantages to the process of data analysis. While I was reading, I was able to make codes, categorise, generate themes, add memos, and highlight segments easily.

Following that, I spent time considering the relationships between the different codes, categorises, and themes and organising the coded extracts under the corresponding theme. This process is labelled by Creswell (2007) as “winnowing” the data or “reducing them to a small, manageable set of themes to write into (the) final narrative” (p. 152). Additionally, the data in the current study were analysed thematically to identify themes within the data. By the end of the

process, I had a coding scheme that consisted of main themes and categories. (Appendix E & F)

4.7.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview Data Analysis

I started the data analysis process by transcribing the recorded interviews and translating them, which took four months. To achieve trustworthiness, the interviews were e-mailed back to the participants after transcription. This was to confirm that the transcripts contained the correct responses of the participants. This technique is known as respondent validation (Silverman, 2001), where I received confirmation from the participants that they were satisfied with the accuracy of my transcription and had no objection to any transcribed views. The interviews were conducted in Arabic with the Saudi postgraduate students, then I translated the transcriptions into English. Then, I sent the Arabic audio files and the translated transcripts to experts in translation to check their validation. This whole process was time consuming (Appendix H & J).

The analysis of the data collected from the semi-structured interviews was guided by Creswell's (2007) procedures in qualitative data analysis that "consists of preparing and organising the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (p. 148). This type of data analysis is a non-linear process; it requires the researcher to get involved in the various stages of research, and involves fluctuating back and forth between the original data and the coding process to create new codes and test existing ones against the original data.

I constructed the analysis of the qualitative data inductively through building categories and themes from bottom up (Creswell, 2013). This is to say that I did not start with predefined categories or themes, but rather “allow [ed] them to emerge from the data” (Randor, 2002, p.70), to provide “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78).

During the reading process, some notes were taken in each of the interview transcription to consider during the data analysis process. As a result of being immersed in the data, the irrelevant and meaningless parts of the data could be discarded (Spencer et al., 2003). The research questions guided the researcher to what to keep and what to omit. However, care was taken not to miss any important, interesting or relevant information (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Coding included selecting certain words, sentences, paragraphs or sections from the texts that seemed to capture the key concepts or thoughts expressed by the participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Then, the data were broken down into small pieces by coding and labelling, to assign units of meaning of the data (Radnor, 2001). The coding was undertaken inductively and the themes emerged (Appendix G, H, I, & J). After that, the data were displayed by creating a thematic chart, which was modified by combining similar categories and forming others. As a result, the data became more organised and could easily be accessed.

4.7.2.2 Open-Ended Questions Data Analysis

As with the semi-structured interviews, I analysed the open-ended questions qualitatively using the same procedure that I used to analyse the interview transcripts. These data were integrated with other qualitative data. (Appendix I & F)

4.7.2.3 Document Data Analysis

These documents included raw data that were read several times and making use of the data analysis software 'MAXQDA'. Bowen (2009) recommends that "the process involves a careful, more focused re-reading and review of the data. The reviewer takes a closer look at the selected data and performs coding and category construction, based on the data's characteristics, to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon" (p.32). The data were then organised and grouped under themes and sub-themes or categories. Then, the documents' data were matched with the data gathered through other qualitative tools (Appendix K).

4.8 Strategies for Ensuring Quality Data and Verifiable Conclusions

Several procedures were followed to ensure that the collected data were reliable and valid. These procedures included piloting, ensuring the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, and dealing with issues of trustworthiness and triangulation.

4.8.1 *Piloting*

Pilot studies are defined as "small-scale versions of the planned study, trial run of planned methods or miniature versions of the anticipated research" (Kim, 2010, p. 2). It is necessary in the cycle of the research design to pilot the research instruments in order to check their usability, feasibility, and clarity prior to conducting the research itself (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001). By the same token, De Vans (1993) underlines the importance of piloting in a simple suggestion: "Do not take the risk. Pilot test first" (p. 54).

Semi-structured interviews were one of the main sources of data for the current study. Therefore, I carried out a trial run before conducting the interview, as

suggested by Dörnyei (2007). As part of this trial, I interviewed three supervisors and four colleagues at the University of Exeter studying for their postgraduate degrees. As for the students, these participants were Saudi, each studying for a Ph.D at University of Exeter. Each one of those students is working as a lecturer at a different university in Saudi Arabia. The first was from a special education institution at King Faisal University, the second from an English language centre at King AbdulAziz University, the third from a science department at King Saud University, and the fourth was from a business school at Taibah University. With regard to the supervisors, each was awarded a Ph.D degree, worked at Exeter University and had supervision experience with Saudi postgraduate students. The three supervisors specialised in education, science and business.

To ensure a high level of sound quality, I utilised a digital sound recorder during the pilot interviews. Following the evaluation process after the pilot session, numerous suggestions and modifications emerged or were made directly by the participants. One of the main suggestions was to add more prompting questions, as they facilitate more effective and in-depth inquiries during an interview. The benefits of prompting questions were also confirmed by Leech (2002) who stated "Prompts are important as the questions themselves in semi-structured interviews"; he further mentioned two key functions of prompts: "they keep people talking and they rescue you when responses turn to mush" (p. 667).

Besides interviews, the questionnaire, as another data collection tool of the present study, was also piloted. This questionnaire was bilingual, written in both Arabic and English, as it was distributed to 20 TESOL /non-TESOL Saudi students doing their postgraduate degrees at the University of Exeter. These students were specifically asked to identify any problems they might have with understanding the questions of the questionnaire. Reflecting on their feedback,

some items were revised, clarified, reworded, and changed as the participants found them ambiguous, repetitious, and even unrelated. Subsequently, the amended version of the questionnaire was re-piloted using the same participants in order to avoid any irrelevant or ambiguous items. This thorough process proved to be very valuable later, as it helped to simplify the analysis of the data.

A secondary benefit derived from conducting the piloting session was familiarising myself with the actual procedures that conducting interviews would entail. This was of particular importance to me since I had never conducted face-to-face or telephone interviews before. Moreover, the experience of piloting assisted me greatly in ensuring that all the items on the questionnaire together with the interview questions were related to the study's research questions and its aims.

4.8.2 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

There are two fundamental criteria according to which any research instrument needs to be evaluated thoroughly: validity and reliability. This section presents how the researcher approached these two criteria when designing the questionnaire.

In essence, the reliability of a research instrument indicates the degree to which this instrument is immune from random errors. According to Oppenheim (1992) reliability also constitutes "the purity and consistency of a measure, to repeatability, to the probability of obtaining the same results" (p. 144). The type of reliability assessment used in this study was internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha test in the (SPSS) that gives an indication of the average correlation between all of the scale items. Thus, the abovementioned assessment proved that the questionnaire was reliable (0.717). The value of Cronbach's alpha

for the cohesion section was (0.625) because Cronbach's alpha test does not only depend on the correlation between the items in the scale, but also on the number of items; the more items the higher the alpha value (Field, 2009). Therefore, the value of Cronbach's alpha (0.625) is acceptable for three items in the cohesion section.

Table (4.5) below shows the value of Chronbach's alpha and the number of items in each section of the questionnaire.

Table 4.5: Reliability Statistics for Questionnaire items

Scale	Cronbach`s Alpha	Number of items
Academic vocabulary	.854	5
Using sources	.742	4
Argument	.862	6
Coherence	.783	8
Cohesion	.625	3
Style	.878	8
EAP	.779	10

The second important criterion through which the questionnaire was measured was validity; this refers to “the extent to which there has been an approximation of truth” (Osborne-Daponte, 2008, p. 86). Put simply, the validity of a research instrument is the extent to which this instrument can measure what it is supposed to measure (Oppenheim, 1992). To check the validity of the questionnaire, I established a content and construct validity test by having the questionnaire reviewed by my supervisor and by experts in the field of TESOL/TEFL to ensure that the questionnaire items measured what they were supposed to measure and represented the main issues of writing challenges. Consequently, based on the provided feedback, certain aspects of the questionnaire together with some items were amended. In addition, the questionnaire was designed in English and then translated into Arabic, which made possible the verification of the accuracy of the translation by two translators. After this process, the questionnaire was approved as valid.

4.8.3 Trustworthiness of the Research

Assessing the quality of any research design can be done by considering various specific criteria. With respect to quantitative research for example, such assessment is based on the criteria of the research’s validity and reliability; however, the idea of using these two criteria to judge the quality of qualitative data has been contested (Richards, 2009). This is because researcher bias can affect the process of data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004). Alternatively, it has been suggested that the term “trustworthiness” should be used when evaluating the quality and credibility of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The term ‘trustworthiness’ is then defined as “a set of criteria” that informs this evaluation (Bryman, 2008, p. 700). More specifically, these criteria are

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The following section presents these criteria in more detail.

4.8.3.1 Credibility

The term 'credibility' is defined as "the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researcher's interpretations of them" (Given, 2008, p. 138). As is evident from this definition, credibility is a particularly complex aspect of research. Therefore, two procedures were used in the current study to achieve the adequate level of credibility: triangulation and a prolonged engagement in the field.

Triangulation was employed because the "use of different sources of information will help both to confirm and improve the clarity, or precision, of research findings" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 275). In the current study, triangulation was performed on two levels: methods and participants. Regarding the former, a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis were utilised to collect data; concerning the latter, data were generated from two sources - Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors - in order to obtain perspectives from both involved parties.

As mentioned, the second procedure to achieve credibility in the current study was a prolonged engagement in the field. The use of this procedure was based on the notion that "the longer (the constructivists) stay in the field, the more the pluralistic perspective will be heard from participants and the better the understanding of the context of participant views" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). In line with this argument, I spent 6 months collecting the data, which is time that can be qualified as a prolonged engagement in the field. However, it should

be noted that the literature states examples of this procedure where its duration was up to a year.

4.8.3.2 Transferability

Another important criterion that was considered when conducting this research was transferability. This term refers to the applicability of the research results to other different contexts (Richards, 2009). The more common term is 'generalisability' of the research findings, which remains a very debatable issue in qualitative research. In this respect, Creswell (2007) asserted that "as a general rule, qualitative researchers are reluctant to generalise from one case to another because the contexts of the cases differ" (p. 74). However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that although the researcher cannot identify the transferability of results, she/he is capable of providing adequate information based on which the reader can then assess whether the results may be applicable in different situations or contexts. Therefore, the current study attempts to provide such a degree and quality of information about its research setting, the design of the research, the utilised analytical processes, and the findings. Supporting this view, Shenton (2004) maintained that "the researcher being acquainted only with the 'sending context' cannot make any inferences concerning the transferability of his/her findings which must be determined by the readers" (p. 70).

Despite the current study's specific focus on difficulties in English academic writing of Saudi postgraduate students in the UK, these difficulties can be representative within a broader context of other Saudi postgraduate students doing their postgraduate degrees in other foreign countries or students from other Arab countries. This is because these postgraduate students share a similar cultural, educational, and linguistic background, where generally speaking,

developing skills in writing academic English is not being prioritised or given sufficient attention. In addition, the findings from the present study are expected to provide helpful insights for institutions in higher education and educators in the EFL field in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, these findings may enable them to better comprehend the complexities of learners' difficulties in writing in L2. Thus, from my point of view, the current study and its results and recommendation can achieve a degree of generalisability.

4.8.3.3 Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability “involves an interrogation of the context and the methods used to derive the data” (Richards, 2009, p. 159). Richards (2009) further asserted that interrogation must involve the provision of details regarding the connection between the methodology and the study's purpose, and should explain the data collection methods, how these were used to generate the data, and the data analysis process. I tried to achieve dependability in the current study by providing an in-depth explanation of the relevant study's procedures to allow other researchers in the future to use the current research in different contexts. The benefits of providing such information were also confirmed by Shenton (2004), who stressed that providing details of techniques employed when conducting specific research can assist other researchers to do the same research in different contexts.

4.8.3.4 Confirmability

In reference to confirmability in qualitative research, this research factor “depends on making the data available to the reader and this in turn depends on the transparency of representation” (Richards, 2009, p. 160). The importance of confirmability stems from the need to ensure that the findings as formulated in a

research study represent the research participants' experiences and thoughts rather than being a product of researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, confirmability was achieved by applying respondent validation, whereby the research participants validated the results of the data analysis, that is, the data interpretation as well as its conclusion, to ensure that my interpretations were in accordance with their intended meanings (Radnor, 2002). This was done by sending some of the interview transcripts to the participants by e-mail and asking them to confirm that these transcripts and the subsequent interpretations were consistent with their perceptions. Furthermore, an 'audit trail' was used in the form of commentaries that I received from an independent reviewer in order to ascertain consistency throughout both the literature review and the methodology stages (Given, 2008).

4.8.4 Triangulation

The last strategy employed in this study to ensure quality of the data and verifiable conclusions was triangulation. The term 'triangulation' was defined by Creswell and Miller (2000) as searching "for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). The rationale for using this method was the notion that any weaknesses inherently associated with any research method can be compensated for by the strengths of other methods if these are used in an appropriate combination (Jack & Raturi, 2006). Triangulation also provides "corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods [...] to locate major and minor themes" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

In the current study, data triangulation was accomplished by collecting data from two groups of participants: supervisors and students. As already discussed, this

was done mainly to obtain different views concerning the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, another form of triangulation was performed by asking three investigators to verify and check the English translation of the interview transcripts.

At this stage of the methodology, triangulation was also achieved by using various research instruments including a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to collect the research data. In this regard, Patton (2002) emphasised that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative methods” (p. 247). The relationship between the questionnaire, interview and document analysis exists so that each completes the others. The questionnaire asks a number of technical questions and the interview avoids exploring the same questions in order to avoid repetition and to allow other area to be explored which was not explored in the questionnaire, such as the psychological factors. Document analysis data also supported the other data and provided the opportunity to see the actual writing difficulties of the students. Therefore, triangulation provides a more in-depth explanation of the different perceptions of the participants regarding the difficulties of academic writing in English.

This section discussed in detail various ways that were utilised to ascertain the high quality of the research. Another factor that contributes significantly to the credibility of any research study is the manner in which various ethical issues are considered and eventually dealt with. This will be the subject of the following section.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethics and morals play an essential role in scientific and education research. According to Wellington (2000) 'ethics' is a comprehensive term encompassing "moral principles which are concerned with people's behaviour and actions" (p. 54), whilst it is absolutely crucial for educational research to be ethical. Correspondingly, Creswell (2003) asserted that a researcher should be aware of all potential ethical issues that can occur at any stage of the research, focusing particularly on the domain of the research questions, the problem statement, and data collection. Similarly, Miller and Brewer (2003) revealed that "ethical responsibility is essential at all stages of the research process, from the design of a study, including how participants are recruited, to how they are treated through the course of these procedures, and finally to the consequences of their participation" (p. 95).

Given various specific aspects of the current study's design, there are certain ethical and moral issues that needed to be taken into consideration. Therefore, to address these issues effectively and guarantee the rights of the participants, I followed a number of procedures. First, I completed the certificate of Ethical Research Approval and signed it; then I showed this certificate to the Chair of Schools Ethics Committee of the University of Exeter. This certificate confirms that the researcher guarantees the privacy and dignity of the participants. Furthermore, issuing of this certificate allows the researcher to proceed with the process of data collection (Appendix L).

According to BERA's ethical guidelines, "the securing of participants' voluntary informed consent before research gets underway is considered the norm for the conduct of research" (BERA, 2004, p. 6). An informed consent form was therefore

distributed to all participants for them to sign, prior to me conducting the research; thus, it was guaranteed that the participation of all participants is voluntary (Appendix M). Creswell (2009) advised in this regard that the researcher should "develop an informed consent form for participants to sign before they engage in the research" (p. 89). Additionally, participants were also informed about the aims of the research, the criteria according to which the participants were selected, and their role in the research. This information was provided in two ways: first, in written form in the covering letter accompanying the questionnaire, and second, verbally by the researcher prior to the interview.

I asked the participants to volunteer to fill in the questionnaire online and to take part in a semi-structured interview. At the beginning of the interviews, I informed each participant of the expected duration of the interview, and I also obtained permission from them to use a digital recorder. Subsequently, I informed them that the interview would be transcribed by me and that all the data would be kept safe. The participants were also told about their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Finally, they were provided with the research results, as recommended by BERA (2004).

Moreover, the information about how anonymity and confidentiality of the data would be achieved was included in the informed consent. Confidentiality means that "although researchers know who has provided the information or are able to identify participants from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 92). In order to maintain confidentiality and protect the identities of the participants, I used pseudonyms for all the interviewed participants. In addition, participants were assured that they would not be identified by name in the final report regarding the research findings.

Closely related to confidentiality of the research is the anonymity of the research participants. Miller and Brewer (2003) explained the meaning of anonymity as “the researcher will not and cannot identify the respondent” (p. 97). This was achieved by determining that the participants’ names would not be required whilst collecting documents related to samples of written feedback given to students by their supervisors. Accordingly, most of students’ feedback samples were received anonymously. In addition, all the returned questionnaires were saved and labelled with only numerical codes. Moreover, the participants were assured that nobody would be able to access their data except for the researcher’s supervisors and that their data would be stored in a safe place.

Succeeding in guaranteeing a high quality level of the research and addressing all relevant ethical issues does not mean that a given research study will not have certain specific limitations. The next section elaborates on this point in more detail.

4.10 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations that can be identified with respect to the current study. Being aware of these limitations, I have exerted a considerable effort to eliminate their impact on the research and its findings.

First, due to practical reasons, it was not possible to travel to various cities in the UK, which restricted the opportunities to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants systematically from all parts of the country. To overcome this limitation, alternative methods of communication, such as online interview and telephone interview, were used. The selected 15 postgraduate Saudi students for the semi structured interview were willing to be interviewed and I did not face any restriction with regards to gender differences. Second, it was necessary to

translate the questionnaire and the interview transcripts to Arabic for students, as their level of English was not sufficient to be utilised effectively at this level of communication. Following this, all the data were translated into English and interpreted accordingly by the researcher. The limitation of this process revolved around the necessity to search for less vague Arabic words for formulating items on the questionnaire and translating the interview. To achieve high accuracy, the researcher sought assistance from experts who were bilingual in Arabic and English for cross-checking for the translations. Third, the data collection methods—questionnaire and semi-structured interview caused certain challenges when conducting the study in terms of finding a suitable time at which to interview supervisors and students. This proved to be a relatively difficult task, particularly in the case of supervisors, given their heavy workloads during the academic year. In addition, some of the interviews with Saudi students had to take place during the time of submission of some of their assignments or when they had returned to their country for holidays, which at times rendered staying in touch with them problematic. Fourth, the researcher did not analyse the actual writing of students to identify certain issues of difficulties, such as coherence or grammar issues; this may lead to a new area of study in the future for the researcher of the current study.

4.11 Summary

This chapter discussed and outlined the design and methodological underpinnings of this study. To summarise the content of this chapter, the current study is informed by the interpretive paradigm to interpret and understand the perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors regarding the difficulties of academic writing. To achieve this, a combination of mixed methods

involving questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documents analysis was used. Following this, the questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews were piloted before being applied in the actual study. Additionally, I have provided a detailed explanation of how the trustworthiness of the study was achieved by addressing the concepts of transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability. Moreover, I have discussed the different guidelines and procedures related to dealing with the ethical considerations of the current study. Lastly, this chapter concluded by explaining the limitations of the study. The finding of the current study will be presented in the following chapter.

5 Chapter Five: Findings and Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the data analysis and the findings of the current study, together with their interpretations. This part has been divided into three sections according to the research questions. The first section highlights the students' views towards difficulties with academic writing, including the challenges they have experienced, the reasons behind these challenges, and the strategies to overcome these challenges. The second section presents the difficulties with academic writing as perceived by supervisors including, once again, their points of view about the factors contributing to these challenges, and the potential solutions. The last section sheds light on the English academic preparation as perceived by students and its impact on their academic writing. Throughout the chapter, the major themes, categories, and subcategories are presented and subsequently supported by evidence extracted from the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews, and/or documentary analysis.

5.2 Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

This first section introduces the difficulties with academic writing from the perspective of Saudi postgraduate students (Table 5.1). The research instruments utilised to address the two research questions were a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Table 5.1: Themes, sub-themes and categories related to the academic writing difficulties from the perspective of Saudi postgraduate students

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
Academic Writing Difficulties	Academic vocabulary Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding the appropriate vocabulary that suit their subject • Proper use of vocabulary • Using word synonyms
	Using Sources Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding plagiarism • Paraphrasing • Citing references in a text • Writing a references list according to a particular format
	Difficulties with Developing an Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justifying an argument to convince the reader • Demonstrating critical thinking to produce a solid argument • Making balance between argument and counter argument • Differentiating between L1 & L2 argument • Bringing evidence to support an argument
	Difficulties with Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking between ideas properly between paragraphs • Writing an appropriate introduction • Writing an appropriate conclusion • Expressing one main idea for each paragraph
	Difficulties with Cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate transition of ideas between sentences • Using cohesive devices properly
	Academic style related Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing in critical style • Achieving clarity • Avoiding redundancy • Writing about unfamiliar topics
	Reading and Thinking Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the gaps present in the existing resources in the literature review chapter • Providing logical justification for the obtained results in the discussion chapter • Understanding the various views that participant provided in the discussion chapter
	Difficulties with Background Knowledge of the Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of ideas about the topic • Writing contribution to the general knowledge
	Language Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spelling • Grammar • Punctuation • Translation

In total, 275 students participated in the questionnaire; 66.5% were males and 33.5% were females. Their ages varied: the majority (58.9%) were between 30-39 years old, 31.6% were 20-29 years old while only 9.5% were over 40 years old. Regarding degrees, almost 49.1% of the participants were PhD holders or enrolled in their PhD programmes while 45.1% were following a master's degree programme. Only 5.5% were studying at an EdD level. Regarding honours degrees, 25% of the participants were specialising in English language degrees while 75% were doing specialities, such as business administration, human nutrition and food science, Arabic studies, biological sciences, marketing, special needs, physics, finance and engineering, human resource and management, history, English literature, information technology, and linguistics.

The data are presented using the frequency of answers (n) and the percentages (%) in order to describe and present the distribution of students' answers. The following paragraphs and tables referred to show each dimension separately.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen Saudi postgraduate students of different specialisations and with nine supervisors.

5.2.1 Academic Vocabulary Difficulties

Students were asked to rate how difficult they perceived the required academic vocabulary when they write in English, and they were given five levels of difficulty to choose from. Based on their answers, it was evident that the use of "appropriate vocabulary" seemed to be the most difficult element of academic writing. This was supported by almost 83% of the participants, who reported that it was difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). "Proper use of vocabulary" occupied the second rank (Mdn=4), as 74% reported finding it difficult or very difficult. This could be due to students' lack of lexical knowledge and the lack of sufficient

exposure to the spoken language. In addition, this may be attributed to the usage of English in Saudi Arabia as a subject rather than a language. So students used English only within the classroom, which limited their opportunities to practise the language outside with members of the public. “Antonyms” were found to be the least difficult part of the academic register. This means that 68% of respondents stated that they found the “antonyms” choice difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). As evidenced by the overall results in Table (5.2), all items were shown to be difficult.

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Academic Vocabulary Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
1.Vocabulary (appropriate vocabulary)	N	7	10	30	104	124	228	4	1
	%	2.5	3.6	10.9	37.8	45.1	82.9		
2.Proper use of vocabulary	N	7	36	28	93	111	204	4	2
	%	2.5	13.1	10.2	33.8	40.4	74.2		
3.Proper use of phrases	N	9	28	43	85	110	195	4	4
	%	3.3	10.2	15.6	30.9	40	70.9		
4.Antonyms	N	7	52	29	110	77	187	4	5
	%	2.5	18.9	10.5	40	28	68		
5.Synonyms	N	6	48	20	125	76	201	4	3
	%	2.2	17.5	7.3	45.5	27.6	73.1		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

With regard to the responses collected from the semi-structured interviews, many students confirmed that they had difficulty using academic vocabulary. Maha, who was studying history, represented an example of the problems mentioned, as she said:

Finding the appropriate vocabulary used in discussing the strong and weak points is very difficult for me. Also, I have a difficulty in finding the academic vocabulary required for writing encountered arguments.

Furthermore, two students found a difficulty in finding the academic vocabulary that suited their subject. Ahmad, studying finance, puts this as follows: “I have a

difficulty with finding the specific vocabulary or terms that suit my degree subject, so I used some Arabic books to translate terms into English”.

Additionally, other students stated that they had problems with using word synonyms when writing. Reem, who studied physics illustrated this difficulty:

Finding accurate word synonyms that express the meaning that I want is very difficult for me. Although I have the information, I can't write it the way I want to, because I have a limited vocabulary.

Some students shed light upon another obstacle to using academic vocabulary when writing. It was reported that they depended heavily on vocabulary learnt at school, and they used only simple words in their writings. For example, Mona, who was studying Arabic, stated:

I always choose vocabulary that I learnt at school and use easy and simple words in my writing, because it is very difficult for me to find accurate vocabulary that expresses my ideas to an academic standard.

Additionally, vocabulary received a greater number of students' responses when answering open-ended questions about academic writing. For example, Noura, who was studying biological sciences, mentioned: “I face a difficulty with finding the appropriate vocabulary that expresses or conveys my intended meaning to the reader”. Another response pinpointed the difficulty of finding the correct vocabulary to use in writing: “Some students can't differentiate between the academic and spoken vocabulary”.

Students often struggle with academic vocabulary because they memorise a certain vocabulary without practising it in real life, and thus lose it quickly. In other words, memorisation and rote learning are the main features of the Saudi education system in schools and universities. This is due to the techniques used for teaching vocabulary in the Saudi system, which is represented as using unplanned and unsystematic vocabulary teaching activities in which students ask

for the meaning of unknown vocabulary items and instructors provide the meaning. Even though instructors devote a considerable amount of instructional time to explaining and defining terms, “this approach to vocabulary instruction is haphazard and lacks pre-planning” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p. 95). In the same vein, Al-Akloby (2001) illustrated that the lack of effective strategies for vocabulary acquisition, such as the use of real-world scenarios or group interaction, leads to the absence of an effective command of the advanced vocabulary required for the appropriate expression of students’ complex mental constructions and arguments. This finding revealed how important it is that the vocabulary learning strategies be improved to become more effective with more guidance and explicit instruction. Furthermore, instructors need to make sure that students understand how to learn, how to increase their vocabulary, and how to use academic vocabulary.

5.2.2 Difficulties of Using Sources

As using sources is critical in academic writing, participants were given four main challenges based on this factor. It was found that avoiding plagiarism is considered as the most challenging element. The result shows that almost 65% found it either difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). Secondly, paraphrasing was also highly challenging for students, as almost 63% of the students found it difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). On the other hand, “citing references” was reported as the least difficult when it comes to using sources, since only 55% found it difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). Further details are shown in Table (5.3). These findings indicate that the students were suffering from lack of sufficient skills in paraphrasing or summarising others’ ideas, which contributes to them plagiarising others’ work. Moreover, this paraphrasing or summarising skill requires good reading comprehension, which enables students to integrate

information from various sources; a lack of this skill can be another barrier. Therefore, "writing classes must provide sufficient time for learning the genres of writing which require the integration and synthesis of sources and citation norms" (LoCastro & Masuko, 2002, p.29).

Table 5.3: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Sources Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
6.Citing references	N	19	66	38	92	60	152	4	4
	%	6.9	24	13.8	33.5	21.8	55.3		
7.Writing reference list	N	33	41	40	94	67	161	4	3
	%	12	14.9	14.5	34.2	24.4	58.6		
8.Avoiding plagiarism	N	24	39	32	105	75	180	4	1
	%	8.7	14.2	11.6	38.2	27.3	65.5		
9.Paraphrasing	N	18	46	36	117	58	175	4	2
	%	6.5	16.7	13.1	42.5	21.1	63.6		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

When the students were asked about their perceptions with regard to their difficulties with using resources, the majority commented that using resources when writing was a difficult skill to acquire. The first example comes from Hana, who was studying human resource management. Hana reported that she had a difficulty preserving the meaning of a text while she was paraphrasing the content:

I have a difficulty with paraphrasing, because I can only give synonyms for the main vocabulary in a paragraph. I am afraid that I may change the meaning of the paragraph. So I always try not to change all things.

Additionally, two students described their difficulties when attempting to understand the actual meaning of the text when paraphrasing. For example, Mohammed, who was studying special needs, said:

Actually, paraphrasing is one of my writing difficulties because I need to be careful when rewriting somebody else's speech. For example, I have to reread the paragraph that I want to paraphrase many times in

order to understand the actual meaning, and then start the paraphrasing.

Three students highlighted that their difficulty with paraphrasing was dependant on the writer's style. This means that some authors of an original text present sophisticated sentences that are difficult to paraphrase. An example of this view was given by Ahmed who was studying finance:

I have a difficulty with paraphrasing because it depends on the writer's style. Some researchers adopt an easy, straightforward, and clear style; others write long, complicated sentences, or rhetorical ones. It takes some time, because my paraphrased text has to contain the same notions of the writer's precise views. In addition, it puts some burden on us, as we try to change the wording and the structure of the original quotes in our own words and writing styles, in other words different from the original source.

Furthermore, other students emphasised their struggles when attempting to understand the meaning of plagiarism and avoid it when writing. In this regard, Lina who is studying English literature stated: "I have a difficulty with avoiding plagiarism when writing because in our studies at university level, students do not learn what plagiarism means and how to avoid it in writing". This view was also stated by Ali, whose major was business administration: "Some lectures teach students roughly the theoretical meaning of plagiarism rather than the practical one, without providing them with any examples". In addition, four students clarified that the meaning of plagiarism goes beyond simply copying and pasting other authors' texts, and expressed that it is therefore extremely difficult to grasp this concept fully and avoid plagiarism. For example, Reem, a physics student, mentioned:

I do not have enough knowledge of other meanings of plagiarism, for instance, copying other authors' ideas without acknowledging the source, or resubmitting the same assignment in two different courses. I only became familiar with this when I came to study here in the UK.

Relating to reference lists or citations, two students stated that they had difficulties in deciding which particular format to use. An example of this was given by Maha, a history student:

When I write the reference list, I find it difficult to choose the suitable format (APA, Harvard, IEEE, etc.), because each supervisor wants you to follow a particular format that he/she likes, which creates confusion and difficulty when writing the reference list.

Two students stated that they had problems when citing references in a text. This problem was expressed by Mazin, who was studying engineering; he commented as follows:

The students of some disciplines, like engineering or medicine, have difficulties with choosing the correct citation style (APA, Harvard ...) in a text, because each supervisor has his own style of citation in theses, which leads to confusion for students.

Four students responded to the problems they faced with open-ended questions; one response in particular illustrated the difficulty of citation. Nourah, a biological sciences student, stated:

There are many difficulties that I encounter when writing, and one of these difficulties is using an appropriate system of citing in the text and quotations, because I didn't get enough training on how to do it; students were just given some hand-outs describing for them ways of writing a reference list, citing references in a text and quotations.

There are possible reasons for justifying students' difficulties with using sources. Firstly, the insufficient knowledge regarding the choice of a proper citation style is one obstacle, while an inefficient teaching method with regard to practical academic writing skills is another. Furthermore, students lacked sufficient knowledge of the different meanings of plagiarism. According to Carroll (2004), "the statistics confirm that international students are over-represented in the statistics of those being punished" (p. 3). Finally, as the students had not read enough English texts, they had insufficient knowledge of different writing styles,

as well as a distinct lack of reading skills, and, consequently, they had difficulties with paraphrasing. It was also evident from the respondents' answers that many of them did not clearly understand what paraphrasing constitutes, as the process is not only about 'using synonyms' but, rather, is based on extracting key points, re-formulating them in one's own words, and then integrating them into the text.

5.2.3 Difficulties with Developing an Argument

Developing an argument when writing in English was investigated using six items. As presented in Table (5.4) "balancing an argument" was the most difficult one for the students, with 81% of the students rating it as either difficult or very difficult (Mdn=4). Secondly, it was found that "Arguing your own position" was frequently either difficult or very difficult (77%) (Mdn=4). Thirdly, "justifying one's own argument" was described as difficult or very difficult by a high percentage of students (76%) (Mdn=4). Although predicted to have a high score on the scale, "Differentiating between L1 & L2 argument" and "Rhetorical English" had the lowest difficulty percentages, 75% and 69% respectively. These results reflect that students were suffering from the lack of explicit instruction to understand the argumentative organisation in L2 along with the insufficient writing practice in L1 in their prior education experience. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning here that the differences in the culture and the rhetorical structures between Arabic and English are another issue that needs to be discussed while addressing students' difficulties in constructing an argument.

Al-Abed-Al-Haq and Ahmed (1994) in this regard explained the following:

Argumentative writing requires that the students be brought up with a mentality that can contemplate, act and react, prove and rebut, and take sides. These qualities cannot be built inside the lecture room only at the hands of an instructor, but are rather the outcome of broader social, cultural, and educational milieus (p.316).

Table 5.4: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Development of the Argument Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
10.Arguing your own position	N	6	26	32	142	69	211	4	2
	%	2.2	9.5	11.6	51.6	25.1	76.7		
11.Demonstrating critical thinking	N	8	31	28	109	99	208	4	4
	%	2.9	11.3	10.2	39.6	36	75.6		
12.Balancing an argument	N	7	30	15	139	84	223	4	1
	%	2.5	10.9	5.5	50.5	30.5	81		
13.Justifying own argument	N	6	28	31	130	80	210	4	3
	%	2.2	10.2	11.3	47.3	29.1	76.4		
14.Differentiating between L1 & L2 argument	N	7	32	29	147	60	207	4	5
	%	2.5	11.6	10.5	53.5	21.8	75.3		
15.Rhetorical English	N	7	33	44	115	76	191	4	6
	%	2.5	12	16	41.8	27.6	69.4		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

Concerning the results of the semi-structured interviews, the majority of students admitted that writing an effective argument was an obstacle for them. This can be seen in the extract given by Ali, who was studying business administration:

I think being able to think critically is the main issue in producing a solid and logical argument in academic writing. I do feel that I am struggling with writing my arguments, and I have to write many versions before I produce the final draft. For example, I have to write an argument that suggests a certain issue and, at the same time, I should include the contradicting one as well, and again I need to include my views considering the balance between the previous arguments with the limitations of each side.

Similarly, Maha, who was studying history, described her difficulty in writing an argument with a reader in mind. In other words, when writing an argument, some justifications should be presented in order to make the reader convinced by the writer. She stated the following:

I have difficulty making an argument, because it is very important to present all the arguments available and convince the reader of what I want to say. I cannot just go ahead and say what I want to say. I have to guide the reader and convince him of the idea I am promoting in my writing.

Mouna, who was studying Arabic, emphasised that using her own words when writing an argument often proved difficult: "I struggle with many things when writing an argument, how I can write that I agree or disagree with authors by using my own words, how to organise them, and how to present a debatable argument".

Additionally, some responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire confirmed that students faced problems with argument building; for example, comments included "building solid and logical argument", "bringing evidence to explain why I agree or disagree with the authors", and "supporting my opinion and the means of writing it - either in a direct way, or more scientifically, and determining what kind of opinion I should express".

There are a number of reasons for the difficulties Saudi postgraduate students face in academic writing, particularly when forming arguments. Firstly, the education system in Saudi is based mainly on memorising information and passing exams with high grades, whilst it restricts or completely ignores the role of critical thinking in learning. Secondly, the students' voices in the education system in Saudi Arabia are ignored, with students' roles considered to be that of passive receivers of information. In other words, students are there only to listen without being given a chance to discuss and express their views. Thirdly, the "insufficient engagement among students in sharing their writing and [constructing] academic arguments in required disciplinary texts" represents another hindrance in this regard (Bacha, 2010, p.239). It can therefore be stated that many Saudi postgraduate students, due to their exposure to the very rigid and traditional education system, as well as inadequacies in the level of proficiency in English, lack the required combination of creativity and critical thinking skills which are absolutely essential in any academic field for developing, formulating, and substantiating arguments.

5.2.4 Difficulties with Coherence

This aspect of English writing, particularly coherence among paragraphs, was analysed using eight items as show in Table (5.5). “Linking ideas between paragraphs” was identified as the most problematic aspect (Mdn=4), being viewed mainly as difficult or very difficult (76%). Secondly, “Linking ideas between sentences per paragraph” (Mdn=4) was also shown to be difficult or very difficult (70%). The third most problematic issue was “Supporting sentence per paragraph” (Mdn=4), where almost 68% found it difficult or very difficult. The least difficult ones were “One idea per paragraph” (Mdn=4) and “Concluding sentence” (Mdn=4). However, both showed a high percentage of difficulty (62% and 60% respectively).

The above questionnaire findings indicate how limited the methods of teaching English writing in the Saudi education system are, with a focus only on the accuracy level of the grammar, structure, and spelling of the text rather than the whole discourse. This contributes to students’ lack of awareness regarding the context as a whole and the reader. As a result, students write without any purpose to their writings. In other words, "when there is no purpose for writings, the students seemed not to write logically and coherently" (Hamzah & Karuppiah, 2010, p.5).

Table 5.5: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Coherence Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
16.One idea per paragraph	N	4	10	90	70	101	171	4	7
	%	1.5	3.6	32.7	25.5	36.7	62.2		
17.Supporting sentence per paragraph	N	9	9	70	100	87	187	4	3
	%	3.3	3.3	25.5	36.4	31.6	68		
18.Concluding sentence	N	11	10	89	70	95	165	4	8
	%	4	3.6	32.4	25.5	34.5	60		
19.Linking introduction and conclusion	N	7	6	87	63	112	175	4	6
	%	2.5	2.2	31.6	22.9	40.7	63.6		
20.Linking ideas between sentences per paragraph	N	4	10	68	89	104	193	4	2
	%	1.5	3.6	24.7	32.4	37.8	70.2		
21.Linking ideas between paragraphs	N	2	10	55	105	103	208	4	1
	%	0.7	3.6	20	38.2	37.5	75.7		
22.Introduction to the whole assignment	N	11	38	46	85	95	180	4	5
	%	4	13.8	16.7	30.9	34.5	65.4		
23.Conclusion to the whole assignment	N	10	27	57	90	91	181	4	4
	%	3.6	9.8	20.7	32.7	33.1	65.8		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

In relation to the responses to the semi-structured interviews, many students confirmed that they found writing coherently difficult. This means students usually write sentences that are unrelated to the main ideas in the paragraphs, which makes the text lack cohesion. An example of this was given by Omar, who studied psychology: "I find it difficult to connect my ideas properly between paragraphs. For this reason, I tend to use the Arabic way of writing, which makes my writing incoherent". Three students stated that writing the conclusion was difficult for them. An example was given by Areej, whose major was human nutrition and food science. She said:

I have difficulty with writing conclusions, because it is very tricky to know what is important to mention in the conclusion and what is not... It is a short and dense part of each chapter that has to be written very carefully... Most of the time I rewrite this section multiple times.

Reem, who was studying physics, expressed a similar concern: “I have a difficulty with writing the conclusion of a chapter because I have to be very focused, and I need to state my ideas in a very limited space regarding the number of words”. Additionally, other students indicated that writing an introduction was another difficult aspect. Khalid, who was studying information technology, reflected on this struggle as follows:

I have a difficulty with writing introductions, as it requires deep thinking and organisation. It is the start point, and students sometimes do not know how to start. Therefore, it is better to plan it before writing.

Writing related ideas throughout the paragraphs to show that the text is unified was another coherence-related difficulty that the students faced in their writings. That is to say, the students found it difficult to write supporting sentences to explain the main idea in the paragraph. An example of this was given by Fahad who was studying marketing: “I have a problem with writing related ideas, as well as writing many details concerning a specific idea”. Similarly, Ahmad’s major was Arabic studies; he expressed his view as follows: “It is difficult for me to make an introduction to my ideas, because I constantly tend to jump to a new idea”. With regard to linking the introduction with the conclusion, three students admitted that this was difficult for them. For example, Ali, who was studying business administration, admitted: “I have a difficulty with linking the previous chapter with the new one. In other words, in the conclusion of the chapter, I don’t make it as an introduction for the following chapter”.

Two students stated that it was difficult for them to understand the meaning of coherence. For example, Mansour, who was studying linguistics, stated: “One of the main difficulties that I face when writing is how to make writing coherent, because I do not understand what coherence means”. Furthermore, four students

pointed out that they had a difficulty with expressing one main idea per paragraph. An example of this was given by Hana; her major was human resource and management and she reported the following opinion: "When I write a paragraph, I express many ideas rather than focusing only on one idea, and I thus make the paragraph unorganised. This is my problem".

One questionnaire response was as follows: "When I write a paragraph, I start writing many ideas. At the end, I find the ideas are not linked properly, which makes the text not unified". Another reply stated, "I have difficulties with balancing the paragraphs in terms of ideas".

There are two possible reasons for coherence-related difficulties for Saudi students. First, students are rarely taught to write coherently, as most of them confirmed that they knew neither the meaning of coherence nor how to achieve it in English writing. The second reason was the absence of any planning strategy that could help students to write a unified text. However, it should be emphasised that this is not just a problem related to students' deficiencies in their command of academic English. Coherence is fundamentally a language-neutral concept, which means that, in order to write a coherent paragraph in any language, certain steps and rules must be followed. Hence, the problem that the Saudi students face in this regard can be ascribed, to some degree, to insufficient attention to the formulation of coherent ideas. This is because the subject of writing was taught indirectly with a focus on grammatical accuracy, and was highly dependent on how to present a simple discourse and use of vocabulary.

5.2.5 Difficulties with Cohesion

Cohesion represents the link between sentences, paragraphs, topics, and ideas when writing in academic English. This was measured through three items. It is

evident from the responses that “appropriate transition of ideas between sentences” was the most difficult (Mdn=4), followed by “proper use of cohesive devices for linking sentence” (Mdn=4) and “understanding the different use of cohesive devices in L2 writing for meaning and structure”. Table (5.6) shows the difficulty percentages for all items, along with other descriptive statistics. It can be noticed from these findings that there is a lack of explicit instruction on how to use cohesive devices between sentences in the target language to make the text flow. Furthermore, the lack of students’ awareness of the differences in the writing style between English and Arabic leads them to repeat ideas and use long sentences with an improper use of linkers. This, in turn, leads to a loss of the intended meaning and makes the text inconsistent. Therefore, it is suggested that “cohesive devices should be teachable, and they should be taught in a writing course with intensive practice through constant revisions, so that students’ writing will be less discursive, better organised, and connected” (Tangkiengsirisin, 2010, p.29).

Table 5.6: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Cohesion Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
24.Proper use of cohesive devices for linking sentences	N	5	11	68	86	105	191	4	2
	%	1.8	4	24.7	31.3	38.2	69.5		
25.Understanding the different use of cohesive devices in L2 writing for meaning and structure	N	8	10	76	76	105	181	4	3
	%	2.9	3.6	27.6	27.6	38.2	65.8		
26.Appropriate transition of ideas between sentences	N	3	12	49	92	119	211	4	1
	%	1.1	4.4	17.8	33.5	43.3	76.8		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

With regard to students’ views of cohesion-related difficulties, most of them confirmed that writing cohesively was a difficult skill to acquire. An example is

shown in the following extract, introduced by Mohammed, who was studying special needs:

I somehow do not have a difficulty with expressing my ideas, but I struggle a lot with connecting these with the previous and following ideas within the paragraphs. I have a problem of making the written text fluent so the reader can know how I think.

Omar, whose degree was in psychology, gave another example:

I have a difficulty with making sequences of ideas between sentences, because this is based on the student's level of writing and his ability to understand the content of the text. I think my level is weak in both of them.

In reference to the use of cohesive devices, like 'so', 'because', and 'but', students stressed that they had a difficulty with this issue. For example, Mona, who was studying Arabic, said:

Writing cohesively is difficult for me, because I do not know how to use cohesive devices properly in the sentences and when I should use them. For example, I use many connecting words between sentences, which is a problem for me.

Additionally, some students' responses to the open-ended questions suggested they lacked experience with cohesion; for example, "Writing cohesively is challenging for me, because I hadn't learnt it until I came to study in the UK, so I don't have sufficient knowledge about this skill". A response to another open-ended question stated, "I have a difficulty with making a proper transition of ideas between sentences. I write one idea, and then another idea in the second sentence. I end up needing to re-write everything again to create a unified text".

Students' difficulties with cohesion could be caused by the fact that they have been taught few cohesive devices when writing. Furthermore, Al-Jarf (2001) confirmed that other potential reasons behind cohesion-related difficulties are semantic awareness, morphology, and poor syntax. Moreover, the different meanings of cohesive devices cause difficulties for students when they try to

translate a text. Finally, students are rarely taught to write coherently; most of the students did not know the meaning of cohesion in English writing. Thus, "Learners of English who are required to produce academic texts in this language need to be provided with training in writing first with respect to the construction of paragraph level prior to the essay level" while students should be also "exposed to cohesive devices so that they can produce cohesive texts" (Tangkiengsirisin, 2010, p.8).

5.2.6 Difficulties with Style

The overall style of writing was investigated using eight items. As presented in Table (5.7) "writing in a critical style" (Mdn=5) was shown to be the most difficult skill, and was referred to as difficult or very difficult by 78% of the participants. Secondly, students also found "Unfamiliar topics" difficult (Mdn=4) since almost 76% of them stated that it was difficult or very difficult. Thirdly, "writing in a simple style" was also found highly difficult by 75% (Mdn=4). Fourth, "editing" was described as difficult or very difficult by a high percentage of students (Mdn=4). Fifth, "Writing in a clear style" was also highly challenging for students, as almost 69% of the students found it difficult or very difficult (M=3.85). On the other side of the scale, "avoiding redundancy" (58%) (Mdn=4) and "familiar topics" (46%) (Mdn=3) showed less importance compared to other items.

The above results show that the majority of the students had graduated from school with a limited experience of writing assignments and writing practice. This practice of writing is usually done by imitating or copying a model provided by their teachers in class, and the students follow this model without allowing them to acquire the skills of academic writing such as planning, analysing new information, synthesising ideas, and being critical. Accordingly, students lose

their creativity because of their incapability to express their views properly in writing (Muslim, 2014). Furthermore, students might not be aware of various topics due to their lack of reading habits, which contribute to their weak topic prior knowledge and repetition while writing.

Table 5.7: Descriptive Statistics for Items within the Writing Style Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
27.Editing	N	6	23	47	116	83	199	4	4
	%	2.2	8.4	17.1	42.2	30.2	72.4		
28.Outlining/Structuring	N	10	18	71	80	96	176	4	6
	%	3.6	6.5	25.8	29.1	34.9	64		
29.Writing in a critical style	N	4	32	24	66	149	215	5	1
	%	1.5	11.6	8.7	24	54.2	78.2		
30.Writing in a clear style	N	8	8	69	73	117	190	4	5
	%	2.9	2.9	25.1	26.5	42.5	69		
31.Writing in a simple style	N	6	17	44	87	121	208	4	3
	%	2.2	6.2	16	31.6	44	75.6		
32.Avoiding redundancy	N	12	5	99	60	99	159	4	7
	%	4.4	1.8	36	21.8	36	57.8		
33.Familiar topics	N	12	3	134	30	96	126	3	8
	%	4.4	1.1	48.7	10.9	34.9	45.8		
34.Unfamiliar topics	N	4	49	12	143	67	210	4	2
	%	1.5	17.8	4.4	52	24.4	76.4		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

Most students reported in the interviews that they had difficulties with academic styles of writing. Five students indicated that writing critically proved very difficult for them; they could not think critically and write a critique of the text they were discussing as Mansour, who was studying linguistics asserted: “I have a difficulty with being critical in writing because during our studies in Saudi Arabia, the students were not taught to develop critical thinking, but were rather forced to respect the author’s view in their writing”. Another example was given by Mohammed, who studied special needs; he reported that:

I have a difficulty with writing the literature review critically in terms of showing my agreement or disagreement with authors' different views.

Another difficulty occurs in the discussion chapter, as I don't know how to explain my results critically.

All in all, three students emphasised that writing their thesis chapters critically was problematic for them. An example of this was given by Areej. Her major was human nutrition and food science; she said: "Interpreting the data in the discussion chapter in a critical way is the most difficult thing in writing my thesis, because it is very difficult to know what your participants meant to say or why they said it". Similarly, Fahad, whose major was marketing, referred to his difficulty with writing his results critically: "I have a difficulty with expressing my opinion for my results critically, because, here in UK, they teach students how to think; therefore, it comes more naturally to them".

Additionally, Hana, who was studying human resource management, described her difficulty with achieving clarity in her writing. She expressed this as follows: "I have a difficulty determining how to discuss my results clearly, because I need to describe the results that I found in my own words".

Furthermore, other students stated that they found it difficult to prevent repetition in their writing. Reem, who was studying physics, expressed this in the following manner: "The most significant difficulty in my writing is making a lot of repetition, especially when I have new ideas and the sources are limited".

Writing about unfamiliar topics is another difficulty that students had to face in their writings. For example, Mansour who as studying linguistics stated: "My problem is that I do not know how to write about unfamiliar topics because I do not know how to start and what kind of information I should include. This is challenging for me".

In reference to the responses to the open-ended questions, three students confirmed that they faced some difficulty with regard to their writing style. One

respondent wrote: “I have difficulty with writing my ideas clearly using academic vocabulary and without repetition”, while another stated: “I have some problems with writing styles, such as being descriptive rather than critical and making many repetitions, especially when I have a new idea and the vocabulary and sources are limited”.

It seems that there are many reasons for students' style-related problems. Students' insufficient knowledge of how to be critical and how to defend their opinion is mainly due to the pre-university education system, as it is based on memorising information rather than teaching students how to be critical. Hence, “they tend to write or copy what they have read instead of filtering it through their own judgment and reasoning” (Barnawi, 2011, p.193). In addition, the lack of reading authentic English texts leads to students' lack of familiarity with various topics and their limited vocabularies. Consequently, students' writings tend to be repetitive. Indeed, the lack of writing practice in L1 and L2 causes problems in achieving clarity and simplicity in academic writing.

5.2.7 Other Difficulties (Reading and Thinking Difficulties)

The findings of the interview data analysis indicated that students have difficulties with critical reading and thinking skills. Five students claimed that they experienced a particular difficulty with reading and thinking skills when writing the literature review chapter. For example, Omar, whose major was psychology, said:

Writing the literature review is the most difficult chapter in the dissertation. I found that covering all the literature in my area is very time-consuming and difficult to accomplish. Another difficulty I faced in this chapter was that there were a lot of articles and books coming out all of the time... and it was very demanding and tricky to keep up with all of this.

Another example was given by Mona, who was studying Arabic, she said:

The literature review is the most challenging chapter because it is the place where the key points should be discussed. I always need to think a lot and read many articles in order to know which points I need to include and which ones should be neglected because when you start writing, lots of ideas come to your mind.

Similarly, Ali, specialising in business administration, emphasised that developed thinking and reading skills are essential aspects of writing the literature review chapter, especially when exploring the gaps present in the existing resources. He clarified his views as follows:

In the literature review, the difficulties that I faced concerned the need to do much thinking and reading before reaching a final decision regarding what to include in each section. The writing process is so demanding, it requires covering many relevant ideas but making them brief, at the same time, including many major aspects and minor ones in each area of your investigation and justifying your research when exploring the [knowledge] gap. Also, a considerable part of my literature review has been taken out or replaced according to the data I collected.

Furthermore, three students reported that it was difficult for them to write the discussion chapter, as it required a high level of reading capability and critical thinking skills. The interview excerpt by Mansour, who was studying linguistics, highlights this issue:

I have a difficulty with writing the discussion chapter because it requires me to provide a logical and possible justification for the obtained results, as well as some support from the literature. The results have to be presented in sequence, and the researcher has to establish a link between them.

Another example was given by Ahmed, whose major was finance; he said:

The discussion chapter is, for me, more difficult than other chapters because I need to write down the results I have obtained from the collected data, so that I convince the reader of those results' relevance. In addition, I have to look critically at the previous chapters and relate the findings to the literature.

Moreover, two students revealed that they had difficulty understanding the various views their participants had provided in the discussion chapter. Hana, studying human resource and management, referred to this as follows:

Interpreting the data in the discussion chapter is the second most difficult part of the thesis after the literature review. It's very challenging to know what your participants meant to say... or why they said it; you need to think a lot and read the quotations many times to reach the exact meaning ... This chapter requires a lot of work and going back to the data... in order to get it right.

There are a number of reasons which might account for these difficulties with the necessary skills related to reading and critical thinking. Firstly, their previous education system may not have encouraged the students to think and express their views; instead, students were dependent on passive learning and a teacher-centred process. Secondly, the students were culturally led to respect authors and researchers' views without questioning what they were reading or being taught. Thirdly, the lack of adequate reading habits was one of the reasons behind students' insufficient knowledge of different writing styles.

5.2.8 Difficulties with Background Knowledge of the Subject

The responses collected from the interviews with students revealed that background knowledge of their thesis subjects was another difficulty they faced when writing. Four students indicated that the lack of previous knowledge of their subjects caused certain difficulties. In other words, some students lacked any idea about the topic they want to discuss. For example, Maha, whose major was history, commented on this issue as follows:

One of the challenging aspects of writing is having sufficient knowledge about the topic beforehand. This makes my ideas limited. I think if you have the information, you will be able to write and you will be able to express many ideas, making your topic more interesting.

Another example was given by Ali, who was studying business administration; he highlighted that conducting a research project which would constitute a valuable contribution to the knowledge of a given field can be very difficult:

Making a contribution to general knowledge is difficult for me because it is a vital issue in any research. My research has to add something valuable in the context of my specialisation. In other words, my research needs to provide some sort of remedies or solutions to a specific problem that has been experienced or complained about in the field I study. I have to offer professional, educational, practical suggestions in order to improve the situation in the future, and this is really challenging for me.

Similarly, Reem, studying physics, emphasised that the requirements concerning previous knowledge of the subject posed a number of obstacles in her writing:

I struggle a lot with writing a contribution to the general knowledge of my subject because I think if you know what your contribution is, you will be able to write about it. A contribution to general knowledge needs to be all original that no one else has thought about before you. This is the difficult part for me.

Furthermore, five students commented that they had knowledge of their subject in their mother tongue (Arabic), but they encountered difficulty writing about it in English. For example, Mohammed, whose major was special needs, said: "My problem is that I am insufficiently informed about my topic. My research is about special needs. My knowledge about this topic, especially in English, which should be the language of my thesis, is very limited". Another example was given by Omar, studying psychology, who said:

When it comes to previous knowledge of my thesis subject in Arabic, I have no problem; I can write about it. The real problem I have is when I want to have sufficient knowledge in English about my subject, and I have to write in English.

Maha's major was history; she disclosed how this problem affected the quality of her writing:

When I want to express my subject knowledge in English, I cannot write it as I want it to be because of my limited knowledge and

vocabulary of my subject in English which negatively affects my writing

There are several reasons underlying the difficulties that Saudi postgraduate students face when acquiring previous knowledge of the subject in terms of academic writing. Firstly, the lack of a planning strategy often renders their work ineffective. Secondly, students do not read enough about their subjects while doing their studies in the UK. Additionally, the nature of many research topics highlights the differences between Arabic and English, which might limit students' vocabularies and cause difficulties when students are attempting to gain sufficient information about a topic.

5.2.9 Language Difficulties

In the interviews, when the students were asked about the difficulties that they encountered when writing, perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority indicated that spelling, grammar, punctuation, and translation were major obstacles for them. For example, Mona, specialising in Arabic studies, commented: "I have problems with writing correct sentences in terms of grammar and structure, because I always write long sentences, which is a factor that affects negatively the reader's understanding". Another example was given by Lina; her major was in English literature, and she mentioned: "I struggle with applying grammar rules when writing, although I have learnt these grammatical rules a lot in school". Additionally, four students mentioned other grammatical difficulties, such as using the right tense when they write. Mohammed, who was studying special needs, described this difficulty as follows:

I have a problem with using the correct tense when writing, I always get confused as to which tense I should use - past, present, or passive - when describing, summarising, or reporting, especially in the literature review, findings, and discussion chapters.

In relation to difficulties with grammar, there are a number of potential reasons for these problematic issues. Firstly, most of the methods used for teaching grammar rules focus mainly on theoretical understanding rather than on any ability to implement the theoretical knowledge practically when writing. This can contribute to a lack of understanding of complex structures of grammar amongst students, as it is an element required in their academic writing. In addition, the difference between the grammar rules of Arabic and English, in terms of sentence structure, is often another reason for grammar-related difficulties. Similarly, academic writing and general writing are skills that need to be practised and cannot be just taught and remembered. However, the majority of Saudi students do not get nearly enough opportunity to practise their writing skills and to receive constructive feedback prior to their arrival in the UK.

Furthermore, two students stated they had problems with punctuation rules, as their previous knowledge relating to these rules was insufficient. For example, Mansour, whose major was in linguistics, said:

My problem is that I do not know how to use punctuation, such as comma, colon, semi colon, correctly when writing. I only know that the full stop should be put at the end of the sentence and the question mark at the end of the question.

Furthermore, Maha, an interviewee who was studying history, drew attention to the lack of teaching of punctuation rules in both public and higher education, as follows:

I have problems with using punctuation in the correct way when writing because I have never been taught how to apply correctly these rules in writing. In addition, the students normally get low marks for wrong content, not for wrong punctuation.

Two reasons might be causing punctuation-related difficulties; the first is that the correct use of punctuation in writing is not a core part of students' assessment.

This is related to the fact that examiners focus only on the content. Secondly, students often have insufficient knowledge of punctuation rules, as the teaching of punctuation and its related rules was considered insufficient.

Additionally, other students stated that they had difficulties with translating. Lina, specialising in English literature, clarified her views in this regard:

I write my ideas first in Arabic, and then I translate them into English using some websites for translation. However, when I see the sentences after the translation, they do not express my ideas clearly, and sometimes they do not even have the meaning that I wanted. This is difficult for me.

Similarly, Maha referred to his difficulty with translation in terms of translating literary texts from Arabic to English.

My major is history; I need to analyse historical texts, and the authors of these are Arabs. Because the thesis should be written in English, I have to translate the texts from Arabic to English. This is difficult for me because I need to be accurate while translating to express the intended meaning of the text.

Additionally, two students reported that they had difficulty with translating specific vocabularies. An example was given by Mona, who said:

My major is Arabic, and I face a difficulty with translating specific Arabic vocabulary into English, which makes expressing my ideas clearly very difficult. I have to write my thesis in English because the policy of the Ministry of Education prevents the postgraduate students from taking both their master and doctoral degree from Saudi universities; one of these degrees should be obtained from a foreign university.

However, using translation as a compensation strategy might affect their English writing style negatively and causes them to make many mistakes in their writing. There are several possible reasons behind translation-related difficulties for students when writing. Firstly, the literal translation of English words from Arabic does not always convey the intended meaning. Secondly, the lack of translation strategies reduces the quality of students' writing style in English, as they cannot

fully grasp the meaning of their sources. Thirdly, students expressed worries about having insufficient vocabulary and synonyms to express the intended meaning, which causes confusion or simplification of the ideas being presented.

All the above writing difficulties were identified in the educational environment for students who are studying via English. i.e., English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in scientific majors; they still have basic writing problems after years of education. Additionally, for students who are specialising in subjects that should be studied in Arabic such as Arabic language, Islamic studies and history, they do not have the language abilities to study these subjects via English. This raises the question about the financial efficiency of the EMI policy, because those student who studied Arabic language, Islamic studies and history will go back to Saudi Arabia to teach in Arabic. Furthermore, it raises another question about how effective the EMI policy is academically for those students who studied in scientific majors, if students still have basic writing problems after years of education via English. These two questions include knowing what the Ministry of Education provides for students to apply this policy in terms of administrative, structural, and academic facilities.

Following this presentation of the students' views regarding their difficulties with academic writing, the following section will present an outline of the given reasons for these difficulties; these reasons vary and can be divided into internal and external reasons.

5.3 Internal Reasons that Cause Difficulties in Academic Writing from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

The analysis of the interviews with the students revealed that five areas of internal reasons cause difficulties in academic writing as shown in figure 5.1 below.

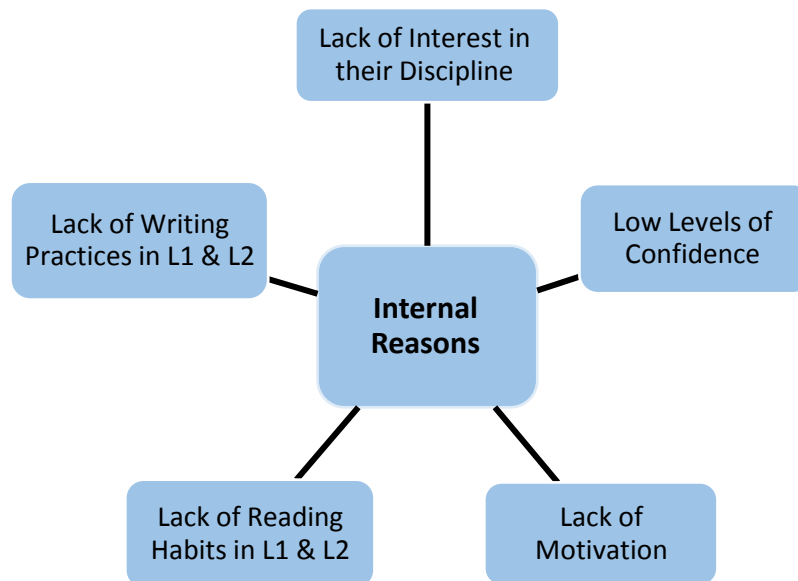


Figure 5.1: Internal Reasons that Cause Difficulties in Academic Writing from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

5.3.1 Lack of Reading Habits in L1 & L2

In relation to the responses of the semi-structured interviews, many students confirmed that a lack of reading habit in L1 and L2 was one of the reasons for their difficulties with academic writing. Five students clarified that the negative attitudes of students' families towards reading resulted in a lack of reading habits in L1 and L2. An example was provided by Lina, who was studying English literature:

Most students do not read, except if they have an exam in Arabic or English. This is because most of the families in Saudi Arabia do not encourage their children to read at home. They do not realise the importance of reading in life in terms of expanding their children's knowledge and variety of ideas.

Furthermore, three students highlighted that they were not accustomed to going to public libraries with the aim of learning. For example, Noura, studying biological sciences, said:

Public libraries in Saudi are very limited and exist only in the big cities. There are lots of stationery shops. In addition, most of the people who use public libraries are authors and writers; you will seldom find that normal people or children go there and read to learn. Additionally, families in KSA do not consider using public libraries important, because they think it is a waste of time.

Similarly, Mazin, who was studying engineering, stated: "We have libraries in the universities, but the topics of the books there are not contemporary, especially with respect to books written in English".

Another example was provided by Eman who asserted: "We do not know how to read critically, and we therefore do not have the ability to write critically". Mansour, specialising in linguistics, also added:

I think the problem is that we do not have effective reading techniques. To clarify more, we do not know how to read, from where we can read, how to write and understand what we read.

It is well acknowledged that reading is a necessary pre-requisite for developing writing skills, particularly in the area of increasing the complexity of the vocabulary used by students, as well as their familiarity with specific language forms including linking sequence or opinion words/phrases. By the same token, if students have not developed a habit of reading in L1, it can be expected that the proficiency of their reading in L2 might also suffer.

5.3.2 Lack of Writing Practices in L1 & L2

Concerning the lack of writing practice in L1 and L2 as a source of students' difficulties with academic writing, four students stated that they had not adopted the habit of writing in L1 and L2 yet, as they only wrote in English for educational purposes. Their writing was, thus, very limited. The quote by Fahad, who was studying marketing, is an example of this issue:

I did not practise writing in Arabic enough; therefore, I am not able to write in English as well. I think most of the Saudi students are in a similar situation. This is because students do not read a lot. If we read a lot, we would be able to have many ideas, which would help us with writing.

Furthermore, Reem, specialising in physics, referred to her inability to write about daily matters:

When it comes to writing about something other than study, for example, an invitation for friends, letters of complaint, or plans for work, I do not know how to start my writing and what I need to include. It is really disappointing and annoying at the same time.

The reason behind the lack of writing practice in L1 and L2 might be because students are not encouraged to write either at school or university, and if there is a writing task, it is very brief, simple, and based on memorising knowledge. Furthermore, the trend of exams at universities are mostly based on multiple choices or true/false questions due to the huge content, the large number of

students in the class, and the need to get the results early, which prevents students from practising their writing.

5.3.3 Low Levels of Confidence

Lack of confidence represents another reason which causes difficulties within academic writing for foreign students. Three students revealed that they lacked self-confidence when writing in English. Thus, Maha, who was studying history, expressed the following:

When I start writing, I hesitate a lot before writing anything because I do not have enough confidence in my writing, whether it is acceptable and its level can be considered adequate for postgraduate studies. Honestly, writing in a different language (English) is frustrating for me; it is above my level.

Another example was given by Hana; her major was human resources and management, and she said:

I will tell you something - when I submit a chapter to my supervisor, I feel scared, because I am not confident enough about my work, and I am scared of getting negative feedback. I think the reason for this is that I did not get enough chance to practise writing at school and university.

There are a number of factors that may lower students' confidence in their abilities, including the fear of failure and the environment surrounding the students which, if not stimulating or if unaccepting of failure, can contribute to fear and lowered confidence.

5.3.4 Lack of Motivation

In reference to the lack of motivation, seven students emphasised that they were not motivated to write. For example, Areej, who was studying human nutrition and food science, said:

In my case, I got 7 in the IELTS exam, and my self-esteem was high, but once I submitted my first chapter, my supervisor gave me negative

feedback and made fun of my writing. After this experience, I do not want to write anything.

Additionally, three students were concerned about their low proficiency in English and consequently became demotivated. An example was given by Khalid, studying information technology: "Some students mentioned that their level of English language was low and this discouraged them to write, as their writing would require a lot of effort and time, and they would still make many mistakes". Moreover, Mazin, who was studying engineering explained: "Generally, Saudi students are not encouraged by their families to write and read to learn. They do not read books, stories, or newspapers. As a result, they do not know the academic style of writing".

Students' demotivation is often caused by the insufficient experience they have with writing articles or essays. This refers to skills which students should have gained through public or higher education. Moreover, they were never asked to write, except for writing assignments at the end of term, according to specific criteria. Thus, students lose motivation and the confidence necessary to write, and they fail to acquire new skills that may help them in their writings.

5.3.5 Lack of Interest in their Discipline

Regarding the lack of interest in their discipline, three students expressed a decline of interest, and they were not making progress in improving their skills (including writing). For instance, Hana, who was studying human resource and management, stated:

Many students have no interest in their disciplines because their choices were based on the labour market. As a result, they do not have any interest or passion for their disciplines; they only want to succeed to get a job.

Additionally, Ali claimed that he lacked interest in his field of study, business administration, because he was forced to enrol in it:

I am not interested in my major at all because my family wanted me to enrol in it so that they could help me when I graduate. That makes me feel bored, and I do not want to develop my skills.

Some students lacked interest in their discipline due to the absence of subjects at school which would make them aware of the range of disciplines available at universities. Another reason concerns job security, as some students had chosen disciplines that guaranteed job security, even if they did not match their interests.

5.4 External Reasons that Cause Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

The responses collected from the interviews with students revealed that there are three areas of external reasons that cause difficulties in academic writing: namely cultural issues, previous learning experience in public education and previous learning experience in higher education as shown in figure 5.2 below.

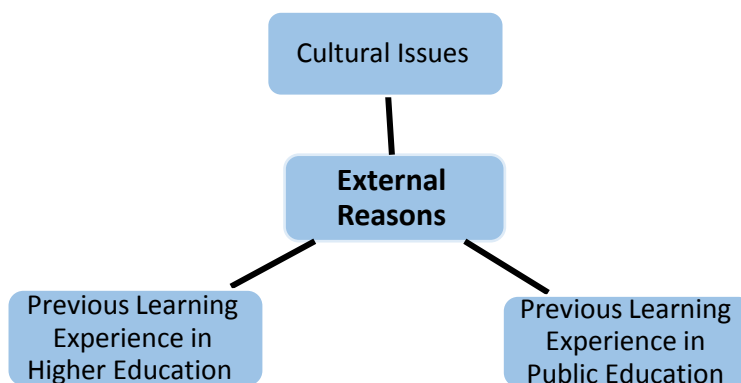


Figure 5.2: External Reasons that Cause Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

5.4.1 Cultural Issues

The results of the interview data analysis confirmed that there are some cultural issues which often cause difficulties in writing for Saudi postgraduate students, such as co-operation amongst students. Three students stressed that there was no co-operation among students to share their ideas and thus increase their knowledge or improve their writing. This issue was expressed by Khalid, who was studying information technology:

There is no co-operation among the students to share their ideas, because parents do not normally encourage them and sometimes even do not allow them to show their homework to their friends or share ideas with them.

Another example was given by Omar, studying psychology, who said:

Some students are not accustomed to cooperating, sharing ideas, or working in teams because they feel jealous of each other. Some are arrogant, have high self-esteem, and want only their individual work to be the best.

Additionally, five students highlighted that traditionally, in some families or in some academic spheres, reading only in particular areas and of particular writers is allowed, so that students cannot develop alternative ways of thinking. This has a negative impact on students' thinking and the quality of their writing. An example was given by Maha, whose major was history:

In Saudi Arabia, only certain authors and writers are approved for reading. Students are not given the chance to read different topics, so that their way of thinking and their perception of traditions are not affected. This leads to the students' lack of critical thinking. In the UK, students get the opportunity to read different topics, and this helps in making their identity complex and builds their critical thinking.

In addition, two students clarified that they were culturally bound not to express their views freely, which had a negative influence on their ability to express their ideas without fear. For example, Mohammed, who was studying special needs, said:

I think the cultural differences between the UK and Saudi Arabia affect the students' way of thinking. For example, in the KSA, students are not free to express their views because of tradition, families, and government. Another reason is that students are used to worshipping the writers and authors, not criticising them.

Additionally, Mohammed, whose major was special needs, indicated that the pyramid form in L2 writing is the main difference between L1 and L2 writing. He provides the following explanation:

When writing in Arabic, we use the 'and' technique a lot. The topics in Arabic do not take the shape of pyramids; the text rather includes lots of ideas without order. On the other hand, writing in English is based on the form of pyramids, starts from general, proceeds to specific, then finds harmony between general and specific ideas.

It is apparent from the responses above that there are certain cultural issues that render writing in English quite difficult for Saudi students. In relation to the abovementioned reasons, most Saudi universities force students to work by themselves rather than in groups, thus building a desire for competition between them rather than a desire for learning and sharing knowledge. Furthermore, the students' low proficiency in L2 causes them to make many mistakes in their L2 writing in terms of the academic style, such as structure, students' views and opinions, critical thinking, vocabulary, and organisation of ideas.

5.4.2 Previous Learning Experience in Public Education

In relation to the previous learning experience in public education, the majority of the students expressed their dissatisfaction with the quality of public education and considered it the reason for their difficulties with academic writing. For instance, Areej, who was studying human nutrition and food science, stated:

The education system in Saudi Arabia does not encourage students to think outside the box. This is because there are no comprehension questions in the exam, in other words; we are not tested on questions requiring deep thinking, which may lead students to explore and read. All we have to do is memorise the information and abide by the teachers' rules.

Another example was given by Lina, studying English literature: “Before the exam, the teacher selects some questions and asks his students to study and memorise these questions to answer them in the exam. This ignores the individual differences between the students”. Another student, Mohammed, who was studying special needs, raised concerns over the purpose of exams:

Exams are not a problem; the problem is who makes the exam and what the exam requires the students to do, whether it requires memorising certain facts, or thinking about them. The quality of the exam is based on the system, teachers, and students.

Furthermore, four students revealed that intensive curricula at schools do not give the students enough space to practise writing and reading. For example, Ali, majoring in business administration, expressed his views as follows:

Students do not have time to read and write, because there are a lot of subjects. The content is very dense and comprises a lot of information. However, in the UK, not all students study following the same curriculum; they take the basic information, but different branches. In this way, they go deeper into the topic selected according to their interest.

Additionally, it is a commonly held view amongst the students that they were not encouraged to search for any information themselves. In this regard, one of the students, Hana, who was studying human resource and management, stated the following:

At schools, students do not have the ability to search for themselves, because they are not taught that self-learning is important. Even if they bring new information, the teacher does not normally accept it. Students always get the information from their teacher without looking for the source of this information. As a result, they lose the information very quickly.

Similarly, Omar, studying psychology, gave an interesting and logical reason for having difficulties with writing. He explained:

At school, we do not have writing practice in Arabic, and we do not know how to express our ideas in Arabic. This influences our ability to write and express our views in English negatively, because the teacher

was always the provider of the information, and the role of student in the class was that of a passive receiver.

Furthermore, three students stated that the interference of L1 (i.e. Arabic) in their English had contributed to the limited quality of their writing. This issue was expressed by Maha, specialising in history, as follows

Writing in L1 is composed, generally, and it gives more details. The text focuses more on collecting information, and fails to achieve harmony between ideas, whilst the features of writing in L2 focus on simplicity and clarity.

5.4.3 Previous Learning Experience in Higher Education

When the students were asked about the reason(s) for their difficulties with academic writing, the majority of them commented that their previous learning experience in higher education had influenced their proficiency in English writing in a negative way. Five students emphasised that the teaching approach at their university was not effective. An example was provided by Areej, studying human nutrition and food science:

At the university stage, students normally get memos or notes already written from lecturers or doctors, so the teaching approach at the universities is the same as at school. There is no active role for the students; they only memorise the knowledge necessary for passing the exam. The form of these exams is mostly based on multiple choice and ignores the students' ability to think, criticise, and express their views in writing.

Moreover, Mazin, specialising in engineering, added that the methods of teaching research processes and methodology are only theoretical at most universities in Saudi Arabia:

Most doctors or lecturers teach students the procedures or steps of educational research theoretically, not practically. Students do not have the opportunity to get some practice on how to write a research project. Therefore, when doctors or lecturers ask the students to write a research project on any subject, they find it difficult. This is because they do not know how to write a research project, or even how to start.

However, Ahmed, studying finance, mentioned that recently, some universities have added a subject in the final year called 'project' for the undergraduate stage, but it is still only based on collecting information on specific topics. He stated:

Some universities ask undergraduate students in their final year to submit a project as a requirement for their graduation. Three or four students are supervised by one doctor; students share one paper and collect information on selected topics. However, students link these pieces of information together and present the project academically. This is because students do not get adequate instruction on how to do research.

Furthermore, seven students referred to the lack of academic preparation as another reason for their difficulties with academic writing. A sample example was given by Khalid, studying information technology:

The lack of academic preparation in Saudi Arabia affected negatively my ability to write academically, especially when I came here to the UK. This effect was caused by the differences between the education systems in Saudi Arabia and the UK. One aspect of these differences is related to the different features of writing: in Saudi Arabia, writing is focused more on composition, collecting a lot of information without linking the ideas and giving much detail, and you don't necessarily present the conclusion. On the other hand, writing in the UK education system focuses on simplicity, clarity, it is more specific; it does not give so many details, and it requires harmony among ideas. Therefore, these differences make me struggle in writing.

Additionally, five students confirmed that insufficient academic preparation in Saudi Arabia contributed to their lack of criticality and logical thinking skills, thus affecting their writing proficiency negatively. For example, Ali said:

We do not have academic preparations in our universities in Saudi Arabia, so most students do not have the skills of criticality when they read or write. They accept what they read as facts and are not able to look at them critically. Some of the written expressions they use just show that they are agreeing completely with whatever they take from their readings. This is because they learn to respect what they find in books without any objections.

Two students mentioned that they were not adequately prepared for using in-text referencing, and nor had they been taught how to avoid plagiarism. For example, Sarah said:

When I took my master's degree in Saudi Arabia, there weren't any academic preparations for academic writing. The lack of such experience became a considerable disadvantage when I came to study a PhD here in the UK. For me, it was the first time that I had heard about plagiarism, citations, etc. So I took some workshops here in the UK to learn how to use references, citations, and what plagiarism means. This helped me a lot in my study.

The above quotations reveal that Saudi students' previous learning experience in public and higher education can often be the reason for their difficulties with academic writing. During secondary education, the students underwent a specific, compulsory curriculum throughout the school year. Moreover, they did not need any external references, and were therefore not encouraged to improve their reading and writing skills. In higher education, students experienced the same teaching approach; lecturers provided the students with specific books or memos which they had to study in order to pass exams. Thus, the students had no active role, but instead, they were always passively receiving information from teachers or lecturers. The exam system in secondary and higher education often involves true or false tasks and multiple choices, but seldom focuses on writing. Furthermore, students' university education in Saudi Arabia does not prepare them well for the academic requirements of doing a postgraduate degree in the UK.

This section has explained in detail the various reasons and justifications for the difficulties and obstacles students experienced with academic writing, from the Saudi postgraduate students' point of view. In order to solve these difficulties,

many strategies were suggested by the students (Figure 5.4). These will be discussed in the following section.

5.5 Strategies to Solve Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

5.5.1 Reading Theses and Articles

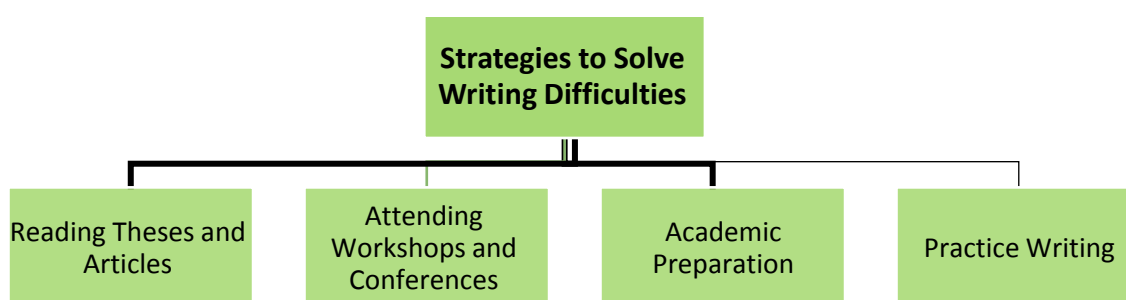


Figure 5.3: Strategies to Solve Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Saudi Postgraduate Students

The analysis of the interviews with the students revealed that various strategies have been suggested which could solve their problems with academic writing in English. For example, Maha, studying history, emphasised that reading is one of the most effective strategies in helping students to improve their academic writing in English:

Students should read a lot of English research texts and articles related to their area to understand how they are structured and to learn the academic style of writing. For example, when I started reading a lot, this helped me to increase my vocabulary and improve my writing skills.

Similarly, Reem, studying physics, said:

Reading the results of other studies is very important to develop students' ability to analyse the results. For instance, my major is physics, and I need to read the results chapters of many studies to understand what it means when the results are low or high, and how to justify my own results. It really helps me to improve my writing.

It was interesting to discover that the students were aware of their own difficulties with academic writing and were able to suggest some strategies to solve these difficulties. Most importantly, the need for frequent reading was emphasised, as it has a positive impact on improving students' ability to write academically.

5.5.2 Attending Workshops and Conferences

Additionally, four students suggested that attending workshops and conferences would significantly improve their academic writing. In this regard, Mohammed, studying special needs, stated the following:

Students need to attend workshops provided by the university to develop their academic writing. In addition, they need to participate in conferences to learn how to present a paper and how to make an argument and face various critical views. These skills are important for academic writing.

Another example was given by Areej, who was studying human nutrition and food science: "Attending lectures concerning research methods will help students to expand their knowledge of new and different trends in research".

As students are not used to attending conferences and/or workshops, it is crucial to encourage them to seize the opportunity to participate in such events, as it can help them to acquire skills related to presenting and discussing arguments, and encountering critical views; these skills will aid them in improving their academic writing.

5.5.3 Academic Preparation

Furthermore, the majority of students advocated for an element of academic preparation before beginning their postgraduate studies because some students did not have the ability to do research independently. For example, Ahmed, studying finance, said:

There should be an academic preparation programme for students before they go to study abroad, lasting for six months or one year. This programme should be conducted by teachers qualified to teach the students the essential skills that they might need in doing research, for instance, making citations, using different resources (e.g. articles, books, online materials etc.), learning academic vocabulary, and planning and brainstorming their ideas before writing.

Noura, studying biological science, expressed a similar opinion:

The education should be of high quality from childhood to help students face future challenges. In addition, there should be preparation courses for those students who intend to continue their studies to teach them research skills. Furthermore, teaching writing in this preparation course needs to be according to students' majors because the methods of teaching writing in Saudi Arabia are general, which do not help students in their majors.

Khalid, who was studying information technology, highlighted that academic preparation is necessary, particularly in science subjects:

Having academic preparation in KSA is important, especially for science subjects because they [the students] need to use English references, and they should have a specific level of language in all four skills (reading, speaking, writing, and listening). This is because if students do not have a specific level of language, they will not understand the content of the references.

The majority of the students clearly expressed the need for academic preparation, and therefore, it is essential for students to attend academic preparation prior to starting their postgraduate stage, as this preparation plays an important role in improving their ability to conduct effective research.

5.5.4 Practice Writing

Maha, majoring in history, supported the previously mentioned notion regarding the absence of opportunities for students to practise writing; she stated:

As for public education, it is better for students to start writing from an early stage and try to practise it for two hours daily. Once they advance to higher education, there should be training for undergraduate students on how to write academic papers, so that they gain the experience of doing this. It will help them when they start their postgraduate stage.

Moreover, Hana, studying human resource and management, focused on writing different types of essays, like reason and argumentative essays:

Students should start writing from an early stage and try to write for two hours. In addition, they should try to write various genres of essays. This would help them to become familiar with different styles of writing.

Extensive practice of writing will help students to overcome their difficulties with academic writing. Any deficits in this area could be attributed to teaching methods, such as the teacher-centred approach, where the teacher is the only one who provides the knowledge in the class, and the students keep silent and listen for this knowledge without interaction between them and the teacher, which is the preferred method in the Saudi education system.

Having identified the key problems with academic writing, as seen from the perspective of Saudi postgraduate students, it is equally important to examine how this situation is perceived by the students' supervisors (Table 5.8); this will be the focus of the following section. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to address the following questions:

5.6 Difficulties with Academic Writing from the Perspective of Supervisors

Table 5.8: Themes, sub-themes and categories related to the academic writing difficulties from the perspective of supervisors

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
Academic Writing Difficulties	Difficulties with Developing an Argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructing sentences clearly and concisely when establishing an argument • Understanding and writing an argument within English texts
	Difficulties with Linking Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifying complex information in understandable ways and relating it to research questions • Reviewing the literature in a synthesizing way • Achieving a hierarchical organisation of information • Achieving a high level of conceptual skill of getting ideas together and trying to weave them together
	Difficulties with Critical Thinking and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding how to be critical in an academic sense • Providing evident facts while criticising • Linking the findings chapter with the literature review chapter to demonstrate their significance.
	Language Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence structure • Tenses of verbs • Use of articles
	Difficulties with the depth of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the discussion chapter to bring out the significance of the study findings • Linking the implications of the study to the data in more depth
	Academic vocabulary Difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a precise vocabulary that suits the research language • Finding the proper and exact words that express the intended views when writing • Using word collocations and idiomatic expressions
	Achieving Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding ambiguous details while showing evidences

5.6.1 Difficulties with Developing an Argument

Supervisors indicated that developing an argument was an area of difficulty for their students because of the focus on the high standards of academic writing in England. An example of this issue was given by Dr John:

Students have problems with constructing arguments, or they use language that just does not quite fit. There is often awkwardness about the written style, which is an indication of the problems the students have when trying to convey a message, you know. It is easier said than done trying to say things clearly, and grammar and sentence construction and stuff like that really start becoming more of an issue when it is technical writing, because it just adds to the confusion, and the way in which they present an argument is often unclear. It just makes it harder to read and to understand. Therefore, the combination of the technical language and the difficulty with constructing sentences clearly and concisely just makes it harder for the supervisors to help and to unpack the arguments that they are trying to present. This means we spend a lot of time helping the students to say what they want to say. Often they can articulate in a conversation a whole lot better than they can do in a written form.

Another example was given by Dr Helen; she emphasised the problem of establishing an argument in English rather than writing in English itself. She said:

I find a lot of students struggle while writing. They think they are struggling with the language, but they are actually struggling with the logical sequence of arguments they are trying to create. I do not think this is necessarily just an academic problem, but it is particularly important for academics, and I think it entails a lot of very difficult thinking to make the argument clear and points that are logical.

Additionally, Dr Andrew mentioned that students' basic way of writing contributes to them not being able to understand or write argumentative essays in their research. He commented:

Some students struggle with the complexity of the arguments within English texts, because it is difficult to understand, to penetrate, and to engage with such writing, because if students are writing in a very simple way, and not an academic way, that can cause an argument to get lost in what they are saying. I think this is challenging, especially for the students from Gulf countries.

The above extracts indicate that the supervisors acknowledged students' considerable struggle with formulating their own arguments and arranging them into logical sequences in English. They also pointed out the fact that students do not read enough English texts; together with the absence of proper training in conducting research, this represents a significant hindrance for students when attempting to construct an argument.

5.6.2 Difficulties with Linking Ideas

The responses from interviews with supervisors revealed that linking ideas when writing is another difficulty that students encounter when writing. For example, Dr Sarah stated:

I think they struggle in academic writing at all stages of the process. They struggle in trying to simplify complex information in understandable ways and relate it to research questions. I think Saudi students struggle when they attempt to complete their work. However, I do not think it is specific to Saudi students; I think all PhD students struggle to link their ideas to one another.

Accordingly, Dr Peter maintained that students face problems when writing the literature review because they do not have the ability to link notions together:

Most students have problems not just with finding literature, but also with reviewing it in a more synthesizing way. I think it is a quite difficult concept for the beginners. Again, many students' literature reviews sound like a kind of summary of authors' views; they start with one, then go on and summarize the next, and again. So the literature review becomes a list of authors. Then their views are summarized, so it takes a while for them to learn how to combine those views together and create a summary. However, this is difficult to do for most students in general, not just particularly for Saudi students.

Furthermore, two supervisors highlighted that achieving a hierarchical organisation of information can be difficult for students. This means that students cannot write headings and include their subheadings while writing. This issue was expressed by Dr Steve:

I think many students think writing means putting whatever comes to their mind on the page before it disappears. It can be made sense of, but it is a wrong approach. I think creating a hierarchy of information is important - for the main concept, specific concepts, even things like making sub-headings, knowing where to put sub-headings so that they do not break up the text, as well as knowing what the overall heading should be. Many students write questions instead of headings, you know. That is not appropriate, so yeah, making headings, sub-headings in a hierarchy of information is very difficult for students.

The following quotation from Dr John indicates that collecting ideas together requires a high level of conceptual skill from students, which makes linking ideas a difficult skill to acquire:

It is not the language level that causes problems, but the conceptual level of getting ideas together and trying to weave them together and that is quite difficult for any doctoral student, not only Saudi students. I mean, personally I think it would be impossible for me to do it in a language that is not my own.

In the above quotations, supervisors confirmed that students had problems with linking ideas to the level required in a PhD study. This may be, in part, to do with a general inexperience in conceptual thinking. It should also be emphasised that conducting postgraduate research in a language other than the students' first language, that is, in English, naturally entails an array of difficulties.

5.6.3 *Difficulties with Critical Thinking and Writing*

The majority of supervisors mentioned that most of the students have difficulty in understanding how to be critical in an academic sense. For instance, Dr Sandy said:

I think the students who come from a different education system are unable, or unaware of the fact that you can critically engage in academic discourse, and I believe that critical engagement is absolutely crucial to academic writing. I mean, I think many postgraduate students, not particularly Saudi students, do not understand what it means to be critical in an academic sense. It means to disagree with other people, their theories or other ways of thinking, but in fact, all it means is to get an understanding of a much wider range of ideas than we had before. In this way, we can form a different

opinion about it and decide how to proceed when people who are equally authoritative disagree.

Dr Ann added that many students just describe the ideas and views of other authors. They do not have the ability to analyse, agree, or disagree. Her interview excerpt highlights this point:

With all PhD students there is a tendency to look at the box and look at the research material and start just writing, and then you find it to be very descriptive, but has to be analytic because the PhD in this country and in America is awarded for an original and substantial contribution in knowledge; it's got to be original in some form.

Another example was given by Dr Mike, who referred to different education systems as the cause of numerous difficulties with students' writing in terms of criticality:

Even if the language skills are high enough, I think the levels of criticality in thinking and writing still remain a challenge for students, because there are differences in educational systems in the world... I treat my students very strictly in terms of developing their research skills and asking critical questions.

Some supervisors of students in the Middle East tend to respect the author's view without criticism as a part of their culture, which is good, but students need to have the freedom and the will to criticise in a respectful fashion and with evidence. For instance, Dr Ann stressed that PhD students should be able to criticise what they read; they do not have to accept ideas just because they have been published in a journal. She commented:

I can see that students have difficulties with the ability to make a critical view of what they read and what they write. Sometimes it seems to me that the international students, including some Saudi students, will read something, and just because it is written in a book or a journal, they think it must be correct whereas the best thing to do would be to think whether it is correct! You need to be critical about this; you need to look at the context in which the research and the ideas are being expressed and whether they are transferable, say, to different concepts. Therefore, there has to be a degree of criticality that some students perhaps do not have. However, when they start working on

their PhD, developing that criticality is an essential part of the PhD process.

In the same vein, Dr John focused on the importance of providing evident facts while criticising. He stated:

Students must feel free to criticise any scholar at all if they provide evidence. Give evidence for what you think, and if your thesis leads you to overturn the theories of an established scholar, that is not a problem, so they must not be shy and their criticality should be evidence.

Furthermore, three supervisors revealed that students struggled significantly when writing their discussion chapter, as it is based on critical reasoning skills.

An example was given by Dr Mike, who said:

The big challenge that the discussion chapter involves is to link the findings of your study back to the literature and to demonstrate their significance. So it is very much about argumentation and, again, you do need critical thinking and confidence. So many Saudi students, in my experience, find the discussion chapter is challenging for them. Students have to think critically in order to write critically. On the other hand, the methodology chapter is more clearly described, as much clearer guidelines are often provided.

Dr Sarah indicated that the work of Saudi students studying at a master's level is not adequate, because they do not show any level of thinking critically. This is shown in the following extract:

I do not think their master's degree is adequate, because, as I say, I suspect this does not reflect their critical thinking ability. They do not have the ability to critically analyse the literature and form their own complex argument, as that probably was not a part of their degree. If they achieve a master's degree, it should mean that they have critics-related skills, but this is often untrue. Obviously, they have knowledge, but I suppose master's degrees in Saudi are more about the knowledge rather than the ability to think critically.

Furthermore, Dr Andrew had a similar view; he stated that the system of education is behind the students' lack of critical thinking skills:

I think the education system in many countries focuses perhaps too much on memorisation, involves too many inputs from teachers and materials that students think they have to learn and reproduce. I do not

say this is not enough, but it is insufficient for the western culture, because here they study in a different culture, and it requires critical thinking. It may not always be required - it certainly was not in the past - but it is now, and I think that this is something that many different cultures have no experience with, and therefore, developing habits of this kind is hard.

The reason for Saudi students' difficulties with writing critically can be traced back to the uncritical culture of Saudi Arabia which "doesn't encourage discussion, even in the home between parents and their children" (Allamnakhrah, 2013, p.205). Furthermore, society in Saudi Arabia considers questioning and arguing with elder people and instructors as an unacceptable mark of disrespect (Barnawi, 2009). Other reasons for the difficulty with critical thinking could be related to the method of teaching writing in Saudi Arabia that is based on the product approach where the focus is only on the grammar, spelling, and structure: "The problem with the traditional writing class is that it leads to a view of writing as a set of isolated skills unconnected to an authentic desire to converse with interested readers about their ideas" (AlKhouday, 2015, p.214). Therefore, curriculum designers are encouraged to include critical thinking in teaching writing courses (AlKhouday, 2015). This makes it necessary to adopt a student-centred approach whereby students are required to engage in the learning process and are given the opportunity to discuss ideas, express their opinions, analyse, and evaluate issues and ideas.

5.6.4 Language Difficulties

Regarding language, the supervisors indicated that this was an area of difficulty for postgraduate student, for example, tenses, sentence structure, and use of articles. An example of this was given by Dr Sandy:

Obviously, the language is one of the writing-related issues. As I have said, it may be because of the different ways tenses are viewed, in addition to the use of articles. I do not know enough about Arabic, but

sentence construction may be different; I mean, there are differences between the two languages that cause difficulties when writing in English.

Dr Mike added the following regarding the problem students' face in terms of English language difficulties:

There are certain language issues that the Saudi students always have, because they come from a country with a very different language. You know tenses of verbs, the use of articles, and things like that will always be an issue.

Accordingly, Dr Ann added that writing in a different language makes practising writing skills all the harder. The following quotation expresses her view:

There is an enormous difficulty with having to write in a second language. I think they [the students] do not want to make mistakes, so they do not write very much. Therefore, students focus only on English as a language and not so much on the ideas and structure of what they are writing about.

Moreover, two supervisors revealed that constructing an argument in another language was difficult for students from Gulf countries. For instance, Dr Peter maintained the following:

Sometimes the complexity of arguments in English texts can be difficult to understand, to penetrate, and to engage with. I think this is what students from Gulf countries in general have a difficulty with, but not all students - this cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, I would say this is one of their main difficulties.

The above extracts show that the reason for students' language difficulty is related to the big difference in writing style between the Arabic and the English language. These differences are related to different alphabets and differences in writing styles. Furthermore, teaching English writing in KSA is based on the product approach, where it focuses on the final product of text and emphasises more the linguistic accuracy, correct spelling, and proper grammar. This tradition of writing instruction contributes to students lacking the opportunity to practise writing in L2, and most of the exam methods depend on multiple choice questions

or take the form of fill-in-the-blank. It is also mentioned that students lack the “ability to write in their own language, Arabic” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p.94), which means that the instruction of teaching writing in L1 is the same as L2 writing instruction.

5.6.5 Difficulties with Coherence

With regard to coherence-related difficulties, four supervisors stressed that writing coherently is another difficulty that students face in their writing. This means that students cannot produce paragraphs that carry a main idea and where all other sentences in the paragraph function to support it. An example is shown in the extract from an interview with Dr John, who stated:

I think paragraph construction and coherence is one of the most problematic areas. I think writing a paragraph is very difficult, but if you read good academic writing, you can see how important paragraphs are in that they indicate the topic at the beginning, develop it throughout the paragraph, and have a clear progression of ideas and coherence between ideas within the paragraph. I think Saudi students have problems with paragraph writing... but I do notice the difference between a well-constructed assignment of a thesis with well-constructed paragraphs and another one that maybe has the same points, but these are not linked coherently - they are synthesised, they do not follow each other. I think that this is a major problem that all students have, not only the Saudi students specifically.

Accordingly, Dr Sarah pointed out the importance of writing coherent paragraphs:

Paragraph construction is different, I believe, in Arabic. I think in Arabic, you lead into the main points. The main point comes towards the end rather than at beginning. Therefore, you have those different structural issues, which really have to be learnt because, if you have chosen to do a doctoral degree here, you have to agree to the requirements of the doctoral writing in this country.

In relation to the analysis of samples of written feedback given to students by their supervisors, four supervisors mentioned that students have a problem with writing coherently. The following is an example of such feedback:

You need to add a new subsection, or at least paragraph, and link it to the others to improve the coherence. Also, you need to indicate its relevance, because it just seems that you are jumping to a new topic.

Furthermore:

I feel this point is out of place with the rest of the paragraph. It seems some of your paragraphs take the form of text dumps rather than reasoned arguments, because this sentence is out of place with what follows.

Examining the mentioned feedback from supervisors to the students, it is apparent that they discuss the issue of cohesion and coherence since students have usually written sentences unrelated to the topic of the paragraph, or they have been confused regarding where to put the introductory sentence or the supporting sentences.

There are various reasons behind students' difficulties with coherence. First, there are differences between the Arabic and the English language in how to construct paragraphs; for example, Arab students tend to use the style of their mother tongue, which negatively affects the quality of their writing. Furthermore, Arab students tend to write long sentences, to use repetition, and to argue through elaboration and presentation (Almehmadi, 2013). Other Arab students write clauses using “and”, “also”, “so” and “but” excessively and that follow neither the sentence nor the paragraph structure in English (Abu Rass, 2015, p.56). To help students improve their academic writing, teaching English writing in Saudi Arabia should give students the opportunity to practise writing “in and outside the classroom in order to be acquainted with the style of English for writing essays appropriately using the right expressions, cohesively uniting their thoughts besides considering the audience” (Abu Rass, 2015, p.57).

5.6.6 Difficulties with the Depth of Explanation

In relation to the depth of explanation, and the amount of information and detail students produce, the analysed samples of written feedback that the students received from their supervisors clarified that this was an area of difficulty in their writing. This difficulty was presented by four supervisors as follows: “You need to have had some explanation or discussion of this beforehand. This will help to enrich why you adopt the position you seek to take”. Sometimes, students just refer to the results of the data without showing their importance. Accordingly, another supervisor added: “You need to expand this discussion chapter to bring out the significance of all your findings”. Moreover, other supervisors' feedback was related to the problem of linking the implications of the study to the data in more depth:

You need to get to a point where you examine the implications of adopting this view to the objectives of what you are seeking to achieve. To an extent, this follows later, but you need to ground it in the work in more depth to have a clear appreciation of its implication for methods, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and theory.

Similarly, another supervisor added the following comments: “You need to investigate what the underpinning premise is to this – why is it important? Generally, though, I feel your points throughout need more depth”.

Writing in an academic discipline at doctoral level should be effective to succeed in higher education. Providing sufficient and in-depth explanations is considered one of the main requirements of English academic writing. The above extracts indicate that supervisors confirmed that students struggle to be able to provide more depth when writing. This is due to the differences in the style of writing between English and Arabic in terms of explicitness, as Arab students tend to “avoid conveying their messages explicitly, assuming that readers are

responsible for understanding the message” (Abu Rass, 2015, p.50). Moreover, there is also a general lack of interest in academic reading in both L1 and L2. The more students read the more knowledge and background information they will acquire, which will help them to be confident and to write effectively. In this regard, the relationship between reading and writing and how both skills are closely related is well documented in the literature, as many studies have confirmed that these skills have an impact upon each other (Al- Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2014; Alkhawaldeh, 2011; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tsai, 2006; Zamel, 1992).

5.6.7 Difficulties with Academic Vocabulary

In reference to academic vocabulary, three supervisors revealed that their students had difficulties in this area. For example, Dr John stated that students find it hard to use a precise vocabulary that suits the research language: “They really have an issue with using specific English vocabulary. One of their difficulties, I think, is finding the proper and exact words that express their intended views when writing”. Similarly, Dr Sarah referred to the limited ability of students to use academic vocabulary:

Other students have a problem with using word collocations and idiomatic expressions. I think this is related to their insufficient knowledge of academic words, which prevents them from writing according to academic standards.

The analysis of supervisors’ feedback on written assignments also revealed that the students had a difficulty with using academic vocabulary: “I do not like the word ‘opinion’. ‘Informed’, perhaps, but still dangerous; you should consider ‘subjective interpretation’ and ‘reasoned judgement’ instead”. Another piece of feedback presented the following: “Be careful of such a term. Can anything really be ‘fully’ treated?” Finally, another stated: “It would be beneficial to be somewhat

more assertive here – e.g., ‘is most suitable’. The above quotations refer to students’ weaknesses in using the appropriate words for expressing their opinions in their studies.

The source of students’ difficulties with academic vocabulary varies, though it is largely attributed to insufficient vocabulary learning strategies in their previous education system. Additionally, the lack of experience in reading English texts has a negative impact on the extent of their vocabulary. Accordingly, while writing, students have a difficulty in choosing the appropriate vocabulary that suits the context and in finding the exact word that expresses the intended meaning. This refers to the students’ lack of lexical knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended in teaching vocabulary that “it is necessary for students to have a thorough knowledge of words that occur frequently in different academic texts in order to read and understand the advanced, authentic, and academic texts in English or to use the academic words when writing in their own fields” (Song, 2002, p.3). That is to say, students need to read intensively in order to meet the needs of academic writing.

5.6.8 Difficulties with Clarity

The majority of the supervisors commented that it is difficult for the students to achieve a certain level of clarity when writing. This was indicated in the following extracts from supervisors’ feedback: “The ambiguity here is problematic – you need to be confident that you show evidence of it; incomplete paragraph or details; this paragraph is unclear. This is really vague, explain the figure; you need to explicitly provide these definitions here” and finally, “Where does this inclination come from”? These extracts reveal the ambiguous details that students provide unintentionally during their discussions.

There are several factors that might cause the students' difficulty when they attempt to achieve clarity in their writing. Firstly, unfamiliarity with writing in academic English causes writing style mistakes when using English as L2. Secondly, the lack of reading academic resources in L2 prevents students from practising their writing skills prior to their arrival in the UK. Thirdly, students' low level of proficiency in the English language forbids them from formulating complex thoughts in a clear manner and structure.

5.7 Internal Reasons that Cause Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Supervisors

The analysis of the data collected from the interviews with the supervisors indicated that three areas of internal reasons cause difficulties in academic writing as shown in figure 5.4 below.

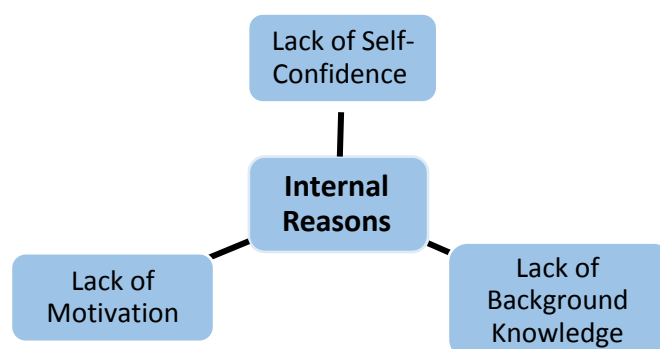


Figure 5.4: Internal Reasons that Cause Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Supervisors

5.7.1 Lack of Self-Confidence

In their responses to the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews, three supervisors highlighted that lack of self-confidence could be considered a major reason underlying students' difficulties with academic writing. This means that students' self-confidence should be at a higher level since it affects the level of their writing. Dr Peter expressed the following in relation to this:

It is also important for the student to feel self-confident as an international student. I think there is no difference between the Saudi students and people from any other country or religious background. You know, confident people will obviously do better than those who have a less developed sense of their own abilities.

Accordingly, Dr Andrew added that the doctoral level of study required more confidence from students than the master's level. This refers to the level of

criticism that students should provide in their PhD study. He expressed his views as follows:

At the master's level, students need to be critical of the literature to a certain extent, but not as much as they do at the doctoral level. Therefore, it is kind of almost a new skill. I also think that some students are not confident about challenging the views of others, because, you know, all of those are researchers and writers in the field, so sometimes, they feel hesitant about challenging what researchers and writers say.

The following quotation from Dr Ann indicated her views regarding the relationship between confidence and the use of language. She stressed the importance of this bond in order to deliver strong arguments and critiques:

If your command of language is not very strong, you do not have the confidence to make a strong argument, and that can be crucial. I think confidence is a big issue. You know, the students who have been to very good universities in this country and they are going to start a PhD degree usually have very high self-confidence. They think that they can do anything. That is a big difference, and you find that confidence among my students who have been to very good universities here and also the American students. I mean, American students are very good when it comes to questions of confidence, and that is a significant difference when it comes to students from Gulf countries in general.

The above extracts suggest that there is a relationship between students' self-confidence and their ability to write academically. Possible reasons for students being not confident while writing could be due to the fear of exams, which obstructs students' writing ability and reduces their confidence. This is because passing exams is considered the main source of students' assessment in the Saudi education system. Furthermore, the fear of negative feedback and discouragement that students receive from their instructors if they make a mistake in their writing prevents students from practising writing, and so they become demoralised.

5.7.2 Lack of Background Knowledge

Regarding the existing discrepancy between the desired and the actual level of subject-related knowledge amongst Saudi postgraduate students, two of the participating supervisors indicated that the different levels of students' existing knowledge prior to commencing their studies could be a cause of their writing difficulties. For example, Dr Ann said:

There are factors that we need to take into account - how well their English has been, how well they have done in English, what their abilities are in English, what their general intellectual abilities are like, you know, in relation to the particular field. I guess the personality would be important, as well as many other factors that count.

Dr Mike revealed that the lack of prior knowledge of the topic might contribute to students' writing difficulties, as students cannot write well about any issue if they do not have sufficient information about it. He stated:

I find that students do not read too widely on their topic, and the literature they read is quite dated and quite narrow. In particular, I do not think they read many articles that are critical of their field or their study.

However, Dr Peter highlighted that Saudi students were very good in the topics related to science, but they struggled in topics related to the humanities because they required more writing. He commented:

I would say that what I have found, my own experience is that Saudi students struggle most in these topics which are close to the humanity but students in biology, do not seem to encounter too much difficulty in terms of adapting. However, for example, in the business school where I teach, I can see that Saudi students feel at ease with accountancy and economics but they find... They struggle more with topics like human resource management or like organisational behaviour because these are topics where I assess them on an essay and where they have to distinguish, between very different approaches.

Most students in Saudi Arabia continue their postgraduate studies five years or more after their graduation. During those years, students do not have the

opportunity to apply the knowledge that they acquired during their undergraduate studies to their work, as often their practical life is different from the academic one. Furthermore, students do not read and they might not be intellectually curious about issues not related to their own lives, which contribute to students' knowledge base not expanding over time. Therefore, when they start their postgraduate studies abroad and in the KSA, they lack any strong background knowledge

5.7.3 Lack of Motivation

With regard to 'lack of motivation', two supervisors considered this a cause of students' difficulties with academic writing. The issue here is that most students care about getting degrees rather than contributing to the body of knowledge. An example is shown in the extract taken from the interview with Dr John, who stated the following:

So, my impression is that most of the non-native students are very motivated, very driven, they work very hard. However, some Saudi students, as well as others from the Gulf, seem less motivated, and when you ask them what PhD topic they want to research, they seem to be motivated solely by getting a PhD, looking for the easiest way possible. That is not a cultural characteristic or personality, it obviously depends on the student, but I think that it is not something I find in the other non-native students, from my limited experience.

Due to the students' lack of prior knowledge and self-confidence, there is a lack of motivation to study more which is an essential aspect that can help the students to improve their writing abilities. This view is supported by Shah et al. (2011), who argue that "the development of writing competence demands that students be motivated to succeed" (p.8). Another reason could be that some students follow their community's interests rather than their own while choosing their disciplines. Therefore, they become demotivated and not interested in their

degree, which reflects negatively on their levels of effort and enthusiasm regarding their studies.

5.8 External Reasons that Cause Difficulties with Academic Writing from the Perspective of Supervisors

The responses collected from the interviews with supervisors revealed that two areas of external reasons cause difficulties in academic writing as shown in figure 5.5 below

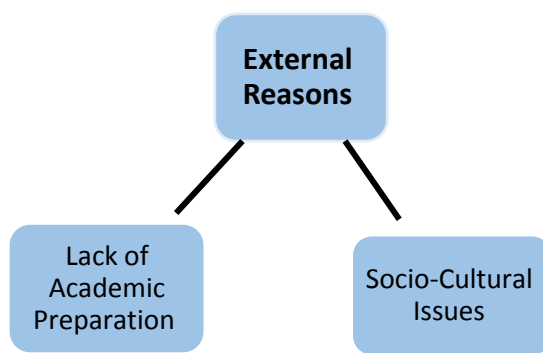


Figure 5.5: External Reasons that Cause Difficulties with Academic Writing from the Perspective of Supervisors

5.8.1 Lack of Academic Preparation

In their responses to the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews, supervisors reported that a lack of academic preparation for doing educational research is one of the reasons for their students' difficulties with academic writing. That is to say, students are not taught to think critically at school or at university, which builds up an obstacle when doing their MA and PhD programmes abroad.

An example of this was given by Dr Ann, who said:

A lack of academic preparation at the undergraduate level and schools is a real issue. In British schools, for example, the students are prepared to critically assess the material from a very young age, before they are 16-17, by the time they are doing intervals, and then that continues when they go to university. So, when they do their MA, they really understand what an argument is, how to construct it, what the

weaknesses are, how to deal with counterarguments and engage with the resources. I mean, students should have already had at least about 6-7 years of experience with this. My impression is that this is not the case of the students from Saudi Arabia. I mean, I do not know enough about the schooling and undergraduate system in their home country, but it does seem to me that there probably is a gap.

Additionally, three supervisors highlighted that memorisation and rote learning seemed to be the main features of the Saudi education system at the undergraduate stage. The root of the problem here is the educational methods that are followed at schools and universities. This view was described by Dr Andrew as follows:

It seems to me that the way of teaching in public schools is based on memorising before the exams, together with the fact that Saudi students do not have any experience with academic papers before going to the university, can be considered the factor contributing to the difficulties with academic writing the Saudi students have.

Another example was given by Dr Peter, who stated that the origin of writing difficulties is the educational system followed in Saudi Arabia:

Well, based on my experience with supervising Saudi students, I think in Saudi Arabia, a lot of emphasis is put on memorising for an exam, without much of an emphasis on critical thinking. That means that there is not much building; students do not build in the following year on what they have learned in the previous. So my impression is that there is a problem of time - it is very difficult in the postgraduate stage to try to catch up with the training that other students had received in 10 or 12 years.

Other supervisors revealed that Saudi students come to the UK with good master's degrees, but they do not have the right skills for developing arguments and criticism. For example, Dr Sarah observed:

Some students do not have the originality to be critical; they do not know how to do their own argument. I think their master's does not include the knowledge of critical thinking. Therefore, I suggest that in

Saudi Arabia, the master's degrees should introduce a lot more critical thinking to focus on. So that anyone who gets a master's degree in Saudi Arabia should be a critical thinker. I think it is quite important for science generally that people challenge it, ask questions, and have to argue.

In the same vein, Dr Ann stated that PhD students should not accept information without checking it and thinking critically about it:

There are some students acting still like the undergraduate students; you know, they listen to the lecture and write it down. That is okay. It is not okay at PhD level. You have to be critical, form your own opinions and your own arguments on the basis of evidence and a wide reading of the literature.

Three supervisors highlighted that Saudi students were very good at using a quantitative methodology, and they often have had some training in statistical analysis. However, they were all less comfortable at using a qualitative methodology. For instance, Dr Sandy stated:

They are not very skilled in qualitative research, but they have strong quantitative research. So, we hope that the modules we put on here help them to raise their expertise on studying qualitative research up to the level of quantitative research understanding.

Similarly, Dr Peter commented on the research methodology used in Saudi Arabia; he said:

I suspect that the traditions in Saudi Arabia are mostly quantitative and positivistic. So, they might not be familiar with the qualitative one. There should be more exposure for qualitative research before they come to the UK and do their postgraduate degree. I think that would be useful; I do not really know if it is difficult to do this preparation.

Saudi students who wish to study abroad usually lack an adequate level of academic preparation. Therefore, upon beginning their studies, they face many difficulties in how to understand and gain new research skills to write academically. This is because Saudi students do not write any academic papers at their undergraduate level, and they are not exposed to qualitative research. This means that there is a gap in the quality of learning and teaching between

the undergraduate and postgraduate stage, which results in students' poor outcomes. Therefore, the Ministry of Education, the administrators, and the instructors are responsible for eliminating these difficulties.

5.8.2 Socio-Cultural Issues

The majority of supervisors revealed that a number of socio-cultural issues contributed to their students' difficulties with academic writing. One of these issues was that students complete their postgraduate studies in a language other than their first language; three supervisors acknowledged this to be a casual factor of difficulties with academic writing for their students. For example, Dr Sarah commented:

I think doing postgraduate studies in a language that is not your first language is difficult. I am full of admiration, because I could not do something like that; it would be far too difficult for all the reasons I stated.

Conducting research in another language can lead to a considerable number of mistakes in structure and content, and in the way students' ideas are expressed. This is because most Saudi students cannot express their views comprehensively owing to their low proficiency in L2, which makes it difficult for them to find the desired terms and precise vocabulary and, consequently, to write coherently and cohesively. Moreover, writing in another language forces students to use translations from Arabic into English. However, instead of helping them, this often causes more mistakes in their writing, as the students "usually think and prepare their ideas in their native language and then translate them into English" (Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000, p.174).

The second issue was mentioned by Dr Steve, who highlighted that students' relationship with their supervisors can be considered a reason for their difficulties with academic writing. Since students perceive this kind of bond as one of

authority, they do not feel comfortable discussing issues with their supervisors and asking them questions about their research. He noted the following:

I think there are two levels of cultural differences. The first level is the student-supervisor relationship. I think that, culturally, the students often do not initially feel that their relationship with the supervisor is one involving critical engagement. They feel the relationship is just following what the supervisor says about things. It is about power and power dynamics in the supervisor-student relationship. In this respect, students do feel that to question the supervisor is wrong and not a good thing to do, again because they feel the supervisor is the authority and the figure almost like a father figure. The second level of cultural differences is that from a particular understanding of religion, they feel that their purpose is not to question things.

There are several differences between the education systems of Saudi Arabia and the UK; one of these differences is the relationship between the student and their teacher or supervisor. Culturally, in Saudi Arabia, this relationship is based on taking the teachers' or supervisors' views as complete fact and accepting them without the student having any opportunity to discuss or express their views. In the UK, on the other hand, the students are encouraged from their early stages of education to discuss, argue, and express their opinions without fear.

The following section presents a quotation from Dr Sarah, who mentioned that in Saudi education, some ideas are restricted, which can be the cause of numerous difficulties within students' writing. In other words, the culture and traditions of the society contribute to students' writing problems; she stated:

Some students, such as those coming from European or western cultures in general, developed ideas that are somewhat more liberal, although I do not think that is an accurate word. I can perhaps say more open-minded, or more accepting towards other people's ideas. On the other hand, students that come from cultures like Saudi Arabia which are, I do not know what the right word is, more restrictive cultures, are not so aware of such a wide range of ideas or perhaps accepting towards such a wide range of ideas. These are general points that might be worth considering, I think.

The learning process in public and higher education in Saudi Arabia is based on memorising knowledge or information and, therefore, students become used to not having their own opinion, or to accepting the views which are included in the curriculum. They consequently tend to reject other opinions, particularly with regard to topics they have studied for four years from a single point of view, usually a specific writer's opinion. Therefore, when the supervisor disagrees with their ideas, the students are unable to accept this disagreement.

5.9 Strategies that Solve Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Supervisors

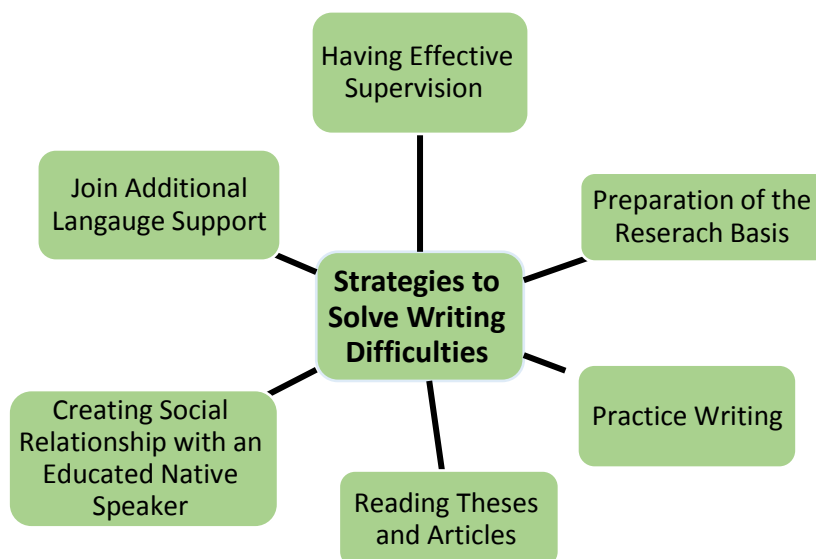


Figure 5.6: Strategies that Solve Academic Writing Difficulties from the Perspective of Supervisors

The data analysis of the interviews with the supervisors revealed that there are various strategies that can be used to help the students resolve their difficulties with academic writing (Figure 5.8). The most frequently mentioned strategies were as follows:

5.9.1 Reading Alternative Theses and Articles

A strategy suggested by most supervisors was that the students have to read a number of different theses and articles in their area of study. This could be helpful and useful in exposing students to arguments, critiques, and vocabulary of their studies. This strategy was also seen by the students as one of the most effective strategies to develop their English academic writing.

For example, Dr Mike said:

I think one of the possible strategies is to read and look for other PhD theses, and to study the way in which journal articles are constructed, in terms of the language used, academic vocabulary, sentence structure, and paragraph structure, etc.

Accordingly, Dr Steve put forward the following point about the benefits of pre reading for postgraduate students:

Students learn to write well by looking at good examples of written English, as well as reading, looking at paragraph construction, working on formulating topic sentences, examining how ideas are linked together, how many connectors are used, where and why the connectives aren't used, how the coherence is achieved, etc.

Moreover, Dr Sarah believed that students' conceptual thinking is most tangibly developed through reading. Her views were expressed as follows:

Students have to understand that they will have to read a lot before they can write something, and that they will read things that in the end will never be in their thesis. However, they still need to read them, because that is a part of developing their ideas of what the topic is. Therefore, I always suggest reading anything that you think is going to be useful in taking a few notes, so that you can use it if you need to later on, or come back to it later on.

These findings suggest that students need to be encouraged to be intensive in their reading of articles and theses in English. Furthermore, they need to be critical when they read, not just of the content, but of the language, vocabulary, and structure that other researchers employ in their writing, as this will

significantly improve their own writing. It will provide them with practical guidance on how to write their own research.

5.9.2 Practice Writing

An analysis of interviews with supervisors indicated that practising writing has great potential to help students to cope and overcome their writing difficulties. In the same vein, the students highlighted the importance of practising writing as a strategy in improving their academic writing. For instance, Dr John said:

They should be encouraged to write to ensure that their writing skills improve. It will give them an idea of their shortcomings and get them more familiar with what they need to do to produce a good piece of academic writing. Therefore, I encourage them to just keep pushing them to write until it becomes a familiar thing and a sort of second nature.

In addition, two supervisors emphasised that students should start writing from the early stages of their research and receive frequent feedback from their supervisors in order to remedy their difficulties with writing. An example of this was given by Dr Sandy, who stated:

I guess early on in the research, it is important that students write and do not leave it to one written piece of work they submit. It is sometimes better to have, certainly in the early stages of a doctoral research programme, relatively frequent meetings where the supervisors and students have some written work to discuss. I think sometimes there is the danger that international students will be put off writing things, but as I say, they have to do a lot more reading. The problems occur when they do not develop the writing skills that they need to develop at an early stage of the process. Therefore, frequent and early feedback is probably a useful thing that helps in developing their writing skills.

Similarly, Dr Peter asserted that supervisors should force their students to write and to submit written material of what they read in order to improve their writing:

I think it is quite important that supervisor forces his students to write, because of course, if we do not do that, they certainly will not start writing by themselves. Of course, most supervisors understand that. So, even if it is just writing short bits on a regular basis, I tend to do

that with, say, a student whose writing I think is quite good. I will leave them for weeks, and they write longer pieces and that is fine, but if I think I have during this first week, I will ask them to give me shorter pieces more regularly, just so that they can see how it builds up into a chapter, whilst with the good student, I will just instruct him to write the chapter, and then we will discuss it. Therefore, you have to use different strategies depending on what sort of student you have.

Clearly, students do not practise writing frequently enough and/or widely enough during the early stages of their education. This may be due to the education system in Saudi Arabia rather than the individual student where learning is more by memory than by essay writing. Therefore, students need more writing practice in class in order to improve their writing skills. In addition, students need to be engaged in critical discussions to become able to write critically, which is important in western cultures.

5.9.3 Creating Social Relationship with an Educated Native Speaker

Another strategy suggested by many supervisors was that of creating a social relationship with educated native and non-native speakers. For example, Dr Sarah stated:

It is a good idea to associate with as many well-educated English and non-English people as possible and practise speaking. Also, it is perhaps practical to write a draft section of the chapter, show it to a native English speaker, and then ask them to correct it, show them what the style should be. I mean, if I wrote something in Arabic, I would never even dream of publishing it without getting a native Arabic speaker to look at it. It is common sense really; you make sure that those who speak the language will look at it and make sure it is correct, and make sure the register is correct.

Similarly, Dr John stressed the importance of having a native speaker friend to help in pre reading and checking writing before the supervisor does so:

I think it is a good idea if students can have access to one native English speaker to read through and tell them which meaning or ideas lack clarity. That is not for proofreading, but to help them with those particular aspects of their presentations.

Dr Helen, one of the supervisors, highlighted what she called 'critical learning' as a strategy that can help students solve their writing difficulties, and she expressed this as follows:

One issue which I haven't mentioned is critical learning, being willing to share your work in order to work with other people, because that would be very useful here. It is not just about guidance; it is about having workshops where you compare different styles of writing. Other people read them, challenge you, and you improve your work together. I think it would be very useful to expose your writing to others. I see this is difficult, particularly for Saudi students, as they are not always as willing to participate as other native speakers. I think it really helps them to improve, you know, because it is challenging.

It is essential for students to try and socialise as much as possible with native English speakers, particularly others in academia, as this can be a chance for them to learn more about the language and various learning styles employed in the UK. This can have a positive influence on the development of their writing performance; particularly as doing a PhD degree can be a somewhat isolating process. It would also be helpful if students could engage with native speaker students and challenge them, let them criticise their writing, in order to form a perfect background of writing styles.

5.9.4 Join Additional Language Support

With regard to this strategy, most supervisors suggested that students should utilise any form of language support that is available at their universities, as this is a great opportunity for them to cope with their writing difficulties. For example, Dr Andrew mentioned:

I have encouraged the students to join additional language support to know how to structure their academic writing and looking at academic chunks. Simply anything that enables them to be a part of academic community and see what is required of them is a benefit.

Dr Sarah also added that using a proofreader to check the students' language is another strategy which can aid the student to improve their writing. She clarified her views as follows:

It is very important that supervisors tell their students where they can get additional language support and that they should seek that. I am also aware that some students from Gulf States get people to proofread their work to check the English, and I have no objection to that, as long as proofreading is not writing for them. That is one strategy to help them.

Dr Peter had a similar view, and he stated the following:

I suggest that students take the course in academic English or another advanced course in academic English while they are doing their PhD.

The need for additional language support was made clear by most of the supervisors and therefore, it is important to encourage students to make use of language support services and share their academic activities with others.

5.9.5 Preparation of the Research Basis

Another suggested strategy, mentioned by four supervisors, was that students needed to conduct preparation in their research before arriving in the UK to begin their postgraduate studies. This preparation includes writing styles, arguments, critiques, and research methods. Dr Helen said:

Students need to have some training in critical thinking and argumentation, using written arguments to help them with their research. Of course, it should comprise mixed methods and qualitative ones; because I suspect that traditionally, the research conducted in Saudi Arabia is mostly quantitative. Students need maybe more exposure before they come or before they do their PhD writing, I think that would be useful for them.

Dr Steve had a similar view; he commented:

Students should have a good foundation in doing research. That is important, and if they have a bad basis for the research, it is very hard to make it better.

Other supervisors drew attention to the importance of having a master's degree in social sciences (MSc) as another strategy, which can help students to integrate into the UK education system at the doctoral level. Dr John stated:

The PhD students who come from other countries should do their master's degree in social sciences research in the first year before they start doing their own research. That really helps them to integrate and increase their chances to meet the necessary requirements, so it is quite useful. It is not a solution, but it definitely helps them.

Dr Sarah drew attention to the need to provide training programmes for international students to help them to cope with the challenges of their academic studies in the host countries. This could be a kind of preparation for students in terms of research, society, culture, and the education system. She stated:

I think there should be a decision on the part of the host countries to offer training programmes as part of the skill training in their postgraduate degree because I would imagine that it is the international students that are not always completely prepared for research work in English speaking countries.

The majority of the supervisors mentioned the usefulness of establishing a research basis for students before they come to the UK, as this will help them meet the research requirements of the UK system.

5.9.6 Quality of Supervision

Having effective supervision was another strategy suggested by many participating supervisors. For example, Dr Sarah highlighted the importance of having good communication, as follows:

I think perhaps more attention should be paid to ensuring that there is good communication about what needs to be done, to make sure the messages that are being transmitted are understood and worked on until they are perfect.

The following quotation from Dr Andrew indicates his views on how important it is for students to ask for clarification from their supervisors. This highlights the significance of the student- supervisor relationship in the learning process:

I think that it is important that the students ask for clarifications if they are not sure what to do, because sometimes, supervisors can suggest to a student certain things, and the student goes away saying he understood. But during the next session, what the supervisor hoped to achieve by giving the advice simply does not happen. This sort of communication is a problem, but there is a way to address the communication problem - the students should write about the supervision meeting, make a detailed account of what it is that has been discussed and what it is that has been decided will happen next. This is what all students are expected to do as part of their PGR record-keeping system.

Moreover, Dr Mike drew attention to the importance of good quality supervision, stating the following:

I think the quality of supervision is important. I think what the supervisors need to achieve at the beginning is to make it absolutely clear how they operate. I think some of the situations arise when the supervisors do not act properly, you know - a supervisor has to provide feedback that is constructive, has to show students what is needed.

Accordingly, Dr Ann asserted the importance of having good supervisors:

“Getting the right supervisor is particularly important - someone who has time, shows willingness, and is pretty helpful”.

It seems that supervision quality plays a crucial role in helping students to improve their writing ability; furthermore, students need to work with a supervisor who shares and facilitates their interests. To achieve that, students should conduct research and find supervisors who are able to help them most effectively with their questions.

5.10 English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

Students were asked to rate how often they had experienced the aspects stated below during the EAP courses in academic writing in the UK. These are courses

they took prior to the start of their postgraduate studies. Students provided their answers via a questionnaire. They were presented by (10) items representing different writing skills. As can be seen in Table (5.9) “Drafting” was rated as the skill with which they had the most experience (Mdn=4); almost 75% indicated that they worked with that often or very often. The second was “useful materials”, another aspect which was reported as being experienced frequently (Mdn=4), as was reflected in the high percentage of students who gave the response of often or very often (74%). Thirdly, students rated “paraphrasing” as an additional and often experienced aspect of EAP (Mdn=4); 72% expressed that it was experienced often or very often. These findings directed my attention to the importance of the pre writing stage for the quality of students’ writing because it requires a complex mental process from students in order to produce a coherent text. Therefore, the methods of teaching writing in Saudi education need to focus more on the composition and rewriting stages of writing rather than the final product of the text.

The least frequently experienced aspects were “writing in various genres” (Mdn=3) and “writing critically” (Mdn=3), with both demonstrating a lower level of experience (reflected in 44% and 35% respectively). A possible reason for such a discrepancy might be that most of the English programmes in UK institutions teach English skills in general. For example, in teaching writing, they focus on teaching students how to structure an essay and organise ideas, or they deal with general topics that are not related to students’ actual needs for writing in their disciplines.

Table 5.9: Descriptive Statistics for Items within EAP Usefulness Scale

		V.E	E.	N.	D.	V.D	T.D	Median	Rank
35.EAP: planning & collecting ideas	N	19	31	34	77	114	191	4	4
	%	6.9	11.3	12.4	28	41.5	69.5		
36.EAP: writing critically	N	42	21	115	48	49	97	3	10
	%	15.3	7.6	41.8	17.5	17.8	35.3		
37.EAP: writing in various genres	N	22	24	108	73	48	121	3	9
	%	8	8.7	39.3	26.5	17.5	44		
38.EAP: summarising	N	19	33	33	65	125	190	4	5
	%	6.9	12	12	23.6	45.5	69.1		
39.EAP: paraphrasing	N	16	39	22	125	73	198	4	3
	%	5.8	14.2	8	45.5	26.5	72		
40.EAP: structuring assignment	N	12	63	20	140	40	180	4	7
	%	4.4	22.9	7.3	50.9	14.5	65.4		
41.EAP: drafting	N	17	37	15	129	77	206	4	1
	%	6.2	13.5	5.5	46.9	28	74.9		
42.EAP: using rubrics for self-assessment	N	47	13	61	36	118	154	4	8
	%	17.1	4.7	22.2	13.1	42.9	56		
43.EAP: useful materials	N	20	23	29	73	130	203	4	2
	%	7.3	8.4	10.5	26.5	47.3	73.8		
44.EAP: helpful feedback	N	12	62	19	119	63	182	4	6
	%	4.4	22.5	6.9	43.3	22.9	66.2		

* V.E=Very easy; E=Easy; N=Neither; D=Difficult; V.D=Very difficult; T.D=Total difficult; N=Number of respondents; %=Percentages

Additionally, some students' responses to the open-ended question and the semi-structured interviews mentioned that there are certain limitations in the EAP courses in the UK even though the majority were happy about them. The writing elements in the EAP courses are not related to students' fields of research as Noura said:

From my experience, teaching writing in EAP is based on writing an essay about various topics, such as global warming or technology, which is not helpful. Furthermore, students in these courses are required to do many assignments, which makes them frustrated and does not improve their writing.

Ahmed had a similar view, stating the following:

From my point of view, these courses do not focus on academic writing in particular; I think it is only a few instructions if they have time, such

as how to move from a general idea to a specific one and learn that each paragraph should include one specific idea and how to support this idea. Sometimes, the feedback on the assignment is insufficient and does not teach the students how to improve their writing.

Furthermore, four students revealed that. For example, Maha expressed her views as follows:

The methods of teaching writing in the EAP [courses] are different from what the actual students need in their disciplines. Therefore, there should be a cooperation between the administrations or instructors in these courses and the departments of students' subjects, as some disciplines have different styles of writing. For example, writing in arts subjects is completely different from science topics. I think most EAP courses are mostly focused on the arts subjects.

Similarly, Karim added that these courses do not provide students with the knowledge that they really require as international students:

The EAP courses, I think, do not know the real needs of international students. For instance, the Saudi students need more time to adapt to the new culture and academic life. That means that the students need to be independent, which they are not used to in their country, and that is a challenge in itself.

Additionally, Lina indicated that the requirements of English language tests, such as the IELTS exam along with the requirements of the EAP course, cause a lot of stress for students, which hinders their concentration on their studies:

Many students when they return to Saudi Arabia have weak language skills unless those students are proficient in English before they start their study..... In addition, the IELTS exam causes a lot of pressure for students during the EAP course, which affects their success in the courses. Students cannot find enough time to cope with the requirements of the course and the exam together.

Furthermore, some supervisors' responses to the semi-structured interviews revealed that there are some shortcomings of the EAP courses in the UK, as they are too general and are not adequate for students' needs in their disciplines. Dr Sarah highlighted this issue in her interview excerpt:

An EAP course mostly tends to be more general; they might do some work on academic writing, but even that is not discipline-specific.

There are different conventions for different disciplines. Some disciplines depend on the methodological framework. Other disciplines would want the writing to be very much in the passive voice, would want no mention of the researcher in the thesis, and would want no subjectivity throughout the writing whereas other disciplines, for example, in many of the social sciences including in education, it would not be appropriate to erase the researcher from the research. So that it is something that is very discipline specific, and EAP courses can't be expected to address that.

Dr Mike had a similar view; he stated that these courses have nothing to add to the students' skills; they are a kind of repetition and a waste of time:

I think, now, the pre-sessional has some specific courses, but a lot of it is very general, and I also have the feeling that it was rather repetitive of what they probably have already done at home. They do not prepare them specifically for their individual disciplines.

The following quotation is from Dr Sarah, who revealed that EAP courses do not prepare students on how to have critical thinking in their writing:

I do not believe that the EAP courses are sufficient in terms of what I call critical thinking skills, and I think students struggle with their critical thinking skills for their PhDs, in particular. They find it difficult to engage critically with facts, theories and the theoretical framework that they need for the PhD. In addition, they find it hard to write in a way that shows that they are able to see literature, which speaks in favour of the research, but also literature that speaks against the research topic.

Two supervisors revealed that EAP courses in the UK are inadequate in terms of preparing students for writing at the PhD stage. For example, Dr John stated:

I find that the language programmes in the UK focus a lot more on what I call communication, and they focus less on writing. Therefore, it helps them if they like speaking and, to an extent, engages in conversations, but I do not feel it provides them with adequate grounding and support for writing for the PhD. The second thing I think, now I have reflected on it more, I think the problem with many of the language programmes offered in the UK for Saudi students before they come is de-contextualized. In other words, they teach them generic language skills, but are not tailored to what they actually want in their research.

The Saudi government gives students the opportunity to study language courses in the UK for one or two years whether or not they have TESOL or non- TESOL

major. However, the students said that even if they stay here for a long time, a year or two, they feel that they are not sufficiently prepared for the academic requirements of doing a postgraduate degree. This indicates two things. First, it shows the weakness of students' English language proficiency in general. Second, doing a postgraduate degree requires students to have the necessary research skills; for instance, in writing, students should be able to criticise, argue, synthesize ideas, and express their own voice; these are all skills which cannot be acquired in one or two years. These skills should be taught to students starting during their secondary education and continuing into their undergraduate degree, as it takes students years to catch up. This is due to the weakness of the outcomes of the education system in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the administrators and the instructors of EAP courses in the UK need to take into consideration international students' previous education to meet their actual needs. Moreover, these EAP courses in the UK should be much better linked to what students are going to research subsequently, so that the course inspires them to contextualize their reading, writing, and speaking skills.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the collected data from different perspectives, based on the research questions of the current study. The results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses were combined, where appropriate, to present the findings in a unified style. Many difficulties with academic writing were identified by both supervisors and their students. These difficulties are related to various factors and reasons according to the students and supervisors' views. It is clear that the majority of problems identified are related to the considerable discrepancy between key features of the educational

system in Saudi Arabia and the requirements of postgraduate study in the UK. In other words, prior to their arrival to the UK, most Saudi students lack essential research skills and a sufficient command of advanced English level in order to formulate clear and concise arguments, let alone produce complex pieces of writing. Some solutions for students' problems and weaknesses in writing English were provided by both supervisors and students. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the major findings.

6 Chapter Six: Discussion of the Research Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main findings of the current study in light of the existing literature on the subject. It is divided into six parts, the first of which discusses the demands of academic writing for Saudi students, while the second explores the problem of using EMI in Saudi universities. The third section addresses the readiness of Saudi students for postgraduate studies, while the fourth discusses the effect of the relative quality of the education system in the KSA on students' writing abilities. The fifth section focuses on the need for academic preparation in the KSA; this leads into the final discussion section, which addresses student and supervisor's relationships and expectations.

6.2 Academic Writing as the Most Demanding Enterprise for Saudi Students at the Tertiary Level

Academic writing is challenging and complex for EFL students, particularly those studying in EFL contexts where English is the language of instruction (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Jiang, 2011; Muslim, 2014). The challenges of academic writing in a second language among Arab students, including Saudi students, is well documented in the existing literature (Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2014; Alkhawaldeh, 2011; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tsai, 2006; Zamel, 1992); For example, Al-Mansour (2015) provides the following explanation:

Academic writing is a systematic presentation of thoughts and experiences, and penchant for logic and reasoning. In this respect, what needs to be elucidated is that academic writing is a quite different form of writing as compared to the other forms that exist concurrent with it (p. 95).

Al Fadda (2012) pointed out that academic writing in English at higher levels requires students to be able to synthesize ideas, and to evaluate and criticise the views of other researchers in order to develop their own academic voice. Writing in a foreign language is a difficult process (Xiao-xia, 2007), particularly when compared to other language skills, it is difficult to acquire.

According to Hyland (2006), writing skills “are the core components of university level academia, as this is largely how assessment is conducted” (p. 39). Therefore, poor academic writing may obstruct the path to success for EFL students, as they may struggle to meet the expectations of the institution in their writing, and thus, “need to develop their writing skills in order to cope with university coursework” in different disciplines” (Bacha, 2002, p. 161).

6.2.1 Lack of Sufficient and Appropriate Vocabulary

One of the most difficult aspects of academic writing which students face is finding the appropriate words to express their ideas. More specifically, both students and supervisors confirmed via the interviews and the questionnaire that having a less rich vocabulary and apparatus of expression had prevented them from phrasing things as they would like while writing. Al-Hazemi (1993), Al-Bogami (1995), and Al-Seghayer (2006) asserted in their studies that Saudi students leave high school with a low aptitude for vocabulary, having memorised only a small number of vocabulary items, explicit grammatical rules, and short phrases. Accordingly, if the quality of learning in schools is poor, this may have consequences for the study of English at a university level. It should not be surprising, then, that “a small vocabulary size among learners at a university level has been reported, despite the expectation that university students would be a subgroup of the most able school learners” (Al-Masrai & Milton, 2012, p. 15).

Moreover, Gurel (2010) stated that writing a doctoral dissertation, a lengthy text which requires students to have a huge stock of advanced vocabulary in order to complete and present their work, constitutes a major challenge; in fact, having only the specific field knowledge of their given specialisation does not suffice when writing a doctoral thesis. Having insufficient vocabulary knowledge in early education obstructs the progress of students in acquiring the acceptable level of vocabulary in their postgraduate studies. This was supported by Rabab'ah (2003), who highlighted that a lack of vocabulary hinders the ability of Arab students to express their views freely.

One reason for the lack of appropriate phrasing for students when expressing their views may be related to the use of the Arabic language in EFL classes. For example, the study by Al-Nofaie (2010), found that the use of Arabic by teachers and students was an unavoidable phenomenon in Saudi public schools. Moreover, the way in which vocabulary is taught is based primarily on the knowledge of meaning and pronunciation (Al-Akloby, 2001) with very few real-life examples of vocabulary use. These factors, it has been argued, prevent students from acquiring proper vocabularies. Furthermore, the low proficiency in the English language for Saudi postgraduate students in the UK is considered another key reason behind this trend, as "there [is a] significant correlation between learners' proficiency and frequency of vocabulary problems... [which] show that language ability did have an effect on the type of vocabulary problem that learners encountered" (Huang, 2010, p. ii). Furthermore, Al-Seghayer (2006) proposed that students may have only limited previous experience with the English language due to "the teaching methods employed in their home country, which is based largely on the memorisation of vocabulary and grammar, with little real world or academic context; there is no instruction on how to present

complicated concepts or arguments” (pp. 118-121). This is due to tradition; teachers teach their students vocabulary using the same methods and strategies by which they were taught.

Therefore, it has been argued that a bottom-up approach should be followed with regard to teaching vocabulary, in that the process should be based on the experiences of the students rather than dictated by tradition or teaching theory (Namaghi & Malekpur, 2015). Not only this, but students should also be trained in how to use effective strategies to assist them in solving their difficulties with regard to vocabulary in their writing, as this process “moves learners towards autonomy” (Namaghi & Malekpur, 2015, p. 238). In addition, teaching strategies alone cannot suffice; once a certain level of education is reached, the vocabulary which is taught ceases to be useful for every student, and so this makes the classes somewhat redundant.

In agreement with the above studies, most of the students and supervisors who participated in the current study acknowledged that it is necessary for students to read extensively, both in their disciplines and generally, as a way of assisting them in overcoming this difficulty. These findings have been supported by the work of Rabab’ah (2003), who recommended that the construction of more reading courses may encourage students to read more widely, thus increasing their vocabulary and improving their academic writing.

6.2.2 Linking Between Ideas Ensuring a Coherent Narrative

It should be noted that both students and supervisors reported that establishing links between ideas is another difficulty that students encounter in their academic writing, insofar as students have trouble making appropriate links or transitions between ideas, sentences, or paragraphs, leading them to jump from one idea to

another. Moreover, these findings reported that students have difficulties organising their ideas properly and logically within the text. This claim is supported by Alkubaidi (2014) and Al Fadda (2012), who found that the writing of Saudi university students was generally weak in attempting to make sentence fragments and link sentences in their writing. In addition, a number of other studies conducted in Arab nations revealed that Arab students faced difficulty in their L2 writing at the level of sentences and paragraphs, including transitioning ideas, and the logical linking of ideas and the concept of paragraph unity (Ahmed, 2010; Ezza, 2010; Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000)

The difficulty of linking ideas or the transitioning of ideas within sentences and across paragraphs can be attributed, in part, to the following factors. First, in Saudi Arabia, there is a lack of knowledge about coherent and cohesive organisation and structure in English writing, which possibly stems from the lack of systematic and purposeful preparation in writing tasks (Hussein, 2015). Second, the methods utilised when teaching writing are highly traditional and product-oriented, focusing only on the vocabulary and grammar of students' writing. This is in line with the findings of the current study, whereby student interviewees confirmed that the teaching methods in the KSA are traditional, which limit their broad knowledge in English writing.

Third, it may be challenging for international students to master the English style of writing and its conventions due to their unfamiliarity with academic English; this can produce work which, to a native speaker, may seem confusing, or strangely worded. National conventions of writing tend to be rooted in cultural and historic specificities, and are often reflections of cultural experience. Fourth, academic writing is believed to be cognitively complex; this has been supported by "social-cognitive theories of writing which demonstrate that writing in a second language

is a complex process involving the ability to communicate in L2 (learner output) and the ability to construct a text in order to express one's ideas effectively in writing” (Myles, 2002, p. 9). Indeed, the participants of the current study acknowledged the complexity of the writing process, especially in a second language. The importance of academic writing and explicit outline to facilitate academic writing is raised in the literature, for example, (Al Fadda, 2012; Wenyu & Yang, 2008).

On a related note, Abdulkareem (2013) suggested that in order to decrease students' difficulties in academic writing, they needed to be taught to brainstorm their ideas, a task which would aid them in creating unified written texts. Further, in order to provide effective pedagogy, L2 writing instructors must understand the social and cognitive factors involved in the process of second language acquisition and the reasons underlying errors in writing, as these factors have a “salient effect on L2 writing development” (Myles, 2002, p. 4).

6.2.3 *Production of Written Academic Argument*

According to the data findings, the majority of supervisors and students indicated that constructing a logical argument is a significant difficulty faced by students in their academic writing at the university stage. This result is consistent with the findings of Barnawi (2009), who found that Saudi MA TESOL students attending American universities encounter enormous difficulties in constructing arguments appropriately in classroom discussions.

Furthermore, other studies have confirmed that, amongst Arab students, constructing an argument proves challenging (Al-Abed Al Haq & Ahmed, 1994; Bacha 2010; Kamel, 2000); this finding is also consistent with those of broader EFL studies (Groom, 2000; Hirose, 2003; Street, 2009; Wingate, 2012; Zhu,

2001). This indicates that there is a large body of literature supporting the claim that students struggle producing written academic arguments.

The difficulties present in constructing an argument can be attributed to the differences in the rhetorical features of writing in English and Arabic, the majority of which have their roots in cultural differences (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014). Moreover, the lack of understanding in terms of the organisation of arguments in the target language and the lack of rhetorical structure knowledge in L2 when putting forward an argument have also been cited as reasons underlying this difficulty (Kamel, 2000). Likewise, in the findings of the current study, 75% of students revealed in the questionnaire that constructing and applying the rhetorical aspects of English argumentation when writing was difficult for them. This seems likely to reflect the absence of explicit instruction for students to comprehend the argumentative organisation in L2.

Furthermore, the ineffective education system in Saudi Arabia has been considered another reason for the difficulties students face in developing an argument. There are two reasons for this: first, there is lack of suitable materials and courses to teach students academic writing, and, second, the passive role of students in the classroom leads to a marginalisation of their voice and views, both of which are important when constructing an effective argument. However, the importance of the student's voice, and its acknowledgment, is well documented in the literature. For instance, Richardson (2001) revealed that the views and needs of students assist educators in "help[ing] students learn.... Writing is an excellent strategy to listen to students' voices" (p. 8). He added that teachers may utilise writing tasks to understand their students and their specific needs.

In efforts to overcome this difficulty and help students in their academic writing, Wingate (2012) claimed that improving students' ability to outline an argument is at the centre of the instructions of academic writing, while dealing with other aspects, such as linguistic features, is subordinated to this. Such claim in the literature alongside the findings of this study do suggest that Saudi universities should offer a more explicit instructional method for teaching students how to construct academic arguments in the required language.

According to Bacha (2010), the process of teaching the effective construction of academic argument "is supported through five steps of the cycle: building the context, modelling and deconstructing texts, constructing texts jointly, constructing texts independently and linking related texts" (p. 229). Furthermore, Katznelson (2007) stated that instruction on how to structure academic arguments has the added benefit of raising students' awareness of their own individual skills and creative potential, encourages their participation in teamwork, and aids in the organisation of their thoughts, as pertains to academia.

6.2.4 Misconception of Plagiarism

The findings of the current study reveal that, for the majority of the students asked about this issue, avoiding plagiarism is very difficult. Although this difficulty was not noted by the participating supervisors, the students ranked plagiarism as one of the greatest difficulties they faced in their academic writing (section 5.2.2). This confirms the findings of Hosny and Shameem (2014), who found that that plagiarism is a common practice among female Saudi students at the university stage.

Other studies have confirmed that plagiarism is challenging for Arab students. For example, Al-Zubaidi's (2012) study at UTM found that plagiarism is a problem

frequently faced by Arab students in their academic writing, which, in some cases, can lead to their exclusion from their college or university.

The reason for this difficulty is that Arab learners are commonly unfamiliar with the notion of plagiarism and the rules of academic literacy in western countries, which can lead them to plagiarise (Al-Zubaidi, 2012). This means that the fundamental understanding does not change, even when the academic reality does.

Moreover, due to the lack of linguistic and sociolinguistic skills amongst non-native speakers, plagiarism is sometimes considered a coping strategy for the demands of academic expectations (Hyland, 2001). In addition, Schevyns et al. (2003) suggested that another cause of plagiarism among international students at the postgraduate level is the requirement for critical thinking in their studies. This finding has been supported by the work of Abasi and Graves (2008), who noted that “unfamiliarity with the ways of thinking, speaking, and writing associated with the specific subject areas” may have contributed to instances of plagiarism (p. 226). Another reason for plagiarism is the time pressures imposed on students, which push many to plagiarise, as when “faced with rapidly closing deadlines, even honest students prefer to plagiarize to meet the deadline” (Riasati & Rahimi, 2013, p. 315). Additionally, “the importance of memorisation in the learning process for Asian students provides some insight into the difficulties they experience understanding the Western ideas of textual ownership” (Maxwell et al., 2008, p. 27). This is in line with the findings of the current study, in which all students interviewed confirmed that their previous learning experience was based on memorising knowledge for passing an exam. A number of other researchers (Angelil-Carter, 2000; Buranen 1999; Carroll, 2004; Wilson, 1997) have suggested that continual pressure to attain high marks and the fear of failure

could lead students to plagiarise. The question arises, then, as to what should be done to remedy the prevalence of plagiarism amongst international students.

A solution to this issue, as suggested by Gurnarsson et al. (2014), dictates that often it is students' unfamiliarity with the rules of academic writing that causes them to plagiarise. Therefore, the development of resources available online might help students to increase their awareness of various aspects of academic writing and of ways to avoid plagiarism. Similarly, Sharma (2007) emphasised the responsibility of those in academia, including lecturers and university staff, to enforce a zero tolerance approach towards plagiarism and to assimilate this attitude into the institutional ethos; the unacceptability of plagiarism must be made clear to students and any instances of plagiarism must be immediately investigated (Sharma, 2007). A more modern approach to identifying instances of plagiarism makes use of plagiarism software; 'Turnitin', a programme commonly used in colleges and universities, assesses documents in relation to their similarity to other submitted papers and the existing literature, within its own database and that of other universities (Norris, 2007).

In light of this, it may be time for the Saudi education system to give serious consideration to increase students' awareness regarding the definition of plagiarism and give guidance on how students can avoid it in their writing. As is evident from the findings of the current study, students often lack an adequate knowledge of the several meanings of plagiarism. Students' awareness can be achieved by "creating lesson plans that include taking time to introduce students to what plagiarism is, engaging them in discussion of the necessity of citation, and giving them more 'active' reading and writing practice" (Norris, 2007, p. 14).

6.2.5 Lack of Criticality

The data analysis stages of the current study have revealed that the majority of supervisors and students reported that critical thinking is challenging for students when writing, something that was most clearly stated in the students' responses. This result is consistent with the findings of Saba (2013), who confirmed that thinking critically is challenging for Saudi students when writing their theses or assignments, as it negatively affects their writing abilities.

Indeed, "Saudi education has been subject to a great deal of criticism for its lack of focus on critical thinking and problem solving and overemphasis on memorisation" (Al Ghamdi, Hamdan & Deraney, 2013, p. 178). Therefore, the current Saudi education policy has encouraged the promotion of critical thinking skills and has recently made significant progress in developing the techniques and strategies to improve students' critical thinking skills, for instance, the Tatweer Project in public education and the Afaq Project to Develop Higher Education. This has highlighted that it is vital to examine the pedagogical practices that teachers and lecturers implement to practise critical thinking when teaching writing skills in Saudi Arabia. This is because "the issue of how to improve students' critical thinking skills still remains a widely controversial topic among all the Saudi education stakeholders such as parents, educators, and policy makers" (Alwadai, 2014, p. 21).

There is a considerable number of studies that highlighted the lack of critical thinking skills among Saudi students at both the school and university levels (Al Gamdi, 2008; Al-Essa, 2009; Allamnakrah, 2013; Al-Miziny, 2010; Al-Qahtani, 1995; Alwehaibi, 2012). The lack of critical thinking present in the academic writing of Saudi students has been explained in a number of ways by academics

in the field. First, in many Arab cultures, including that of Saudi Arabia, 'critical thinking' is taken to mean 'criticising others', which is considered culturally unacceptable and disrespectful. In Saudi Arabia, for example, "the culture is predominantly one of uncritical submission to authority" (Allamnakhrah, 2013, p. 205). Students from these cultures are encouraged early in their development to refrain from questioning their elders and are taught by their parents that it is disrespectful to object to the teachings of authority figures. In addition, Saudi society, in the words of Allamnakhrah (2013), is "an uncritical society. Saudi society needs to learn that others' views must be respected. The problem is a society that does not encourage discussion, even in the home between parents and their children" (p. 205).

In addition, students from the KSA are culturally conditioned to believe that they should refrain from questioning their teacher, or expressing their disagreement with teachers or peers, due to the cultural unacceptability of disrespect (Barnawi, 2009). Further, the majority of students' responses in this research relate their lack of critical thinking to what they consider to be a weak Saudi system of education. These findings are corroborated by the work of many researchers, who found the lack of critical thinking skills reported by Saudi students to be due to the 'insufficient' education system in Saudi Arabia (Al-Essa, 2009; Al-Miziny, 2010; Al-Qahtani, 1995; Al-Sagoube, 2009; Barnawi, 2009; Elyas, 2008; Kafe, 2009). Moreover, Al-Zubaidi (2012) highlighted that the lack of critical thinking skills demonstrated by Arab learners is largely due to deficiencies in their overly traditional education system, in which the teacher is the only provider of knowledge. This creates a culture in which students are reluctant to express themselves in writing and where the students' voice is neglected, as their teacher has not given them the opportunity to be involved in the learning process.

Accordingly, “they tend to write or copy what they have read instead of filtering it through their own judgment and reasoning” (Barnawi, 2011, p. 193).

Al-Zubaidi (2012) asserted, “Arab students are not sufficiently prepared for the tasks of analysing the data or synthesizing the information in research. These are key activities to support academic writing” (p. 50). It has also been argued that educators experience a high level of work-related stress due to being often overwhelmed, and so they lack sufficient energy to spend on developing their own critical thinking abilities that they could then pass on to their students (Ijaiya et al., 2011). This would suggest that a lack of human and educational resources could often prevent teachers from creating or adapting strategies and techniques for teaching students critical thinking at a higher education stage and therefore leave students unequipped to employ critical thinking in their writing.

Moreover, in the Saudi higher education system, there is a lack of sufficient exposure to a number of disciplines of education, such as psychology, philosophy, and sociology. This can constitute a problem given that these disciplines aid students in learning how to understand, explain, and analyse human behaviour and the relationship between humans and society. According to Facione, “The interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation were the cognitive skills at the core of critical thinking” (as cited in Smith & Stitts, 2013, p. 75). More facets of education, it has been argued, should operate with regard to this process; interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation. This process may assist students in solving problems, providing evidence, and making decisions. In addition, students will learn how to develop their abilities in terms of organising their ideas and thoughts. For all people, but especially students, “Thinking critically is an essential tool for performing successfully in a complex and rapidly changing world” (Ahmed, 2014,

p. 210). For academic writing in particular, thinking critically is fundamental, as to write well requires a combination of physical and mental processes in one concerted effort to communicate information and ideas (Scott, 2009).

On a related note, it has been suggested that overtly emphasising knowledge and neglecting the ability to reason is affecting the academic proficiency of students; this is made even worse by introducing computer-based testing even at the tertiary level, whereby students are encouraged to learn how to answer factual questions without having to formulate an argument supporting their opinions or answers (Ijaiya, Alabi & Fasasi, 2011).

However, it is not only the lack of opportunities to develop critical thinking skills which have contributed to this problem, but also the attitude of students towards critical thinking. Williams (2005) commented that students are reluctant to practise critical thinking because it “requires hard work” and “many students would prefer that teachers just give them answers to complex questions” (p. 182). Moreover, the majority of Saudi students, according to the interview results, revealed that their knowledge was limited and vague as to the meaning of critical thinking and its required skills. Accordingly, critical thinking is also an ongoing process, and time and patience are required to provide the necessary support to learners in their active learning. Moreover, thinking skills may be taught in isolation but are more effective when linked to classes on writing, to hone the specific academic skills that are useful in higher education (Al Khoudary, 2015). It has also been asserted by some researchers in the field that if elements of critical thinking are to be introduced into mainstream Saudi education, they must be introduced in the least imposing and unsettling way possible in order to maintain cultural harmony; such elements should be presented as a means by

which younger generations can keep up academically with students from overseas (Alzahrani, 2016).

In the current study it was evident that thinking critically was important to meet the academic requirement of international universities, e.g. UK universities. Regarding English academic writing difficulties and the negative effect it has on the writing quality of Saudi language students, the question arises as to how effective the education policy in the KSA is. This policy outlines that English should be used as a medium of instruction (EMI) in scientific majors, though this is of limited use if students still struggle with their English writing after years of education. The following section will address this issue in further detail.

6.3 Problematising English as a Medium of Instruction in Saudi Universities

The KSA has chosen to adopt EMI in higher educational institutions. This has been mandated by the Ministry of Higher Education (Ebad, 2014), rooted in the belief, that English has become “the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 13).

There are a considerable number of studies which deal with the use of EMI in higher education, particularly in Saudi Arabia and in the Arab world more generally (Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Kahtany et al. 2016; Ebad, 2014; Mansour, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011). For instance, Ebad (2014) mentioned that “EMI has posed several challenges and obstacles in educational settings in Saudi Higher Education settings” (p. 142). He added that these challenges range between “huge communication, connection, and cultural gaps between students and instructors in a typical classroom setting of lecture delivery in the English

language” (p. 142). This contributes to students graduating with poor learning, knowledge, and writing performance. This issue has been confirmed in the findings of this study, as the students revealed that their previous learning experience in higher education negatively influenced their English writing.

One challenge raised by studying through EMI at Saudi universities is the negative impact on students; for instance, students who enrol in their specialisation with low English proficiency must spend more time on improving their language level as well as making the effort to understand the content. Students are exposed to the same scientific specialisation regardless of their actual level of English proficiency, which can contribute to a loss of confidence amongst students and a loss of motivation to further their knowledge and expertise in their subject (Tamtam et al., 2012). This negatively influences the quality of education as a whole. This issue has been confirmed in the findings of this study, as the supervisors indicated that the low English language proficiency in Saudi postgraduate students is a crucial factor that is adversely influencing their abilities with regard to academic writing.

In addition, it is also true that applying this policy might lead to only “one way student-instructor communication, i.e., from instructor to student” (Ebad, 2014, p. 144). This is, in part, due to the low-level of English proficiency among students, which reduces the potential for reciprocity, as they struggle to ask questions, discuss, or comment on what they are being taught. Consequently, instructors may not be able to discern whether students understand the content.

A two-way interaction between teacher and student has been identified as conducive to learning by a number of researchers, in relation to both native and second languages (Nawaz, 2012). Models put forward by sociocultural theorists

have supported this, advocating for reciprocity and exchange (Mercer, 2001). This issue has been confirmed in the findings of this study, as the students indicated that the teaching approach in their previous learning experience was always passively receiving information from teachers or lecturers.

Students participating in the current study were not satisfied with the English language teaching methods in scientific specialisations, due to their inadequate proficiency with both English and specialisations, despite the opportunities for practise afforded to them during their undergraduate studies. Teaching methods focus mainly on a “lecture-oriented and text-based pedagogy” (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 81), and students are used to memorising knowledge rather than understanding the content in order to pass exams and achieve high grades. Furthermore, they rarely write in L2 and have relatively little experience writing technically, even in L1. Additionally, the data obtained from the students suggests that the department for teaching writing skills in English focuses on the grammatical rules and vocabulary of a text, regardless of the content. On the other hand, in scientific specialisations, where English is used as a medium of instruction for writing, this process is very brief, with little importance placed on developing the language skills of the students, and with the emphasis being only on the content.

In the same vein, Al-Seghayer (2011) argued that there has been a rise in students from the KSA who have a low level of English proficiency and therefore, cannot keep up with their peers. This leads to a discussion regarding whether there exists a “gap between policy intentions and the actual implementation of the EMI programs” (Shamim, 2016, p. 35). Furthermore, Ebad (2014) pointed out the breadth of literature that identifies a disparity between learning, the acquirement of knowledge, and general comprehension, particularly in English.

Therefore, the quality of learning and teaching in classes through EMI needs to be investigated (Navaz, 2012).

To conclude, there is a discrepancy between the policy and the implementation of EMI in scientific specialisations. This is because Saudi Arabia, as with many Arab countries, has not achieved the desired results of EMI policy and students still have a low proficiency in English, particularly in writing. In the KSA, for instance, students are prepared to study via English, and some of the students go to study abroad; indeed, in many academic programmes, writing is a major part, like doing assignments, although there is no writing preparation. Therefore, the policy of EMI itself is questionable due to the lack of the academic conditions required to implement this policy. According to the participants (students) in my study, it seems that the academic conditions for success in effective academic learning are not available in Saudi universities.

Based on the previous section, which discussed the challenges of applying EMI to higher education systems, there is a further issue to be addressed with regard to Saudi postgraduate students studying abroad. In 2005, the government launched the King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship Programme to improve the quality of education and the adoption of international academic standards in the hope that this would increase the employability of graduates and develop their academic abilities. Students were subsequently required to write their theses in English in all the subjects at university and were not permitted to write in Arabic. However, English proficiency across the student body remains poor, which causes students enormous difficulty with academic writing. This raises the question of why the government continues to send students abroad and to spend massive amounts of money on the scholarships instead of making efforts to tackle the root of this issue at home. There is a contradiction; it seems that the people

in charge lack any awareness of the major role writing has in academic institutions abroad. It is obvious from the participants' views that writing is not given importance in Saudi Arabia, but in the UK, writing is of major significance.

6.4 Saudi Students' Readiness for Postgraduate Studies

In this section, the attention will be directed towards the effect of Saudi students' readiness, or lack thereof, for postgraduate studies and for understanding the complexity of academic writing. The subsequent sections will address the factors which obstruct students' readiness for academic writing at the postgraduate level, including a lack of prior knowledge, demotivation, low levels of confidence, and negative culture transfer with regard to L2 writing.

6.4.1 *Prior Knowledge of Written English*

Supervisors in the current study reported that the students' lack of prior knowledge of English writing had a negative impact on the quality of their writing as "students with previous knowledge in English performed better in writing researches than those who lacked this knowledge" (Al-Zuoud & Tawalbeh, 2013, p. 156). Furthermore, Gupta (2006) stressed that students' prior knowledge has a high influence on their writing, with Hailikari, Katajavuori and Lindblom-Ylanne (2008) adding that there is a correlation between students' academic achievement and their prior knowledge.

In reference to Saudi students' lack of prior knowledge about written English, Ryhan (2014) highlighted that when this is combined with students' limited English language proficiency, they often feel threatened, confused, and demotivated, which results in their low performance in English language-related tasks. The insufficiencies in the prior knowledge of writing found amongst Saudi students can be attributed to a number of factors. First, there is a lack of courses

focusing on academic writing in Saudi Arabia. Second, as other researchers have maintained (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Al-Ahdal, Alfallaj, Al-Awaied & Al-Hattami, 2014), the teaching methods with regard to writing in the KSA focus only on the final product of the task, with less attention being given to the sentence level and to the importance of linguistic features. Thirdly, Al-Seghayer (2014) highlighted that many English learners from Saudi Arabia are insufficiently exposed to authentic materials aimed at developing their reading and listening skills in particular and motivating their further learning in general. Accordingly, students have a weak prior knowledge in English, which influences their writing abilities. In order to remedy this, Al-Zuoud and Tawalbeh (2013) suggested that it might be useful for these students to join intensive research courses and to participate in field work with other researchers.

6.4.2 Lack of Motivation

The obtained data revealed that most of the supervisors and students highlighted lack of motivation back in Saudi Arabia as another reason why students experience writing difficulties. This is, one could argue, because “the relationship between motivation and writing follows a pattern similar to the one between motivation and learning” (Ballinger, 2009, p. 10). The lack of motivation has numerous possible causes. For instance, it has been noted that students often learn English at the primary level, yet then they neglect further studies and do not employ English sufficiently until their university studies, but only when required to do so. Moreover, the role of the appropriate family environment cannot be neglected with respect to increasing the effectiveness of learning English (Khan, 2011). Additionally, the students’ desire to learn English may be adversely affected by the weak encouragement and support that they receive from their parents, especially those with lower levels of education (Shah et al., 2013; Khand,

2012). The data collected from two students interviewees in particular revealed that their families did not encourage them to write and read, which continues to affect their ability to write academically.

It has also been noted that the low standard of English amongst these students means that they cannot “compete not only with the students of advanced countries but also with their counterparts from other Arab and Asian countries” (Javid, Farooq & Gulzar, 2012, p. 58). In addition, according to the findings of the study, inappropriate teaching methods in English classes in the KSA were mentioned as a major factor contributing to writing problems. It would seem that improving the methods used to teach English within the Saudi education system, particularly with regard to writing, might boost students’ motivation; good teaching can trigger the motivation to study, starting an almost self-perpetuating cycle. In this cycle, the increasing self-confidence based on improved language skills fuels motivation for further studies, which subsequently leads to an additional improvement of language skills and an ensuing rise in a learner’s confidence to use the language (Al-Buainain, 2007).

6.4.3 Lack of Self-Confidence

Findings derived from the data analysis demonstrated that self-confidence is another source of difficulty for students in their academic writing. Many studies have examined the relationship between self-confidence and writing ability in an academic setting (Ahmed, 2011; Albertson, 2006; Ankawi, 2015; Sasaki, 2004; Tyson, 1997); the findings of this research revealed that there are strong links between the two. The lack of self-confidence may be related to the absence of writing practice in the education system, a factor noted by Tahaineh (2010) and Alhaysony (2012), who emphasised that Saudi students do not practise writing in

English sufficiently, which limits how far this learning can progress. Second, the low level of target language proficiency has also affected students' writing abilities, which results in feelings of disappointment when students encounter difficulties while composing their assignments or theses. On a related note, Ansari (2012) highlighted that over 50% of Saudi learners were incapable of writing in English. Third, the education system in the KSA does not generally encourage students to be self-confident, with teaching techniques based on creating passive receivers for knowledge rather than encouraging interaction and open discussion. Fourth, Saudi students exist in a culture of dependence, whether this be parents, siblings, or teachers; this is apparent in their studies, as students largely depend on lecturers, leading to a lack of independence in studying across the Saudi culture. The current study's findings revealed that there is a relationship between lack of confidence amongst students and their previous learning experiences, which further impacts negatively on their ability to write academically. As a result, L2 learners can benefit considerably from being given instructions regarding how to improve their writing and the ability to convey their ideas in a written form (Shah et al., 2011).

In short, the findings of the current study suggested that teaching English within a Saudi context may not be conducive to the effective learning of English which is likely to negatively affect students' success during academic studies abroad. As a consequence, those responsible for education policy should be aware of these concerns and be proactive in adapting and improving the curriculum according to students' needs and interests. This should improve students' achievement in English language proficiency "as it is a prerequisite and a demand of life in 21 century" (Gholami et al., 2012, p.1422). More specifically, "teachers

need to see writing as a useful intellectual and social tool” rather than a skill that they need to acquire to simply progress (Ballinger, 2009, p. 134).

6.4.4 Negative Cultural Transfer on L2 Writing

The transfer of some cultural elements could have an adverse impact on Saudi students' writing ability. In the current study, culture transfer can be taken to mean a transfer of cultural elements, such as the features of writing, ways of thinking, attitudes, and social knowledge that students use to explain their experience. A number of studies have examined the impact of culture transfer on L2 writing for Arab students (Abu Rass, 2011; Al-Khatib, 2001; Dweik, 2000; Feghali, 1997; Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000). For instance, Abu Rass (2011) reported the impact of Arab culture on the English writing of students in terms of a tendency towards assertion, group orientation, and exaggeration, which conflicts with the English language tradition.

This negative transfer of some cultural elements into L2 writing may be due to the following reasons; first, low proficiency in L2 may cause students to transfer L1 strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies) unsuccessfully when writing in L2 (Karim & Nassaji, 2013). Second, Arab students “usually think and prepare their ideas in their native language and then translate them into English”, which can cause weaknesses in their writing (Khuwaileh & Shoumali, 2000, p. 174). This view corresponded with the findings of the current study, as some students reported that they used translation as a compensation strategy, which causes problems with their writing style in English as they deploy the wrong word in an English context or the grammar is adopted incorrectly.

Third, Arab students, including Saudi students, have reported negative attitudes towards the complexity of foreign language writing. This is because the western education system expects writers “to reflect their voice through their judgements, display their knowledge, and give their opinions” (Shukri, 2014, p. 197). On the other hand, Saudi students have been brought up within an educational culture which is largely based on pedagogy where the lecturer is the sole source of knowledge, and students receive this knowledge with almost no opportunity to express their own views directly. As a result, students may only have had experience of memorising information in order to pass exams rather than being encouraged to ask questions and criticise arguments. Shukri (2014) asserted that students in the KSA and neighbouring countries do not seek out knowledge, but rather accept what they are taught in the classroom as the whole and unshakable truth (Shukri, 2014, p. 195). Accordingly, their writing may “rely heavily on abstract and passive constructions that obscure the direct presentation of their ideas” (Al-Zubaidi & Recharads, 2010, p. 114).

Fourth, Saudi students find it difficult to speak about certain aspects of western culture, as they often lack the background knowledge of these topics, which influences the quality and process of their writing. Furthermore, particularly difficult topics may generate fewer ideas about their topic, which may make the writing process more difficult for students. In the same vein, Zhang (2004) added that the topic of the writing will influence the writer in making decisions, will contextualize how they choose to write and will shape their opinion and position, all of which are then projected onto the writing. Further, the current study indicated a relationship between lack of prior knowledge and writing difficulties amongst students.

As mentioned above, regarding the challenges of culture transfer and its negative effect on the writing of Saudi language students, the question that arises is how these challenges can be addressed. One could argue that the Ministry of Education needs to consider this issue in Saudi and UK universities and formulate a solution; this would involve the Ministry of Education in the KSA compiling and disseminating information regarding the requirements of research students in the UK, as well as cultural factors which students should be aware of before they start their academic studies in the UK. Further, UK universities need to be aware of the level of English language competency with regard to overseas students, as well as their cultural and academic norms and preferred methods of learning (Tanveer, 2007). These measures would optimise the comfort and performance of international students in an unfamiliar academic setting and raise awareness amongst the students as to what is expected of them once they begin their studies overseas (Tanveer, 2007). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia needs to be aware of the need to establish academic preparation for students before they commence studying abroad. One of the main components of this preparation to be done in Saudi Arabia is constructing a course to teach students the linguistic differences between the Arabic and the English languages, particularly the differences pertaining to written English.

It would also be pertinent to provide students with more exposure to writing topics from the culture of the target language, as well as providing students with constructive feedback and the criteria of their assessment, and giving students the opportunity to receive peer feedback in order to create cooperation between them. Fageeh (2011) asserted that the Saudi education system, as it relates to EFL, would be well advised to provide cultural information alongside linguistic information so that the learner is fully informed of the grammatical and social rules

of living in the host nation; this eases communication with native speakers, which will both aid students academically and lessen the isolation often felt by overseas students. The participants of the current study shared the same opinions and recommended that students should have an academic preparation programme before they study abroad to help them to cope with the challenges of academic studies in the host countries.

Following on from this discussion of transnational cultural gaps, the following section will focus on the Saudi education system in particular to provide some clarity as to the impact of previous educational environments on students studying overseas and their writing ability.

6.5 The Quality of the Education System in Saudi Arabia, with Regard to Students' Writing Abilities

In this section, the focus will be on the relative weaknesses in the Saudi education system and its impact upon students' writing abilities.

6.5.1 *Students Previous Learning Experience*

Findings derived from the data revealed that the students' previous education histories can be considered a reason for the difficulties they face in their academic writing. One of the main features of the education system at both the pre-university and university level is the issue of memorisation; students are encouraged to memorise what they have learnt instead of being stimulated to think critically. Freire (1970) termed this the 'banking model of education', a phenomenon that can be explained as follows:

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more

they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 73).

Culturally, students in Saudi Arabia who have the ability to memorise a lot of information are considered extremely talented students, despite their lack of deeper understanding. A variety of studies previously conducted in Saudi Arabia mirror the findings of the current study, suggesting that Saudi schools and teachers often focus on repetition and memorisation (Hazmi, 2006; Grami, 2010; Khan, 2011).

My personal experience of the Saudi context indicated that the students' habit of memorising information stems from the exam-oriented nature of the Saudi educational system, which is centred upon learning by rote, thus reinforcing memorisation. The questions these exams pose require students to recall information that they have learnt during the course of different educational stages. As one would expect, the aim of students becomes only to pass the exam and get a high score, rather than attempting to gain a thorough understanding. Indeed, the current study reveals that students are encouraged to memorise information to pass exams with a high score, with little time dedicated to improving their thinking skills and creative capacity. Grami (2010), building on research by Zaid (1993), reported that Saudi students are more interested in getting high grades than in learning the target language, as they are encouraged to memorise passages with little comprehension of lexical items and grammatical rules. Various studies indicated that many Saudi universities taught traditional and outdated syllabuses via textbooks, which encouraged students to memorise rather than understand the target language (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Bersamina, 2009; Khan, 2011).

In light of the factors explored above, specialists in the field of education in the KSA need to improve the methods of students' assessment by steering away from memorising information to pass exams without any educational diversity whilst moving towards the development of critical thinking and reasoning skills. This issue needs urgent attention given that the current system of education puts a lot of strain on students, which leads them to become demotivated as learners.

6.5.2 *The Insufficient Practice of Writing*

Data analysis has revealed that the majority of the students reported the lack of writing practice in L1 and L2 in the KSA as one of the main reasons for their writing difficulties. Fageeh (2014) stated that writing represents a language skill that is of particular importance in the process of learning and teaching a language, insofar as English learners are mostly tested in a written form. Hence, the writing skills can to some degree constitute proof that the learner has acquired a higher level of proficiency in the target language. The lack of writing practice can be attributed to a number of factors, not least the marginalisation of writing skills in the Saudi education system, even in Arabic, beginning from the early stages of education. In Saudi schools, the teaching of Arabic composition does not focus on the set of strategies that are commonly utilised by writers, such as the idea of prewriting, comprehensive planning, and using examples to substantiate one's opinions (Fageeh, 2003). Furthermore, the focus on teaching writing in Arabic is at the sentence level, prioritising the final product and its linguistic features (Saba, 2013); this same practice is observed in English language writing classes. Second, Al-Hazmi (2006) highlighted that EFL writing in the Arab world suffers from traditional teaching, which renders it "abstracted, depersonalized and product oriented" (p. 35). This contributes to a lack of opportunities for the students to think critically and express their views through

their own writing. In this regard, Saba (2013) noted that “critical thinking is not only absent in the teaching of English writing in the KSA, but also in the teaching of Arabic writing” (p. 49).

In order to improve students’ writing abilities, supervisors and students in the current study both agreed that more frequent practice in writing skills is the best way to develop students’ ability. Saudi postgraduate students reported that they had not practised writing as much as is expected of them at the university stage, as they were rarely asked to write long passages or essays during their undergraduate education. Additionally, supervisors reported that they encourage students to do as much writing practice as possible, as they believe this provides “a real reason for the practice to be meaningful for the students” (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Gurel, 2010, p. 138). Further, Lagan (2000) noted that “because writing is a skill, it makes sense that the more you practice writing, the better you will write” (p. 14). One effective way of encouraging the practice of writing is to ask students to write several drafts of their dissertation in the early stages of a doctoral research programme.

6.5.3 Deficiencies in Reading Habits

Saudi postgraduate students have highlighted that the lack of reading practice in L1 and L2 is a significant contributing factor towards their difficulty with academic writing.

The lack of reading as a habit may be related to the Saudi culture, in which there is little encouragement of wide reading habits across the life of the student, including at school, university, and home, where children are not encouraged to read for pleasure from an early age. Additionally, students in some universities, especially in the small cities in the KSA, do not utilise library facilities due to the

lack of well-equipped libraries with regard to modern resources, especially English resources, as well as a lack of consistent online access. Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman (2011) added that in the KSA, "Public libraries tend to be located in the cities and most students have limited access to them, which prevents students from easily accessing reading materials" (p. 6). Furthermore, students in the current study revealed that their lack of reading stemmed primarily from the inadequate nature of traditional teaching methods pertaining to reading in general, and English reading in particular, across all education stages. On a related note, Fageeh (2003) highlighted that "reading is not emphasised or used as a source of knowledge, rather, it is used as a drill of decoding and memorization, with no room for a wide range of reading" (p. 44-45).

In relation to the current study, Saudi postgraduate students' lack of reading habit was one of the factors that caused problems with their English academic writing; thus, supervisors and students suggested that reading theses and scholarly articles can assist in developing students' academic writing. Various studies in the existing related literature have highlighted the advantages of reading academic sources, such as theses and scholarly articles, in order to improve EFL students' English academic writing (Buckingham, 2008; Ankawi, 2015; Keong & Mussa, 2015). Supervisors mentioned that they provide their students with sample theses as a guide to the required academic style so that students can see how to structure arguments, how to discuss the results, and how to link effectively between ideas. Moreover, students confirmed that these theses are often relevant to their area of study and provide a good example of academic written English. The second essential written source utilised is the reading of scholarly articles, which can assist students in improving their writing abilities. This was also noted by Keong and Mussa (2015), who found that students believed in the

usefulness of this method, insofar as reading academic articles helped them to develop further the level of their academic writing.

The symbiotic relationship between writing and reading skills has been confirmed by several studies found in the literature (Alkhaldeh, 2011; Al-Mansour & Al-Shorman, 2014; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Tsai, 2006; Zamel, 1992). This link between reading and writing is supported by the findings of the current study, which suggested that reading has a significant impact on improving students writing. This shows consistent support for the claim that reading improves writing.

Therefore, those designing the curriculum of EFL materials in the KSA need to give students the opportunity to gain exposure to a variety of authentic English texts if their reading skills are to improve; this will eventually contribute to improvements in their writing abilities, too. Furthermore, designers in the field of devising the English language teaching syllabus must pay more attention to the relationship between writing and reading skills and how they affect each other; ideally, an environment should be fostered in which “educators are invited to teach reading and writing together within a contextual framework” (Alkhaldeh, 2011, p. 353).

6.5.4 *The Absence of Writing Genre*

The majority of participating students reported that the methods employed in the EAP writing syllabus at universities and EFL at schools were mostly based on memorising grammar rules and fitting them into whichever context they were needed for. Moreover, students in the current study added that they had not been adequately trained to identify and practise a variety of EFL writing types. Teaching EFL writing by focusing on grammar rules “overshadows the nature of writing as a communication skill where grammar is one of many resources that

writers resort to in order to enrich their communicative intent” (Ezz & Al-Mudibry, 2014, p. 83).

Moreover, a focus on grammar rules prevents students from gaining experience of the major requirements of academic writing, such as planning, generating ideas, and setting objectives for their essays. However, it should be kept in mind that teaching grammar rules is a fundamental element in the teaching of proper writing and cannot be neglected. In this regard, Weigle (2002) stressed that writing is not just a product of the individual, but is a social and cultural act, and so learners must be taught how to work with the language effectively. It could be argued, then, that grammatical rules are best taught gradually, in association with the teaching and exploration of the conventions of the writing genre.

The observed ineffectiveness of EFL writing classes in the KSA (Al-Seghayer, 2015; Ansari, 2012) may be due in part to the neglect of other types of writing, such as the genre approach, as it is likely that the teachers themselves do not have a high level of knowledge regarding how to structure different genres of EFL writing. This contributes to the creation of an academic environment in which students lack confidence in their writing and become afraid to make mistakes, rather than celebrating creative writing tasks. The teaching practice of Saudi English teachers is influenced by their own educational experiences, which may, in turn, be applied to their students. In this regard, Hyland, (2003) highlighted that “it is necessary to identify the ways writing is used to create knowledge in potentially different ways in different disciplines” (p. 191).

6.5.5 Competitive Learning Environment

The data analysis also revealed that the lack of cooperation between students is considered one of the socio-cultural reasons that cause students difficulties in their academic writing. The majority of students in the current study were extremely critical of the assessment methods, as the education system in the KSA, whether at the pre-university stage or at the university stage, does not encourage cooperative learning or interaction between students. In addition, parents do not encourage their children to share ideas and assignments with others, as they fear this will lead to other children getting higher scores than their own. This is largely because the classroom environment in Saudi higher and further education categorises student achievement based on competition: those that get high scores in exams are considered the best students. Moreover, Mansour and Alhodithy (2007) found in their study that contemporary educational settings in Saudi Arabia do not offer space for the principles and methodologies of cooperative learning. Accordingly, students are afraid that they are being copied by others, resulting in an academic culture of jealousy, mistrust, and arrogance and a reluctance to share knowledge with others. Furthermore, this competitive environment results in a lack of peer feedback within this environment, creating pressure and “making students work harder to be the best among other students” (Alqahtani, 2011, p. 170).

Therefore, I believe that decision makers and the academic authorities should make it their responsibility to modify the assessment methods and techniques practised in these academic institutions in order to foster an environment more conducive to learning. For instance, peer-assessment “if thoughtfully implemented, can facilitate students’ development of various learning and life skills, such as learner responsibility, metacognitive strategies, evaluation skills,

and a deeper approach to learning” (Mok, 2010, p. 231). Furthermore, lecturers and teachers must update their knowledge regarding assessment procedures and try to implement various methods when assessing their students.

6.5.6 *The Quality of EFL Teacher-Preparation Programmes in Saudi*

Arabia

It is apparent from the obtained data that the majority of Saudi postgraduate students believe their poor English proficiency is related to the ineffective way in which the English language is taught, as well as to the weak performance of Saudi English language teachers. In other words, “It is publicly acknowledged that the proficiency level of the majority of Saudi Arabia’s English teachers is insufficient to the degree that they barely understand the materials that they are attempting to teach to students” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 143). Additionally, it has been frequently reported that the curriculum taught in Saudi universities is outdated, overly traditional, and textbook-based, teaching the students merely to memorise rather than to understand the target language (Bersamina, 2009; Hazmi, 2006; Khan, 2011; Zughoul, 1987).

The inadequacy of Saudi English language teachers in preparation programmes may be due to the teaching methods in English departments in most of Saudi colleges and universities, having adopted a teacher-centred approach rather than learning-centred methods (Alqahtani, 2011). In addition, Al-Hazmi (2003) suggested that the problem lies in the fact that “students take only one course on EFL teaching methodology, which is not enough for the diverse needs of EFL teachers” (pp. 341-342). It is also true that in English departments, the methods used to teach writing skills in particular do not differ much from those employed at intermediate and secondary schools; the methods focus only on the final

production of the task of writing, including grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, elements which, while important, should not be taught in lieu of exam-related content. Students learning via these methods are not improving their language skills but, rather are memorising passages without forming an understanding of the content (Grami, 2010; Zaid, 1993). Furthermore, the EFL writing curriculum is not entirely clear in Saudi colleges and universities as, due to the traditional methods used in these departments, Saudi English teachers do not have the opportunity to learn and practise the various EFL writing genres, such as narrative, argumentative, descriptive, and expository.

It has also been noted that Saudi English teachers, during their study at a college or a university, do not practise an understanding of the theoretical background pertaining to the main factors that affect second-language learning, such as motivation, attitude, and aptitude (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 146). It has also been argued that the qualifications, experience, and training of the faculty members may contribute less than might be expected (Khan, 2011). This is because these staff members do not have any specialised knowledge or qualifications in teaching writing skills, nor have they had teaching experience in the four language skills. Furthermore, there is often a lack of acknowledgement of the needs of Saudi students and their potential weakness in learning a second language due to their different teaching methods. Accordingly, when Saudi English teachers graduate, they are often “inadequately trained to prepare students to be good English learners”(Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 143). This view has also been supported by the work of a number of researchers, who revealed that they were not satisfied with the effectiveness of the preparation programme in Saudi Arabia for English teachers. The foregoing led to an urgent demand for such training and professional development for Saudi English teachers (Al-Harbi,

2006; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Alshuaifan, 2009; Zohairy, 2012). The Ministry of Education in the KSA then organised in-service teacher education through cooperation with the British Council and the U.S. Embassy, which outlined modern teaching methods for Saudi English teachers. This training, however, was not compulsory and was of relatively short duration (Al-Hazmi, 2003). Therefore, if they wish to keep up with the modern educational trends, Saudi English teachers should participate in training programmes aimed at continuous professional development. This type of development is necessary even for the most experienced teachers (Khan, 2011).

It is key, then, that teachers in the KSA who are attempting to prepare students for writing English under an academic framework understand their materials and the teaching techniques that are most conducive to not merely teaching vocabulary, but to preparing the students linguistically and socially for academic life in an English-speaking country. The following section will identify and discuss the needs of students pursuing overseas tuition, a factor closely related to the above, as teachers must understand students' needs if they are to equip them effectively. It will also present the drawbacks of inadequately preparing students for this transition.

6.6 The Academic Preparation Needs of Postgraduate Students in Saudi Arabia

This section aims to discuss the effect of Saudi students' lack of academic preparation in advance of their pursuit of postgraduate studies abroad. Furthermore, the section illustrates the effectiveness of the EAP courses in the UK. For example, all of the supervisors and students in the current study reported that a lack of academic preparation in the KSA is one of the main reasons Saudi

postgraduate students encounter difficulties with academic writing. On the one hand, some Saudi students mentioned that they had attended some sort of English language course or programme provided within the Saudi education system, while others had attended English courses in private institutions such as the British Council. Furthermore, a few students reported that they had taken language proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, the scores of which can be sufficient for admission to postgraduate programmes in the UK.

Despite this, a number of students claimed that these English language courses and texts are inadequate to meet the low requirements of postgraduate studies in the UK. Alqahtani (2011) noted that "students' previous knowledge of English in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had not significantly helped them to survive and to achieve success in their transition to the British learning environment"(p. 188). In addition, he found that students often had weak writing and reading skills, and an inadequate vocabulary.

From my familiarity with Saudi higher education systems, I can confirm that the majority of universities do not offer courses which teach academic writing in L2 at the undergraduate and postgraduate stage. As a result, postgraduate students struggle significantly when they are required to write academically in L2. This is largely because "success at the postgraduate level depends on the students' ability to access, evaluate, and synthesize the words, ideas, and opinions of others in order to develop their own academic voice" (Bristol Business School, 2006, cited in Al Fadda 2012, p. 124). The data collected during the current study suggested the need for academic preparation amongst Saudi students in the KSA, with a focus on EAP to help students with their L2 academic skills, particularly those related to writing. This preparation was considered important and necessary by all of the interviewed supervisors and students.

The lack of academic preparation in the KSA has been attributed by some to the lack of qualified teachers. The argument for this is twofold: the first point relates to the fact that teaching of the English language in the pre-service programme focuses mainly on the literature regarding applied linguistics. This view is supported by the work of Al-Seghayer (2014), who cited “courses prescribed by the Department of English, including skill-building curriculum, general linguistics courses, applied linguistics courses, and English literature courses” (p. 21). Secondly, the majority of the teaching staff in the in-service programme are foreign teachers who have obtained a high level of certification; however, it has been argued that this “background and training does not contribute a lot” as it does not meet the actual needs of the students or addresses the challenges that Saudi students face in their learning (Khan, 2011, p. 70). Therefore, the long-term plan should involve hiring more Saudi lecturers to work at the in-service teaching programmes in the KSA, as well as enforcing effective teaching methods and a mindful curriculum.

On the other hand, some students reported in the interviews that they were not satisfied with the EAP courses in the UK, arguing that these writing classes did not assist them in learning the writing skills required in their specific disciplines. The EAP courses, it has been argued, are generic, as they are usually discipline-free, with little provision made to incorporate “discipline-specific discourse or terminologies” (Al-Badwawi, 2011, p. 186).

Moreover, there is a debate surrounding the pedagogies and materials used in EAP courses (Zaid & Alamir, 2010). Many studies confirm that EAP courses do not necessarily lead to an improvement in writing proficiency (e.g. Green & Weir, 2003; Hu, 2007, Storch & Tapper, 2009). The results of these studies indicated that the curriculum of EAP courses did not lead to an increase in students’

capacity to write at a university level, to solve difficulties when using academic vocabulary, to structure arguments, or to make use of precise language when writing. Therefore, EAP instructors and teachers in the UK should take into consideration the challenges of Saudi postgraduate students in terms of language and culture; only then will these students acquire an acceptable level of English proficiency to succeed in their academic endeavours (Alqahtani, 2011; Zaid & Alamir, 2010).

It is clear, then, that there needs to be a shift in the processes by which Saudi EFL teachers are trained and hired and in the way they teach if these classes are to become more effective at meeting the students' needs. Part of these improvements, and the focus of the following section, is creating a communicative relationship between students and supervisors, in which the students feel comfortable expressing their needs and ideas.

6.7 The Student and Supervisor Relationship and Expectations

This section will assess the role and the responsibilities of the supervisors towards their students and examine how this relationship affects the development of student writing.

The relationship between students and their supervisor may also be one of the reasons for the difficulties in academic writing faced by Saudi postgraduate students. The experience of doing a postgraduate degree in a foreign country and writing a thesis in another language is extremely challenging for many Saudi students, who confess that they had expected something quite different from the role of their supervisor. On this matter, Roberts (2005) argued that the overseas postgraduate students faced challenges in their relationship with their supervisors, as their expectations of regular support, monitoring and direction, do

not always materialize; doctoral and master's degree research requires self-motivation, which is different from the home educational culture of overseas students.

Additionally, some supervisors believe that they should not interfere heavily with doctoral dissertations, as it should be the student's original work, and they believe that students can improve through practising on their own. These supervisors fulfill their role by adding notes and question marks in the margins and by asking the students to revise their work once again to clarify the meaning rather than making corrections in the text i.e. providing correct words, adding, deleting or correcting sentences in the text (Gurel, 2010). The findings of this study also indicated that, in the UK, the expectations of a supervisor of a Saudi or overseas postgraduate student is to help clarify their argument, criticism, and discussion. In contrast, Saudi postgraduate students, due to their educational culture, expect that the role of the supervisor is similar to that of a schoolteacher, in that they will be told exactly what they should do without expressing their own views or questioning their supervisors. This is due to the academic culture of learners in Arab countries, "do not train them to be critical thinkers and discover their own point of view or own voice; three important elements in helping students to become independent researchers and writers" (Azman et al., 2014, p. 153). Accordingly, this can contribute to the students' inability to communicate effectively in English with their supervisors (Aldoukalee, 2014). Therefore, Moses (1992) emphasised that students need to process various forms of guidance during their research, including during collecting and analysing the data, during writing and structuring their theses. This is because students experience a high level of difficulty during their research process as some are not familiar with the research topic and lack knowledge relating to research methodologies (Afferro

Ismail et al. 2015). In relation to the current study, Saudi students are often unsatisfied with the feedback provided by their supervisors when writing their dissertation, as they require more in-depth advice.

Thus, there is a need for a systematic pedagogical approach to supervision where these international students can be socialised into academic genres through supervisory feedback (Azman et al., 2014). Similarly, Wang and Li (2008) believed that supervisors should employ a systematic approach in order to highlight the problems in research writing, particularly with international students who encounter difficulties in writing their thesis in English: “This is due to the fact that PhD students are not homogenous, but highly diverse in terms of academic ability, personality attributes, motivation and attitude” (Afferro Ismail et al., 2015, p. 14). In the current study, all of the participating Saudi postgraduate students had a different background to that of their supervisor in the UK, which may render the interaction between students and their supervisors problematic and less productive.

The aforementioned issue implies that Arab learners need more assistance with regular writing experiences and structured feedback, along with continual and effective communication with their supervisors (Azman et al., 2014). Creating a good relationship between supervisor and students will, then, contribute towards the successful completion of their project.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the main findings of the current study, which have been drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis. It considered academic writing as a demanding enterprise for Saudi students at the tertiary stage, problematising the adoption of EMI in higher educational institutions in

Saudi universities, the readiness of Saudi students for academic writing at a postgraduate level, the impact of previous educational environments in Saudi Arabia on students studying overseas, the effect of the lack of academic preparation in advance on the pursuit of postgraduate students' studies abroad and supervisors and students' responsibilities, relationships and how these affect the development of student writing.

These findings attempt to describe the complexities associated with students' academic writing in an EFL context, and the subsequent discussions have demonstrated an understanding of these complexities. This process is crucial in terms of formulating solutions for improving students' writing skills. The next chapter will go on to describe this process and its results in more detail.

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Contributions and Implications

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the study based on the research questions, followed by a presentation of the theoretical and pedagogical contribution to knowledge and the consequent implications for policy makers. There is also an assessment of how to overcome the difficulties of academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students. Lastly, suggestions for further research and a retroactive reflection on my PhD research journey are provided.

7.2 Summary of the Research Findings

The primary aim of this study is to investigate issues surrounding academic writing amongst Saudi postgraduate students studying in UK universities. The study was an investigation of the perception of Saudi students and supervisors regarding the difficulties students face in writing their theses.

The findings pertinent to questions one and two revealed that Saudi postgraduate students often encounter difficulties when attempting to find the appropriate words and use them in context when writing to express their views. They also lacked sufficient vocabulary to express their ideas coherently or to distinguish between formal and informal words in their writing. Furthermore, the findings indicated that avoiding plagiarism and paraphrasing when writing are difficult tasks for a number of students. Further, the findings showed that students often face difficulties when attempting to present a clear progression of ideas and when making coherent links between these ideas within sentences and paragraphs to create a coherent text. The students also noted difficulties when attempting to

use cohesive devices properly, as well as when constructing logical, solid arguments and organising them in their English language writing. In addition, the majority of the participants highlighted that demonstrating critical thinking skills in their academic writing was often challenging, as were providing in-depth explanations and writing with clarity.

In addition, the participants of the current study highlighted that the difficulties could be attributed to a number of factors; these included those related to low levels of English proficiency, a lack of previous knowledge on the topic and a lack of motivation. Other factors were largely related to instruction; for instance, a lack of writing practice in L1 and L2, a lack of previous learning experience in the KSA, ineffective feedback from supervisors, and a lack of academic preparation at the undergraduate stage. Socio-cultural elements are also factored in when addressing academic writing difficulties, including the negative transfer of L1 in L2 writing, a lack of cooperation between students, and a lack of regular reading habits in L1 and L2.

In reference to the above findings, the participants were asked about their views on potential strategies for students to overcome academic writing difficulties. A number of strategies were proposed which could assist Saudi students in improving their level of academic writing. One of the suggested remedies was to look for other exemplary PhD theses and journal articles in order to alleviate some of the stress of academic writing and aid with the fundamentals. In addition, students were advised to practise writing and reading frequently in order to learn the paragraph structure, how to organise their ideas, and how to construct a logical argument, as well as to improve their familiarity with the language, vocabulary, and critical style of academic papers.

With reference to the findings pertinent to research question three, participants indicated that the lack of academic preparation in the KSA had a negative influence on the proficiency of Saudi postgraduate students in their English academic writing, resulting in disparity between the expectation placed on students in postgraduate studies in the UK and the actual results achieved by Saudi students. In addition, some of the students commented that the transition to a different education system required students in their postgraduate level to have a much higher level of critical thinking, depth of explanation, and overall clarity when writing, all of which were considered challenging for them. A number of students pointed out that understanding the specific features expected when writing a thesis as a genre, and the particular requirements of the discipline, created some confusion for them. This may be related to the lack of teaching of genre writing in L2. Furthermore, students were asked about how often they had encountered characteristics related to the teaching of L2 writing during EAP courses in academic writing in the UK. The findings revealed that EAP courses often aided students in learning writing techniques by utilising a variety of materials, summarising ideas from the text, and planning and collecting ideas about many topics. On the other hand, other aspects, such as writing critically, writing in various genres, and structuring assignments, were recorded as being less developed skills relating to writing education according to students enrolled in EAP courses for academic writing in the UK.

7.3 Theoretical and Research Contributions of the Study

First, at the level of educational research, the current study makes a significant contribution towards filling the gap in the academic preparation programmes offered to postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia; this study has explored the ineffectiveness of the current offering of these programmes, as this issue has been largely neglected by previous studies. Postgraduate students sent abroad for study by the Saudi government are considered to be the elite, and thus, the government expects a return on the national human capital. It is perhaps then surprising that these Saudi postgraduate students are rarely considered in the literature with regard to their difficulties while studying abroad. Al-Zahrani (2016) addressed this issue by stating the following:

The banking method of knowledge transfer had not allowed Saudi students to engage deeply and meaningfully with English in the simulated environment that is the classroom. Thus they could not go on to apply knowledge in the real world, particularly in a community populated by native speakers of English (pp. 119-120).

Therefore, the current study has attempted to provide useful suggestions conducive to effective academic preparation for postgraduate students in the KSA, which could help students to cope with new academic environments. In the words of Jackson, "Unrealistic expectations can lead to disappointments and disillusionment on stays abroad" (Jackson, 2008, p. 223).

Further, from a methodological point of view, this study adopted a sequential mixed methods research design combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods, a design which has not been extensively used in Saudi Arabia; the findings will serve as an example for further studies in education, as this field is still underexplored in Saudi Arabian literature. In addition, the current study utilises a mixed methods research in a triangular technique, where the researcher

employs three independent research methods (a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis) to explore the chosen phenomenon. Using ten samples of students' written feedback from their supervisors as a complementary method to support the findings of the questionnaire and interviews proved valuable in exploring the actual difficulties that students face in their English academic writing and provided an in-depth understanding of these difficulties, which was particularly useful when attempting to formulate solutions.

It is also true that though there have been many studies dealing with writing difficulties for Saudi students, including linguistic problems, such as grammar and spelling (Al-Mansour, 2015; Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Kairy, 2013; Ankawi, 2015), students still reported numerous other writing difficulties. Therefore, conducting this research would make a significant contribution to the global corpus of research that focuses on the difficulties of English academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students. These writing difficulties encompass more than just language difficulties, as writing at a high academic level has a larger focus on criticality, arguing, and organisation.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, a number of difficulties that Saudi postgraduates face in their academic writing have been identified, and it has been found that these difficulties have a number of underlying causes. Therefore, I have formulated a theoretical model as a contribution to knowledge in the field in order to assist Saudi postgraduate students in their English academic writing. It should be noted that this theoretical model is suggested only as a guideline, and it does not imply a fixed line of action (Figure 7.1).

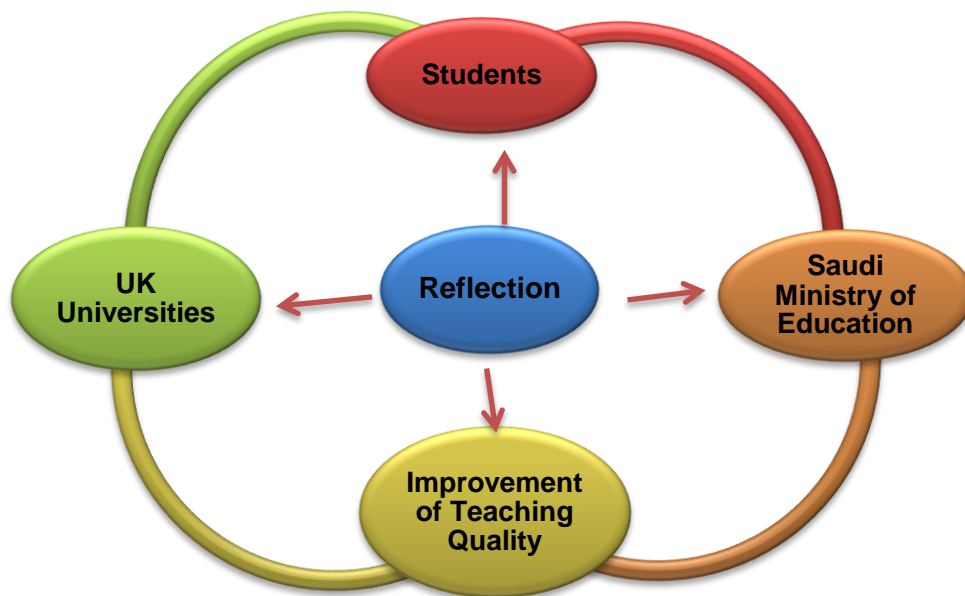


Figure 7.1: Proposed Model to Assist Saudi Postgraduate Students in their English Academic Writing

The proposed model includes four main focus points: the Saudi ministry of education, improvement of teaching quality (including lectures at university and pre-service English teacher education) universities in the UK and students. Through an assessment of these factors, it becomes clear that writing skills are not only about language, but instead describe a process of several stages until one reaches the final stage of composing a text. According to Bukta (2013), “The ability to write is not [...] innate. Compared to listening and speaking, people need to reach a certain level of cognitive development before they can acquire writing skills (p. 18). As for writing academically in particular, this is linked to the ability to develop various types of skills, for instance, higher order thinking skills, which include critical thinking, communication, and research skills (Scarcella, 2003). To make this process a success, there should be continual co-operation between these elements to assist students in their writing abilities. The following section presents the main elements of the proposed model in more details.

7.3.1 Saudi Ministry of Education

Based on the findings of the study, the lack of academic preparation provided for Saudi students may be the root cause of many of the reported difficulties during studying abroad, particularly difficulties in academic writing. Most of the students, prior to travelling abroad, attend an orientation or preparation week organised by the Ministry of Education. The focus of this event is to provide the students with information regarding medical issues, housing, student visas, banking, travel, driving, university accreditation, safety tips, and diploma authentication. However, this preparation does not have a section devoted to the academic aspects of studying abroad.

Therefore, Saudi postgraduate students who are aiming to study abroad should first undergo academic preparation in the KSA, which according to the participants' suggestions should last a year at the very least. The content of the academic preparation should also consider cultural elements "to raise participants' awareness of cultural issues and social interactions in the target country" (Jin, 1992, p. 432). Moreover, the learning environment for the academic preparation needs to be multifaceted in order to provide effective preparation for students. These elements may include the following: clear objectives, a variety of assessment methods, a focus on independence, interactive elements, and student/teacher interaction, all of which can have a significant impact on outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002).

This academic preparation needs to be conducted by highly qualified specialists who can cope with students' weaknesses and needs, and who should "reconsider their different roles including the affective ones and shouldn't confine their roles solely to providing information" (Al-Zubaidi, 2012, p. 44). Based on the findings

of the study, the unfamiliarity overseas students have, regarding the academic environment of the UK can often obstruct their academic success. Therefore, workshops and lectures need to be established to assist students in understanding the differences between the academic culture of the UK and that of the KSA before beginning their studies abroad. For instance, these workshops could bring in guest speakers, such as professors, experts in the field of education and/or researchers to “discuss British academic culture” (Jin, 1992, p. 432). Additionally, institutions could invite Saudi students who have studied abroad to visit and talk about their experience in studying in the UK; this would provide a firsthand account of the differences in teaching methods between the two cultures and compare these accounts with previous experiences and current expectations.

Based on the findings of the current study, the lack of regular and effective reading habits, as well as of writing practice, may be considered one of the main factors underlying academic writing difficulties for Saudi postgraduate students. Therefore, it has been argued that writing and reading skills should not be taught together during academic preparation, as reading input affects the development of writing, and writing input affects the development of reading abilities (Al-Saadat, 2004). Students need to be encouraged to read broadly to widen their knowledge, which helps them to acquire various ideas and, subsequently, improve their writing abilities. To aid students in their second language academic writing, the instructors should allow students to be exposed to a variety of rich writing contexts in academic settings and encourage them to practise writing in various academic genres (Atkinson, 1993).

Furthermore, the study findings revealed that universities and schools in the KSA teach writing in L1 and L2 according to the product-oriented approach, where the

focus is on the final product of the written text, and little attention is given to the prewriting stage, including the planning, drafting, sharing, or to the postwriting stage, which includes revising written products (Badger & White, 2000; Leung, 2008). In the feedback from teachers who used this approach, “Much emphasis was placed on the correctness of sentence structures and linguistic form” (Leung, 2008, p. 29); accordingly, writing abilities amongst these students did not improve, as this approach failed to address the synthetic and analytical skills of the learners (Leung, 2008; Robertson, 2008).

To improve students’ writing skills and help them to write academically, teaching methods need to shift to a process-oriented approach that “provides effective instruction in what is often called the ‘prewriting stage’ of the composing process” (Leung, 2008, p. 24); the prewriting stage generally consists of brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing (Yan, 2005). The role of the teacher in this approach is that of a facilitator to guide and provide feedback during these stages, though they should not prioritise ‘correctness’. While it has been argued that students should receive constructed feedback from their teachers during all stages of the writing process, emphasis on the final product comes only towards the very end of the writing process. Moreover, Leung (2008) argued that in order to maintain students’ attention and encourage them to produce their best work, “students must be allowed to work independently and explore their own interests, rather than being forced to write traditionally and with a high level of formality” (pp. 28-29).

Based on the findings of the current study, English proficiency amongst students is one of the primary reasons for their difficulties in academic writing, and thus academic preparation should help students to "be ready to meet the minimum requirements in dealing with the tasks for completing their PhD without having

language problems” (Son & Park, 2014, p. 9). Hence, there is a desire for high quality learning and students’ success, but this cannot be achieved unless we have qualified teachers; this requires that we invest in teachers and acknowledge that they are one of the main components of any educational programme (Khan, 2011). This investment “in teacher quality starts at the earliest stages of a teacher's career and continues throughout a professional lifetime (Moir & Gless, 2001, p. 114).

7.3.2 Improvement of Teaching Quality

7.3.2.1 Lecturers at University

Khan (2011) asserted that “there are basically three kinds of English teachers: native speakers, bilinguals, and the teachers from India, Pakistan and other similar countries” (p. 70). However, while the majority of lecturers in Saudi universities hold higher degrees, it is often uncertain as to whether these teachers are qualified to the required standard or if they have the experience to teach successfully an EFL syllabus. Often, these teachers fall back on simply teaching formulae for writing and teaching instead of instilling key skills in the students (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In addition, they are often not specialised in teaching any of the four language skills, most notably writing skills, and the training provided does not contribute enough to overcome teaching difficulties (Khan, 2011). This may explain the lack of pedagogical practices and literature surrounding English teachers in terms of teaching writing, a claim confirmed by the study findings. Therefore, effective training university lecturers is essential to meet the pre-service teachers’ needs; if the teaching practice of a lecturer is developed, this will contribute to the teaching quality of pre-service teachers (Elghotmy, 2012). This training can be completed in the form of a meeting between lecturers,

whereby they can share their views and teaching experience and "keep themselves updated about the latest development in language theories" (Leung, 2008, p. 182). Lecturers need to update their knowledge about strategies in feedback, as they should focus not only on the grammar accuracy, but also on the meaning of students' writing. Choosing other forms of feedback, such as conferencing between students and teachers, is "an absolutely worthwhile investment in student motivation and hence engagement" (Leung, 2008, p. 184). One study found that the lack of cooperation between students was considered amongst the main factors that cause students' writing difficulties. Therefore, lecturers in L2 writing would benefit from creating collaborative learning environments to enhance their students' confidence. Indeed, Kamil (2011) noted that "in group work, students not only compose their own written texts but read and criticize texts written by their peers, and interact with each other to elaborate better texts" (p. 219). Moreover, the findings of the current study have highlighted that the lack of frequent reading habits in students, especially the lack of authentic English texts in their reading pool, may create considerable challenges with regard to their writing skills. Thus, it is recommended, "Adequate library resources and services, physical facilities and a supportive reading environment should be available to enhance students' intellectual, cultural, and technical development" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 245). In addition, including L2 writing lectures in the curriculum plan and in the design of L2 writing courses in universities provides a valuable opportunity to understand students' interests and identify their needs.

In order to make the above elements work successfully in the training programme, a follow-up process must be administered if teachers are to feel free to experiment with approaches and create a useful dynamic between themselves and the students. A process of examination and reassessment can be incredibly

useful for teachers in staying aware of their teaching environment and in learning how to encourage their students to remain engaged and learn in their own ways (Leung, 2008). With reference to the above training strategies, which aim to improve the quality of the teaching methods for lecturers at universities, these cannot work successfully unless a pre-service programme is developed. Therefore, in the following section, there will be a closer examination of pre-service English teacher education in the KSA.

7.3.2.2 Pre-Service English Teacher Education

Research data have revealed that low proficiency levels and weak performance across Saudi English language teachers can be considered one of the reasons for the poor English proficiency of Saudi postgraduate students; this is due to "insufficient preparation to meet their diverse needs as ELT teachers" (Habbash, 2011, p. 42). Thus, it is recommended in the proposed model that pre-service English teachers should receive effective training in the pedagogical and linguistic aspects of writing in order to develop their teaching practice and meet students' needs. For instance, teachers need to be trained in methodological courses (Al-Seghayer, 2014) and not only in translation and applied linguistics. Furthermore, it is useful for teachers to be trained in the use of contemporary approaches, such as learner-centred approaches and research skills. Pre-service teachers also need to be trained in "using contemporary test styles (e.g., open-book tests), how to assess students based on their research skills, and how to diversify student assessment methods" (Al-Mandhari, 2011, p. 286). Pre-service teachers should also obtain knowledge about theories of second language writing; understanding these theories will assist them in becoming "critical and reflective practitioners, researchers of their own professional life, and agents of change" (Van Lier, 1994, p. 7). Furthermore, English teachers in pre-service

programmes should encourage the use of technology to facilitate their pre-service learning. It is also helpful to engage English teachers in the creation of collaborative and cooperative learning activities in which they can share their ideas, knowledge, and experience; this is conducive to “serious questioning and critical reflective thinking” (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2010, p. 58). Additionally, pre-service teachers need to be exposed to critical pedagogy as an integrated component of the pre-service programme for English language teachers in the KSA. On this note, Troudi (2005) emphasised that “we need to develop a teacher education framework that prepares teachers not only in the technical knowledge of language and the various discourses of the related fields, but especially in the cultural and socio-political issues that come with teaching English” (pp. 118-119). Habbash (2011) similarly noted that teachers in the KSA needed to acknowledge social, economic, and political issues with regard to teaching processes and teacher/student interaction. Accordingly, these modifications in the pre-service training of English teachers can assist in stimulating the professional development of teachers.

With the above in mind, aims to develop the educational process in the KSA have been discussed by the Ministry of Education, demonstrating an awareness of the need for well-educated people to contribute to the improvement of the Kingdom. Therefore, in 2005, the government established a sponsorship scheme named “the King Abdullah Scholarship” for Saudi students who wished to study abroad in English-speaking countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). However, it has been acknowledged that “studying overseas has always presented students with unique challenges as well as benefits, ranging from socio-economic and academic to individual” (Alzahrani, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, in the following section, an outline will be provided of the suggested orientation programmes in the UK to

help international students deal with the challenges that they encounter in their academic studies in the UK.

7.3.3 Universities in the UK

Based on the findings of the study, it has been revealed that a lack of communication between Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors, as well as an absence of constructive feedback, is considered one of the factors behind the academic writing difficulties students encounter. According to Kingston and Forland (2008), "the problem lies in the 'gap' between expectations and an unusual teaching style that does not meet the needs of these students" (p. 209). Similarly, students' language competence in L2, their previous learning experience, cultural differences, and academic skills were all factors reported as contributing to a lack of student success in their academic field in overseas institutions (Andrade, 2006). Thus, the proposed model suggests, with respect to the support the UK universities provide to international students, that it would be useful for universities in the UK to offer orientation programmes for international students to help them cope with the challenges that they face in their academic studies in the UK, including those pertaining to academic writing difficulties.

Kingston and Forland (2008) provided the following suggestions:

Students may gain insight into the expectations of the UK's education system and university's policies of learning and teaching before, or early on in their courses. It was suggested that this could be remedied by sending information to students before they came to the (p.216).

This is because the focus of the current orientation programmes in the UK does not take account of cross-culture preparation. Most of the focus is on the procedures of or introduction to the system such as healthcare, police registration, immigration rules, available courses and what is expected from students. Therefore, there are certain limitations in the structure of these courses

themselves; they do not allow postgraduate Saudi students to actually get to know about the British system through students, although the undergraduate students can.

Thus, cultural differences and previous learning experience are both fundamental factors that need to be considered by academic staff and supervisors. Furthermore, international students require constructive feedback, support, guidance, and regular tutorial sessions from their supervisors in order to improve. In addition, knowledge regarding the culture of international students is fundamental in ensuring that teachers and students are "aware of their own values, styles of communication, cognitive orientation, as well as emotional reactions" (Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 22). Accordingly, an understanding of these issues can contribute towards the establishment of effective communication between international students and their supervisors.

Despite the necessity of such orientation programmes to help international students adapt to the academic environment, these orientations cannot work effectively unless students are aware of the potential challenges and claim some responsibility for improving themselves; this responsibility will be the topic of the following section.

7.3.4 Students

Based on the findings of the study, factors related to individual learners, including low proficiency in L2, limited prior knowledge, lack of motivation, and self-efficacy, are often considered key factors that contribute to academic writing difficulties. Therefore, it is recommended in the proposed model that students play a pivotal role in improving their academic writing and claim some responsibility for their own weaknesses. Students can assist themselves by

becoming more frequent readers of both literature and academic journals and by making use of online resources. Moreover, they should search for the required information independently, thus contributing to their sense of autonomy and reducing their dependence on teachers for all of their education (Shukri, 2014). Furthermore, they can gain access to exemplary pieces of academic writing to learn how to structure an academic paper, present their ideas, construct a logical argument, organise paragraphs, and make links between ideas. Students also need to utilise the facilities provided to them from abroad, from international student support centres, personal tutors, and academic workshops to improve their writing skills. Additionally, students should feel comfortable engaging in regular communication with their supervisors and asking for clarification if they need it. For students, “Taking ownership of the writing process can help them to understand that effective academic writing is a process which requires effort and commitment” (Pineteh, 2014, p. 20).

7.3.5 Possible Challenges of the Proposed Model

Although the proposed model can aid Saudi postgraduate students in improving their abilities in English academic writing, it should be noted that this model is likely to encounter a number of challenges pertaining to its effectiveness. Firstly, there is often miscommunication between UK and Saudi universities in terms of the actual needs of the students and their respective weaknesses prior to students studying abroad. Second, the Ministry of Education in the KSA has centralised the education system in schools and universities, which makes the possibility of modifying the teaching methods during the pre-service and in-service programme for teachers a difficult task to accomplish. Third, the lack of qualified staff available to teach students using the suggested academic preparation can obstruct the Ministry of Education in establishing this preparation.

Fourth, “The unavailability and inadequate diverse, selective, and appropriate teaching resources” (Al-Seghayer, 2014, p. 20) may prevent teachers from effectively assisting students in improving their academic skills.

7.4 Implications of the Study

The main findings of the current study have a number of implications for policy makers, as the difficulties of Saudi postgraduate students in English language academia need much consideration. In this study, the recommendations are made based on the literature and on the interpretation of the given results.

7.4.1 Implications for Policy Makers

This study indicates that the majority of Saudi students are not prepared academically before they arrive for study in the UK, and those who are prepared beforehand are not satisfied with the quality of these preparations. It was found that most struggle as they find the requirements of academic study in the UK, in terms of writing skills in particular, very demanding; participants commented that many expected some preparation before starting their academic studies. It has been suggested by those involved in the study, that effective academic preparation be implemented for a period of between six months to a year in the KSA to prepare students linguistically and academically to cope with the challenges they will face in academic studies in the UK. Furthermore, cultural differences should also be considered in this preparation to help students with their social awareness and allow them to flourish in a different education system. This preparation will most likely take the form of public lectures, seminars, or workshops.

The practice of teaching English language skills in the Saudi classroom has demonstrated that there exists a significant gap between theory and practice.

When teaching writing skills, for example, the teacher or lecturer focuses only on the form of the written task in terms of linguistics features rather than the content, ignoring the process of writing itself. It is necessary, then, to put into place a mechanism to discover if objectives are achievable during classroom practices.

It is also recommended that policy makers conduct comprehensive evaluations of the English language curriculum in universities and schools to respond to the needs of students and allow them to acquire the English language skills needed in their academic studies. Furthermore, Pineteh (2014) added that the curriculum “should create space for intensive academic reading and writing activities which allow for experimentation with different writing challenges” (p. 20).

The Saudi Cultural Bureau in the UK should consider integrating a training programme into their plans for the chosen students or organise pre-orientation sessions informing them of key cultural differences; Saudi students must be adequately prepared before beginning their studies in the UK, so that they can access more quickly the benefits of learning in a different education system.

Most English departments or TEFL programmes in the KSA provide courses in English literature and applied linguistics, though only 10% of these courses represent English teaching methods courses (Al-Seghayer, 2011). This creates a culture in which English teachers graduate with a poor knowledge of pedagogical practices, which goes some way to explaining the weak teaching methods in writing classes. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be a mechanism implemented for teaching professional development in English departments to assist student teachers in acquiring the required competencies and skills to improve the quality of their initial teacher education. For instance, Al-Seghayer (2014) asserted that a “greater emphasis should be placed on teaching

methods in teacher preparation programs” (p. 24). Furthermore, professional development programmes for teachers should involve instruction on how to teach academic writing.

Appreciating the role of libraries for students and teachers, as one of the key facilities for development, can be achieved by providing libraries with adequate resources to encourage students to read. This also includes regular access to the internet, a database via which well-known journals can be accessed, the availability of contemporary books, especially those concerning the English language, and comfortable places for reading.

It has been argued that reading and writing skills should not be taught separately and that students should be stimulated to read extensively; this reading skill has a significant impact on improving students’ writing and is well documented in the literature (Buckingham, 2008; Alkhaldeh, 2011; Ankawi, 2015; Keong & Mussa, 2015). The following section will discuss the ways in which direct action with regard to teaching students these key skills can have tangible effects on students’ outcomes.

7.4.2 Implications for Practice

The study indicated that the difficulties in writing ability reported by the students were due, in part, to the weak teaching methods of writing teachers in schools; these teachers implement a top-down approach where the teacher is the only source of knowledge and students must passively receive this knowledge. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers employ various teaching techniques to suit different learning styles and thus improve students’ English language proficiency (Al-Khairiy, 2013; Shukri, 2014).

The findings of the current study reveal that English language teachers in the KSA must be aware of the various genres of writing and should attempt to incorporate these different styles in their teaching. The results also indicated that the education system in the KSA is still based on the traditional assessment method, i.e., formal examinations (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Alqahtani, 2011; Khan, 2011). Therefore, a measure should be implemented to provide students with criteria for their writing assessments so that they can plan for their writing. Furthermore, alternative assessment methods need to be considered to gain a fuller understanding of the knowledge or ability of each student to give each equal weight in the students' final grades; these methods may include a portfolio, a take-home assessment, or a presentation. Using exams as the only tool of assessment may mean that students memorise only the knowledge that they have studied to pass the exam, leaving them little space to develop their creative and critical thinking skills. In addition, effective feedback should be provided to assist students in identifying and correcting their mistakes; this can be facilitated by self-feedback, peer-feedback, conferencing feedback, or one-to-one tutorials.

The findings of the study have indicated dissatisfaction among students regarding their previous learning experience, especially with regard to their writing abilities; they often encounter difficulties dealing with their academic demands when they arrive in the UK. Therefore, writing instruction needs to be allocated more importance and practised widely in schools and universities.

The results of the current study reveal that the lack of reading practice is one of the primary reasons for the difficulties faced by overseas students in their academic writing. Thus, it is recommended to encourage students to read widely to solve their writing difficulties, particularly as English language teachers in Saudi

Arabia seemed unaware of the impact of reading on the development of student writing, L2 writing especially. Therefore, teachers need to pay more attention to their English teaching practice and encourage their students to read and to implement various strategies to improve their writing abilities. The more the texts are "related to learners' own socio-cultural concerns and interests, the deeper and more rapid the progression will be" (Liton, 2012, p. 146).

The study findings indicate that students dislike lecture-based classes in which the teacher is the only one who provides knowledge; therefore, it is recommended that there be a friendly relationship between the English language teacher and the students in the classroom "to develop and facilitate a mutual communicative environment" (Liton, 2012, p. 148). Furthermore, English language teachers should listen to their students and give them the opportunity to express their views, accept their mistakes as a part of the learning process, and involve them in leadership tasks, as meaningful participation will enrich their learning. In this regard, Sano et al. (as cited in Finch, 2001) point out that there is a need for "warm-hearted interaction between teachers and learners, as well as among learners themselves [as] this friendly interaction is, in our opinion, the most essential factor in successful language learning" (p. 135).

Most English language teachers in Saudi Arabia are overwhelmingly concerned with the final written texts of students and seldom consider the writing process and/or the strategies students employ when writing in the English language. Therefore, English language teachers should "scaffold the learner in all stages of writing" (Shukri, 2014, p. 202), which include drafting, revising, and redrafting.

To improve academic writing skills amongst students, they should be encouraged to participate in the academic community through reading and analysing

academic conventions in action. Before being asked to produce academic writing, “Students should engage in active analysis of these texts in order to become familiar with textual form, function and actions” (Al-Sharafi, 2014, p. 28).

Based on the findings, it has emerged that the kind of feedback students receive from their supervisors is very limited and often too vague for students to understand. Therefore, supervisors should give students in-depth written constructive feedback on how to improve their content with clear instruction and specific comments, especially during the early stages of their research journey. In the same vein, Hattie and Timperley (2007) argued that “[f]eedback needs to provide information specifically relating to the task or process of learning that fills a gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood” (p. 82). When detailed feedback is given to students, the supervisors assume a supportive role and can allow the students to work independently on the comments given; this can aid the student’s general outcomes and personal development (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2010).

In order to ease the transition for overseas postgraduate students when they enter the social and academic environment of the UK, it is recommended that an awareness of the academic and socio-cultural context of international students be prevalent amongst the university faculty and staff. Furthermore, understanding the perceptions of students and their experiences before studying in the UK is vital to the teaching process. Andrade (2006) argued that "support services focused on the transitional challenges of international students need not involve new programs and budgets, but can be offered within current support centers given additional training of personnel and redesigning of existing programs" (p. 150).

To encourage independent learning, it is important to create an environment of mutual understanding across various cultures; this may include seminars held by professionals, providing the international students with the opportunity to discuss their learning experience in the UK and encouraging them to communicate with local students (Wu et al., 2015). For example, the learning experience of Saudi students in the KSA is often highly traditional and involves an approach in which knowledge passes only from teacher to student (Al-Miziny, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Khan, 2011). This was termed “the banking concept of education” by Freire, who went on to argue that, through this process, “education [...] becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the student patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). The views of Freire, in this case, align with my own, as Saudi students often accumulate knowledge with the sole aim of passing the exam and shortly afterwards forget everything that they have learned. Teachers, then, often provide students with an excess of information to memorise for an exam without paying attention to whether students have absorbed the knowledge. In the UK, academic culture is completely different, as students are encouraged to be independent from the early stages of their learning. According to Jin (1992), the academic culture in the UK is characterised by independent thinking, originality, creativity, academic freedom, and critical evaluation. Therefore, these orientation programmes can be considered the first step in identifying the differences between intellectual cultures, and so they might aid international students in reaching the required academic standards and achieving success in their studies.

7.5 Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of the current study suggest a number of areas in need of further investigation. While the current study focuses on the difficulties of academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students studying in various universities in the UK, further study may be conducted with regard to other bodies of overseas students in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the nature of these difficulties and how they can be remedied.

It would also be worthwhile conducting a longitudinal study to observe the writing of Saudi postgraduate students during their academic journey, from the first to the last stage, to provide more depth and understanding of these difficulties. Academic writing development, it has been argued, “is a lengthy process since students need time to acquire the required literacy knowledge and practices necessary to write successful texts that meet the expectations of tertiary level writing” (Al-Badwawi, 2011, p. 2014).

The findings of the current study suggest that the lack of reading practice among students was one of the key reasons underlying difficulties in academic writing. Therefore, further study needs to be conducted to investigate the impact of the lack of EAP preparation in Saudi Arabia on the proficiency level of academic reading for Saudi postgraduate students in the UK.

The current study has explored difficulties in academic writing from the perspective of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors; thus, it is perhaps pertinent to conduct another interpretive study to investigate the difficulties of academic writing, based on the perception of Saudi undergraduate students, to gain a better understanding of various perceptions which could contribute to improvements in English academic writing.

Last but not the least, this study can be duplicated using Saudi postgraduate students and supervisors studying in other foreign countries and contexts, such as America, Australia, and New Zealand, to support the current findings, as there are currently 200,000 students studying abroad in 30 different countries (MOHE, 2015).

7.6 Personal Reflection on my PhD Journey

This section will consist of an exploration of my PhD journey, identifying the lessons that I have learnt, the aspects I have enjoyed, and the challenges I have faced during this stage. Studying for my PhD at the University of Exeter has thoroughly developed my research skills and my development as a person. I began my journey by studying the MSc modules as part of the PhD programme, which was an important step towards fully understanding social science research; this allowed me to differentiate between different research paradigms and theories in educational research, conduct qualitative research, and use mixed methods. Furthermore, I have gained a number of important research skills, such as paraphrasing, summarising, expressing my own views, reading from various sources, and sharing work and ideas with colleagues, all of which are important tools for students to acquire at the doctoral stage. On a personal level, the PhD journey has assisted me in learning how an academic researcher should construct different arguments and discern between different perceptions, something which I had not encountered in my previous learning experience.

The MSc modules have given me the opportunity to develop my research preparation, which provided much clarity regarding the research topic while the study design, data collection methods, and data analysis aided much of my

understanding of and insight into English academic writing difficulties, which became more refined during the process of conducting my actual research.

Furthermore, I feel fortunate in having had the chance to attend many of the workshops and seminars provided by the university, which helped me in broadening my knowledge about the research culture. I have also become proficient in the use of technological software for managing and analysing data, such as SPSS and MAXQDA, as well as Endnote for managing the bibliography.

However, I have also faced a number of challenges during my PhD study, including difficulties in deciding how to approach and identify the issues related to English academic writing that students and supervisors discussed in the semi-structured interviews. Dealing with anxieties, lack of confidence, worries, and time-management issues at each stage of this journey was another challenge, as well as differentiating between the concepts of methodology and methods and grasping terms such as 'ontology' and 'epistemology'. Despite the challenges I have faced throughout my PhD journey, there have been a number of memorable and positive moments, which I have shared with my supervisors and colleagues; these challenges have encouraged me to be patient and tenacious, and to never give up.

Appendices

Appendix (A): Students' Questionnaire

Dear participant,

The purpose of my study is to investigate academic writing difficulties in English language that Saudi postgraduate students face in their research while doing their postgraduate studies in the UK.

I would therefore be very grateful if you would take the time to complete the questionnaire, which will take 15-20 minutes. In addition to the research questionnaire, with your written permission, I would like to make an interview with you for the same study. Your participation will be kept completely confidential and your identity anonymous. Also, your answers will be used only for study purposes. Moreover, you have the right to withdraw at any stage .Your participation is entirely voluntary.

I would be happy to answer any possible enquiries at the email address: na291@exeter.ac.uk

Best wishes

Noof AL-Harbi

Demographic Data

Please choose an item, which appropriately describes you:

- 1) Age:
 - a) 20-29
 - b) 30 – 39
 - c) 40 +
- 2) Gender:
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
- 3) Course of Study:
 - a) Master
 - b) Ph.D.
 - c) Ed.D.
- 4) Specialisation:
 - a) English language specialisation e.g. (English literature, TESOL, Translation.....etc)

Please mention your specialisation:

- b) non- English language specialisation e.g. (Special Needs, Science, History..... etc)

Please mention your specialisation :

Categories of Enquiry
Section One: Academic writing difficulties

How difficult to you are the following sentences when writing academically in the English language?

Academic Vocabulary

No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
1	Finding the appropriate vocabulary to express your ideas.					
2	Using academic vocabulary properly when writing					
3	Using phrases properly when writing					
4	Using accurate word antonyms when writing					
5	Using accurate word synonyms when writing					

Using Sources

No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
6	Citing references in a text					

7	Writing a reference list based on a particular format (APA, Harvard, IEEE, etc.) when writing					
8	Understanding the concept of plagiarism when writing					
9	Writing a paraphrase of other researchers' words					
Developing an Argument						
No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
10	Constructing an effective argument when writing to show your own position					
11	Constructing an effective argument when writing to demonstrate critical thinking					
12	Making a balance between arguments and counterarguments when writing					
13	Justifying your arguments to convince the reader when writing					

14	Differentiating between the principles of making an arguments in L1 and L2 writing					
15	Applying the rhetorical aspects of English argumentation when writing (<i>i.e. using subordination (although, after, while) as a sign of full-fledged and effective writing/ low degree of repetition/ short sentences /writing direct and clear message for the sake of clear exposition</i>)					
Coherence						
No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
16	Expressing one main idea appropriately for each paragraph when writing					
17	Writing appropriate supporting sentences for each paragraph					
18	Writing an appropriate conclusion sentence for each paragraph					
19	Linking the introduction with the conclusion of each paragraph					

20	Linking ideas between sentences for each paragraph when writing to create a unified written text					
21	Linking ideas correctly between paragraphs when writing to create a unified text					
22	Writing an appropriate introduction for your thesis or assignment as a whole					
23	Writing an appropriate conclusion for your thesis or assignment as a whole					
Cohesion						
No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
24	<p>Linking sentences and paragraphs by using appropriate cohesive devices (<i>references, conjunctions, substitutions, lexical features and ellipses</i>) to create a unified written text.</p> <p><i>For example, Conjunctions (refer to using connectors or linkers such as: and , but, also, moreover, furthermore....etc)</i></p> <p><i>References (means using pronouns,)</i></p> <p><i>Substitutions(means replacement of one word or phrase within another)</i></p>					

	<i>Lexical features (refers to collocation, synonymous, antonymous)</i> <i>Ellipses (means the omission of repeat words or phrases)</i>					
25	Understanding the different uses of cohesive ties in L2 writing to achieve consistency in the written text					
26	Making an appropriate transition of ideas between sentences in the written text to show unified information					
Style						
No	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
27	Revising and editing your writing					
28	Structuring/outlining your thesis					
29	Writing in a critical style					
30	Writing in a clear style					
31	Writing in a simple style					
32	Avoiding writing in a repetitive style (Redundancy)					

33	Writing about familiar topics					
34	Writing about unfamiliar topics					
<p>If you have any other difficulties you face in your writing, please write them in the space provided below.</p> <p>.....!</p> <p>.....!</p>						

Section Two: Saudi students' experience of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in the UK

How often have you experienced the following in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in academic writing in the UK?

No	Item	Very Often (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
35	An EAP course has helped me to plan and collect ideas for writing about many topics					
36	An EAP course has helped me to analyse the text to write critically					
37	An EAP course has helped me to write various genres of essays (i.e. narrative, argumentative, descriptive, expository)					

38	An EAP course has helped me to summarise ideas/information from the written text					
39	An EAP course has helped me to paraphrase ideas/information from reading a text					
40	An EAP course has helped me to structure the assignment (i.e. introduction, body and conclusion)					
41	An EAP course has helped me to write several drafts					
42	An EAP course has helped me to use writing rubrics for self-correction assignments					
43	The writing materials from an EAP course were useful					
44	The feedback that I have received from my tutors on my writing was helpful					
	<p>If you have other experiences in EAP courses in academic writing in the UK, please write them in the space provided below.</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>					

Appendix (B): Supervisors Semi-Structured Interview

1- Are you currently supervising any Saudi students at master or doctoral levels?

2-What do you know about the academic preparation of Saudi students before they come to the UK?

3-Do you know anything about how Saudi students in UK were prepared academically before they come to UK universities? If yes:

3.1-What do you think of the academic preparation of Saudi students in the UK to study for their postgraduate degree?

3.2-Do you think that Saudi students are ready to study in the UK universities?

3.3-Do you think that Saudi students when they come to their supervisors are ready for the doctoral level or not?

4-What do you think are the main difficulties that Saudi students face in writing their theses or assignments?

5- Can you tell me if you are aware of any specific areas of difficulty among Saudi students compared to other non-native students in their postgraduate studies? Can you provide any examples?

6- Can you suggest reasons that cause these difficulties for your Saudi students in their postgraduate studies?

7-What are the strategies that would you suggest to solve these difficulties?

8-Is there anything you want to add?

Appendix (C): Students Semi-Structured Interview

Non-English Specialisation

1-From your experience in writing in L1 and L2 during your undergraduate and postgraduate study, are there any differences or similarities in the writing styles of both languages?

2. Did you receive any writing instructions that help you to write academic texts in English language subjects during the undergraduate stage?

English Specialisation

1-Can you describe to me your experience in English language writing during the undergraduate stage?

2-. Did you receive any writing instructions that helped you to write academic texts in English language subjects during the undergraduate stage?

3-Do you have any academic preparation (EAP) in the UK before you start studying in the UK universities?

4-Can you highlight the main differences, if any, between the academic preparation (EAP) in Saudi Arabia and the one in the UK with regard to academic writing?

5-What aspects of the academic preparation in the UK (EAP) had the most positive impacts on developing your academic writing?

6- Based on your learning experience of both EAP preparation programmes in general and academic writing in the UK, do you suggest having such EAP preparation programmes in Saudi Arabia?

7-Can you tell me please, what are the difficulties that you encountered when writing in the UK?

8-What is the most difficult stage in writing that you struggle with during writing your dissertation or assignments in your postgraduate studies?

9- Based on your academic writing learning experience, what are the factors or reasons that make academic writing a difficult skill to achieve - are there any factors related to the educational system that might affect the way of students' writing?

10-What do you think of the factors that are related to the background issues that might affect the way of writing?

11-Can you tell me if there are any factors related to the psychological issues that might affect the way of writing?

12-What strategies or techniques are you doing right now to help yourself with these problems in writing?

13- Can you offer any suggestions to overcome these difficulties in order to make English academic writing a smooth process?

Appendix (D)

A Sample of written feedback from Supervisors

Research Philosophy

The ontological proposition of critical realism sees the world as an open system with emergent properties (autopoiesis, complexity theory), neither a closed system (a determinist machine with stable properties) as the positivists assume nor 'the world is nothing but the meaning that we give to it' as the constructionists presume (Thorpe and Holt, 2008). According to Bhaskar's ontological view, both knowledge and the world are structured, differentiated, and changing. The world exists independently of the knowledge; and experiences and the things to which it affords us access are normally out of phase with one another (Bhaskar, 1975). This separation of thought (knowledge) and object (the world) can lead to a distinction between practice and structure (Al-Amoudi and Willmott, 2011). Knowledge can be divided into practices, such as linguistic, scientific, technical, aesthetic, and so on. Structures, which range from the atomic to the economic, are not exclusive to particular practices. Thus, the role of science is to examine them.

Commented [MH1]: develop

Sayer (2000: 2) argues that critical realism is not what many people think in which they suppose it is the 'truth' and thus involves a kind of 'foundationalism' where this is inconsistent with realism. He points out that critical realism is

Commented [MH2]: text is a bit unclear here

the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it.

Thus, this independence of objects from knowledge weakens any content assumptions about the relation between them and renders it problematic (Sayer, 2000). What makes critical realism 'critical' is that the identification of generative mechanisms (which Bhaskar refers to) offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo (i.e. stable things) (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 18).

There are fundamental characteristics of critical realism shared by widely regarded critical realists such as Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie who together edited *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (1998). Some critical characteristics will be discussed as follow:

Commented [MH3]: Subheadings would be beneficial.

Reed (2005a: 1637) reflects on the relevance, nature and consequences of adopting a critical realism approach as an investigative orientation in organization and management studies. He points out that critical realism can offer a 'coherent ontological' grounds and 'causal-explanatory' method for determining fundamental structures and mechanisms which create 'observable events' and outcomes that may or may not be 'actualized' in particular historical contexts and social settings. Contu and Willmott (2005: 1646) indicate that 'critical realism can assist in opening-up deep-seated issues in the philosophical standing of social and organizational analysis'. Pratt (2011) observes that the critical realism approach seeks a depth investigation of natural and social phenomena in which it attempts to identify the mechanisms operating in a context. He also indicates that critical realism attempts to go beyond the boundary of experience by suggesting the reality behind it. Moreover, a social phenomenon can often be 'understood' but not often 'meaningfully measured', hence its preference for qualitative methods (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004). Looking at the world from this angle is best for exploratory and descriptive studies that seek to understand, investigate, and explain a phenomenon in depth as perceived by social actors.

Commented [MH4]:
You need to ground it in the work in more depth to have a clear appreciation of its implication for methods, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and theory.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this research study will look at the research problem from a critical realism perspective, which prioritizes ontology over epistemology and focuses on the mechanisms that produce events rather than the events themselves, more specifically as 'structured' and 'differentiated' (Bhaskar, 2008: xi), along with a

qualitative method. The stratified reality offers insights in a series of 'staggered layers', each of which provides a foundation for the level above (Pratt, 2011: 15). This stratification with underlying generative mechanisms and causal structures provide a means to answer the research questions. Thus, critical realism can be seen as 'a philosophy of science that provides a theory and model of social scientific explanation, based on a systematic form of ... methodology, which combines historical, structural and processual analysis in a coherent and integrated framework' (Reed, 2005b: 1664).

Commented [MH5]: Expand.

Also does this fit onto this paragraph or does it not need a new one?

Commented [MH6]: By/because?

Commented [MH7]: This paragraph is far too fragmented and is in need of splitting up. For example, I don't see how this sentence is a conclusion of the latter (the word "thus" here).

Both critical realism and institutional theory highlight the importance of social context and take a multi-level view of reality. Wry (2009: 160) adopts Bhaskar's domains of reality and argues that 'structures' which operate in the 'domain of real' is parallel to 'institutional logics', the 'domain of actual' is equivalent to 'institutions', and the 'domain of empirical' is similar to 'practice' (see figure 2). In the 'domain of real', structures/logics have the potential, as frameworks, to generate phenomena and make them meaningful (Bhaskar, 1978; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). These structures/logics play an important role in shaping patterns of behaviour in a context (Wry, 2009).

Commented [MH8]: This paragraph should come before some of the few text you place above – see my last few comments.

4.3 Research Methodology

Research methods represent the way data is collected. There are two main types of research methods in social science: quantitative methods and qualitative methods.

Thus, it allows for flexibility and variety of interpretive techniques that are essential for understanding a phenomenon in social science studies. Creswell (1994: 24) points out that:

[a] research problem needs to be explored [when] little information exists on the topic. The variables are largely unknown and the researcher wants to focus on the context that may shape the understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Thus, a qualitative approach is best for investigating a little-known or poorly-understood phenomenon. It is also best for areas that mistreated, non-treated, or received very little attention in the literature. Whereas these areas, which have unknown variables, needs to be fully treated and covered sufficiently to open doors for future research which, in turn, are necessary to broaden the views and provide insights that contribute to the literature.

Qualitative research concerns the process rather than the outcomes or products (Merriam, 1988). It also concerns the meaning – the way people make sense of their lives, experiences, and structures of the world (Merriam, 1988). Within a qualitative approach, the researcher is inclined to be subjective. More to the point, when the research inquiry is on the basis of the participant's perception and opinion, then the collected data is subjective data as the researcher's knowledge can influence the research to some extent (Herndl and Nahrwold, 2000). Qualitative research is used to gain insights and better understanding about an individual's experience and to have a sense of reality (Herndl and Nahrwold, 2000). It is also used in research that explores where and why knowledge and practices are at odds (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Qualitative research often generates credible data for analysis by means of describing, exploring, or expanding existing knowledge and theories (Herndl and Nahrwold, 2000). Qualitative approach is often used for gathering an in-depth understanding of the research topic through various instruments (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). These instruments include interviews, observation, case studies, and focus groups (Creswell, 1994).

There are a number of previous studies that have used a qualitative approach, most commonly via the interview methodology, in order to conduct research on institutions. The following table provides a detailed view of these studies.

corporate governance from the lens of institutional logics. In fact, the subject of corporate governance in the Arabian Gulf area has received very little attention in the literature due to difficulty to access 'actors' as this subject is relatively new in the area which resulted in a paucity of experts in the field. Therefore, qualitative approach seems to be the best for gathering in-depth information from the key actors in the field. Also, the exploratory

Commented [MH9]: The above quote seems to be on research design so I can't see the linkage to the "thus" clearly here. You need to be more thorough in developing your arguments, decisions and explanations here. Remember, the objective here is to justify what methods you use and methodological decisions taken. With this in mind, depth and rigor are all important.

Commented [MH10]: Be careful of such a term. Can anything really be 'fully' treated? Also, does critical realism even accept that anything in a single assessment can be fully treated?

Commented [MH11]: I don't like the word opinion. Informed perhaps but still dangerous. You should consider 'subjective interpretation' and/or 'reasoned judgement' instead.

Commented [MH12]:

Also, I feel this point is out of place with the rest of the paragraph. It seems some of your paragraphs take the form of text dumps than reasoned arguments because this sentence is out of place with what follows. You would be best raising this issue when discussing the implementation of your methodology and its implications.

Commented [MH13]: This is too generic a statement. It can only do this if your methodology is rigorous. Place elsewhere and explain how you will achieve this.

Commented [MH14]: This reads like a start of paragraph sentence not one to end a paragraph. You need to pay more careful attention to structure.

Commented [MH15]: Again this paragraph seems to be positioned in the wrong place. Why start talking about interviews if you then raise the issue of the purpose of the study and paucity of actors?

nature of this study along with the research questions necessitate the adoption of a qualitative approach, which is broadly seen as most suitable for understanding people's opinions, perceptions, and views on a phenomenon (Walliman, 2006).

Sampling: Interviews will be conducted with around 20 social actors. This will be divided (5 in each) on the following four groups: owners, managers, financial regulatory authority officials, and scholars (business writers and academics) in order to elicit information about the research topic (see Figure 2). The choice of those key informants has been made based on the condition that each participant must be in relation to corporate governance in order to be able to answer questions about the role of institutions in shaping corporate governance in a context. In particular, each actor will be interviewed to provide his inclusive opinion about the influence of each institution (politics, kinship, religion, family, market, law, bureaucratic administration) on the formation of governance systems in Saudi Arabia. But to provide additional evidence, further actors influenced by each institution can be interviewed to determine a picture of the broader issues at play. It is anticipated that interviewing actors will generate a web of insights from different perspectives into the role played by an institution with respect to the emergence of corporate governance in the Saudi context.

Commented [MH16]: Subheading style?

4.3.3.7. Data Analysis

Content analysis is also a family of procedures to study the content and themes of written or transcribed text (Insch and Ellen, 1997). This method is useful for drawing key features out of the data and giving richness of material to remain so it can be used to evidence the conclusions drawn and help 'let the data speak' for itself (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). It can also be useful for analyzing communications, such as letters, articles and abstracts, reports and papers of different organizations, social actors' speeches and interviews and discussion transcripts.

Commented [MH17]: Can be or will be?

Tesch (1990) suggests to design categories that relate to the research objectives and to place all occurrences of relevant words, sentences, paragraphs, or themes into these categories. The researcher will then count how many instances in each category in which they form new ideas, themes, and concepts and this is a basic method in conducting content analysis (Tesch, 1990). Another method of conducting content analysis is the exploration of word usage, where the researcher is able to discover the variety of meanings that a word can express in normal usage (Tesch, 1990). Thus, content analysis

Commented [MH18]: Very important to expand on this.

seems to be helpful in analyzing the data collected during interviews conducted in this study.

Meta-Narrative:

1. The Regulatory: The Capital Market Authority (CMA).

This theme has been mentioned frequently among all interviewees to show its effective role in applying and implementing CG rules in all listed companies making it a key theme in this research. Six sub-themes have emerged under this theme which fall mainly in compliance and implementation and will be described as follows starting by compliance.

1.1 Imposed Compliance.

It has been noticed that there are some companies consider CG system as an imposed system that must be complied with in order to avoid punishment. When SA from JAZ bank has been asked if the market forms any pressures on CG, he points out that

“The market in Saudi Arabia is not mature yet to impose its opinion ... The one who imposes instructions, is the CMA through its CG system.”

So, there is a sign in this evidence reveals that CG is an imposed system implying scope for resistance in its implementation or one in which implementation varies based on the extent to which the firm complies only to the bare minimum that is necessary versus others who view the system more favorable (I return to this in a later discussion of themes, for example, sub-section 1.2 below). He also considers that audit committee is an imposed committee by the CMA that must be created in any listed company. Finally, when he has been asked about the influence of the CMA on listed companies in order to drive CG or implement CG, he reports that

“The CMA issues regulations and it gives time limit to implement them (pressure) ... I think the number of penalties is increasing in order to force listed companies to implement CG practices.”

This is another sign reveals that The CMA forces listed companies to implement CG practices. MD from INV bank notes that the nomination & remuneration committee was

created in the bank based on the compulsion of the CMA which reveals that it was not created to follow best practices.

AT from H Insurance company has been asked if there is any resistance to change from the company side, he replies that

“No there isn't. In the contrary, we have to comply with the regulations, otherwise we will be penalized.”

So, it does not seem to be a matter of following best practices. It seems just like avoiding penalties. He also insists that The CMA imposes penalties to companies that do not comply with CG rules and this punishment can be extended to suspend stock exchange in this company.

Commented [MH19]: I think you could add some interpretation to each of these small paragraphs to go beyond the descriptive and into the evaluative.

1.2 Bare Minimum Compliance.

This sub-theme has emerged when it has been observed that some companies comply with the minimum requirements of CG. MD from BLD bank reports that the annual report contains many items such as the results, reasons of deviation, shareholders and ownership rights, listing rules, etc., but they need to mention the minimum and do not go beyond this minimum. This could be a sign of companies targeting minimum compliance. AD from BLD bank similarly notes that both audit and nomination & remuneration committees are mandatory items by the CMA and they have to be adopted and followed. Thus, it is a sign of bare minimum compliance and not an effort towards best practice. AS from The CMA reveals that both committees are minimum requirements from listed companies in order to activate the role of the board of directors. He outlines that the board of directors should create committees based on the needs and the nature of the company. So these two committees are the minimum requirement but all other committees are optional to all listed companies based on their needs. He has also been asked if CG makes any financial burdens to listed companies such as extra employees and divisions. He concludes that

Commented [MH20]: Could expand to better justify the sentence that follows.

“That's why CG asks for the minimum. The CMA doesn't want any financial burdens as of applying CG which make it harder to those large and small companies. Therefore, whenever the company size becomes larger, CG document allows it to go beyond and exceeds the minimum, such as creating more committees based on the needs and nature of the company and based on what the board of directors sees because these committees need money. However, other companies consider

the creating more committees and meetings could be extra expenses that cannot be afforded, especially they got small and simple structures. Therefore, there is a minimum that must be applied and there is flexibility for who want to implement CG in a way that serves them.”

This evidence shows that CG does not appear to make extra loads on listed companies, in contrast, it asks for complying with the minimum standards in order to protect shareholders’ rights.

1.3 Exceeding Minimum Compliance (best practice).

This sub-theme has emerged when it has been inferred from the data that a large number of companies tend to exceed the minimum compliance of CG document in order to achieve best practices. A number of companies such as, SAV food, G Energy, and P Chemical, have created a separate division for CG in order to follow best practice. NOR from SAV food point out that

“We are starving to comply with the maximum of S&P regulations as S&P has got 110 disclosure items. This means not only compliance with local CG but also international CG. For example: Forecast, ownership concentration.”

This evidence demonstrates the intension of this company to comply with the maximum requirements of CG to follow best practice. This means more transparency and disclosure can be added in the favor of shareholders. Thus, it may increase the credibility of this company in front of shareholders. When FD from B Transport has been asked about the way that CG works in their company, he notes that

“The task then is to make updates by applying the highest standards suggested by the CMA or available at the market in a way that they always keep updating and implementing their procedures as a best practice. In our company, whenever we see something suggested or optional, we apply it without waiting it to become mandatory whenever we find it effective, in line with the executive management, and gives higher standards in transparency. So why don’t we apply it? So in this company we comply with the best practice whether it is mandatory or optional which is totally compatible with protecting shareholders and doesn’t affect our work nature.”

Commented [MH21]: I think this point is a bit naive and too descriptive. In principle the CMA wants to keep the burden as low as possible but it is obvious from the statements of the firms you refer to that compliance is seen as an expense in some instances some firms appear to cooperate with the minimum only to avoid penalties and do not go beyond the minimum – implying a lack of genuine interest and effort towards CG in some cases. This to my mind indicates important implications.

It can be seen from this evidence that some companies are moving towards complying with best practices for multi purposes such as achieving best results, protecting shareholders' rights, and gaining more credibility to attract the investors. The topic will move now from compliance to describe the implementation.

1.4 Implementation: the Regulatory Role.

This sub-theme has emerged as a role played by the CMA with less responsive companies to CG rules. The CMA then needs to take an action against these companies as reported by AS from the CMA

"If we find a company doesn't have a self motivation, neglects, and prejudices in the requirements here the role of the regulatory comes through speaking, letters, and imposing penalties and other correction procedures."

So these correction procedures are being applied on companies that do not have self-motivation to implement CG rules but the nature of the statement by AS implies that the approach is somewhat punitive and coercive as opposed to a narrative or discursive based approach to engaging companies with CG. AG from the CMA agrees with this and points out that

"If we don't see a response from a company, we start our procedures in warning them and imposing penalties against them."

This is another evidence that shows the regulatory role of the CMA with less responsive companies in order to encourage them to be more interested in the subject of CG. SA from JAZ bank argues that

"The penalties that been imposed by the CMA are more in disclosure than in other CG items. So more than %95 of these penalties were due to disclosure issues."

Commented [MH22]: You should expand on this – Generally though, I feel you points throughout need more depth.

This evidence reveals the reason behind the failure of some companies to comply with CG rules, which is lack of disclosure. This CG item forms a high percentage of the overall number of penalties. Proper disclosure is a goal of the CMA in order to meet the objectives of CG.

Commented [MH23]: Need to expand on this and maybe add quotes from firms that perhaps indicate difficulties in determining the level of disclosure needed – this would help make it richer.

1.5 Implementation: the awareness / cooperative / partnership role.

2. Family Ties.

A total of 19 respondents observe that the family is a reason for applying CG in Saudi Arabia, which can be considered as a main theme in this research. This theme contains 5 sub-themes which will be highlighted and explained in the following evaluation.

2.1 Separation of Ownership and Control.

One of the biggest challenges that family companies can face whenever they want to turn to public companies is the separation of ownership and control which has been pointed out by some practitioners.

“... family companies face a big challenge which is separation of ownership and control. It is a big challenge in the continuation of the company.” (AS, from the CMA)

This can be attributed to the indirect or little control of shareholders on management decisions which does not seem to be something that owners (family members) really like.

“Most of the companies in Saudi are family companies and some of them became public companies. So when a family company becomes a public company, there must be already family settings exist from the existing majority, the management of family companies are totally different as they make the decisions that suit them and as a board of directors nobody has a finger in the pie (intervention) because it's their own money ... but now, they can't act anymore as when it was a family company.” (FD from B Transport Company)

This is another evidence that shows the difficulty of separating ownership and control as some family settings are still exist when the company becomes a public company which can be attributed to collective action problems and poor coordination.

“The penalties that been imposed by the CMA are more against family companies due to the problem of separation of ownership and control.” (AG, from the CMA).

This reveals that the problem of separation still exists and CG has come to treat such a problem through warnings and punishments which can be a solution to reduce these practices from family companies.

There is evidence that CG has to some extent improved in this matter as it reduced the power and domination of the family by the gradual process of implementing CG rules by the CMA. KT from A Cement Company points out that

“CG has improved a lot by the gradual process that the CMA practices. Many actions and decision that we used to see in the past have disappeared. The domination of the family in this company has totally changed. The family has no more power in controlling the company since the CMA applied CG in 2006.”

Commented [MH24]: I don't understand this sentence.

SA from JAZ bank points out that

“The market in Saudi Arabia is not mature yet to impose its opinion. So it doesn't give any instructions that we need to disclose or separate interests or ownership. The one who imposes it is the CMA through its CG system.”

Commented [MH25]: I don't see the fit of this quote to the above – need to expand to help contextualize it.

This reveals that the market in Saudi Arabia has no apparent influence in CG system. The CMA through its CG system is the one who has the power to reduce the problems of separating ownership and control.

Commented [MH26]: Expand. Also, fit here?

2.3 Conflict of Interests.

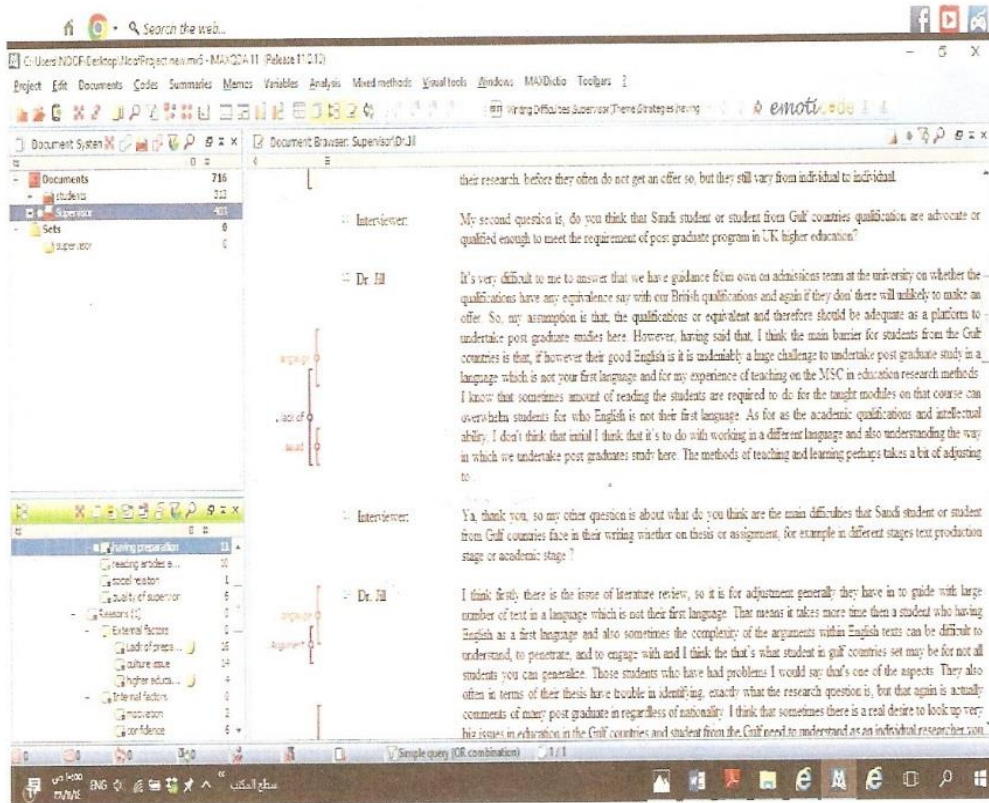
This sub-theme seems to be a dilemma in which CG system attempts to eliminate its impacts on stakeholders. Conflict of interests occurs usually between the owners (the family) and the managers (e.g. executive directors) when the manager is involved in multiple interests. It can also occur when the board of directors wants to exploit the company for their own interests as defined by FD from B Transport Company when he points out that. “[t]he main point of CG is shareholders protection, and the board of

Commented [MH27]: Might want to clarify here whether you are intending to capture conflict of interests owing to family dominance?

directors not to exploit the company for their own interests.” KT from A Cement Company has been asked if there are any factors or pressures that might control the organization in setting up the policies & procedures, he observes that

“In the past, there were some pressures. For example, when the board of directors consisted of members of the family (the owners), there were some actions, authorities, decisions, and orders that serve their own interests without looking after shareholders’ interests because there were no clear rules to control that, but now after the CMA appears, nothing like that can happen at all.”

Appendix (E): Sample of coded process using MAXQDA software (Perception of Supervisors)



Appendix (F): Sample of coded process using MAXQDA software (Perception of Saudi postgraduate students)

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA 11 software interface. The top menu bar includes Project, Edit, Documents, Codes, Summaries, Memos, Variables, Analysis, Mixed methods, Visual tools, Windows, MAXDictio, and Toolbars. The main window is titled 'Document Browser: students\Fahada'. On the left, a document list shows 'Documents' (716), 'students' (313), 'Supervisor' (403), and 'Sets' (0). Below this, a hierarchical code list is visible, including 'Students' (0), 'Theme' (0), 'ST/Difficulties' (0), 'repetition' (5), 'punctuation' (3), 'critical thinking' (15), 'translation' (4), 'paraphrase' (11), 'topic knowledge' (4), 'language difficulties' (3), 'coherence' (22), 'argument' (23), 'vocabulary' (16), 'ST/Reasons' (1), and 'external factors' (64). The main text area contains the following text:

23 Students: Well, I do not plan or make any outline for my writing. I try to look at any theses or articles related to my area and see the structure and issues that are discussed in these theses or articles.

24 Researcher: What are the other sections you find most difficult to write from the following and why: Introduction, literature review chapter, methodology chapter, analysis and discussion chapter or conclusion and recommendations?

25 Students: Ahhh, in the literature review, making an argument, because it is very important to present all the arguments available and convince the reader of what I want to say. I cannot just go ahead and say what I want to say; I have to guide the reader and convince him of the idea I am promoting in my writing. Also, in the analysis and discussion chapter, I have a problem in how to express my opinion on my results and how to support that opinion with evidence .

26 Researcher: Ok, thank you. Let me ask you, while you are revising your thesis or assignment, do encounter any difficulties during this stage?

27 Students: When I start revising any chapter before I submit it to my supervisor, I find that I express many ideas in one paragraph rather than focusing only on one idea, and this makes the paragraph disorganised. This is my problem. Also, I struggle with applying grammar rules when writing, although I have learnt these grammatical rules a lot in school, but this can be solved through employing a proof reader.

28 Researcher: Based on your academic writing learning experience, what are the factors or reasons that make academic writing a

The text is annotated with codes: 'argument' is applied to the student's response in paragraph 25, 'coherence' is applied to the student's response in paragraph 27, and 'language' is applied to the student's response in paragraph 27. The bottom of the screen shows the Windows taskbar with various application icons and system tray icons.

Appendix (G): Sample of Data Analysis Stages: (Perception of Supervisors)

Stage 1 Quotes	Stage 2 Codes	Stage 3 Categories	Stage 4 Theme
<p><i>Document : Dr Peter</i></p> <p>Some students and this is not related to Gulf students but to all, who find very hard to look at different arguments, perspectives on the issue. They think there is one right answer</p>	<p>Making a balance between arguments and counterarguments</p>	<p>Developing an argument</p>	<p>Academic writing difficulties</p>
<p><i>Document : Dr Andrew</i></p> <p>Some students struggle with the complexity of the arguments within English texts, because it is difficult to understand, to penetrate, and to engage with and I think it is more challenging especially for the students from Gulf countries.</p>	<p>Establishing an argument in English texts</p>		
<p><i>Document : Dr John</i></p> <p>They really have an issue with using specific English vocabulary. One of their difficulties, I think, is finding the proper and exact words that express their intended views when writing.</p>	<p>Hard to use a precise vocabulary that suits the research language:</p>		

<p><i>Document : Dr Sarah</i></p> <p>Other students have a problem with using word collocations and idiomatic expressions. I think this is related to their insufficient knowledge of academic words, which prevents them from writing according to academic standards.</p>	<p>limited ability to use compound nouns, expression, idioms</p>		
<p><i>Document : Dr Ann</i></p> <p>I think many postgraduate students, not particularly Saudi students, do not understand what it means to be critical in an academic sense. It means to disagree with other people, their theories or other ways of thinking, but in fact, all it means is to get an understanding of a much wider range of ideas than we had before. In this way, we can form a different opinion about it and decide how to proceed when people who are equally authoritative disagree.</p>	<p>Understanding what it means to be critical in an academic sense.</p>	<p>Critical Thinking</p>	

Appendix (H): A Sample Interview with Coding (Supervisor interview)

Note: In this sample, the underline refers to the quoting item and the bold in brackets refers to the code, category then theme.

Researcher: Are you currently supervising any Saudi students at master or doctoral levels?

Supervisor: Yes, mainly at doctoral level.

Researcher: What do know about the academic preparation of Saudi students before they come to the UK?

Supervisor: There are quite a lot of differences in terms of preparation for those Saudi students who come. Those who came a year before and have done their master's already in the UK are a lot more prepared than the other students who come straight from Saudi to the UK. For example, some students who come straight from Saudi Arabia having completed a master's in Saudi Arabia, I find they struggle a lot more in terms of being able to conceptualize and do a doctoral study in the UK. They also are not very skilled in qualitative research, but they have strong quantitative research skills **(students' lack of preparation/external factors/factors that cause writing difficulties)**.

Researcher: Do know anything about how Saudi students in the UK were prepared academically before they come to UK universities?

Supervisor: What do you mean by an academic preparation? Could you explain it more?

Researcher: I mean the language preparation programs in the UK that are provided to the international students before entering university to do their postgraduate degree. Also, the MSc programme which is the one-year research training for all MPhil/PhD students that prepares them in educational research knowledge and skills.

Supervisor: Right, I know what you mean now.

Supervisor: I found that the language programs that they do, I did not find that it provides strong effective preparations for PhD studies particularly in writing. I find that the language programs in the UK focus a lot more on what I call 'communication'. So it helps them with, if you like, speaking and, to an extent, engaging in conversations, but I don't feel it provides them with adequate grounding and support for writing for their PhD. I think the problem with many of the language programs offered in the UK for Saudi students before they come [is that they] are de-contextualized. In other words, they offer the standard language program that is not really tied to the idea of the study people are engaged in. So they teach them generic language skills, but it is not tailored to what they actually need for research. So I don't think it is adequate preparation in terms of the PhD (limitations of EAP courses in the UK/ EAP in the UK/ EAP). I would have thought that the language program that the Saudi students were to take should be much better tied to what they are going to actually research after that, so it provokes them to do contextualized reading, writing and speaking skills (students' preparation in Saudi /having academic preparation /strategy that solve writing difficulties). I also think that the language programs in the UK, a fair number that I feel, and obviously, this does not apply to all, come on the communicative teaching approach and all on the communicative language

approach. They focus a lot more on communication, and they focus less on writing (limitations of EAP courses in the UK/EAP in the UK/ EAP courses).

Researcher: What about the MSc programs?

Supervisor: With regard to an MSc of one year as an academic preparation program, I think that is quite good. Helps students a lot at doctoral levels **(students' preparation in UK)**. However, not all MSc programs are the same. It depends on how the MSc program is structured and what it is focusing on because I know of one or two students who started in the MSc and found it less useful. So it does depend often on the students, but it also depends on how the MSc preparation program is structured because it can be effective if it is well structured.

Researcher: What do you think are the main difficulties that Saudi students face in writing their theses or assignments?

Supervisor: I think they struggle in trying to synthesize; they lack the ability to provide synthetic overviews, coherent summaries of their work and their findings (students' difficulties in synthesis, coherence, and summarising/academic writing difficulties). So it is the difficulty analytically in academic writing or bringing things together. I think all PhD students struggle to synthesize complex information in understandable ways and to relate it to research questions. Also, I find that Saudi students do not read too widely on their topic, and the literature they read is quite dated and quite narrow. In particular, I do not think they read a lot of articles that are critical of their field or their study (lack of reading habits/internal factors/factors that cause writing difficulties). Saudi students find it difficult to critically engage with the theories and theoretical framework

(students' difficulties in critical thinking/academic writing difficulties) that they need for the PhD, and they find it hard to write in a way that shows that they are able to see the literature which speaks in favour of the research, but also literature which speaks against the research topic **(students' difficulties in making a balance between arguments and counterarguments developing an argument/academic writing difficulties)**.

Researcher: Can you tell me if you are aware of any specific areas of difficulty among Saudi students compared to other non-native students in their postgraduate studies? Can you provide any examples?

Supervisor: It depends which part of the world they are from. If they are from a generally English-speaking country, then there are obviously less problems. For Saudi students, I think they struggle while presenting the discussion chapters; they are unable to relate the literature to their findings **(students' difficulties in coherence/academic writing difficulties)**.

Researcher: Can you suggest reasons that cause these difficulties for your Saudi students in their postgraduate studies?

Supervisor: I think there are multiple reasons. I do not think they are familiar enough with the education system in the UK. There is a big jump in terms of the demands and expectations on doing a master's in Saudi Arabia and a PhD in the UK **(students' lack of academic preparation/external factor/factors that cause writing difficulties)**. OK. Also, there are some cultural differences which cause these difficulties.

Researcher: Cultural differences - could you explain it more, please?

Supervisor: Sure. I think [there are] various dimensions of what I mean by cultural differences.

Supervisor: I think the first level of the cultural differences is the understanding and expectations of the student-supervisor relationship. I think often, culturally, students do not initially feel that the role of the supervisor or their relationship to the supervisor is one of engaging critically with their supervisor. They often initially feel the relationship - and this is a cultural artefact - they feel the relationship is one of just following what the supervisor says about things **(students' relationship with their supervisors/external factor/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties)**. So, you know, so it is that kind of way. So that is the one cultural difference. I think the second set of cultural differences that I am talking about stems from a particular understanding of religion that they feel that the purpose is not to question things **(reason for students' lack of critical thinking)**. Again, it is linked to the first one, and therefore, they can't be critical and that is, again, what I mean by cultural differences as well. I think the third cultural difference is that it is about power and power dynamics in the supervisor-student relationship. In this respect, students do feel that to question the supervisor is wrong and not a good thing to do and, again, because they feel the supervisor is the authority and the figure almost like a father figure, and I think that again is what the cultural differences are **(students' relationship with their supervisors/external factor/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties)**.

Researcher: Are there any other reasons that might cause difficulties in academic writing for Saudi postgraduate students?

Supervisor: I think this mismatch part of it is expectations, but I also see that in a number of international students who are studying. Saudi students and international students are similar in many respects. They are entering a culture or a territory that they are not familiar with them. So they have to make social adjustments to a particular cultural milieu and way of living (**Creating Social Relationship/strategy to solve academic writing difficulties**), and I think this causes them anxiety and difficulty, and in the research we have done, we have found that there was a huge gap for many students, not just Saudi students, between what life is like back in their home country and what life is like in England. For example, without trying to generalize too much, life in England is much more individualistic – the focus is very much inwardly looking - and they struggle to make sense of that (**students' lack of independent learning/Internal Factors/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties**) Secondly, I think they have difficulties in their social world because, for example, Saudi students, like any other international students, come with their families. They have to worry about their children's education or how their husband or wife is coping or settling in while they are studying. We found all forms of worries, and in the research we have done, we found that also the fact is that we do not think that the university is sufficiently sensitive to the needs of international students in terms of providing adequate support and resources (**students' lack of support and preparation /external factor/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties**). We also found that, you know, if you come from Saudi Arabia, in particular, if you are coming from a largely majority Islamic society and the majority of the population is Muslim, whereas when you come to England, it is exactly the reverse, so I think there is a degree of what I would call cultural shock and in differences in accommodating to those differences as well. I also think that it turns family

dynamics that one has to factor in and account for. For example, female Saudi students are expected to look after the families on top of doing their PhD. So there is a high expectation on them, and that causes difficulty in managing home life and study life and similarly for males (**students' lack of support /external factor/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties**). I have done interviews [where] students said they have to take care of the family and act like they did in Saudi Arabia, and that places the demand on them as well. So I think those are some of the, if you like, the psychological or cultural factors that make an effect, impede or make an impact on students doing their PhD, and I think, lastly, with many international students, including Saudi students, you are coming into a context where you don't have your traditional or your established social structures and networks that provide support. You have none of that when you come to an international context. So, you have to recreate or find ways of creating these support structures, which is very difficult. Again, that impacts on their studies as well (**students' lack of support and preparation external factor/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties**).

Researcher: What are the strategies that would you suggest to solve these difficulties?

Supervisor: I think UK universities can do more to make the transition of international students in general into a different academic culture with different demands much easier by providing more tailored workshops, more support, and more focused attention on some of these issues (**Attending workshops/ strategy to solve academic writing difficulties**).

Researcher: Is there anything you want to add?

Supervisor: No, I do not think so. Do you have any other questions?

Researcher: No, thank you very much for your help.

Supervisor: My pleasure, Best of luck with your study.

Appendix (I): Sample of Data Analysis Stages (Perception of Saudi postgraduate students)

Stage 1 Quotes	Stage 2 Codes	Stage 3 Categories	Stage 4 Theme
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Document : Fahad</i></p> <p>I did not practise writing in Arabic enough; therefore, I am not able to write in English as well. I think most of the Saudi students are in a similar situation. This is because students do not read a lot. If we read a lot, we would be able to have many ideas, which would help us with writing.</p>	<p>Lack of Writing Practices in L1 & L2</p>	<p>Internal factors</p>	<p>Factors that cause academic writing difficulties</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Document: Maha</i></p> <p>When I start writing, I hesitate a lot before writing anything because I do not have enough confidence in my writing, whether it is acceptable and its level can be considered adequate for postgraduate studies.</p>	<p>Lack of Confidence</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Document : Mazin</i></p> <p>Generally, Saudi students are not encouraged by their families to write and read to learn. They do not read books, stories, or newspapers. As a result, they do not know the academic style of writing.</p>	<p>Lack of Motivation</p>		

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Document : Sarah</i></p> <p>The education system in Saudi does not encourage students to think outside the box. This is because there are no comprehension questions in the exam, in other words; we are not tested on question requiring deep thinking, which may lead students to explore and read. All we have to do is to memorise the information and abide by the teachers' rules.</p>	<p>Pervious learning experience in public education</p>	<p>External factors</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Document : Ahemd</i></p> <p>Most doctors or lecturers teach students the procedures or steps of educational research theoretically, not practically. Students do not have the opportunity to get some practice on how to write a research project. Therefore, when doctors or lecturers ask the students to write a research project on any subject, they find it difficult. This is because they do not know how to write a research project, or even how to start.</p>	<p>Previous Learning Experience in Higher Education</p>		

Appendix (J): A Sample interview with coding (Students interview)

Note: In this sample, the underline refers to the quoting item and the bold in brackets refers to the code, category then theme.

Researcher: From your experience in writing in L1 and L2 during your undergraduate and postgraduate studies, are there any differences or similarities in the writing styles of both languages?

Students: The style of writing in Arabic is based on giving more details and the overuse of conjunctions particularly "and/ but ". The style of Arabic writing does not give the shape of pyramid; it only includes collecting a lot of ideas without making harmony between them. In contrast, the style of English writing is based on the form of a pyramid, which starts with general and known things, then moves to the specific, and then makes harmony between general and specific ideas **(pervious learning experience in higher education /external factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties)**

Researcher: Did you receive any writing instructions that help you to write academic texts in English language subjects during the undergraduate stage?

Student: No, I did not receive any writing instructions. Teaching writing in Saudi was very simple - focus on grammar and structure. It is like teaching writing in schools. The exams mostly were multiple choice, true and false, matching vocabularies with definitions without subject questions **(pervious learning**

experience in higher education /external factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties).

Researcher: Did you have any academic preparation (EAP) in the UK before you started studying in UK universities?

Student: Yes, I took a one-year language course.

Researcher: Can you highlight the main differences, if any, between the academic preparation (EAP) in Saudi Arabia and the one in the UK with regard to academic writing?

Student: To be honest, there is not any academic preparation in Saudi especially for academic writing. In Saudi, there is no official academic preparation; universities or colleges do not require students to have a specific level of language **(lack of academic preparation /external factor/internal factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties)**. EAP in the UK I think focused mainly on language skills in general, in all types of skills - writing, reading, listening skills, and speaking. From my experience, EAP courses do not have any specific training in academic writing, dealing with critical thinking, or reviewing literature, or those sorts of things **(not adequate for preparing students for writing at the PhD stage/EAP courses in the UK/EAP courses)**. Not prepare students on how to have critical thinking in their writing

Researcher: What aspects of the academic preparation in the UK (EAP) had the most positive impacts on developing your academic writing?

Students: The main positive impact of the academic preparation in the UK for me is that I have learnt how do reference lists, citations in the text, and what plagiarism means, and this helped me a lot when I started my PhD and made me gain the basics of academic writing.

Researcher: Based on your learning experience of both EAP preparation programmes in general and academic writing in the UK, would you suggest having such EAP preparation programmes in Saudi Arabia?

Student: Yes, I think students should have academic preparation before they study abroad. This preparation should be in both languages - Arabic and English and in all skills.

Researcher: Could you please explain this in more depth?

Student: For instance, in writing skills, students should learn and practise how to be creative in writing. Also, they need to know how to construct an argument, how to link ideas within the text, and how to criticise authors' views with evidence but in a respectful way (**Teaching writing in the EAP courses do not meet the needs of the students /EAP courses in the UK**). Also, students need to know the common mistakes in writing. This should be done in both languages because I think that Saudi students have writing problems in their native language, which is Arabic, and not only problems in English writing. Additionally, this preparation should be based on students' attendance rather than giving them exams to pass this preparation.

Researcher: Can tell me please what difficulties you encounter when writing in the UK?

Students: The most significant difficulty in my writing is making a lot of repetitions (**students' difficulty in making repetitions/academic writing difficulties**), especially when I have new ideas and the sources are limited. I also have a problem with using the correct tense when writing, I always get confused as to which tense I should use - past, present, or passive - when describing, summarizing, or reporting, especially in the literature review, findings, and discussion chapters (**students' difficulty in the language /academic writing difficulties**).

Researcher: Ok, thank you

Researcher: **What is the most difficult stage in writing that you struggle with during writing your dissertation or assignments in your postgraduate studies?**

Student: I find it difficult to connect my ideas properly between paragraphs, especially while writing the literature review chapter. For this reason, I tend to use the Arabic way of writing, which makes my writing incoherent (**students' difficulty Linking ideas correctly between paragraphs/coherence/academic writing difficulties**). Another difficulty I struggle with is being able to think critically, which is the main issue in producing a solid and logical argument in academic writing. I do feel that I am struggling with writing my arguments, and I have to write many versions before I produce the final draft (**students' difficulty in writing arguments to demonstrate critical thinking /developing an argument/academic writing difficulty**). For example, I have to write an argument that suggests a certain issue and, at the same time, I should include the contradictory

one as well and again, I need to include my views considering the balance between the previous arguments with the limitations of each side. Also, I have a difficulty in writing the theoretical framework in the methodology chapter because in Saudi, we do not learn how proper educational research does. I think this is because in Saudi, we still depend on or follow the old methods of doing research **(students' lack of research skill /external factor/academic writing difficulties).**

Researcher: Based on your academic writing learning experiences, what are the factors or reasons that make academic writing a difficult skill to achieve? Are there any factors related to the educational system that might affect your way of writing?

Student: Well, I think there are many factors. One of the factors is the lack of academic preparation back in Saudi. We do not have academic preparations in our universities in Saudi Arabia, so most students do not have the skills of criticality when they read or write **(students' lack of academic preparation/external factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties).** They accept what they read as facts and are not able to look at them critically. Some of the written expressions they use just show that they are agreeing completely with whatever they take from their readings. This is because they learn to respect what they find in books without [raising] any objections **(students' previous learning experience/external factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties).**

Researcher: What do you think of the factors related to the background issues that might affect students' way of writing?

Students: I struggle a lot with writing a contribution to the general knowledge of my subject because I think if you know what your contribution is, you will be able to write about it (**students' lack of previous knowledge of the subject/internal factor/factors that cause academic writing difficulties**). A contribution to general knowledge needs to be all original - that no one else has thought it about before you. This is the difficulty for me.

Researcher: Can you tell me if there are any factors related to the psychological issues that might affect students' way of writing?

Student: I think that students' low proficiency in English consequently demotivates them to write, as their writing would require a lot of effort and time, and they would still make many mistakes (**students' low motivation/internal factors/ factors that cause academic writing difficulties**). Also, I think some students suffer from homesickness and with how to adapt to the new culture and responsibilities, which affects their study progress.

Researcher: What strategies or techniques are you doing right now to help yourself with these problems in writing?

Student: I have attended many academic writing workshops that are provided by the university to learn how to write academically. In general, these workshops are useful (**academic writing workshop/strategy to solve academic writing difficulties**). Also, I have been attending

workshops about how to do educational research to know what the requirements of research are here in the UK.

Researcher: Can you offer any suggestions to overcome these difficulties in order to make learning English academic writing a smooth process?

Student: The education should be of high quality from childhood to help students face future challenges. In addition, there should be preparation courses for those students who intend to continue their studies to teach them research skills (having academic preparation/strategy to solve academic writing difficulties). Furthermore, teaching writing in this preparation course needs to be according to students' majors because the methods of teaching writing in Saudi Arabia are general, which does not help students in their majors.

Researcher: Thank you for your help.

Student: You are very welcome and best of luck.

Appendix (K): Sample of Data Analysis Stages (Document Analysis)

Stage 1 Quotes	Stage 2 Codes	Stage 3 Categories	Stage 4 Theme
I do not like the word 'opinion'. 'Informed', perhaps, but still dangerous; you should consider 'subjective interpretation' and 'reasoned judgement'	Inappropriate words for expressing their opinions	Academic Vocabulary	Academic writing difficulties
Be careful of such a term. Can anything really be 'fully' treated?"			
It would be beneficial to be somewhat more assertive here – e.g., 'is most suitable			
You need to add a new subsection, or at least paragraph, and link it to the others to improve the coherence. Also, you need to indicate its relevance, because it just seems that you are jumping to a new topic.	Linking ideas between paragraph	Coherence	Academic writing difficulties
I feel this point is out of place with the rest of the paragraph. It seems some of your paragraphs take the form of text dumps rather than reasoned arguments, because this sentence is out of place with what follows.			
Have you talked about this before? If not, I don't think it should be here. A			

<p>new subsection or at least paragraph (well linked to the others) may improve the coherence but at the moment it just seems that you're jumping to a new topic</p>			
<p>The ambiguity here is problematic – you need to be confident that you show evidence of it"</p>	<p>Ambiguous details</p>	<p>Clarity difficulty</p>	<p>Academic writing difficulties</p>
<p>This is really vague, explain the figure</p>			
<p>This paragraph is unclear</p>			
<p>You need to explicitly provide these definitions here</p>			
<p>You need to get to a point where you examine the implications of adopting this view to the objectives of what you are seeking to achieve. To an extent, this follows later, but you need to ground it in the work in more depth to have a clear appreciation of its implication for methods, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and theory.</p>	<p>linking the implications of the study to the data in more depth</p>	<p>Depth of Explanation</p>	<p>Academic writing difficulties</p>
<p>You need to expand this discussion chapter to bring out the significance of all your findings.</p>	<p>Linking the discussion with findings in depth</p>		
<p>You are now being non-specific. Which method will you use and why and how will you implement it?</p>	<p>Need more depth</p>		

Appendix (L): Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Graduate School of Education

Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Noof AL-Harbi

Your student no: 600013523

Return address for this certificate: 11 The Mede / Post Code: EX4 8ED

Degree/Programme of Study: Ph.D Full Time

Project Supervisor(s): Dr/ Salah Troudi
Professor /Debra Myhill

Your email address: na291@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 07427638367

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:.....Noof.....date:..11 December 2013.....

Certificate of ethical research approval

TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Investigation into the Academic Writing Difficulties of Saudi Postgraduate Students

1. Brief description of your research project:

This study will attempt to (1) explore Saudi EFL postgraduate students' views about the difficulties posed by their academic writing learning experiences; (2) explore supervisors' views about the academic writing difficulties of Saudi postgraduate students; and, (3) provide suggestions and implications for Saudi postgraduate students to improve their academic writing.

2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

The participants of this study will mostly be Saudi postgraduate students at universities in the UK and their available supervisors. These students and their supervisors will be selected according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility. That is to say, students will be studying at English universities to obtain an MA, PhD, MEd & EdD degree in different specializations at the time the study is being conducted and will represent most of the Saudi postgraduate students available. The sample of the study will consist of both male and female Saudi postgraduate students. The students will share some common characteristics as they will be in their late twenties or thirties and from the same Saudi culture, but with different specializations and background knowledge. Saudi postgraduate students will be asked to fill in the questionnaire. For the semi-structured interviews, fourteen postgraduate Saudi students, seven of each gender and their available supervisors will be interviewed. These interviews will / may be voice recorded.

Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

3. informed consent: Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. a blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: Each consent form **MUST** be personalised with your contact details.

I will explain the research project to participants. They will need to sign consent forms to tell us that they are happy to volunteer in the research and allow the information collected to be used in my dissertation. No children will be taken part in this study.

4. anonymity and confidentiality

In the data collection pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants. Also, the consent form will assure for the participants of their anonymity, explain their right to withdraw at any time. Participants will be remained to the important of answering the questions honestly to ensure the research validity especially that all information they will give will be treated in confidentiality. Only information relevant to the research questions will be used. The data file will be kept securely.

5. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, or

The methods to be used are questionnaire, semi-structured interview and document analysis. All data will be stored safely away from any misuse by anybody. Other ethical issues (storage) Hard copy data, including signed consent forms and any document which matches names with pseudonyms, will be stored in a locked cabinet or drawer; digital data will be stored in my password-protected account on the University of Exeter U-drive. Interviews will be recorded and notes will be taken during the interview. Also, Audio data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest possible opportunity, and then deleted immediately from those devices” to the storage details. Then, transcripts will be coded and questionnaires will be labelled with numerical to maintain anonymity of the participants. Data analysis will be performed by me alone and will not impinge on the participants in any way. There will be no harm to the participants.

6. Special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.

To the best of my knowledge, no students with special needs will be taken part in this study.

7. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

As far as the researcher is concerned discussing the issue under study will not cause any harm or danger to the participants.

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: December 2013 **until:** December 2014

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): Saleh Doshi ...
date:11/12/2013.....

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

GSE unique approval reference: D.1.13/14/10

Signed: NRome **date:** 19/12/13
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

Appendix (M): Consent Form

Title of Research Project: Investigation into the Academic Writing Difficulties of Saudi Postgraduate Students

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations if applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form all information I give will be treated as confidential the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....

(Signature of participant)
(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 07482251625.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Mrs. Noof AL-Harbi..... E-mail: na291 @exeter.ac.uk.....

* when research takes place in a school, the right to withdraw from the research does NOT usually mean that pupils or students may withdraw from lessons in which the research takes place

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