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Teaching and Learning Arabic Writing to Fourth Grade Students in the Basic Education Schools in Oman

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**TEACHING AND LEARNING ARABIC WRITING TO
FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE BASIC EDUCATION
SCHOOLS IN OMAN**

Submitted by

Massoma Habib Al-Ajmi

For the degree of PhD
of the University of Bath

2007

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Signed: _____

Date: _____

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to my mother and father, and to the memory of my supervisor Louise Poulson.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank first of all both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education for the grant that enabled me to undertake this research. Without them I could not have been able to do this study in the UK.

Second, I wish to thank my two supervisors Louise Poulson and Dr David Skidmore for guiding me throughout the research processes. With their guidance, patience and understanding I completed this thesis.

I owe a special thanks to my family. I thank my mother for praying for me every single minute and I thank my sisters Laila and Sara for their support and encouragement. All other family members, as well as my friends, especially Dr Madiha Al-Shaibania, and Dr Dana Alabdulmalik, who supported me to finish this work, deserve my thanks too.

I also thank the teachers, the students and curriculum profanations in the Ministry of Education in Oman for participating in this study and giving me their time freely. My thanks also go to all the people in the Ministry of Education who provided me with significant help in different stages of this study, as well as the people in the Department of Education in the University of Bath.

Abstract

This study, which took the form of a case study approach, investigated the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in fourth grade Basic Education (BE) in the Sultanate of Oman. The aim was to understand how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools, and how this influences students' performance in writing. In order, to achieve this aim, the teaching and learning of Arabic writing was explored from different angles, which incorporated the perspectives of curriculum professionals, teachers and students, in addition to classroom practices and students' written texts.

This qualitative study used participant observation, interviews and document analysis to collect data related to investigative issues. An inductive approach was employed, to analyse observation and interview data, and content analysis was conducted for the document analysis.

The findings of this investigation were divided into three chapters according to the emerged themes. The first chapter was about knowledge for writing, which included transcriptional and compositional knowledge, knowledge about writing forms (genres) and knowledge about the writing processes. The second chapter explained the writing pedagogy, teaching processes, teaching recourses and teacher's roles in the writing classroom. The third chapter discussed the successful and limited aspects in the BE curriculum. Generally speaking, this study illustrated that teaching and learning Arabic writing is restricted by the official curriculum, which not only affects students' ability in writing, rather it also influences teachers' perspectives and practices in the writing classroom. Arabic writing in the fourth grade of the BE schools is taught in a prescribed

manner, and few opportunities are granted for student to do creative writing. The emphasis in the Arabic writing curriculum of fourth grade is given for writing accuracy in terms of spelling, handwriting and grammar, rather than for creativity in writing.

In the conclusion of this study, several recommendations were proposed for policymakers, curriculum professionals and teachers to assist them in enhancing the teaching and learning of Arabic writing.

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Chapter 1 Research Background, Problem and Significance

1.1 Introduction:

This study examines the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in fourth grade Basic Education (BE) schools. The BE is a new system that was introduced in the 1998 to replace the General Education (GE) system, as will be detailed in the upcoming chapter two. However, without giving a brief explanation of the research background and its problem it might be difficult to realize the significance of this study. Therefore, the intention of this chapter is to: (a) give a brief introduction about the background of the research (b) identify the perception of the research problem (c) underline the purposes of the research (d) highlight the research approach, and finally (e) underline the significance of the research.

1.2 The Research Background:

Writing is one of the most important modes of communication that humans have developed. It has been used from ancient times to record historical incidents and commercial transactions and it is still used by all societies to record their life events and to save their documents, statements, policy, wills and all types of certificates. It is moreover the principal medium used to protect original Islamic and non Islamic traditions (Khatter, Shahata, Azzazi 1990)*. Writing, for example, has been used to document the Holy *Quran* and *Hadith* (prophetic tradition) since the early Islamic era in the year (579) when the prophet Mohammed asked some of his companions to record the *Quran* as he pronounced it. After the prophet died, his companions wrote most of his speeches and actions so as to

* The titles of the Arabic references were translated to English, to make it easier for the English reader to understand the topic of the reference.

be used as guidelines for Muslims. Without writing most of the Islamic concepts, rules and instructions would have been lost or changed with the passing of time. For the purpose of saving Islamic documents, Prophet Mohammed encouraged Muslims to learn reading and writing (Qoorah, 1972). In addition, writing is the basic medium that has been used to transmit knowledge, ideas, and emotions among people across time and space (Al- Hashmi, 1995 and Riley & Reedy, 2000). Therefore, teaching writing, along with teaching reading, has been given considerable attention in educational systems of most countries.

Theorists, linguists, educators, and researchers in many countries have emphasized writing as a subject matter of their research because of its importance as an angle of schooling and communication (Gumperz & Gumperz, 1990), and because of the difficulties both teachers and students face in teaching and learning writing (Albajjah,1999 and Kos& Maslowski, 2001). However, in spite of the attention that has been given to writing, there are still many problematic issues associated with the teaching and learning of writing.

Various factors have contributed to the problems facing teaching and learning writing. These include; teacher's practices in the classroom (Burden, 1990), the instructions provided to the teaching of writing (Al-Hashmi, 1995 and Topping, Nixon, Sutherland, and Yarrow, 2000) and the curriculum content (Al-Kalbani, 1997). Vygotsky (1978) summarized the problem of teaching writing in schools, when he stated that:

'The teaching of writing has been conceived in narrowly practical terms. Children are taught to trace out letters and make words out of them but they are not taught written language instead of being founded on the needs of children as they naturally develop and on their own activity, writing is given to them from without, to the teacher's hands'

(Vygotsky (1978, p105)

I took this statement as a foundation for this study for three reasons. One it focuses on

teaching writing for early stage students. Second, it, to some extent, mirrors the way that writing is still taught in schools in many parts of the world. Thirdly, it puts major responsibility of the shortcoming in students' writing on the way that writing is taught in schools. Vygotsky mentioned that the teachers often overlook the ways that children encounter and gain experience of writing as an activity or practice within the social world. Teachers used to emphasize writing as a set of skills to be acquired by students. However, Vygotsky attributed the limitation of teaching and learning writing to teachers' practices when teaching writing. In other words, Vygotsky neglected other factors that influence the teaching and learning of writing such as curriculum directives.

One can argue that Vygotsky's statement does not reflect the current situation of teaching and learning writing, as a great deal of development in the area of teaching and learning writing has been introduced around the world during the last few decades. However, I can claim that Vygotsky's statement is still true in many countries, such as the US, Australia and the UK. The evidence from research conducted recently in countries, such as the US (Gutierrez, 1994), the UK (Hart, 1996) and Australia (Hill, 2002) expressed the need for more research in order to develop the way writing is taught in schools. On the other hand, the issue that was stated by Vygotsky is true in most Arab countries, where little research or development work has been conducted to improve the teaching and learning of Arabic writing. Yet, the issue might be more critical in Oman where only three studies have been conducted in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing. To be more specific, there is only one study that is closely related to teaching and learning Arabic writing, which was conducted by (Al- Hashmi, 1995), while the other two studies are only somewhat related to teaching writing. One is about oral composition (Al-Kalbani, 1997) and another, about the

grammatical mistakes in the written composition (Al- Bosaidi, 1998). Therefore, I believe that the research in this thesis tackles a currently under- researched area of educational issue and practice in teaching Arabic writing in the Omani schools.

The development of educational policies in most countries is largely based on research findings and researchers' recommendations. According to my review of both the Arabic and the English literature on writing and its pedagogy, I found that during the period that most researchers in the English speaking countries have given significant attention the teaching and learning of writing in the primary schools (or in the early stages), while in Arab countries attention has been given to teaching and learning Arabic writing in the secondary schools (or in higher stages) (Al-Hashmi, 1995; Mosa, & Mohsen, 1995 and Nuser, 1998). Researching teaching and learning Arabic writing in the primary schools is largely absent in most Arab countries and in Oman particularly. However, it may well be that problems in writing among secondary school students and university students might be due to the lack of the teaching of writing in primary schools (Kress, 1994). Therefore, this study focuses on examining teaching and learning Arabic writing in the primary stage, specifically at grade four of BE schools in Oman (age of 9 to 10) as will be identified later on.

Vygotskys' statement which puts responsibility on schools and teachers for the way that writing is taught, might be true in many western countries, where the teachers are given some space to interpret the curriculum in a way that suits their students. For example, in the UK, the schools and the teachers are more flexible in interpreting the curriculum document in a way that is appropriate to their students than Arabic language teachers in Oman who

are restricted to apply the curriculum as it is, without adding to it. Although one can argue that this is no longer true in the UK since the implementation of National Literacy Strategy, which limited teachers' flexibility in relation to pedagogy, I still believe that the English teachers are more likely to have a chance to diversify writing activities according to their students' needs. However, in most Arab countries particularly in Oman central education is conducted where all schools in all regions apply the same curriculum and all students use the same textbooks which include the same content, regardless of the students' cultural, social and psychological background (Al-Adawi, 2004). In this type of educational policy there might be equitability in providing all schools with same materials and equipments. However, it controls teachers by specifying particular content and methods regardless of their suitability for the students, according to their socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Limiting the teachers to particular content has also significant influence on students' performance in learning literacy (Hill, Comber, Loudon, Rivalland and Reid 2002). In this type of education the teachers are not given freedom to be flexible in their practices. Therefore, it is not only the teachers who are responsible for any shortcoming in teaching writing but the curriculum that they are interpreting is also a factor. To be specific the curriculum professionals have also contributed to the way writing is taught in schools.

1.3 Perception of the Problem:

As has been mentioned earlier, this study examines the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the fourth grade of the BE schools. However, my awareness of writing issues is not new. I became aware of this issue from two different sources: the first was my own experience as an Arabic language teacher and Arabic curriculum professional in the Ministry of Education in Oman, and the second was the evidence derived from prior

research conducted in Oman.

At a personal level, I initially experienced problems, when I finished my secondary school and entered university. The key difficulty that I faced was how to write essays and reports as it was a basic requirement of the university course. I faced this difficulty alongside most students at the university. This is because we had not learned how to write these types of texts in our school years. Subsequently, when I finished my degree, I worked as an Arabic language teacher in the preparatory stage school (the stage that comes between the primary stage and the secondary stage and inclusive of grades seven to nine for students of ages 13-15). In this position the writing problem became more obvious and challenging for me. On one hand, most of my students lacked the fundamental skills of writing, such as vocabulary, ideas and transcription aspects such as spelling and sentence structure, which were supposed to be taught to them at the primary stage. On the other hand, my academic background in teaching writing was insufficient to teach writing in the practical context of the classroom. I was lacking the practical background of how to teach writing, what to prioritize and what to delay, what is important and what is less important. What students should be taught in the writing classroom and how they should be taught? All these aspects were missing and I believe these aspects are still confusion among most Arabic teachers because of the unclear aims and content of the Arabic writing curriculum (Al-Kalbani, 1997 and Grainger, 2005). Lacking the practical knowledge and background in teaching writing and missing the clear guidance in the writing curriculum led me as well as many other teachers to neglect writing lesson and utilize it in teaching other skills. This was due to the fact that we as, Arabic teachers, did not get appropriate training in teaching Arabic writing throughout our academic years in the university, where the focus was on theoretical

knowledge aspects more than practical aspects. However, the lack of practical experience in teaching writing is more critical amongst primary school teachers who are preparing to become field teachers (class teachers) teaching more than one curriculum subject matter at the same time, as will be identified later on. As a result, many primary teachers do not have the appropriate academic background in teaching Arabic language skills to sufficiently affect students' learning and performance.

Another experience that made me more conscious of the problem of Arabic writing among the students in Oman was when I conducted my Master's research (Al-Ajmi, 1995). The research was in evaluating grammar textbooks of the first grade of preparatory school according to functional grammar (by functional grammar, I mean that which is used by students in their speaking, writing and reading). To achieve the research objective I had to analyze students' speech, their written texts and some common stories they selectively read. During the fieldwork I found that students have significant difficulties in speaking and writing. Although I used various materials to encourage them to talk and to write, most of their written texts were unstructured, comprising of no more than three or four lines. In addition, they were full of linguistic mistakes (i.e. spelling, grammar and punctuation errors), which meant that the students in Oman had critical problems in Arabic writing in both compositional, (generating ideas, imagination, and structuring the written text) and transcriptional (spelling, handwriting and punctuation) aspects.

The second source of my awareness of the writing problem was from the findings of research conducted in Oman in the area of teaching and learning Arabic language. One important study was the study of the Arabic Bureau of Education for the Gulf States

(ABEGS, 1989) which applied survey questionnaires to the Arabic language teachers in Arabic countries to identify the most common problems in the area of the teaching of the Arabic language. The result of this study indicated that oral and written compositions are the most prevalent problems in the Omani schools. Therefore, (ABEGS) recommended more research in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing. Consequently, some studies were conducted in Oman in the area of teaching oral and written composition. For example, there is a study of Al- Hashmi (1995), which has examined the influence of suggested functional programme in teaching written composition for the first grade of secondary school. The researcher found that students in this grade have obvious difficulties in writing, such as a lack of ideas, disorganised writings and numerous spelling and grammar errors. In addition, he found that the majority of written topics were focused on description and fictional aspects. Most of them were made up of the same topics repeated every year with no new topics being created for different purposes. Another study in this area was the study of Al- Bosadi (1998) who examined the common grammatical mistakes in students' writing in the secondary schools. The study indicated that most students lacked adequate writing skills, especially in transcription aspects. A further study, by Al- Kalbani (1997) focused on oral composition in preparatory schools (grade7-9). The researcher analyzed students' speech and found that they were weak in oral composition, which negatively affected their writing. The researcher also interviewed 15 teachers, who had referred to students' weakness in both oral and written composition, as well as lack of vocabulary and ideas in students' writings. Moreover the researcher analyzed the Arabic language curriculum of the preparatory stage and found that there were no clear objectives and content for both oral and written composition, which allowed teachers to neglect

teaching writing. Therefore, many teachers use the composition class period for teaching other skills such as reading, grammar and poetry.

All these issues led me to think seriously to conduct my study in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing. And as the BE, as will be identified afterward, is a new system, applying a new policy and new curriculum, it needs to be supported by research to explore its strengths and weaknesses in the area of teaching Arabic writing. Therefore, I decided to conduct my study in the BE schools, specifically in the fourth grade classes, as this grade is the final grade in the first cycle of the BE and students are supposed to have mastered the basic skills of writing. To be more specific the next section will identify this study purposes.

1.4 The Research Purposes:

I mentioned in the last section that, this study was designed to investigate teaching and learning Arabic writing in the fourth grade in the BE schools, exploring how this influences students' writing and their perspectives about writing. This issue will be examined from six different angles: curriculum professionals' perspectives, teachers' practices, teachers' perspectives, students' practices, students' perspectives and students' written texts. This is to discover different aspects that influence the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the BE schools. Particularly, this present study is designed to:

1. Examine curriculum professionals' perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing for fourth grade student in the BE schools.
2. Describe how Arabic teachers teach Arabic writing (e.g. what aspects are emphasized? What teaching processes are used? What roles they play in the classroom?)

3. Examine teachers' perspectives about teaching and learning of Arabic writing.
4. Describe students' practices in writing in the writing classroom (e.g. their interactions with each others, writing processes they go through).
5. Examine students' perspectives about Arabic writing.
6. Identify how teachers' perspectives and classroom practices influence students' writings (i.e. quality of writing in terms of compositional and transcriptional aspects and writing forms they produce).
7. Identify the successes and limitations of teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools.

Needless to say that to achieve these aims it was necessary to examine the research and theoretical literatures in the area of teaching and learning writing to develop a framework in order to help in identifying the research questions and analyzing the research findings. This will be presented in detail in the literature review chapter. In addition, it was important to investigate how other researchers carried out their studies in the area of teaching and learning writing in order to find the useful approaches and methodologies to achieve my study aims. This will be explained in detail in the methodology chapter. However, some features of the research approach will be identified in the next section.

1.5 The Research Approach:

I identified earlier that this study aims to achieve many purposes in order to explore how Arabic writing is taught to fourth grade students and how this influences students' writings and their perspectives about writing. Various approaches were used to achieve the study

aims.

Within the Basic Education System (BES) the Ministry of Education introduced new teaching methods such as collaborative learning approach. This approach is employed by all Arabic language teachers as well as other subject matters teachers. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study is to observe teachers and students' practices in the writing classroom in an attempt to further understand how teaching methods used, by teachers, influence the teaching and learning of Arabic writing.

Another major objective of this study is to interview the teachers in order to examine teachers' perspectives about teaching and learning writing within the new system. This is to gain deep understanding of their practices in the observed writing classrooms. This is because the evidence from research indicated that teachers' beliefs might influence classroom practices (Fang, 1996) which in turn, influence students' learning. In addition to this, examining teachers' perspectives will help to understand their practices from their points of view (Gutierrez, 1994) rather than depending on one's interpretation of the observed practices.

As students are a fundamental part of classroom practices it was equally important to understand their classroom practices from their points of view. From children's talk one can gain an understanding about classroom practices and what students like and what they dislike (Casey& Hemenway, 2001), as well as what they think about their writing (Kos& Maslowski, 2001). In addition, it was important to understand how classroom practices influence students' perspectives about writing (Hart, 1996). One of the aims of this study was

to interview the students in order to identify their perspectives about writing, to understand clearly their practices in the classroom and to explore the influence of classroom practices on their perspectives about writing.

Students' written texts are the outcomes of classroom practices. Analysing students' written texts can provide a picture of classroom practices (Graham, 1998). In addition, it is a significant tool for teachers to discover students' strengths and weaknesses as writers. This enables them to take them to further challenge stages. One of the key objectives of this study is to analyze students' writing in order to examine how classroom practices influence students' writing in terms of the quality (transcriptional and compositional aspects) and forms of writing they create.

It was mentioned earlier that all teachers in Oman employ the same curriculum and the students use the same textbooks. Thus, the teachers are the interpreters of the writing curriculum and the students are the receivers of it. Therefore, in order to understand how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools, it was important to examine Arabic language curriculum professionals' perspectives about the teaching and learning of Arabic writing. As I highlighted previously, there are a number of ways in which this study was significant and this will be discussed in the next section.

1.6 The Significance of the Research:

The contribution of this study to the body of knowledge is aimed to be in various aspects: First, this study is the first study conducted in the BE schools in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing in Oman. Thus, I assume that this study will indicate some

suggestions and recommendation in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing. To be more specific some recommendations in terms of knowledge for writing, teaching writing methods, classroom practices, teacher's roles in the writing classroom and curriculum content will be proposed.

Second, this study is in an area of educational research in which there is a shortage in Oman. Although some studies have been conducted in Oman in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing (Al- Bosaidi, 1998; Al- Gattami, 1995; Al- Hashmi, 1995 and Al- Kalbani, 1997) all of them focused on preparatory and secondary stages of schooling. Thus, this study is the first study conducted in Oman in the primary stage.

Third, this study examined teaching and learning writing from three phases: (1) the curriculum professionals' perspectives which reflect the theoretical phase (2) teachers' and students' practices which reflect the practical phase (3) Teachers' perspectives which combine between theoretical and practical phases (4) students' perspectives and their writings which reflect the outcome phase. Most researchers have examined teaching and learning writing by focusing either on teachers' practice (Gutierrez, 1994), or students' practices (Hart, 1996) in the classrooms, or by examining either teachers' beliefs (Brindley& Schneider, 2002& Graham, Harris, MacArthur, and Fink, 2002), or students' perspectives (Casey& Hemenway, 2001 and Kos& Maslowski, 2001) about writing. Subsequently, it is expected that this study will propose some suggestions in the area of researching teaching and learning writing.

From all what has been mentioned it is clear that this study is not aiming to evaluate the way

that Arabic writing is taught; rather it aims to investigate and understand how Arabic writing is taught for fourth grade students in the BE schools in order to explore some key issues about the phenomenon. This ultimately will help to provide some evidences about how Arabic writing is taught for fourth graders, and what aspects need to be developed and reformed. Yet, without giving basic information about the current study context and the educational system in Oman, it might be difficult for the reader to follow the different issues that are raised in this study. For this reason the next chapter will present some basic information about Oman and the BES.

Chapter 2 Omani Context and Teaching and Learning Arabic Writing in the BE Schools

2.1 Introduction:

As indicated in the previous chapter, this study investigates how Arabic writing is taught in the Basic Education (BE) schools in Oman and how this affects students' writing and their perspectives about writing. However, in order to help the reader understand the different issues that will be discussed in the different chapters of the current study it was vital to provide background information of this study context and the educational system in Oman. Thus, in this chapter an overview of the Omani context and the educational system in Oman will be presented. Specifically this chapter will offer (a) a geographical background of Oman, (b) history and development of the educational system in Oman, (c) a brief information about Arabic language curriculum and teaching of writing in the BE schools and finally (d) some issues related to the BES and Arabic language curriculum.

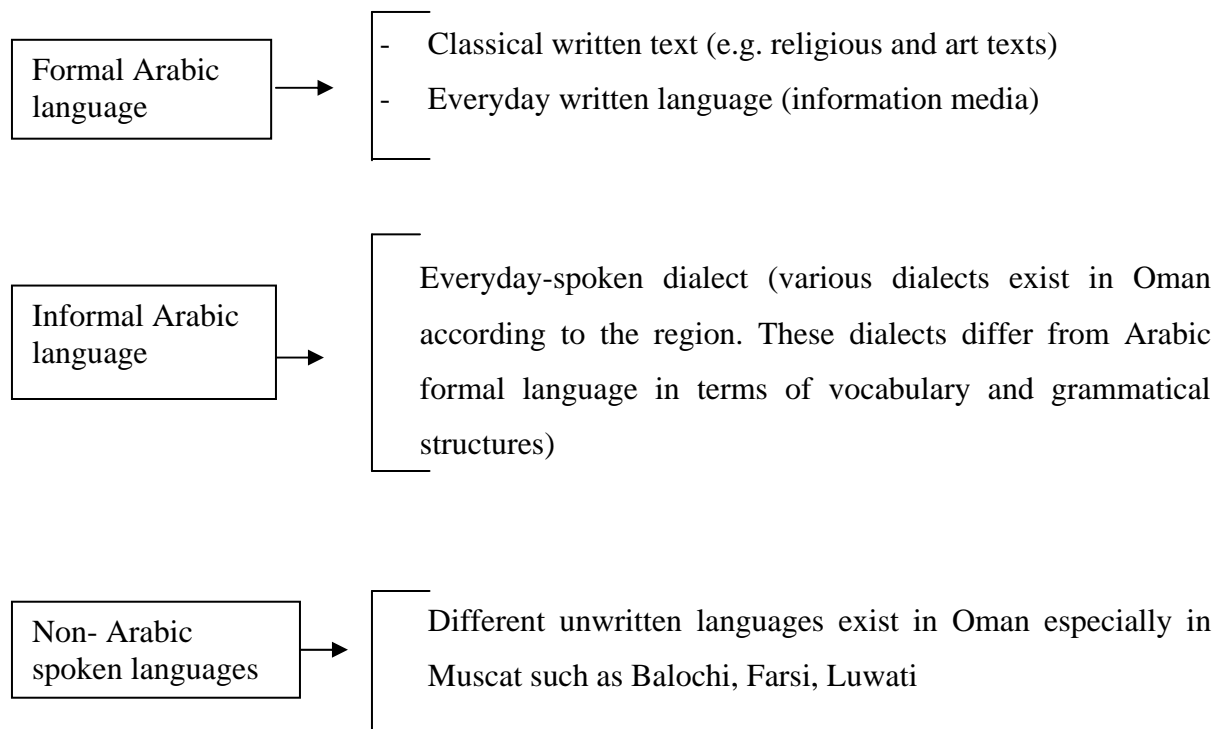
2.2 Geographical Background:

The geographical background of Oman might help the reader understand the socio-cultural aspects of the Omani society that emerged within this study, especially those related to the sample and findings of the study.

Oman is an independent Arabic Islamic state, where the majority of the population follows the Islamic religion and the official language is Arabic. However, there are many other languages in Oman such as Balochi, Farsi, Luwati in addition to various dialects such as Arabic Dofari Spoken, Arabic Gulf Spoken and Arabic the Omani Spoken

(Ethnologue.com, 2002). The written and spoken languages in Oman can be identified in the following figure:

Figure 2.1 the spoken and written languages in Oman:



Several researchers (e.g. AL Gattami, 1995 and Al-Kalbani, 1997) found that the widespread of Arabic dialects and non- Arabic spoken languages has a significant influence on students' achievement in learning Arabic language especially in writing.

Oman occupies a vitally important strategic location. It lies in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula with a 1,700-kilometres coastline, extending from the Strait of Hormuz in the north to the border of the Republic of Yemen in the south. The total land area of Oman is approximately 309,500 square kilometres with a population of 2,302,000 of which

75% (1,779,318) are Omani with the remaining 552,073 being of expatriates of different nationalities (Ministry of Information, 2003).

There are eight administrative regions in Oman: Muscat, Al-Dakhilya; Al-Dhahira; Al-Batinah, Dhofar, Al-wusta, Musandam and Al-Sharqiya. Muscat like all other regions is divided into smaller districts called *wilayats*. This study was conducted in the Muscat region in three different wilayats: Alaamirat; Alseeb and Alghubra, as each wilaya reflects, to some extent, different socio- economic levels. In addition, to some extent, the population in Muscat might reflect the socio-cultural features of the population in other regions of Oman. This is because many families moved to Muscat from other regions for employment reasons.

Since 1970, Oman has been ruled by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos who has provided a period of relative stability and social progress. Education was one of the major priorities of the Government of Oman. The following sections describe the history of education in Oman and how it has changed since 1970.

2.3 History and Development of the Education System:

Education in Oman has progressed through many different stages. Until the second half of the twentieth century Oman had no schools as we know them today. That does not imply, however, that there were no other forms of education. Teaching existed in simple recitations of the *Holy Quran* taking place in the open air or in mud brick classrooms and mosques. Some of the wise and knowledgeable citizens would also teach a variety of subjects such as Arabic Language, Islamic science and history in their own homes to small groups of pupils.

In 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos committed Oman to take its place among the nations of the modern world, it was natural that attention should immediately be focused on the youth of the country. The aim was to inspire, to grant them the opportunities which the late twentieth century offers and equip them to face its challenges so that Oman could progress in the modern world. An Example of the progress in the educational aspect is the enormous increase in the number of schools, teachers and students. In 1970 there were only three modern schools which were based on prescribed curriculum. Two of these three schools were in Muscat region and the third one was in Dofar region, with the total number of students at 909 and 30 teachers. However, the total number of modern schools rose to 1022 with the total number of students 576472 and the total number of teachers 6319, in the academic year 2003/2004 (Ministry of Education, 2004). To stress the importance of education to the Omani citizens, H.M. Sultan Qaboos, at the second national anniversary of the country on 17th November 1972, stated

“Education was my great concern, and I saw that it was necessary to direct efforts to spread education. We have given the Ministry of Education the opportunity and supplied it with out capabilities to break the chains of ignorance. Schools have been opened without taking into account the requirement. The important thing is that there should be education, even under the shadow of trees” (Ministry of Information, 1990, p25)

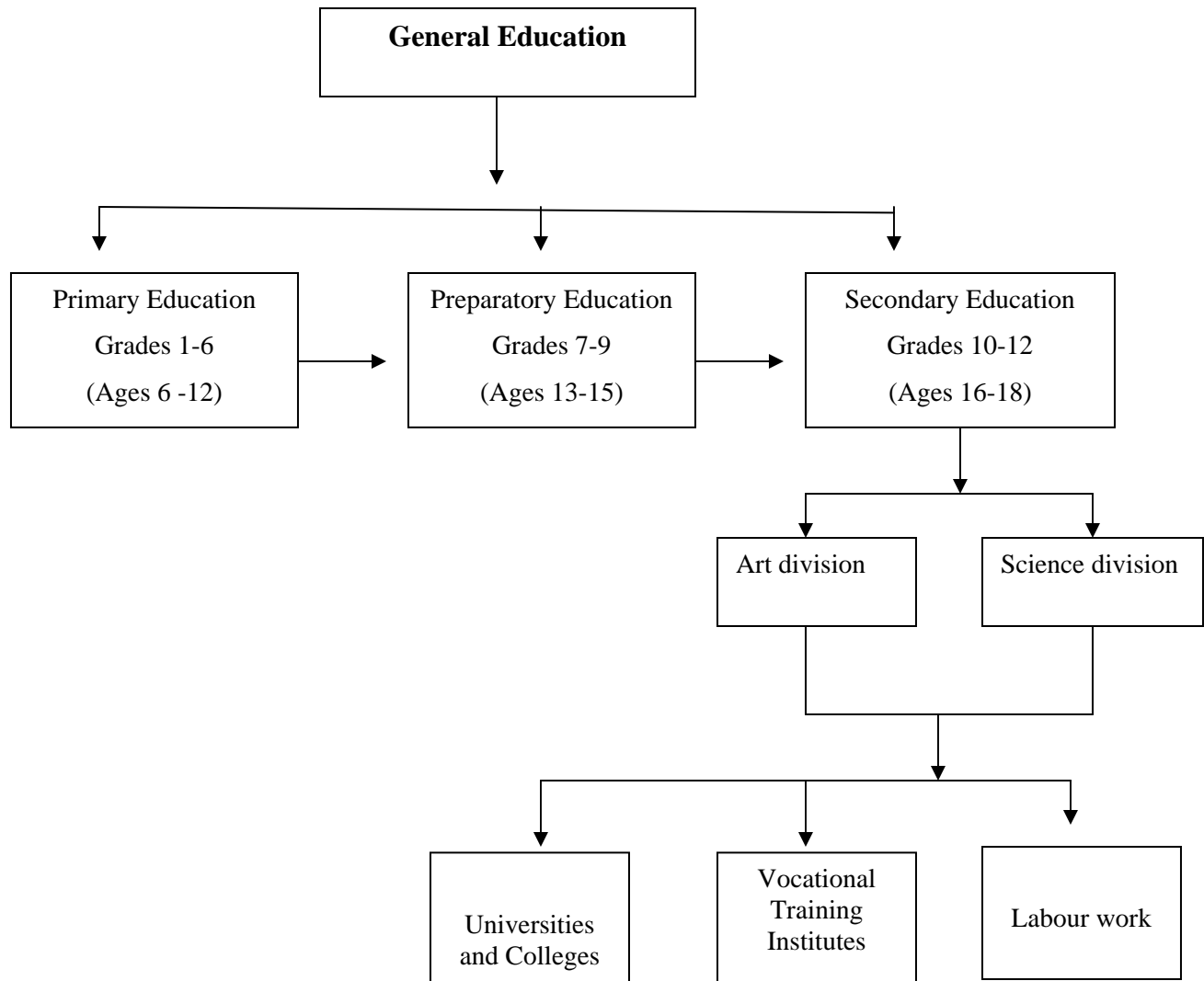
In Oman education starting from grade one (age 6) to grade twelve (age 18) is not compulsory for either males or females, but jobs are difficult to find without it. For this reason the government has paid attention to the initial preparation of the citizen as a major way of ensuring the opportunity for employment. Education in Oman is free of charge in all public schools, and it contains two educational systems: the General Education (GE) system and the Basic Education (BE) system.

2.3.1 General Education System in Oman:

The current General Education system (GE) in Oman consists of 12-years of school education that is divided into three phases: primary, preparatory and secondary.

Primary education consists of six years (grades 1-6) starting at the age of six. After the sixth grade examination are taken between ages 12 and 13, students move on to preparatory education. Preparatory education lasts three years (grades 7-9, ages 13-15). Students passing the preparatory certificate examination are then admitted to the secondary education phase. Secondary education covers three years (grades 10-12, ages 16-18). This secondary phase is divided into two divisions: the sciences and arts. This phase consists of a common core curriculum of Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, Mathematics, Science, English Language and Social Studies and optional specialized art or science courses that end with a general secondary education examination. The figure 2.2 summarises the stages of the GE system in Oman.

Figure 2.2 the structure of the GE system:

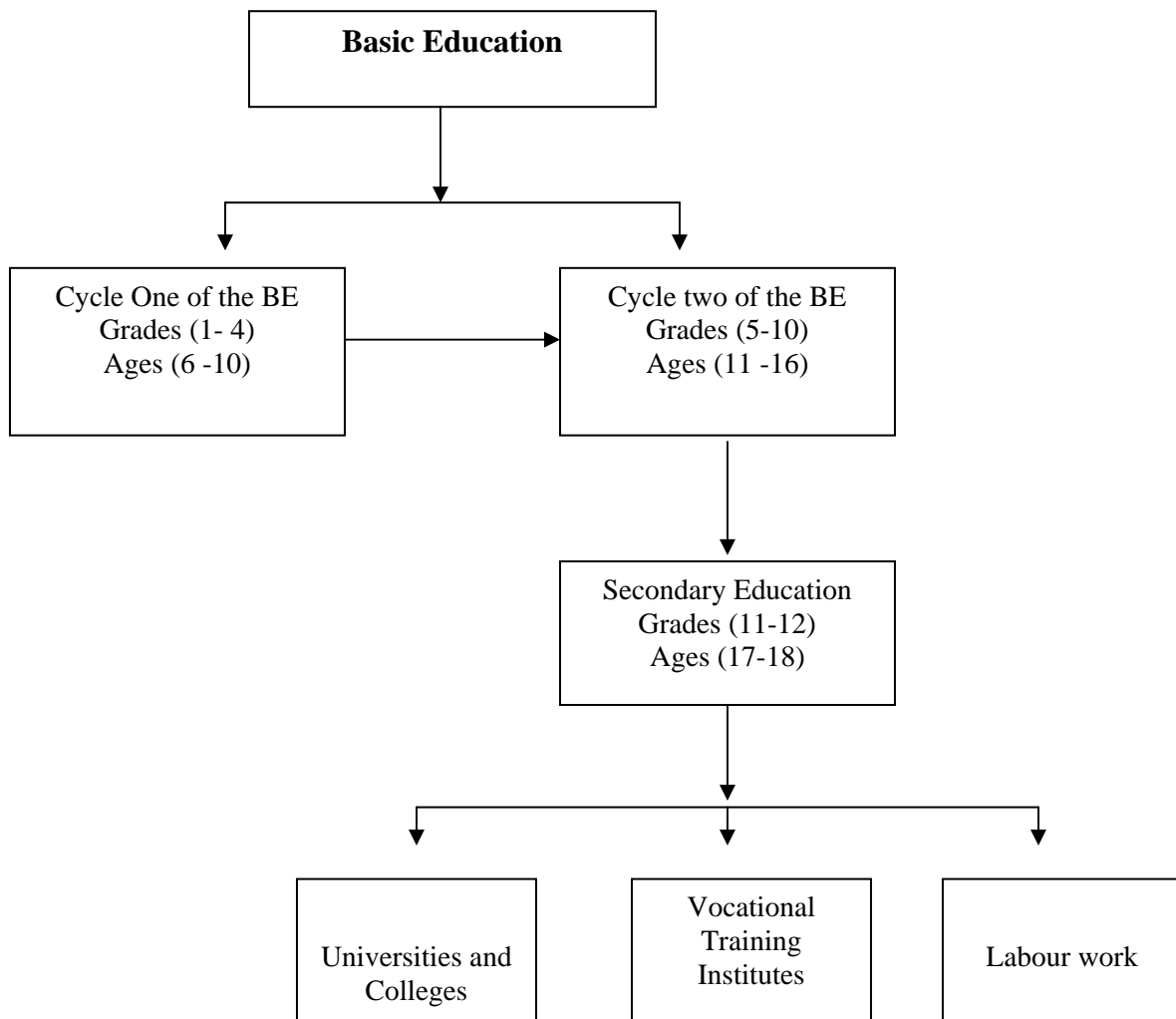


2.3.2 Basic Education System in Oman:

At the beginning of academic years 1998/1999, along with the GE, the Ministry of Education introduced the Basic Education system (BE) in two phases: a basic education (BE) phase for ten years and secondary phase for two years. This BE phase is divided into two cycles, cycle one consists of four years (Grades 1-4, Ages 6 –10 year) and cycle two

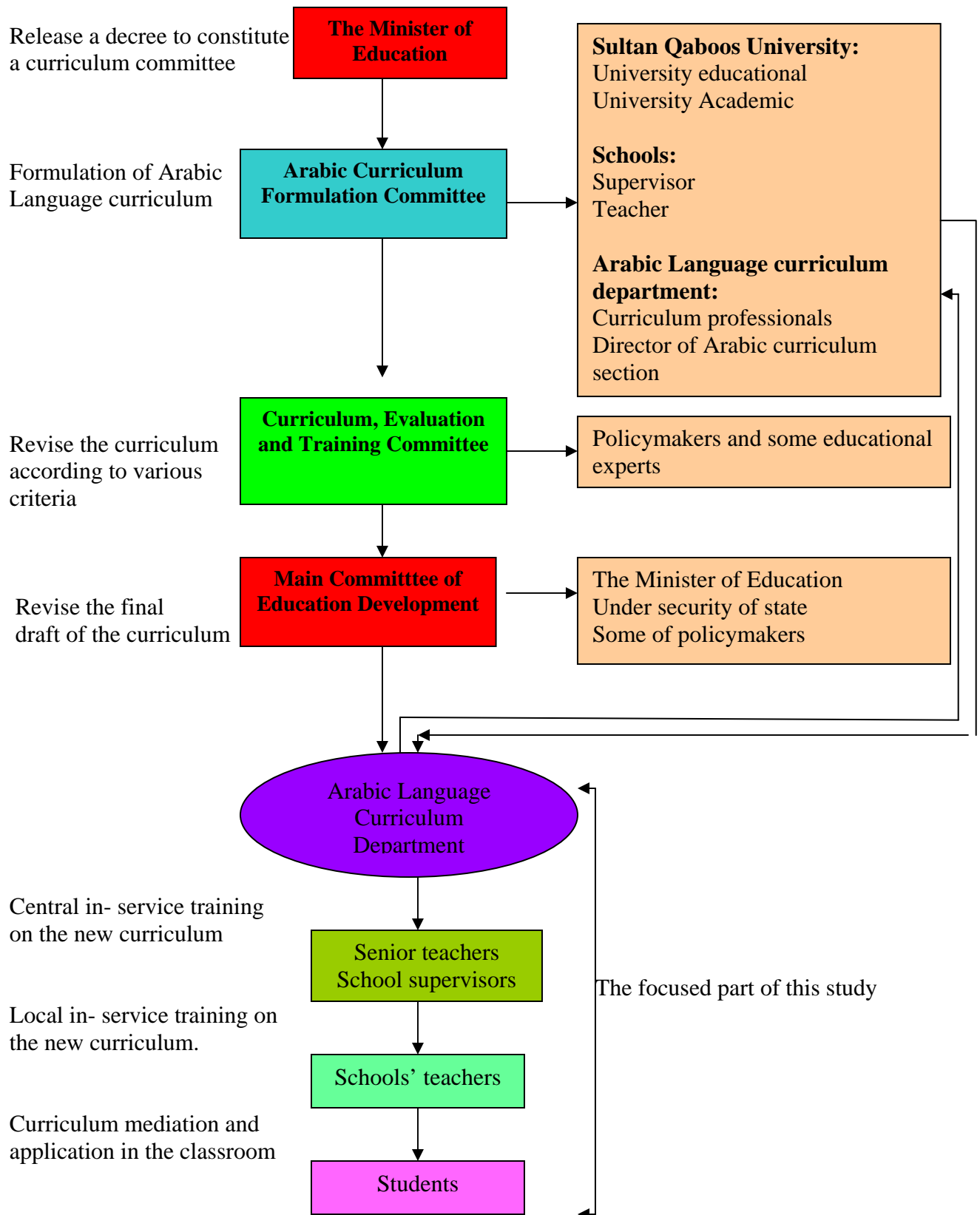
consists of six years (Grades 5-10, Ages 11- 16 year). When students complete the basic education they will be able to continue their secondary education which will be two years (Grades 11-12, Ages 17-18 year), or join vocational training institutes. The BE system will gradually replace the existing system General Education system (GE). Yet, the age range will remain the same (of which grade one begins at the age of six). The figure 2.3 bellow summarizes the BE in Oman.

Figure 2.3 the structure of the BE system:



Education in Oman is organised centrally. All schools in Oman have to follow the same curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education also provides textbooks, laboratories, equipment and libraries, stationery and other scholastic materials and equipments for students of the public schools. All the schools use the same materials (textbooks, activity books, and teacher's guidebooks). All subject materials and textbooks are written, reviewed, edited, illustrated, and printed in the Ministry of Education in Oman. The curriculum content is decided by a central educational authority which is the Ministry of Education and this content is applied throughout the country. The figure 2.4 illustrates the stages of development of Arabic language curriculum.

Figure 2.4 Stages of Arabic language curriculum’s formulation and application in schools



Many educational researchers view curriculum content and teaching methods as the two main factors affecting students' achievement and perspectives towards different subjects. Thus, the improvement in the BE curriculum focused on two main aspects, firstly, the content of the curriculum and secondly, teaching methods. In terms of content the main improvement was based on reducing the amount of lessons in the textbooks, and connecting the material to society and students' lives. In teaching methods there were shifts in practice. First, teachers should stay more away from rote learning and memorisation. Second, they should concentrate on cooperative learning.

The main objectives of these curricula were stated as:

- (1) Developing self- learning and thinking skills.
- (2) Developing collaborative and co-operative work among students.
- (3) Building positive attitudes of students towards their subjects and schooling.
- (4) Encouraging independence among students.

(Ministry of Education, 2001b)

In the first cycle of the BE some subjects are grouped by common content depending on the link they have with, Islamic studies, Arabic Language and Social Studies which are considered as one field called first field; with Mathematics and Science as another called second field. Each field is taught by the same teacher to ensure that integration is taking place while there are other subjects which require a specialized teacher such as English Language and Information Technology. The first cycle is co-educational. Yet,, starting from grade five (age 11); cycle two, boys and girls go to separate schools.

Basic Education schools are equipped with Learning Resource Centres (LRC). Computer literacy is very important in the curriculum. The schools are equipped with computers to allow students to learn how to use them in their daily work whether writing their homework or researching for projects. Students are able to access information in different ways and forms with books, videotapes, television, and computers.

The school year in Oman was relatively short when compared to other countries. According to the Ministry Of Education (2001a) the total number of days in the Omani school academic year is 160, compared to Japan and Germany with 240 days and in the United States of America about 180 days. To extend the school year may mean there is a better chance of improving performance when students get the opportunity to spend more time in activities that prepare them for their future. For this reason Oman has extended its school year to 180 days to bring it more into line with hours of schooling in other countries. The school day has been increased to 8 class periods, each period lasting 40 minutes. Students in all schools cover the same number of hours assigned to each subject applying the same timetable.

To implement the BE programme effectively, efficient teachers were chosen to teach in the BE schools. The effective teachers, according to schools principals and subject supervisors' annual reports, are chosen from different primary schools to teach in the BE schools. All these teachers were trained on the BE curriculum and the philosophy and concepts that it relies on such as student- centred education and collaborative learning. In addition, it is essential that all staffs involved in the BE are fully trained in the philosophy, methodology and curriculum materials on which the programme is based.

One main goal of the BE is to improve the content and teaching methods for all subjects and Arabic language is one of the main subjects in both Basic and Secondary Education in Oman. Thus, the Ministry of Education is paying great attention to the Arabic language curriculum and teaching strategies. As teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the fourth grade is the focus of this study, in the next section a detailed explanation of Arabic language curriculum of fourth grade in relation to Arabic writing will be presented.

2.4 Arabic Language Curriculum and Teaching Writing:

The new Arabic language curriculum of the fourth grade has addressed the following general objectives to enable students to:

- Present their ideas or any ideas they heard or read, using Arabic language fluently.
- Compose, in an eloquent way any event happened to them, or any scene they saw.
- Understand what they listen to and express their idea about it.
- Use the linguistic and grammatical aspects in their oral and written composition.
- Read fluently texts taking in consideration the vocalization of the words and punctuation marks.
- Write without any spelling mistakes in clear handwriting

(Ministry of Education, 2000)

These objectives were divided into more specific objectives related to different skills of the Arabic language; listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The research in this thesis is dealing with writing; therefore, the objectives, contents and teaching method of writing of grade four will be presented.

Objectives:

It is expected that at the end of fourth grade, students be able to:

- Write some words including pronounced but unwritten sound or letters and other words including written but unpronounced sounds or letters.
- Build some words from letters and sounds.
- Write some sentences accurately and neatly.
- Write some paragraphs from reading lessons.
- Answer lessons questions in writing.
- Summarise in simple sentences some short stories they listened to or read.
- Complete a story or a text using correlated and completed sentences.
- Write short sentences about their every day observations.
- Employ studied linguistic and grammatical rules

(Ministry of Education, 2000)

From the presented objectives it is clear that using punctuation is not one of the writing objectives. Yet, punctuation is included in the Arabic curriculum content as one of basic skills of Arabic language. On the other hand, as we will see in the composition content that the content does not cover all presented objectives. This gives an impression that there is a contradiction between the objectives and the content. Thus, these objectives are not necessarily reflected in the content of the writing curriculum.

Although the writing objectives are a mix of the transcriptional and compositional aspects of writing, content is separated into spelling lessons, handwriting lessons and composition lessons. And since the focus of the study is on composition, the content of the written composition will be presented next.

Content:

The compositional goals were translated in the content of the writing curriculum which included twenty four (24) writing lessons divided into two semesters; each semester included twelve (12) lessons. All lessons were linked with the reading topics. Students at the end of each lesson were asked to write some limited sentences, approximately, five to six lines about the topic.

The content of the lessons require students to write about the following topics:

First semester:

1. Obeying parents
2. Handicrafts in Oman
3. The Omani army and its role in protecting the nation
4. The importance of intelligence in problem solving
5. Aisha, Prophet Mohammed's wife
6. The student's duty towards the country
7. A student's wish towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
8. Etiquettes of using the phone
9. Lessons learnt from studying the autobiography of Al- Khaleel bin Ahmad Al-Frahidi, one of the Omani characters
10. Why do you like the computer?
11. The importance of swimming in people's life
12. Describe the camel

(Ministry of Education, 2003a)

Second semester:

13. Bad behaviour and good behaviour
14. Benefits of cooperation to the society
15. How every one in the society can help the police?
16. Summarizing the story of the shepherd and wolf
17. Express your appreciation of the roles played by Islamic women in history
18. The importance of petroleum in society
19. The importance of respect among the people
20. Characteristics of the Arabic world
21. Describing Oryx and how Oman protected it from extinction
22. Victories of Tariq bin Zeyad in Andalusia
23. Uses of the satellite and its role in people's life
24. The role of civil defence in defending citizens

(Ministry of Education, 2003b)

It is clear from these topics that, some of them sound rather traditional topics and some rather dull for the age group. Overall, they seem more aimed at developing desirable social attitudes rather than developing students' interest in writing by addressing topics of relevance to their own age and experience. These issues will be elaborately discussed in chapters five and seven in this thesis.

Teaching Methods:

The method of teaching was traditionally teacher-centred. The teacher was the central figure in the classroom and controlled the learning activity within it. Students were expected to remain quiet in their seats and concentrate closely on what the teacher is

presenting. The teacher specified the follow up textbook assignments and supervised their completion page by page and unit after unit. Improving Arabic language teaching methods became one of the main goals of the BE system, so all the BE schools started to shift teaching methods from teacher-centred toward more student-centred approaches. Student-centred education is one of approaches that recommended by many educators and researchers (Ministry of Education, 2001b). It provides the students with a confidence and helps them to be independent learners. The Ministry provided several facilities such as a minimum class size of 30 students, and in-service training programmes to prepare teachers for applying the student-centred approaches. One of the main methods for moving from a teacher-centred towards a student-centred approach is to develop co-operative group work with the co-ordination and help of teachers. It is hoped that in-service training programmes will encourage and reinforce teachers to follow the student-centred approach. However, from my professional experience in the Ministry of Education, it appears that teachers and students are still in need of more support and training in this type of approach.

In the last section the theoretical angle of the Arabic writing curriculum was clarified. This theoretical framework will provide the required support on the quest to answer the integral questions of this study, namely how the writing curriculum is implemented? How it affects students' abilities in writing? And what are the success and limitations of it according to curriculum professionals', teachers' and students' perspectives and classroom practices? Therefore, I believe that it might be useful to present some of the challenges that faced the BES in its initial implementation. This might shed some light on the findings of this current study.

2.5 Some Issues Related to the Arabic Language Curriculum of the BE:

According to my work in the Ministry of Education as one of Arabic language professionals formulating Arabic language curriculum and materials and training Arabic language supervisors and teachers, I have come to realise that the BE system in Oman, as any new policy in the world would be, is faced with numerous difficulties and problems in its infancy. Although the BE has been shaped in a new package regarding the building of new premises; providing schools with modern equipment; introducing a new curriculum, textbooks and materials and choosing effective teachers to teach in these schools, it is still lacking in many educational aspects. For example, even though the Minister of Education has constituted a specialised committee to formulate and write the Arabic language curriculum for the BE schools, the time which was allocated for this committee to complete the work was extremely limited. It had no more than six months, including the work involved to formulate the curriculum and related materials and train the teachers. Therefore, the resulting curriculum does not reflect the necessary revisions according to educational theories and research.

In addition, the Arabic language curriculum is constantly aligned with social, religious and cultural aspects. This has restricted Arabic language formulators' freedom in choosing more attractive topics for the children than the historical cultural and social topics, which are maybe more appropriate for high stages in schooling. Therefore, most topics included in the writing curriculum of fourth grade do not relate to students' developmental needs. It seems that the aim of these topics is providing cultural and informative knowledge rather than developing students' creativity in writing. Hence it might not be extreme if I say that the development of the Arabic language curriculum of the BE schools has been

“superficial” more than “radical” since the new curriculum is not much different than the GE curriculum with regards to the content.

On the other hand, in relation to pedagogy, as I mentioned earlier, co-operative learning and discussion are central to teaching approaches in the BE schools. And as these approaches became customary in the BE schools, Arabic language teachers have used them in teaching all Arabic language skills without bearing in mind the appropriateness of these approaches for the skill and the situation in hand. However, I believe that this might be due to the way that teachers were trained to use these approaches.

Regarding the in-service training programmes, Arabic language teachers did not receive appropriate training in these approaches in relation to quantity and quality. Concerning the quantity aspect, the duration of the training is very short, as it does not exceed two weeks, including training teachers on three different subject matters i.e. Arabic Language, Islamic Education and Social Studies. This is because they were trained in the teacher preparation programme to become “field teachers”, teaching all these three subjects. Conversely, regarding the quality aspect, the in-service training programme is implemented in two diverse ways (as has been explained in figure 2.4). First of all the in- service training programme is implemented centrally by the experts in the Ministry of Education who train supervisors and senior teachers. Then it is implemented locally when the supervisors and senior teachers train school teachers within a two weeks period.

The vital issue in the in-service training programme is that trainers focus on the theoretical aspects more than practical aspects. Given that training activities are carried out before publishing the new curriculum, teachers do not see the new curriculum in the in-service

training to identify aspects, which they need more to be focused on during the training period. Besides, many teachers who teach Arabic language are not specialised in Arabic language; thus the knowledge and the academic background they have might be inadequate to teach Arabic language skills sufficiently.

Additionally, although this new system has attracted some teachers, it is however disliked by others. This is because the new system has placed more responsibilities on teachers regarding the increase in the school year and school day. This system did not provide any additional compensation incentives that would motivate the teachers. In other words, the teachers who teach in the BE schools receive the same amount of monthly pay that the teacher in the GE receives, regardless of additional efforts made by BE schools teachers.

Some of the previous issues have been mentioned in a paper presented in the seminar held in Muscat in the 17-21 February 2001, by Al Hammami, the previous Director- General of Curriculum and Training as the following:

“There are many difficulties facing the new policy of education in Oman. First of all, problems of changing teachers’ beliefs and philosophy about teaching pedagogy; although plenty of efforts offered to train teachers on new pedagogy which based on student, many teachers mechanically, return to the old one which is based on teacher more than the student. Second, work pressures in the curriculum departments are obvious as preparation and writing of students’ textbooks and teachers’ guides as well as their printing and publication should be done within five to six months, which cause inaccurate work. Third, problems in training teachers; because there is not enough time to coach teachers on appropriate training on the new curriculum and pedagogy”

(IBE& UNESCO, 2001)

The last statement presented some vital aspects related to this study such as time pressure on curriculum professionals which might lead to some limitation in curriculum development and teachers’ training. This problem might be significant when we realize that it is not easy to change teachers’ beliefs to adopt the new pedagogy especially for those

who have long teaching experience years using traditional teaching approaches. Teachers' beliefs, according to many researchers, (e.g.; Brindley& Schneider 2002; Clark& Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992 and Poulson, Arramidas, Fox, Medwell and Wray, 2001) are related to their practices in the classroom which accordingly are linked with students' achievement and perspectives about the subject matter. These aspects will be looked at in this study.

2.6 Conclusion:

From all what has been mentioned in this chapter it is clear that immense efforts were made by the Ministry of Education towards developing the educational system in Oman. The BE is one of these efforts. It is a new system that was aimed to replace the GE gradually. However, I believe that during the implementation of any new curriculum it is vital to conduct several researches in order to explore the successful parts of the curriculum to be emphasised and to identify the limitations in the curriculum to be resolved.

Needless to say, that there are various types of research that might provide some information and suggestions to the policymakers to help them in developing their policies. One of these types of research is the critical evaluation research that aims to evaluate the policy and provide the policymakers with a statement that identifies what is wrong with what is happening and why. This type of research is useful if the researcher has the basic information about the policy that can be used as a foundation for the critical evaluation research. Yet, if the phenomenon is still 'ill defined', it might be useful to carry out an explorative research that aims to 'understand' the phenomenon on hand, to provide the policymakers with the basic knowledge about what is going on and why, which is the

rational of this study.

To conclude, this study explores the teaching and learning of Arabic writing at the fourth grade of the BE schools describing what happens in the social setting of the writing classrooms and explaining what is happening from participants' point of view. Yet, before doing this, it is vital to build a theoretical framework that helps to investigate the phenomenon of teaching and learning Arabic writing in Oman; and to frame research questions guiding an empirical study of the topic. In other words it is important to critically review what is already known about teaching and learning writing more generally; what is missing and what debatable issues there are in the area of teaching and learning writing. Furthermore, it is important to consider the various ways in which the teaching of writing has been researched by others. This critical review will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 the Literature Review

3.1 Introduction:

As I mentioned in chapter one, this study investigates how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools (grade four at the age of 10), and how this influence students' writing and their perspectives about writing. Therefore, it was important to examine the existing literature in the area of teaching and learning writing in order to know what research says about teaching and learning writing especially, in the early schooling stage. The following issues need to be addressed. What is known? What are the debatable issues about writing? And what is the prominent gap in this area?

Research on learning writing during the last several decades has revealed a great deal about how students learn writing and what they need in order to be able to write. The methodology used by most studies, conducted in this field, depended on several methods such as observing the practices in writing classrooms and interviewing both teachers and students. Thus, these methods provided educators a fuller picture of teaching and learning processes and the supportive roles that the teacher plays in students' writing development.

Researchers according to their findings have recommended supportive teaching, which means that teachers should not assume that the students are a 'blank slate' rather they should acknowledge that students come to the school with wide experiences enriched by socio- cultural knowledge. These experiences and knowledge form the basis for writing. The conception of linear and separate stages of learning appears to be flawed. Thus, the teaching of writing shifted from traditional formats of invented spelling and incomplete

genres to more regular written language and forms such as notes, lists, letters, journal writing, stories, posters and instant messaging (NCTE, 2004).

However, this is not the case in Oman which is the centre of this study. The students in Oman, especially in the early stages, are taught writing as a manner of checking comprehension and transcribing aspects. This might be due to the lack of awareness of what students require in learning and what they are able to learn in the early stages of schooling. In addition, there is a lack of awareness about how writing should be taught for young students. This is what will be examined in this chapter. This chapter considers five main issues. First, in order to lay a foundation for a discussion in this chapter it is vital to outline the importance of writing in the students' life. On the other hand, to figure out how writing is taught for the primary stage, it is necessary to know how theorists and researchers have defined writing. According to the different definitions of writing researchers specified what students need to know or to learn in order to be able to write. However, it is not only the knowledge which is important for learning writing, writing pedagogy is also a key aspect that helps students to develop their writing ability. Therefore, teaching methods and approaches that are used in teaching writing will be addressed. Since most approaches that are used in teaching writing rely on particular theories, writing pedagogies are discussed in relation to the different theories. The strength and weakness of each approach will be explored. Finally, some empirical research conducted in the area of teaching and learning writing will be discussed in order to identify how different researchers carried out their research and what type of methodology they applied in order to achieve their goals.

3.2 The Importance of Writing:

In most English and Arabic, speaking countries writing is considered central to the school curriculum. The importance of writing stems from first, its value in schooling phase and second, its importance to live and communicate in society. Writing represents a special kind of learning mode (Czerniewska, 1992). On the other hand, it is also considered as a crucial skill for individuals and societies (Albajjah, 1999).

3.2.1 Writing is a Learning Mode:

Emig in her article that was published in the 1977 considered writing as a “unique” mode of learning. She argued that 'writing, as process and product possess a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies' therefore, she explained that writing is not only a valuable or special mode of learning but writing is 'unique' (Emig, 2003, p25). a

In order to identify how writing is a mode of learning it is vital to explain what learning means and how it was defined. There are many definitions of learning, Piaget (1977) (cited in Moll, 1992), for example, identified three ways of learning: learning by doing; learning by depiction in an image and learning by restatement in words. According to this definition, three things are included: hand, eye and brain and according to the nature of writing all three modes are employed when writing, therefore, writing is considered as a powerful mode of learning.

According to the writing curriculum content it seems that curriculum professionals in the Omani context have given writing as a mode of learning significant attention. Writing is used to emphasize students' learning of transcriptional skills as well as reading comprehension. In other words, as it has been mentioned in chapter two, writing subjects are linked with reading textbooks. In each unit students are guided to use writing for the purpose of applying transcriptional aspects and linguistic knowledge in their writing. However, it is unclear whether they are guided to learn the function of writing as a medium to access the society which is the second vital function of writing.

3.2.2 Writing is an Access to the Society:

Most theorists and researchers did not see writing as merely a mode of learning, but it has another vital function. Writing is a vehicle that allows students to communicate with others and to access the society. Vygotsky, (1978) has recommended teaching writing as something that children need and he argued that by doing this one can ensure students' development in writing. This is because the written text is a mediational means by which the child communicates with others. Therefore, Britton argued 'it is only as children come to value the written language as a vehicle for stories that they are likely to form an intention to write' (Britton, 1982, p179).

In the Omani society, as well as in other societies, writing is required in both the professional level and personal level. Therefore, people need to master writing to be able to have access to most job opportunities or to meet everyday needs such as obtaining a passport, a driving license, or an identity card. Yet, the problem in the Omani schools, especially in the primary stage, is that writing is taught as a tool for narrowly instrumental

learning, rather than a tool of communicative activity which enables students to interact with others and to access services in the society. Primary school students in the Omani context are not given a chance to realize the social function of writing, as they are taught writing in the same way that writing was described by Vygotsky in the 1978:

‘The teaching of writing has been conceived in narrowly practical term. Children are taught to trace out letters and make words out of them, but they are not taught written language’. (p105)

This view was also mentioned by many researchers who derived some evidence from different studies which indicated that writing in schools is taught in a very narrow way (Al-Hashmi, 1995; Czerniewska, 1992 and Graham & Kelly, 1998).

Some might argue that these days modern technologies reduce the need for writing as a communication activity. However, the evidence from research indicates that even in the recent years as numerous technologies such as mobiles, internet, digital cameras and satellite are used as mediums of communication among people; writing still retained its importance as a major mode for communication. This is because many researchers view most of these technologies as ‘poor substitutes for old forms of human interaction (Anson, 1999). Therefore, teaching writing through computers was criticized by researchers (ibid.). Writing through computer, especially for school students and novice writers, lacks the interaction aspects while writing was considered as communicative activity that is learnt by communication with others (Graham & Kelly, 1998). In addition, people still need to know how to write in order to be able to use these technologies to communicate with each other. However, not all schools teach writing as a communicative activity especially in Oman. I

mentioned earlier that writing is used as learning process, rather than communicative process. Furthermore, not all researchers and educators consider writing as a communicative process and this will be discussed in the next section.

3.3 Writing Definitions:

Many researchers defined writing in different ways according to the manner they approached writing in their research. In this section, I will present some definitions of writing because I believe that there is a relationship among definitions of writing, writing pedagogy and aspects that are emphasised when teaching writing. This then might explain why Arabic writing is taught in a particular way for fourth grade students in the BE schools in Oman.

Since this study is dealing with Arabic writing it was beneficial to explore writing definitions in both Arabic and English literature for two reasons: first this helps me to explore the limitation and strength of different definitions and how a particular definition influences the teaching and learning of writing; second, exploring writing definitions in Arabic literature might familiarise the reader with how Arabic researchers and educators see writing and how this influences the teaching of writing in the Arabic educational settings.

It is difficult to present all definitions of writing; therefore, I will focus only on the main definitions of writing from different angles. Murray (1972) for example, defined writing as a ‘process of discovery through language’. This process was divided into three stages: prewriting, writing and rewriting. Murray has claimed that prewriting is the largest part of the writing process and that students should do it by themselves. In this stage, the teacher’s

role should be limited to listening and responding to the words that reflect the student's world.

In this definition Murray identified both teacher's and student's roles in the writing classroom. Writing is the students' responsibility. They have to explore life by themselves through the language. On the other hand, the teacher is an assistant, encourager, developer and creator of environment in which the students can experience the writing processes by themselves. Therefore, the assessment in this definition is not given for the last product of writing but for the processes that the students engaged in (ibid, P21).

The implementations in Murray's definition are as follows: the text is student's own writing; finding the subject is student's responsibility; student should use their own language; students should be given enough time to draft their writing and they should be encouraged to attempt any form of writing that might help them to express their ideas. The mechanical aspects of writing comes last and students' writing process should not be assessed as one shot writing. However, these implementations need a teacher who respects and responds, not only to what students do but to what they are capable doing. Although these implementations were stated in the early seventies, they are still recommended by current researchers, especially Graves (1983) who developed writing as processes approach as well as many other researchers (see Graham & Kelly, 1998; Moll, 1992, and Villanueva, 2003).

However, Murray's definition gave little attention to accuracy in writing in spite of the importance placed on it in clarifying individual's ideas and meaning. In addition, the definition did not mention any thing about writing as a mode of communication.

In contrast, there is another definition of writing focused on the use of language rather than on the processes of writing. This definition counted writing as:

‘A language and thought written down; it is a discovery of very best language to express one’s thoughts, ideas and information’ (Brunboor, 1998, p10).

This definition, to some extent, is similar to the definition of writing that appeared in the Arabic writing curriculum of fourth grade in the BE schools where writing was defined as:

“A cognitive and linguistic process related to generating or creating ideas and writing them on paper according to the accuracy rules in spelling, organisation in punctuation and clarity in handwriting” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p65).

The similarity between these two definitions is that both of them emphasise the importance of accuracy in writing because it helps the individual to identify his/her views and ideas easily. On the other hand, both definitions ignored two basic things related to writing: the writing processes and the communication function of writing. Both aspects have been stressed by many researchers over the years. For example, Ibin Jini the Arabic philosopher identified language as a *“medium that each nation expresses their needs through”* (Ibin Jini, Ed, 1952, p23).

Depending on this particular definition of language one of the Arabic theorists defined writing as:

“A bond that connects the individual with his nation and gives him the chance to communicate with the society he lives in”. (Samak, 1979, p424)

These two definitions of writing in the Arabic literature highlighted the communicative function of the language. Yet, they did not deal with the practical aspect of teaching writing. It is more related to identifying the importance of writing as a communicative process rather than clarifying how writing should be taught as a communicative activity.

On the other hand, in the definition mentioned by Vygotsky, writing is defined as a 'complex cultural activity'; he linked writing with cognitive and socio-cultural aspects. Therefore, he recommended that writing should not be taught as merely writing of letters and words neither as 'motor skill' rather it should be 'relevant to life and should be meaningful for children that an intrinsic need should be aroused in them'. In addition, he established a link between playing, drawing and writing.

'make-believe play, drawing and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language will appear to be very much overstated' (Vygotsky, (1978, p118).

In his definition, Vygotsky mentioned that writing is a complex activity; he suggested that it should be taught as something that can arouse the student's interest such as playing and drawing. However, he failed to mention that unlike playing and drawing, writing is a process that depends on different rules related to the language, form and the content of the writing so it needs more effort than playing and drawing.

Although writing was defined differently according to approaches of different theorists and researchers, it seems that there is an agreement between Arabic and English literature in defining writing. However, they differ in the terminology used for writing. Most books and research in the English literature use the term 'writing' as a title for the section that deals

with the writing process that people use to express their needs, emotions, and to communicate with others (e.g. Graham & Kelly, 1998). In contrast, most Arabic literature uses the term “written composition” to head the section that deals with writing process, (e.g. Albajjah, 1999). Both definitions of writing or written composition that have emerged from both Arabic and English literature have similar feature and are used to imply the same meaning. However, the surprising thing in this issue is that although in the English literature the term writing is used more than the term composition; the literature indicated that since the early stages of learning, the students are taught to use writing to express their ideas freely not to merely write some limited sentences. Therefore, the students are trained to be creative writers since their childhood.

On the other hand, although in the Arabic literature the common term that is used is ‘written composition’, in the practical phase, primary stage students are taught to write rather than to compose. This is especially true in the Omani context where composition and creative writing are delayed to high school stages, whereas in the primary stage students are restricted to narrow topics and forms of writing.

I therefore, argue that the term ‘writing’ is more flexible because it incorporates all types of writing that students do for schooling and personal purposes. It also includes both fiction and non-fiction writing as well as creative and imitative writing. While, when using the term ‘composition’ the thing that comes to the mind is creative writing. Thus, other types of writing such as comprehension writing and writing exercises are not included.

However, it is not my purpose here to state that the Arabic authors should change the terms that they are using in their books and research. Rather my argument is about establishing

precision in curriculum documents when using different terms and according to the aims of teaching the particular subject matter. In the Omani context curriculum documents, teacher's guidebook and student's textbook in the BE schools use the term 'written composition' to refer to 'writing'. Yet, when looking at the content and writing topics few of them are related to 'composition', which requires some creativity in writing. Instead, the majority of writing is done for schooling purposes. Thus, I argue that the type of writing that fourth grade students are taught can be called "comprehension writing". This is because it aims to identify the extent to which students understand the ideas included in the reading texts, as well as the extent to which they mastered the linguistic aspects that they learnt in the spelling and handwriting lessons. Therefore, in this study I used the term 'writing' instead of 'written composition'. This is because the term 'writing' is more appropriate to express the type of writing that students are taught in the Omani schools than 'written composition'.

The definition of 'writing' that I used in this study encompasses transcribing, composing, processes of writing and the product of the writing process (i.e. writing forms). This will lead me to identify aspects of knowledge that is emphasised in teaching and learning writing.

3.4 Knowledge for Writing:

I was influenced in using the term knowledge for writing by Britton (1982) who asked the following question in his study: what a young writer need to know in order to master writing? This question led me to ask the same question in order to explore some common aspects that were emphasised as basic knowledge for writing.

As I mentioned earlier the differences in writing definitions are mostly related to the differences in approaches of examining writing. Therefore, the knowledge that was emphasised in teaching writing is linked on one hand with the writing objectives and on the other hand with writing pedagogy. Britton for example, agreed with Vygotsky, (1978) that writing should be taught for children as process they need to acquire. Therefore, he recommended teaching writing as a vehicle for stories that the children like (Britton, 1982). However, unlike Vygotsky, Britton has clarified some aspects that the child needs to know in order to be able to write, such as knowing:

- The structure of the story
- The knowledge of linguistic conventions of stories, the written code and formation of letters, words and sentences
- The rhythms of the written language that is used in writing stories.

It is clear that all aspects that were emphasised by Britton are related to story writing. However, it could be used as a foundation for other forms of writing. Therefore, I was able to identify three aspects as important knowledge for writing: transcriptional and compositional knowledge, knowledge about writing forms and their structures; and knowledge about the writing processes.

3.4.1 Transcriptional and Compositional Knowledge:

Wray & Medwell (1991) mentioned that any writer involved in various writing tasks such as (1) composition task which demands searching for information, choosing useful ideas and shaping them into appropriate forms that can be classified as writing and (2) transcription task, which requires accuracy in writing.

Most researchers have agreed on what is counted as a transcriptional knowledge, which is spelling, grammar, punctuation and handwriting. These four aspects are key conventions of accurate writing, which are called by some researchers, transcription skills (Riley & Reedy, 2000, p7) or secretarial skills by others (Hart, 1996, p 56). It is believed that the term 'transcriptional skills' are more common among educational researchers and widespread than the term 'secretarial skills'. Therefore, I used 'transcriptional' term instead of 'secretarial' term.

No matter what terminology is used for these aspects of writing, the core issue is which knowledge of writing should be emphasised in teaching and assessing writing: is it the transcriptional or compositional aspects (Pinsent, 1998)? Initially, researchers who had emphasised the product of writing (written text) focused on linguistic knowledge as a fundamental aspect for writing. They saw the written text as autonomous objects, which can be analysed and described independently of a particular context, writer and reader, and they believed that by following linguistic rules an individual can present his/ her ideas in an accurate text. However, other researchers such as Yu (1998) argued that writing is more complex than following grammatical rules to transfer ideas from the mind to a piece of written text. He argued that the most important issue in linguistic knowledge is teaching students how to apply it across various contexts, audiences and purposes, rather than mastering abstract rules.

In addition, many researchers, such as (Graves, 1983 and Murray, 1972) have mentioned that mechanics come last. Even researchers such as Britton (1982), who emphasised linguistic knowledge as aspects that children need to know to be able to write, mentioned

that these aspects should be taught in the writing classrooms implicitly as focusing on them explicitly, while teaching writing might hinder rather than help. Yet, this does not mean ignoring transcriptional aspects and focusing on compositional aspects as this might lead to two consequences. Firstly, it may cause missing the fundamental requirements of the academic writing proficiency, which students need in their schooling life. Secondly, ignoring the transcriptional aspects may mislay the linguistic rules that are important in clearness and accuracy of any written text. Although one may argue that students now a days use the computer facilities, which help them to ensure the accuracy in their writing in terms of linguistic and grammatical aspects, yet, the computer facilities are unlikely to control all linguistic rules. In addition, few of school students, especially in Oman, have access to computers and also most school writing work is done manually. It is therefore, crucial in teaching writing to combine both compositional and transcriptional aspects and balancing the emphasis on both of them when teaching writing.

Another area of debate about transcriptional and compositional aspects is the extent to which transcriptional aspects should be emphasised when assessing students' writing. Is it worthy for teachers to spend long hours correcting students' writing mistakes in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar and slang words, rather than focusing on correcting ideas and completing content? Unfortunately, there is no clear answer for this question. Many researchers (e.g. Burden, 1990 and Kress 1994) have mentioned that one of the problems of teaching and learning writing is the unclear criteria of success in writing. However, there are some attempts by some researchers and educators in providing several criteria for quality of written texts. For example, Witte & Faigley (2003, p 247) have mentioned two criteria that should be considered when assessing the quality of students'

writing.

- Coherence of the text: the extent that the text is understood in a real world setting
- Cohesion of the text: explicit mechanisms in the text that hold the text together

They referred to the debate among the researchers, who underline the semantic relations in the text as a key criterion of good writing and those who emphasised linguistic approach in assessing students' writing. They argued that neither exclusive focus on syntax in students' writing nor narrow emphasis on cohesion might produce significantly improved writing. Therefore, the balance between transcriptional and compositional aspects might be helpful. Beside his/her role in balancing invention and convention, when assessing students the teacher needs to take in account the results of assessment in motivating and insuring self-esteem of students as well as guiding the students to understand how to progress (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). The aim of assessment is not to categorise the students according to their achievement level but to know about each student's needs (Black & Wiliam, 1998 & Black, Harrison, Lee and Marshall, 2004).

On the other hand, in the Arabic language literature, transcriptional skills were given major attention in both teaching and assessing writing. Consequently, less attention is given for meaning, ideas and imagination. For example, in the study of Alzahrani, (1994) that was conducted in Saudi Arabia to identify the requirements of teaching Arabic written composition for grade nine. One of the major aspects that were mentioned by the participants (i.e. Arabic language specialists in the Umm Al-Qura University) was transcriptional aspects such as writing without spelling and grammatical mistakes, with punctuation and clear handwriting. This led me to ask: what is the situation in the Omani

context? What is the basic knowledge emphasised in teaching and assessing Arabic writing for fourth grade students? In addition to transcriptional and compositional aspects that affect students' achievement in writing, there are other aspects such as knowing about different forms of writing and their structures, which will be explained in the next section.

3.4.2 Knowledge about the Writing Forms (Genres):

Kress (1994) argued that teaching writing is not merely teaching writing skills such as spelling, handwriting and punctuation, it is spread over the process of the language system. Writing must be considered in ways that develop productive and creative writers. This is because most students will need, to some extent, write productively in their future life. Wilkinson (1986b) emphasised the necessity of teaching students various genres and their formal characteristic to suite special social and cultural demands. In addition, Hyland (2002) considered teaching genres as a very useful way to provide students with writing skills to be creative writers. This is because genres provide students with obvious insights about the community, which help them to communicate with their society, and easily convey their experiences and perspectives.

It is recommended that when creating an atmosphere for writing, teachers need to consider how they can encourage reading (Wray & Medwell, 1991). This is because reading various genres in the writing classroom provides students with some ideas, information as well as knowledge about the structure of different types of texts (Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1986a). However, some teachers use this view in a very limited way as they guide their students to read in order to collect the needed information and some do not mind if their students copy the text as they read it. These types of teachers usually seek accuracy for

schooling purposes rather than guiding students to be creative in their writing or guiding them to learn different genres as it is used in the social life. So what types of genres have researchers identified? And which genres are recommended for the primary stage?

By reviewing the literature I found that there is a similarity in forms of writing that were mentioned by most researchers in both Arabic and English literature. However, the only difference between them is in the terminology of these forms that are used to identify types of writing. The majority of Arabic literature (e.g. Albajjah 1999, Al- Hashmi, 1995 and Madkor, 2000) divided writing into two forms of written composition: functional composition and creative composition. Functional composition refers to type of writing that students do in their everyday life and in their official needs, and it includes forms such as: letters; application forms; reports; taking notes; summarizing books and articles and writing memos. On the other hand, creative composition refers to type of writing that aims to transfer individual's ideas, emotions and senses which usually are written in literary style and creative writing, and it includes forms such as: stories, novels, articles and poems.

These two forms of writing appeared in some English literature, (e.g. Murray, 1972). However, the majority of English literature mentioned two main forms of writing which are, fiction and non- fiction writing (Collins, 1998). Collins divided pupils' writing into six forms of non- fiction genres: recount, report, procedure, explanation, persuasion and discussion. Non- fiction writing has several advantages including: enabling pupils to live in their societies easily, giving them access to join the culture surrounding them, helping them to think in different ways and providing them with a special linguistic expression that suits their culture and society (Wilkinson, 1986a and Wray & Lewis, 1997). This type of writing

is equal to functional writing in the Arabic literature.

Fictional writing is the second basic type of writing that includes forms such as stories, narrative and poems. Fictional writing is considered as one of ways that may help to develop pupils' writing ability and create writers if it is utilised in an appropriate way. This is because children usually like to retell stories that they hear from others or watch on the television or create from their imagination. Fictional writing parallels creative composition in the Arabic literature.

Hedge (2000) has summarized most types of writing that come under fiction and non-fiction writing and divided them into six forms of writing.

- Personal writing (e.g. diaries, journals, shopping lists, and reminders)
- Social writing (e.g. letters invitations, telephone messages, and instructions)
- Public writing (e.g. letters of enquiry request and form filling)
- Study writing (e.g. making notes while reading, summaries, essays and reports)
- Creative writing (e.g. poems, stories, drama and songs)
- Institutional writing (e.g. agendas, minutes, memoranda)

All these forms of writings were considered as important forms that should be taught to primary school students. In the Arabic literature, Albajjah (1999) for example, has stated that both functional and creative composition should be taught for all schooling stages. Similarly, in the English literature most researchers recommended teaching of both fiction and non-fiction writing for children.

Although, different forms of writings were recommended to be taught for school students,

the evidence from research claims that schooled literacy is narrow in its conceptualisation of writing and that it inducts students into very limited range of writing (Bunting, 1998 and Czerniewska, 1992). Similar evidences were found in the Omani context as the study of Al-Hashmi (1995) stated that students in the Omani schools were limited to particular topics and forms of writing, that are repeated every year without extending them in a way that help students to write more socially relevant forms of writing, so that writing becomes meaningful for them.

Riley and Reedy (2000) identified various factors that influence the form and structure of the text: the purpose, the situation and the culture. Since this study deals with Arabic writing I will explain how the culture influences the forms of writing that are taught in the Omani context. This is to help the reader to be familiar with some cultural aspects in this study context and its influence on teaching writing. I mentioned in chapter two that Oman is an Arabic and Islamic country. These two socio-cultural factors have a significant influence on writing topics and the structure of writing forms that students are required to write in schools. On one hand, the topics of writing are strongly linked with the Omani society and Islamic culture, For example, most stories that are included in the Arabic language curriculum are preferred to be Islamic stories such as, stories about the prophet Mohammad and other Muslim characters. In addition, there are some topics that became common writing for all grades, such as writing about Oman national day and about the two Islamic holy festivals (i.e. Eid Alfitr and Eid Aladha). On the other hand, both official and personal letters should be started with the phrase (in the name of god). In addition, official letters should include the Islamic greeting phrase, which is (peace up-on you).

Although these types of writings link students with their society and Islamic culture, it narrows their creativity in writing, imagination ability, and their knowledge about other forms of writing. It, on the other hand, deprives students of their freedom in choosing writing topics and forms of writing that they like. Limiting students to particular forms of writing probably is a consequence of the limitation of curriculum professionals' views, which can be described as 'one- sided view' of writing that merely teaches writing for schooling purposes. Therefore, writing is restricted to expository or essay –type of writing in which the text can be assessed according to its structure and information included in it (Czerniewska, 1992). The evidence from research indicated besides the type of writing done in the schools, students need opportunities for their own writing; free writing that is not controlled and marked by the teacher's red pen (Casey & Hemenway, 2001). In the free writing activities students can develop their writing talent and explore life through their own language and experiences which is one major concept of learning theory (Dewey, 1938). The limitation in writing forms taught to school students in Oman led me to consider this issue as one of the aspects that needs to be explored from different perspectives.

Again it is not only the forms of writing that is basic for writing but how to write is another issue that attracted a number of researchers (e.g. Graves, 1983, Murray, 1972, and Nuser, 1998). They believed that training students to go through particular processes when writing helps them to develop their way of thinking as well as their writing. So what processes are recommended for teaching writing and how do these help in developing students' writing? This is what will be explored in the next section.

3.4.3 Knowledge about the Writing Processes:

Reviewing the literature on the writing processes has resulted in identifying two types of processes. The first type is related to the cognitive processes, while the second type is related to the practical processes, Britton and his colleagues have identified some of the cognitive and practical processes in writing. They conceptualised writing as a process consisting of three stages: 'Conception stage' when the writer thinks about his/her ideas or topic; 'Incubation stage' where the writer identifies his/her ideas and plans how to shape them into an appropriate form and 'production stage' when the writer with his/ her paper and pen transfers his/her ideas into written words (Britton, Burgess, Martin, Mcleod, and Rosen 1975, pp22- 32).The first two processes are cognitive processes that cannot be observed rather it can be examined through some cognitive experimental studies. These types of studies attracted some psychologists such as Bereitor & Scardamalia who conducted a number of cognitive experimental studies. Bereitor & Scardamalia in their studies aimed at examining the relationship between cognitive developments and the writing processes (ibid). However, cognitive processes are not the emphasis of the current study. This study is more related to the practical processes of writing which are stated by Graves (1983) such as planning, drafting, revising and publishing. These processes were considered as essential knowledge to be taught for students (Murray, 1972 and Nuser, 1998). This is because these processes might develop students' thinking ability; improve students' writing; teach students to be accurate in their writing; encourage students to work collaboratively and benefit from others comments.

The writing processes are vital even for expert writers in order to ensure the quality of their writing (Sommers, 1980). In spite of the importance of these processes the evidence from research indicates that these processes are neglected in the writing curriculum and in the

classroom practices in most Arabic countries (Nuser, 1998). Specifically, writing in the primary stage in Oman considers the accuracy in writing as a major aim of the writing curriculum. However, there is no reference to these processes in most Arabic writing curriculum of primary schools. This brought about another question in regards to the writing processes as a part of this investigation. Namely, what type of the writing processes do fourth grade students go through or should go through when writing?

All previously stated knowledge (i.e. transcriptional and compositional knowledge, knowledge about the writing forms and knowledge about the writing processes) are not only important to be mastered by students, but also teachers need to master them. This is vital to be able to help students in their writing and to assess students' writing. Fang (1996) called this type of knowledge a subject matter knowledge, which includes the basic knowledge of the subject (concepts and principles). Without this knowledge, teachers cannot teach writing. There is an Arabic folk saying that "*man cannot give what he lacks*". In addition, in writing particularly some researchers such as Grainger (2005) argued that it is not enough for writing teachers to have knowledge related to writing, but they should also master the writing processes to be able to teach writing. In this study I will explore evidences about the extent to which knowledge for writing was considered by teachers and curriculum professionals.

Besides the subject matter knowledge, teachers also need to know about pedagogical knowledge that enables them to choose the appropriate ways in presenting ideas and transferring knowledge to students. Aspects related to writing pedagogy and teaching

processes will be discussed in the next section.

3.5 Writing Theories and Writing Pedagogies:

The various theories and models about the acquisition and the development of writing competency, that have emerged through research conducted over the past 30 years, have dealt with writing from different perspectives: linguistic, cognitive, socio-linguistic and socio-cultural. Although these theories paved the way that writing was defined and the knowledge that is considered in teaching writing, they have influenced the way that writing is taught in the classrooms. Therefore, I established a link between different approaches that are used in teaching writing and theories they rely on.

◆ Linguistic Theory:

Chomsky is one of the influential linguists who have influenced the field of language acquisition. He developed the linguistic theory by stressing the importance of learning grammar rules as a manner in mastering spoken and written language (Halle, Bresnan, and Miller, 1978). From this theory, a 'product model' in teaching writing emerged consisting of three main compositional aspects: stimulus, processes (mental and physical) and product, with an emphasis on mechanical and grammatical aspects in writing. It emphasised linguistic aspects as 'indicators of fluency and proficiency'. Accordingly the writing pedagogy that appeared in the writing classrooms from such theory based on 'error avoidance' as a principle of writing. This model focused on preparing students to achieve academic writing. Therefore, the linguistic theory was criticised for ignoring the social effect on developing students' writing and stressing the transcriptional aspects when teaching and assessing writing (Hyland, 2002).

◆ **Cognitive Theory:**

Another theory that has influenced the area of teaching and learning writing was the cognitive theory. Vygotsky (1978) is one of the most powerful theorists who have influenced the field of literacy and learning language since the 1920s. He has impacted both cognitive and socio-linguistic research. Vygotsky established the link between language development and cognition through his theory zone of proximal development. Researchers, according to this theory, focused on the importance of adults' support in providing information and guiding students to learning processes within their zone of proximal development (Tudge, 1992). Therefore, teaching writing models that developed from this theory focused on cognitive processes of writing which guide students through linear processes. The 'classical model' is one of teaching writing models that developed from this theory (Catanach, Anthony, and Golen, 1997). This model is based on five stages of composing processes: finding ideas, ordering them, dressing the ideas into persuasive language, memorizing the prepared speech and delivering the speech. According to my experiences as one of Arabic language curriculum professionals I claim that most teachers in the Omani schools especially in the secondary schools use a similar model in teaching Arabic writing.

Although this model is based on several essential compositional processes, it emphasises the linearity in the composing process, neglecting the importance of discussion, revising, the relationship between the writer and the reader as well as the motivation of the writer. In addition, it has been criticized in terms of its emphasis on grammatical correctness as a main aspect in improving students' writing. This led to the development of the 'cognitive

processes model' which identified writing as a 'set of distinctive thinking processes that writers orchestrate during the act of composing' (ibid, p2). Researchers within this model, (e.g. Flower & Hayes, 1981) developed a framework that includes three main parts of composition; the task environment (i.e. social and contextual knowledge), writing processes (e.g. planning, revising) and the writer's long-term memory (i.e. the writer's knowledge of style).

The difference between the two models is that the last model sees writing as a recursive processes (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987) and not linear processes. In addition, it emphasises the importance of context in the writing processes, and it stresses writing as a manner to express the self rather than to satisfy academic requirement.

◆ **Socio- Linguistic Theory:**

The limitation of the cognitive theory was in its ignorance of the importance of classroom interaction and communication in developing students' learning. Therefore, the emphasis in teaching writing later shifted to seeing writing as a social and communicative activity. Researchers who adopted this theory examined the influence of children's interacting with their parents, especially a mother, teacher and peers in their learning (Tudge, 1992). The importance of discussion, peer assessment, sense of audience and publishing has all been emphasised in Graves's work (Graves 1983). Later on many researchers highlighted the writing processes as an avenue for developing a socio-linguistic function of writing by developing students' awareness of audiences (see Bunting, 1998 and Czerniewska, 1992).

Hyland (2002, p88) mentioned that writing is a 'collaborative process' where students benefit from the feedback they get from their teachers and fellows or other sources. In addition, Riley & Reedy (2000, p44) identified some concepts of this approach such as: 'ownership' by giving students the opportunity to choose their own topic; 'conferencing' by providing the writer with audiences to discuss his/her ideas and get a feedback before writing; 'drafting and revising' which, allows students to receive an acceptable level of writing accuracy; and 'publishing' the piece of writing in order to get a feed back from the reader who might be the teacher or peers. Herrmann (1989) and Kos & Maslowski (2001) mentioned that getting support and feedback from teacher and peers is the most important factor, which makes writing both a social activity and interesting to pupils.

The socio-linguistic theory gave major attention to the social interaction in teaching and assessing students as both are done through discussion, questioning and feeding back. Yet, it did not emphasise the importance of teaching students different genres as a manner to access the society and culture that surrounded them. While many researchers argued that effective school instructions link schooling concepts and everyday concepts (Gallimore & Tharp, 1992) and by doing so students can benefit from schooling experience in their future social life (Goodman & Goodman,1992) this aspect is considered crucial in socio-cultural theory when teaching writing.

◆ **Socio- Cultural Theory:**

The social context was given attention by some of socio- linguistic researchers, especially Graves. Yet, it has been given more attention in the socio- cultural theory. This theory has stressed the significance of the social and cultural aspects in developing students' writing.

It emphasised the idea of writing for life that appeared since the 70s in the work of Halliday (1975). Therefore, the advocators (e.g. Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1975) of this theory emphasised teaching various genres as a manner to access the society and culture that surrounded students.

Hyland (2002, p82) has referred to the importance of genre modelling to help both the teacher and students to teach and learn the writing process. This model includes some stages the teacher may use in the teaching of writing by (a) introducing genre for students by reading it (b) discussing how to compose any text by using question and comments by the teacher to help students to write successfully (c) searching for reading materials, note making, and summarising to gather important information before writing (d) writing genre as a draft (e) revision of the first draft by students and their teacher and (f) writing the final draft of genre. Modelling genre supports students in their writing and it helps them to ensure cohesion in the whole text and to choose suitable linking words and vocabulary and generic forms of writing.

Some researchers (e.g. Laycock, 1998) suggested writing frameworks (models) of different genres; letters, reports, stories and essay style model to help students to structure their writing. These types of models or frameworks were suggested by some educators in some Arabic countries especially in the notebooks that were published for primary school students in Lebanon. Additionally some models of formal and informal letters included in some of Arabic language students' textbooks. This means that the idea of modelling writing is known by some of the Arabic curriculum professionals. In spite of its usefulness

in helping students to structure their writing, modelling writing is not applied widely in the writing curriculum; especially in the Omani writing curriculum (Al-Hashmi, 1995 and Al-Kalbani, 1997).

In addition, in spite of the variety of writing pedagogies and strategies some teachers still tend to use a 'routine- de contextualised' writing activity and 'superficial mechanics of writing' (Topping, et al.,2000 p79). This is the case in the countries that have made advancements in developing teaching writing strategies, so how about the countries where little research is conducted in the area of teaching and learning writing?

In the Arabic literature there is no indication suggested the development in the teaching writing methods over the years. However, the only development that was mentioned in the Arabic literature is the movement from teaching traditional topics and forms of writing to teaching functional writing or writing for life (Madkoor, 2000). This could be because of the lack of research conducted in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing in the Arabic countries. Nevertheless, there are some concepts in the Arabic literature that are related to different writing approaches based on theories that were developed in the English speaking countries such as: writing processes, writing for life, writing for different purposes and audiences, writing framework (writing models) and the freedom in choosing writing topics. These concepts were probably translated from English literature or transferred by some researchers, who conducted their research in one of the English speaking countries. Therefore, I believe that these concepts are not more than theoretical concepts included in Arabic literature rather than applied in classroom practices or emphasised in the writing curriculum. The evidence from research indicates that Arabic

writing is still taught in a traditional way (Khatteer, et al., 1990). This is specifically true in the Omani context as, theoretically the Arabic writing curriculum has mentioned some valuable approaches in teaching writing such as self- identification approach that is based on some useful concepts such as: giving students freedom in choosing their own topics; encouraging them to be like a “bee” rather than like an “ant”. In that unlike the ant the bee collects nectar from various sources to create honey, while the ant only accumulates what it collects. Students have to search for the information from different sources to create new ideas rather than collect information and write it down (Ministry of Education, 2000). Yet, unfortunately, the writing curriculum has restricted both teachers as well as students to teach and learn particular topics, which contradicts most concepts that were emphasised in the last approach. In addition, the curriculum guides the teachers through several traditional steps in teaching writing which are: identifying writing topic, discussing it orally, writing some words and vocabulary related to the topic, asking the students to write the text in their notebook, correcting students’ writing and finally discussing the errors (ibid). This contradiction in the Arabic language curriculum led me to think about the real writing pedagogy that is used by Arabic teachers in the writing classroom and what teachers and curriculum professionals believe about concepts related to writing pedagogy such as freedom in choosing writing topics, writing framework and writing for different purposes. The following question therefore, emerged: what writing pedagogy is used in teaching Arabic writing for fourth grade students?

In order to investigate how Arabic writing is taught to the fourth grade in Oman, three different theories (i.e. linguistic, socio- linguistic and socio- cultural) are considered in this study. Initially, linguistic theory was important to explore how linguistic and

transcriptional aspects are considered in teaching writing and how this influences the quality of students' writing. In addition, the socio- linguistic theory helped in observing writing classrooms and exploring how students are taught and learn writing through interacting and communicating with their teachers and peers. Finally socio- cultural theory was vital in exploring how socio- cultural factors influence the way that writing is taught in the BE schools and what forms of writing are taught as I believe that socio- cultural factors have an effect on the way writing is taught and what is taught in the writing classrooms. However, the aim of this study is not to follow students' writing development and cognitive processes. Therefore, writing cognitive theory was excluded.

Writing pedagogy is usually linked with the roles that the teacher plays in the classroom. This is what will be explored in the next section.

3.6 Teacher's Roles in the Writing Classroom:

In supporting and developing students' writing, teachers play many vital roles in the writing classroom (McAnish, 1992). However, the teacher's roles in the classroom are not specified rather there are merely recommendations and suggestions from different researchers. Hyland (2002) for example, has mentioned that:

'Writing is learnt not taught, and the teacher's role is to be non-directive and facilitating, providing writers with the space to make their own meaning through an encouraging positive and co-operative environment with minimal interference' (Hyland (2002, p 23).

In this view Burden (1990) has argued that the nature of teachers' intervention during the writing processes has a crucial effect, not only on the students' writing, but also on their perspective of themselves as writers. In addition, he mentioned that much of the control by

the teacher over students' writing activities might cause them to lose the sense of ownership over their work. Dunn and his colleagues (In Freedman, 1985 pp 33-50) conducted a case study aimed at examining the relationship between a high school teacher and his students in a creative writing class. The findings of the study indicated that the teacher's role in the writing classroom as a monitor, coach and creator of space for writing, had a significant influence on encouraging students to be creative writers. On the other hand, he argued that the teacher who takes the power to 'initiate students' writing, determines its content and form and thus, becomes its sole audience and evaluator' (p41). This limits students' writing ability on merely completing writing tasks as they have been directed.

Brindley & Schneider (2002) in their survey study found that the participating teachers identified teacher's roles in the writing classroom as following: 45 from 125 teachers stated that the teacher is a model and encourager. 41 of them stated that the teacher guides students' writing. 32 teachers mentioned that the teacher should teach writing skills. 28 teachers mentioned that the teacher should correct students' writing and provide feedback and 27 stated that the teacher should set the attitude towards writing and motivate students. Although the study has identified valuable roles of writing teachers, it reflected merely teachers' opinions, which might not reflect their actual roles in the real setting of the writing classroom. In addition, it is clear that there is an overlap between the teacher's roles and teaching processes as described in the in teachers' responses to the interview questions.

Some evidence from research indicated that students' achievements in writing are related to the role that the teacher plays in the writing classroom. Some teachers lead their students to

be creative writers and enjoy writing tasks, while some teachers lead students to abhor writing lessons, which result in their failure (Burden, 1990 and Riley & Reedy, 2000). This depends on the way that students are questioned, fed back, and motivated (Black & Wiliam, 1998 and Torrance & Pryor, 1998).

In the Omani context one of the BE philosophy is student- centred education which changed both teachers' and students' roles. In student - centred education, students do all the work while the teacher is a facilitator when there is a need, a guide and an encourager. In the guidebook to the first cycle grades 1-4 of BE document there is a statement that reads: "*Teacher's guidance is a rich way for the continuous improvement of students' learning*" (Ministry of Education, 2001a). Therefore, teacher's role in the classroom is one aspect that was examined in this study answering the following question: what roles do Arabic teachers play in the writing classroom?

Changing teacher's roles in the BE schools from controller to facilitator is linked with collaborative learning, that is based on the group work approach, which is considered a fundamental approach in all BE schools.

Group work is one teaching strategy, which received much attention in the BE schools. This approach focuses on small group work where the effect of social interactions between students is at the centre of the teaching programme (Ministry of Education, 2001b). Group work was associated with learning theories since the early seventies. Vygotsky (1978, p87) was one of the theorists who mentioned that writing is taught through interacting with others. This theory has influenced the development of group work in teaching writing. The

work of Graves (1983) in the area of teaching and learning writing was based strongly on group work and collaborative learning. Yet, the group work approach is not as simple as it seems, as the evidence from previous research identified various difficulties that challenges teachers, who employ the group work approach. Therefore, there is a debate among researchers regarding advantages and disadvantages of the group work in teaching writing. Many researchers stressed the importance of collaborative work in developing students' writing (Graves, 1983; Kos & Maslowski, 2001 and Topping et al., 2000) Yet, there are other researchers who claim that collaborative writing has negative influence on students achievement in writing (Herrmann, 1989).

Group work and collaborative learning are not merely changing the classroom organisation or students' setting rather it also includes changing the roles of both students and the teacher. Some researchers such as Goodman & Goodman (1992) mentioned that the teacher in the collaborative learning literacy classroom should be an initiator, kid watcher, mediator, providing students with opportunities to think and learn by collaborating and assisting each other.

Cohen (1994) in her work mentioned, that most teachers desire group work, yet, they are still unaware of group work concepts. Although teachers set students in groups and ask them to work as groups, they control the whole work. She argued that delegating authority is the key feature of group work. When the teacher gives students a chance to work together, struggle and make mistakes, they have delegated authority. This makes students responsible of their work so they try to do their best to have their work done appropriately. However, when students sense that the teacher controls the talk and the work, they will

believe that the work is teacher's responsibility. So it is likely that they will rely on him/her and by doing this the group work loses its basic feature.

There are many other debatable aspects in group work such as group organisation, group work and gender and roles in groups. Dunne & Bennett (1990) have stated some problems that face teachers in organising group works. The following questions were discussed by researchers: Should the group include students from same achievement level or from different levels? Is the group organised according to students' choice or according to students' ability? Most teachers prefer mixed abilities groups (the most common in the Omani schools). On the other hand, some other teachers like to put low achievers in same group so that they are given more attention than other groups. Conversely, other teachers like to put high achievers in same group to challenge their creativity and ability in doing the work. In each type of groups there are some advantages and disadvantages. Dunne and Bennett argued that if the teacher puts low achievers in same group he/she should provide them with enough time and support, which is sometimes difficult for classroom with 30 students (which is the situation in Oman). On the other hand, groups of high achievers might lead to inappropriate competition where each student wants to dominate the work and control the group. Even mixed ability groups might not be the proper solution for these challenges as there is a chance for low achievers to rely on high achievers. This satisfies some high achievers but irritate some others who do not like the "sucker effect" when low achievers take advantages from them. These issues accordingly might cause problems such as working in groups but individually, too much disagreement, and breaking away from the group, thus teachers should be aware of these types of problems that are associated with group work and train their students to work collaboratively and to assist and assess each

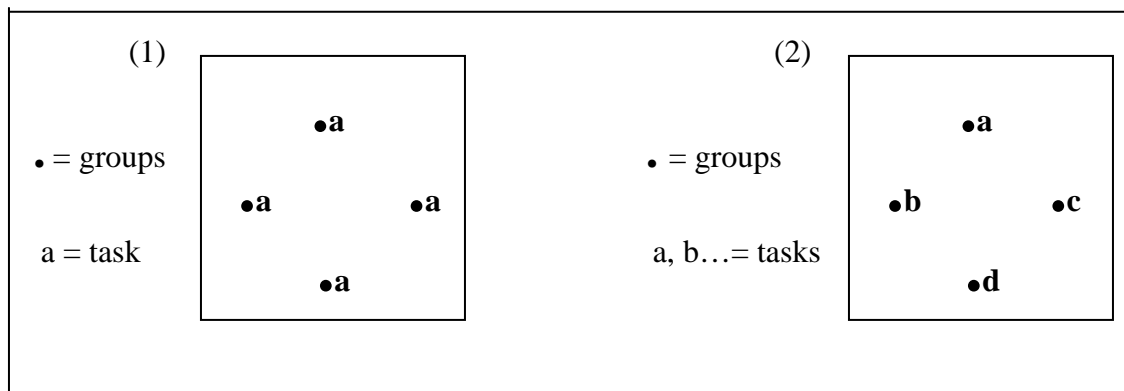
other's work.

Another issue related to group work is how to divide the task/s between the groups.

Dunne & Bennett mentioned two types of group work organisation regarding the task:

- (1) Working as groups on same task for same produced text,
- (2) Working as groups on different tasks for different produced texts, as appear in the following figure.

Figure 3.1 working groups organisation according to the task:



These two figures also reflect types of group works in the Omani context with some differences in terms of group number, as each classroom in the Omani context includes 30 students therefore, the classroom is divided into six groups instead of four groups and each group includes four to five students which is the most common size of group work organisation (ibid). Asking the groups to work on the same task or on different tasks is also a challenging issue. Therefore, the teacher should be aware and confident about the aims of choosing a particular type of group work.

The gender issue is another matter of working as groups, which is strongly related to the Omani context. Dunne& Bennett found that one of the major problems that challenge

group work is the gender issue. Usually boys do not like to work and talk to girls and vice-versa. This could be related to the nature of young children who prefer to play and talk with same gender. Yet, it might be also related to the socio-cultural factors, especially in Oman where boys are used to be separated from girls and vice-versa in most of the social life. In addition, all students in Oman study in single gender schools, except the first cycle of the BE schools grades (1– 4) and private schools. Although there is no evidence from research indicating that mixed gender groups is better than single gender group, mixing genders might provide opportunity for both gender to learn and benefit from each other. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to identify for students the aim of setting them in mixed groups as well as they should train students to be used to these types of mixed groups to prepare them for the future and working life, which might demand, working in mixed gender groups.

Those were the theoretical aspects that assisted me to identify some basic concepts in teaching and learning writing to be examined in this study. Yet, it is also important to discuss how other researchers researched teaching and learning writing, this is to identify the strength and weakness and issues lacking in their research.

3.7 Research in Writing:

There are few studies conducted in the Arab countries in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing and only three studies conducted in Oman. In contrast, there is a large number of studies conducted in the several English-speaking countries such as the UK, the US and Australia. However, it is difficult to present all studies that I came through during reviewing the literature in this limited account. Therefore, I present some selective

examples of different approaches in researching writing.

▪ **Experimental Studies:**

Experimental research conducted in both Arabic and English speaking countries on teaching writing examined the influence of a suggested programme or course on students' writing and writing development. Al- Hashmi (1995) for example, conducted a programme in teaching functional composition for the first grade students in the secondary school in Oman. The researcher aimed to answer these questions:

What forms of functional writing do first grades of secondary school students need? How the programme influences the development of students' writing ability? To answer these questions the researcher developed a list of functional forms of writing and gave it to Arabic language specialists, supervisors and teachers. After analysing participants' answers he found the most suggested forms of functional writing were personal letters, posters, diaries, summaries and official letters. In addition, to examine the influence of the suggested programme on students, he conducted six writing tests before and after applying the programme. After analysing exam scores he found that there was some development in students' writing. In general the researcher found that students in the secondary stage have obvious difficulties in Arabic writing, such as a lack of ideas, disorganised writing and numerous spelling and grammatical errors. Additionally, he found that the majority of written topics were focused on description and fictional aspects. Most of them were made up of the same topics repeated every year with no new topics being created for different purposes.

This study provided the policymakers with some suggestions to vary the forms of Arabic

writing that are taught to secondary school students. Yet, the researcher limited his research in examining the influence of the programme on students' writing and ignored examining students' perspectives about the programme. Whereas some researches (e.g. Casey & Hemenway, 2001) claimed that one of the factors that may lead to insufficient writing is students' perspectives and attitude toward writing. In addition, the researcher neglected examining the interactions that took place during the application of the programme, keeping in mind many researchers recommended teaching and assessing students according to the processes they go through and not according to the product (Murray 1972).

On the other hand, McLane (1992) presented the procedures and the findings of the course in the after- school programme as a case study, that he was involved in, as part of a large programme. This programme was conducted to support children to write outside formal school settings, such as a child- life programme in a children's hospital and after-school day- care programme. The course aimed to encourage children to write in non-school settings, where writing is supported but not directed by adults. The course based on Graves' approach that is based on several practical concepts such as: (1) the only way to learn writing is to write (2) students need to be provided with enough time to write (3) students should be given freedom to choose their own topics and styles (4) transcriptional aspects in students' writing should be revised and discussed through a communicative environment and context (5) students need to be provided with audiences for their writing and publishing of their written texts. In this way the writer gets a feedback from others to improve his/her writing. In addition, the teacher needs to create a collaborative environment in which students get help from peers and the teacher in their writing.

The programme conducted in a community social service agency in a poor inner city neighbourhood of Chicago whose residents include African Americans, Hispanic and Asian immigrants. The aim of this study was providing the students with various activities that would foster their school success in writing. In the beginning of the programme, the researcher found that little writing at home and at school is done. However, after gradual introduction of different writing activities and a collaborative and communicative environment for writing, some students started to respond to the new way and meaning of writing, while others faced difficulties getting rid of their school experiences in writing. Therefore, they were uncertain about what to write and how to write and were afraid of making mistakes. Not only were the children uncertain and unfamiliar with the new approach that offered them several opportunities to write what they want, the administrators of the programme also had problems allowing the children to choose their own topics and accepting and responding to whatever the children write. This is because they were used to the traditional practices of teaching and learning writing. Nevertheless, after the training on the new approach concepts, the administrators started to change their beliefs and practices.

The aspects that can be learnt from the two studies is that students are used to be taught through traditional instructional methods, which usually is a one shot affair in which the child is told to write something (typically a list of words or sentences for primary stage) which is then corrected for handwriting, spelling and grammar. Consequently, writing for students became exercises in formal mechanics empty from personal content and intention, which is the case in most Omani schools. Therefore, many researchers (e.g. Gutierrez,

1994; Hart, 1996 and McLane, 1992) conduct courses or workshops to help in developing students' writing abilities, as it is rare to see teachers applying such approaches in the real setting of writing classroom. I do not believe that this is because teachers and students do not want to, but because writing policy and school curriculum restrict them in applying particular approaches and content. However, it is not enough to apply experimental studies rather naturalistic research is needed to further understanding of classroom practices as will be explained exhaustively in the methodology chapter. In the next section some studies examining the naturalistic setting of the writing classroom will be discussed.

▪ **Research in Classroom Practices:**

There is little research conducted in observing the naturalistic setting of the writing classrooms. This might be because of the difficulties that researchers face in getting access to the classroom context, as usually teachers do not like to be observed while doing their work.

Gutierrez (1994) conducted a three year ethnographical study to examine how the construction of the classroom contexts influenced literacy instruction for language in minority children. The researcher mentioned that because she aimed to examine the processes of literacy development not only the product, she used qualitative methods to collect and analyse her data. Namely, observation (using videotapes), filed notes and interviews with administrators, teachers and students. Later discourse and conversational analysis traditions were used to analyse the data. The study was conducted in an elementary school, grades (2 to 7). The findings of the study indicated three types of

classroom interaction patterns: recitation, responsive and responsive- collaborative instructions. In the recitation instruction, the teacher plays the controller role and the interaction is mostly between the student and the teacher who initiates the topic and assesses student's response. There is a limitation in students' interactions with each other and in peers' assistance. The responsive instruction on the other hand is, to some extent, flexible. Although the teacher still plays the controller role, he/she gives a chance for other students in the classroom to respond and help the student to think about his answer. In both these types of interactions teachers seek the right answers. However, in the responsive- collaborative instruction, the teacher seeks to provide students with a collaborative and creative environment. The teacher plays the facilitator role; sets the activities and grants students opportunities to interact with each other, think together, assist and assess each other. This type of interaction usually is done through group work activity but can also be done through whole class activity.

The findings of this study provided me with a guideline about exploring and explaining the type of interactions that take place in the writing classroom. This is because one aim of this study is to examine classroom practices and roles that the teacher plays in the writing classroom.

Gutierrez mentioned that although there was uniformity in curricula, materials, use of the writing processes, activities, teacher preparation, and in-service training programme, there were major differences in writing process instruction across the nine classrooms studied. However, I believe that these differences in the interaction patterns are expected because of the differences in students' stages and ages. This is because the researcher conducted her

study in different schooling stages (2 to 7). I argue this based on my experience as an Arabic language teacher, that students' age and abilities are some of factors that might lead the teacher to vary his/her instructional practices and pedagogy. So it is quite common for the teacher to vary his/her strategies from one classroom to another according to the students' response to activities and tasks.

On the other hand, the evidence from research indicates that to get a deep and accurate understanding of classroom practice it is suggested to understand it from participants' points of view. Therefore, some researchers are interested in examining teachers' beliefs and perspectives about writing.

▪ **Research in Teachers' Beliefs and Perspectives:**

Researching teachers' beliefs and perspectives has become a topic for recent studies in education. Poulson et al., (2001) argued that teachers' theoretical beliefs have an influence on students' learning. Goodman & Goodman (1992) also argued that the teacher who holds a narrow view about learning is likely to use limited and 'outdated' teaching approaches. In addition, Clark & Peterson (1986) stated that the relationship between teachers' thought (theories, beliefs, and values) and observable action and behaviour is reciprocal. Therefore, researchers thought that researching teachers' beliefs and perspectives might help in understanding 'how and why the processes of teaching looks and works as it does' (ibid, p256), as well as to be applied for actions and implementations (Pajares, 1992). In spite of the importance of researching teachers' beliefs, little research has been conducted in the area of teaching writing.

Graham et al., (2002) for instance conducted a quantitative research aimed to develop an instrument to measure primary grade teachers' orientations to the teaching of writing, provide construct validation for instrument and obtain an early 2000s perspective on teachers' beliefs about writing instruction. In order to achieve their aims the researchers developed a six point Likert- type scale to measure teachers' beliefs about two basic orientations to teaching writing: the skills- based and the natural learning approaches. The scale included nine items related to the skill- based approach and nine items related to natural learning approach. The items included in the scale were adopted from previous studies and modified to suite the study aims. In addition, they developed 12 items seven point Likert- type questionnaire to assess how often the teachers and their students engaged in specific writing activities and instructional procedures. These two instruments were posted to 220 first –third grade teachers who were chosen randomly from the population of elementary school teachers in the US. The sample included both male and female teachers from urban, suburban and rural locations and from private and public schools. However, only 153 teachers completed the two instruments. The researchers used various quantitative analyses such as means, standard deviations and correlations among the items of writing orientation scale and among them and the questionnaire's items.

According to their findings, the researchers achieved their research aims. Firstly they developed a writing orientation scale which includes 13 items divided into three orientations to writing: correct writing, explicit instruction and natural learning instead of two in the original instrument. In addition, the researchers insured the instrument's validation by counting the correlation between teachers' responses to items included in

both instruments (the questionnaire and the scale). Finally, the researchers measured teachers' beliefs about writing orientation and they found that 99% of the teachers believed that explicit instruction based on teaching words and their spelling, using formal instruction to develop writing skills and teaching students to practice handwriting was important. While 73% valued natural learning based on teaching grammar when the need arises as well as the act of composing is more important than the resulting product. And only 39% believed correctness was based on the copying of a good model, reminding high achievers to use correct spelling, reminding non-standard dialect speakers to use correct English was important.

This research has an influence on the current investigation in terms of the importance of examining the relation between teachers' beliefs and their practices in the classroom. However, the researchers in Graham's study used quantitative methodology, and relied on questionnaire and a writing orientation scale while many researchers (e.g. Clark & Peterson, 1986) considered researching teachers' beliefs and thoughts as a problematic issue in terms of methodology. Therefore, multi- methodology or triangulation approaches are recommended (Wragg, 1997). This current study will adopt a multi- methods approach. Moreover, the researchers did not mention the issue of piloting their instruments in order to get feedback from the specialist or the teachers which might help them in revising their instruments before applying them. The researchers did not explain why they used particular methods. Yet, they recognised that one of their research limitations was relying on a questionnaire to examine teachers' practices and they recommended using observation approach to examine teachers' practices. In addition, teachers' beliefs and perspectives as mentioned by Clark & Peterson (1986) are a cognitive processes existing in teachers'

minds and thus, is unobservable. Therefore, it is difficult to understand it by merely relying on a Likert-type rating scale. Clark & Peterson identified five forms of self-report by teachers that most researchers relied on in researching teachers' belief and thought (i.e. thinking aloud, stimulated recall, policy capturing, journal keeping and the repertory grid technique). Stimulated recall approach (showing the teachers their recorded practices in the videotape and asking them to explain particular behaviours) as well as a semi structured interview applied in this recent study for the purposes of examining teachers' practices in relation to their perspectives.

The finding of Graham's research in addition, guided me to include some aspects to be considered when observing teachers' practices and examining their perspectives. In the US numerous studies were conducted in developing teaching writing. Yet, teachers from the US still believe that explicit instruction in teaching writing is more important than natural learning for primary school students. Therefore, it is not surprising that Omani teachers have the same feeling, considering that there is little research has been conducted to develop teaching writing. The findings of this study will provide some evidence about how Arabic teachers believe writing should be taught for fourth grade students.

Another study conducted in this area was by Brindley & Schneider (2002). The study aimed to examine fourth grade teachers' self-assessments of their perspectives about writing development and writing instruction. They used a questionnaire including two types of questions (Likert type rating scale and open-ended questions) which were given to 504 fourth-grade teachers from 100 inner-city, suburban and rural elementary school in one school district in the south east of the US. The researchers focused on fourth-grade teachers

because they aimed to gain insight into the ways that teachers balance their professional perspectives with various demands on their teaching. These demands included the testing pressure that is exerted within the writing curriculum, as their students are required to pass a state wide standardised test on writing before being promoted to middle school. Therefore, in the in- service training program in writing the focus primarily was given to testing writing rather than teaching writing. The teachers are guided to teach particular type of writing and use particular strategies to teach students how to write successful narrative and expository texts.

The researchers used a survey questionnaire utilising quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect and analyse their data. However, the researchers realised that one of their research limitations was relying on only one method which was survey questionnaire, which means that this study can be criticised for lacking the naturalistic aspect by observing a natural setting of a writing classroom. In addition, another weakness of Brindley's and Schneider's research is its neglecting the importance of face- to- face interviews that might help in providing deep and clear understanding of teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, one limitation of survey studies is the risk of including some questions that might be misunderstood by the participants. Although, the researchers piloted the questionnaire, the fact remains that the attention and the answers given by teachers for questions in face to face interview is more authentic than when answering the same questions through questionnaires. Although some teachers might feel more secure when they are anonymous and unknown, yet if the interviewer insured the confidential aspect for the participants the researcher might gain detailed and clear responses from participants.

The basic impact of Brindley's and Schneider's research on my study was the aspects that were included in the questionnaire on the writing instruction part. The study of Brindley & Schneider was the first study that I came across in the English literature. Therefore, I adopted some aspects from it that I thought might help me in researching Arabic writing. For example, I found that the common aspects that were considered in Brindley's and Schneider's study and other studies were writing instruction, teacher's role in the writing classroom and type of writing that students were provided within writing classrooms. These three aspects as I mentioned earlier in this chapter will be investigated within the recent study. In addition, the researchers found that the directives that teachers received from the policymakers influence their practices. However, accepting policymakers' directives differ from one teacher to another as some teachers accept all directives while some try, if there is any possibility, to adapt these directives in a way to suit their students and correspond to their beliefs. By examining teachers' practices and their perspectives one can see the extent to which policymakers' directives influence teachers' practices and beliefs.

In addition, one of the main aims of Brindley's and Schneider's study, as I mentioned earlier, was to examine teachers' perspectives about writing development and writing instruction in the light of the pressure of the writing exam on both teachers and students. However, the researchers neglected examining this issue from students' perspectives instead of asking the teachers about it. Many researchers mentioned that, researching students' perspectives might provide insightful data about teaching instruction as well as assist in developing writing instruction. The next section presents some studies on students'

perspectives on writing.

▪ **Research in Students' Perspectives:**

Kos & Maslowski (2001) conducted a study to examine the perspectives of 15 second-grade children of what constituted good writing. This was for the purpose of seeing how this might better inform the teacher's instruction. The researchers conducted a five months study which included early and late interviews of the children as well as observations of communication between the teacher and children during a small- group classroom writing session. The findings of this research indicated that during the first interview the children emphasised transcriptional aspects (e.g. spelling and handwriting) as indicators for 'good writing'. However, when they were in the group work and their work was scaffolded by the teacher and peers they reflected more emphasis on compositional aspects such as generating ideas, planning, and organisation of the text. In both interviews, children considered handwriting as the most important aspect for good writing followed by spelling, while ideas and vocabulary took secondary importance. On the other hand, the observation findings indicated that the children mentioned other different aspects as important aspects for good writing such as: idea generation, organisation, listening to stories, peers' help and praise. I believe the methods that were used in the study helped the researchers to achieve their aims. Yet, the findings that the researchers achieved seems to be expected as the children in this age are accustomed to being taught to focus on handwriting, words and spelling (Graham et al., 2002). Thus, five months might not be enough to change the experience that children had in their previous schooling years.

The influence of Kos's and Maslowski's research on my current study was threefold. First,

the research guided me to emphasise students' perspectives as a basic angle in researching writing. Students' perspectives might reflect the way that writing is taught and provide useful suggestion in developing the area of teaching writing. Second, I adopted similar methods that were used by Kos & Maslowski (i.e. interview and observation) to collect data related to the students. Third I adopted some questions that were used by researchers in their study which are: what do you need to do to become a better writer? What makes somebody a good writer? Yet, as my study was not focusing on 'good writing' rather on writing ability and basic knowledge for writing these two questions were modified to be: What do you need to be able to write? What aspects help people to be able to write? I did not use the term 'good writing' because I thought this might challenge the students and make them think about good writing as neat handwriting and accurate spelling. This is because the way that our teachers teach and assess writing leads the students to think only about spelling and handwriting as features for 'good writing'. Therefore, the way that I asked the students about vital aspects for writing might give them a chance to think about different activities and aspects that help them in their writing regardless if their writing is good or not.

Another study examined students' perspectives was a study of Casey & Hemenway (2001). The researchers conducted a longitudinal study in order to follow third grade students through high schools by interviewing them again in sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grades. The researchers presented a finding of one of these students as a case study (Page) who was considered by herself and the researchers as a good writer when she was in third grade, and eventually became a student who abhors English writing because of the way that writing is taught and the form of writing that students are required to write. In the tenth grade (Page)

considered herself as a bad writer who cannot write well and in the twelfth grade she suggested having a balance in the writing curriculum between analytical writing and unstructured writing. She thought that this will offer a chance for students to write what they like to write. She mentioned that she missed the opportunity to write what she wanted to write since third grade. In the third grade the researchers with the classroom teacher set a programme based on some concepts in teaching writing that were derived from two key studies of Murray and Graves such as: the writers should choose their own topics, teachers should model the writing process by writing along with their students, teachers should provide the students with real audiences and purposes and opportunities for lots of writing and publication.

Although the researchers used interview to collect their data they did not mention why they particularly used this method. In addition, they did not identify explicitly the methodology that they used to analyse their collected data. One of the limitations of this study I believe was that the researchers only based their findings on what the students mentioned without supporting these findings with evidence that can be derived from analysing students' writing. In this current study students' written texts will be analysed to support the finding of the study regarding knowledge emphasised in the classroom practices and forms of writing that are taught for students.

3.8 Conclusion:

This chapter examines a set of studies on teaching and learning writing. Reviewing such studies indicated that there are some aspects which still form points of controversy and

dispute among researchers. Examples of such aspects: what aspects are more important in the teaching and the assessment of writing: transcriptional or compositional aspects? What types of genres should be taught to primary stage students? What are the teaching strategies that should be used in teaching writing? What are the roles of the teacher in the writing classrooms? These aspects were of great concern to me when I set up the sub- questions of this study that can lead to an answer to the main question of the study which is: How writing is taught to grade four BE students, And how this influence students' writing and their perspectives about writing?

On the other hand, from the presented studies it is clear that most research in the area of teaching and learning writing was conducted from a particular angle. Some researchers conducted experimental, studies to examine the influence of a suggested programme or teaching strategies on students' practices, perspectives and writing. Some on the other hand, conducted naturalistic studies for the purpose of examining the real setting of the writing classrooms to observe the types of interactions that take place between the teacher and the students and the students with each other. In addition, other researchers were interested in examining the relationship between teachers' practices and their perspectives and beliefs. Conversely, some were interested in examining students' practices and perspective. By looking at theses studies I believe that there is a major angle missing in researching teaching and learning writing which is the impact of the writing curriculum and policy on teaching writing. All attention of researchers were given to the practical aspects that related to classroom practices while the theoretical aspects that related to the directives and guidelines that teachers receive from curriculum and policymakers were neglected.

Although some might argue that, most research that was conducted in the classroom with teachers and students aimed at developing teaching and learning writing. Yet, I claim that besides examining classroom practices it is also vital to examine curriculum developers' perspectives about what is included in the curriculum. I have derived this view from three different evidences. First the pilot study that I conducted in two writing classrooms suggested a significant influence of the curriculum on both classroom practices as well as on teachers' perspectives. Second by reviewing the literature, I realised that teachers in many English speaking countries especially in the UK have some freedom to employ different activities and strategies that suit their students with guidelines from the NLS policy. In spite of this situation in the UK which I believe is much better than the situation in Oman, the National Curriculum in the UK was criticised in terms of limiting students to schooling types of writing. Hilton, (2001) for example, argued that the NC writing test is constructed to measure performance of language in use, ignoring how able students are in writing clearly, imaginatively and logically for themselves. So if this is the situation in the UK how about the writing curriculum in Oman which was built, developed and imposed on the teachers, without relying on any research. Third, the study of Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, (2004) aimed to identify the factors that influence students' writing achievement from the teachers' points of view. They found that curriculum and assessment policy system were not included in the sets of factors that influenced students' writing achievement identified by Australian teachers. Therefore, the researchers suggested more studies to be done to examine how the curriculum and assessment policy influences teachers' beliefs and practices as they are related to pedagogy and assessment. Therefore, I argue that these types of studies are required more in Oman where the teachers are directed by a central

educational policy. Therefore, I included curriculum professionals' perspectives as a major angle in this study.

My assumption about the influence of curriculum on classroom practices will be examined through the findings of this study. Although I assumed that the curriculum informs the way that Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools in Oman, the findings of this study might suggest some exceptions to this assumption. This will be clarified in findings chapters (five, six and seven). However, before presenting the findings chapters, in the next chapter the methods and methodology that were used in this study in order to gain detailed and rich information about teaching and learning Arabic writing will be presented.

Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology:

4.1 Introduction:

As outlined in chapters one and three, this study examines the following central question: How is Arabic writing taught to fourth grade students in the BE schools and how does this influences students' writing and their perspectives about writing?

By reviewing the literature, knowledge for writing, writing pedagogy, teacher's roles in the writing classroom, writing forms and genres and writing processes were considered as key aspects in teaching and learning writing. However, there is a debate among researchers regarding these aspects. Through this study new evidences and knowledge about previous issues from the Omani context will be explored. Thus, the following questions were included to be explored through this study:

- What knowledge is considered in teaching Arabic writing?
- What writing processes fourth grade students go through when writing?
- What forms of writing fourth grade students are taught?
- What writing pedagogy is used in teaching Arabic writing?
- What type of roles Arabic teachers play in the writing classroom?
- What are the successes and limitations in the Arabic writing curriculum of fourth grade?

In addition, I mentioned in chapter three that although previous issues related to the teaching and learning of writing have been examined by researchers from a number of different perspectives, most have focused on teachers' practices and beliefs or students' practices, perspectives and writings, whereas a focus on the curriculum angle is less

apparent in previous research. This study is accordingly aimed to examine teaching and learning Arabic writing through observing classroom practices, examining teachers' students' and curriculum professionals' perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing as well as analysing students' writings.

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations that were made in planning the empirical work, as well as outlining how the data was actually collected and analysed. The chapter includes five main sections following the introduction. The first section deals with theoretical perspectives that led to the choice of the qualitative research methodology. A case study approach was adopted in this study and an explanation of why such a methodological approach was employed is discussed in the second section. The third section discusses the overall design of the study; the sample of the study, access and ethics, research methods; observations, interviews and students' written texts as methods for data collection employed in the study are discussed and these are followed by how the instruments were developed and piloted. The fourth section discusses validity and replicability issues and the last section discusses data analysis procedures.

4.2 Theoretical Perspectives:

Researchers in social science have tended to classify their methodologies under two dominant approaches, the qualitative and quantitative.

However, the division between the qualitative and quantitative approaches has become less clear-cut in recent years, in education, as well as in other social science disciplines. 'Paradigm war' debates are becoming increasingly regarded by many researchers as unhelpful in the practice of research in social science. And instead a more inclusive,

eclectic and pragmatic approach is taken in making methodological choices (Bryman, 2004 and Punch, 1998). It is increasingly argued that how each of these approaches is utilised depends on the nature and the context of the researched phenomenon (Neuman, 2000). For example, it depends on whether the phenomenon studied is perceived as an object and the research seeks to quantify relationships and mainly deals with numbers; or whether the research is concerned with a deeper understanding of individuals' perspectives and actions (Merriam, 1998) and the researched phenomenon is perceived as a subject, or as inter subjective relation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000). A similar distinction is made by Blaxter and his colleagues (1996).

Quantitative research is, as the term suggests, concerned with the collection and analysis of data in numeric form. It tends to emphasise a relatively large-scale and respective set of data, and is often, falsely in our view, presented as being about the gathering of 'facts'. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with collecting and analysing information in as many forms, chiefly non-numeric, as possible, smaller numbers of instances or examples which are seen as being interesting or illuminating, and aims to achieve 'depth' rather than 'breadth' (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996, p.60).

Some researchers (e.g. Maykut & Morehouse, 1995) on the other hand, make philosophical distinctions between qualitative and quantitative forms of research. From this perspective, qualitative research seeks understanding the meaning that events may carry for the studied participants while quantitative research is keen on explanation and the prediction of observable events (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995, p.3). Creswell (1998) explores the

philosophical differences between the quantitative and qualitative as it is summarised in the following table.

Table 4.1 Contrasting qualitative research with quantitative research

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
Tends to view reality as objective	Tends to view reality as subjective
Researchers tend to be independent from what is been studied	Researchers tend to interact and be part of their studies' subjects
Researchers' values have no effect on the research and may be ignored	Researchers' values and biases should be reported
Formal or impersonal words are used	Informal or personal words are used
Tends to use deductive logic and the study concepts, variables, and hypotheses are selected before the study begins. The intent of the study is to develop generalisation which contributes to theory and to enable one to predict, explain and understand some phenomenon.	Tends to utilise inductive logic, which means the informer should reveal the information rather than it being identified a priori by the researcher. This information emergence provides a bounded context which leads to patterns or theories that explain the studied phenomenon.

Adopted from Creswell (1998)

Miles & Huberman (1994) identified limitations in both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data although is more 'rich' but time consuming, and less able to be generalised. In contrast, quantitative data is more efficient, able to test hypotheses, but may miss contextual detail (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p40). The philosophical differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches however, do not mean that one approach is superior to the other (Cohen et al., 2000 and Miles & Huberman, 1994) because there are no clear-

cut foundations for the approach to be either qualitative or quantitative. However, as has been argued by many social science researchers (e.g. Crotty, 1998 and Punch, 1998), it is the research objectives, or questions that ultimately guide which approach is most appropriate or in some cases a combination of both. Thus, 'we should accept that, whatever research we engage in, it is possible for either qualitative methods or quantitative methods, or both to serve our purposes' (Crotty, 1998, p. 15).

Yet, we have to remember that the findings of research often guide us to important decisions about specific practices and policies. Therefore, choice of which approach to use may reflect the interests of those benefiting from the research and the purposes for which the findings will be applied. Decisions about which kind of research methodology and methods to use may also be based on the researcher's own background, experience and choice, the population being researched, time, money, and other resources available (Neuman, 2000). In other words, which approach is the most appropriate depends on the topic being investigated, the type of evidence to be collected, and the kind of analysis to be used in investigating the research topic (Bogdan & Biklen 1992; Denscombe, 1998 and Silverman, 1997). Moreover, it is also argued that:

'The way research questions are formulated make it clear what approach is most appropriate and trustworthy' (Verma & Mallick, 1999, p. 27).

However, this distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches does not mean that there is a certain method for qualitative research and another for quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). Questionnaires, observations, or interviews can be adopted in both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, in chapter three I highlighted how

Brindley & Schneider (2002) used a questionnaire which included two types of questions Likert- type rating scale and open-ended questions which allowed them to utilise both quantitative and qualitative approaches in collecting and analysing their data. The observation and interview can also be conducted in a structured way instead of being semi-structured.

Why use qualitative research methods?

According to what has been discussed earlier regarding qualitative research which seeks to understand and interpret the research world through its participants and its subjectivity to understand the researched case in-depth (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) and this study aims to explore and understand how Arabic writing is taught for fourth grade students and how this influences their writing. The key issues were to *explore and understand* a phenomenon, rather than measure or quantify relationships between previously identified variables, thus, a qualitative approach seemed to be the more appropriate one than the quantitative one for two reasons. The first reason is that the primary focus of this study is to provide a picture of what happens in the Arabic writing classroom and qualitative methods seemed to be appropriate in assisting understanding the full picture of the subject of study (Cohen et al., 2000). In contrast, using quantitative methods might lead to miss factors that are key to a real understanding of the phenomena being studied, as well as they do not always support understanding of multi-dimensional wholes (ibid).

The second reason is that this study is intended to examine the participants' (i.e. teachers, students and curriculum professionals) perspectives towards the way Arabic writing is taught within the BE schools and qualitative methods are useful, not only in providing rich

descriptions of complex phenomena, but in understanding the phenomena from participants' views (Yin, 1994). So the aim of this study is to explore answers for two main questions 'how and why' that are more related to a case study research (Cohen et al., 2000) which will be discussed further in the next section.

4.3 Case Study Strategy:

Qualitatively-oriented research has been used increasingly in social science to understand the real world or the phenomena studied. In particular, case study approach provides an opportunity to study a particular phenomenon in depth within a limited time (Hamel, 1993). Creswell (1998) has defined case study as an 'exploration of a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context' (Creswell, 1998, p61).

Stake (1995) has suggested that researchers should not think that 'everything is a case study', but should see a case study as a 'bounded system' in order to help them to keep firmly focused upon the particulars of, and to catch the complexity of, the case study. The system is bound in time and place and it could be a programme, an event, an activity, a group or an individual and it should also provide a 'unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles' (Cohen et al., 2000, p, 181).

From these definitions and traditions of case study approach it can be argued that a case study research tradition seemed to be suited to the work undertaken in this study for a number of reasons. First, the major purpose of this study is to explore and understand how

Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools from different people involved in the Arabic writing curriculum development, implementation, and receiving. Therefore, detailed- in-depth data about teaching and learning Arabic writing as an activity or programme will be collected from multiple resources of information (i.e. teachers, students and curriculum professionals) by using multiple sources of evidence (observation, interviews and students' written texts) in order to get a fuller picture about the problem undertaken in this study.

Second, according to case study definition, context in which the activity takes place is one key concept of case study tradition. Yin (1993) and Cresswell (1998) argued that if the context contains important explanatory variables about the phenomenon under study, then a case study approach is appropriate. The nature of this study focus, which deals with teaching and learning writing activities and processes, is likely to be influenced by overall environment of the classroom context. Including different schools and classrooms to collect the data of this study may appear to make it a multiple case study. However, since the emphasis of this study was not to examine the differences between teaching and learning in different context, rather to explore rich information, a fuller picture and detailed in- depth data about studied phenomenon from different resources and cases. This study is, therefore, more appropriately seen as a single case focusing on one single activity within an education system, where centralised educational policy is adopted across the state as has been mentioned in chapter two, rather than a multiple case study. In addition, the evidence from research indicated that case studies can use one participant, or a small group of participants who can represent a diverse cross section of society, but this is not necessary. For instance, in the study of Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1988) the researchers looked at just one participant to investigate a first year graduate student's initiation into an academic

writing program. By contrast, in the study of Emig (1971) that looked at the composition process of twelfth graders, eight participants were selected representing a diverse cross section of the community and in both studies the researchers adopted single case study tradition (see writing@CSU,2005).

Third, the benefit of using the case study tradition for this study lies in its flexibility in choosing the methods that meets its objectives. For instance as one of this study focuses is to examine the influence of the way that writing is taught on students' writing as well as to examine teachers' perspectives about the Arabic writing curriculum this might make this study seems to be as an 'evaluative case study research' as it is categorised by Stenhouse (1985) and Merriam (1998), but these aims are to be utilised to explore extra evidence that support the interpretation and explanation of this study findings rather than to evaluate the writing curriculum and the way that Arabic writing is taught.

Fourth, in this study I aim to explore *why* Arabic writing is taught in a particular manner by interpreting participants' emic (i.e. teachers and curriculum professionals) perspectives about the issue. By doing so, 'interpretative case study research', which seeks the answer to 'why' questions, was applied. This, as many researchers argued, requires an in-depth investigation of the studied situation (Gubrium& Holstein, 2000; Merriam 1998; Schwandt, 2000 and Yin, 1994).

Overall, the main focus of this study is to explore answers for the two main case study research questions; 'how and why'. This is by observing the real practice in the classroom context and exploring some explanation and interpretation of the classroom practices from the people who are involved in the phenomenon.

It was mentioned earlier that qualitative research has some advantages and disadvantages and as a case study approach is one of the qualitative research approaches, it is likely to have similar advantages and disadvantages which will be explained in the next section.

Advantages and disadvantages of using a case study approach:

In reviewing the value of case studies in the context of this study, some of the following advantages and disadvantages were found. One advantage was that case study helped me to understand the whole picture of what was happening in the sample classrooms during observed writing lessons. Without interacting with the real setting of researched context and subjects it was unlikely that I would be able to engage with the live reality of the researched phenomenon (Stake, 1995) and gain a real picture of it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1995).

My interaction with the participants (teachers and students) after the observed lessons on the other hand, allowed me to understand their perspectives about their practices as well as towards the way writing is taught in the BE schools. This therefore, has assisted me in seeing the situation through the eyes of participants, instead of interpreting it as an objective situation (Cohen et al, 2000).

Furthermore, case study research gives the possibility of adopting varied research methods in order to triangulate the researched problem (Bell, 1999). Therefore, in this study, observation, interviews, and students' writing analyses were utilised as forms of triangulation of methods in order to strengthen the validity of interpretations made within the research findings. This accordingly assists in presenting original information that can be adopted by others who have a similar situation (Nisbet & Watt, 1984).

On the other hand, the methodological literature identifies several weaknesses of case study research, such as the large amount of qualitative data they generate, and accordingly their time consuming nature to transcribe, organise and analyse (Stocker, 1991). Case studies are also not easily cross-checked and may be selective, and tend to be biased as it is affected by the subjective perspectives of the researcher (Nisbet & Watt, 1984, p. 9). In addition, case study is criticised for its lacking to provide an appropriate base for finding generalisation (Stake, 1995 and Yin, 1994). Yin argued that case study research is not generalised to the whole population but to some theory. Bassey (1999) in addition, argued that case study can be used not to generalise in a firm way but to make what he terms 'fuzzy generalisations'.

However, Yin (1993) suggests that in order to reduce the effect of case studies' weaknesses and to enhance their validity, researchers can adopt multiple data-collection techniques. The weaknesses of each one can then be encountered by the strengths of the others. Therefore, multi methods are adopted in this study. Observation of nine writing classrooms in four different schools, interviews with the nine teachers who taught the observed writing lessons, samples of four students from each classroom and curriculum professionals; and students writing analysis methods were used to enhance the validity of the produced information and collected data.

In addition, in spite of case study limitation in generalising its finding, it is partially possible that the finding of this study can be cautiously generalised to other BE schools in Oman for two reasons. First, all BE schools in Oman are similar in applying the same writing curriculum and writing pedagogy. In addition, teachers received similar in-service training as a result of adopting a centralised education policy. Second, using multi

resources of information (teachers, students and curriculum professionals) and multi sources of evidence (observation, interviews and students' writing analysis) to collect this study data might enhance the validity of the research findings. Although the literature advises researchers not to use multi sources and methods for granted that it will secure validity, yet the researcher needs to care about the methods he/she uses to meet the research objectives (Cohen et al., 2000 and Stake, 1995). Therefore, the reason of utilising different data collection methods was to meet this study objective rather than to claim one hundred percent validity of these research findings. However, 'any findings or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources' (Yin, 1994, p. 92). It also enabled me to examine emerging interpretations and explanations of one data set with that of other data sets. This is to check for consistency and any apparent inconsistencies and anomalies, which meant that interpretations attempted to account for examples of data that did not always fit the general pattern or emerging interpretation.

4.4 Research Design:

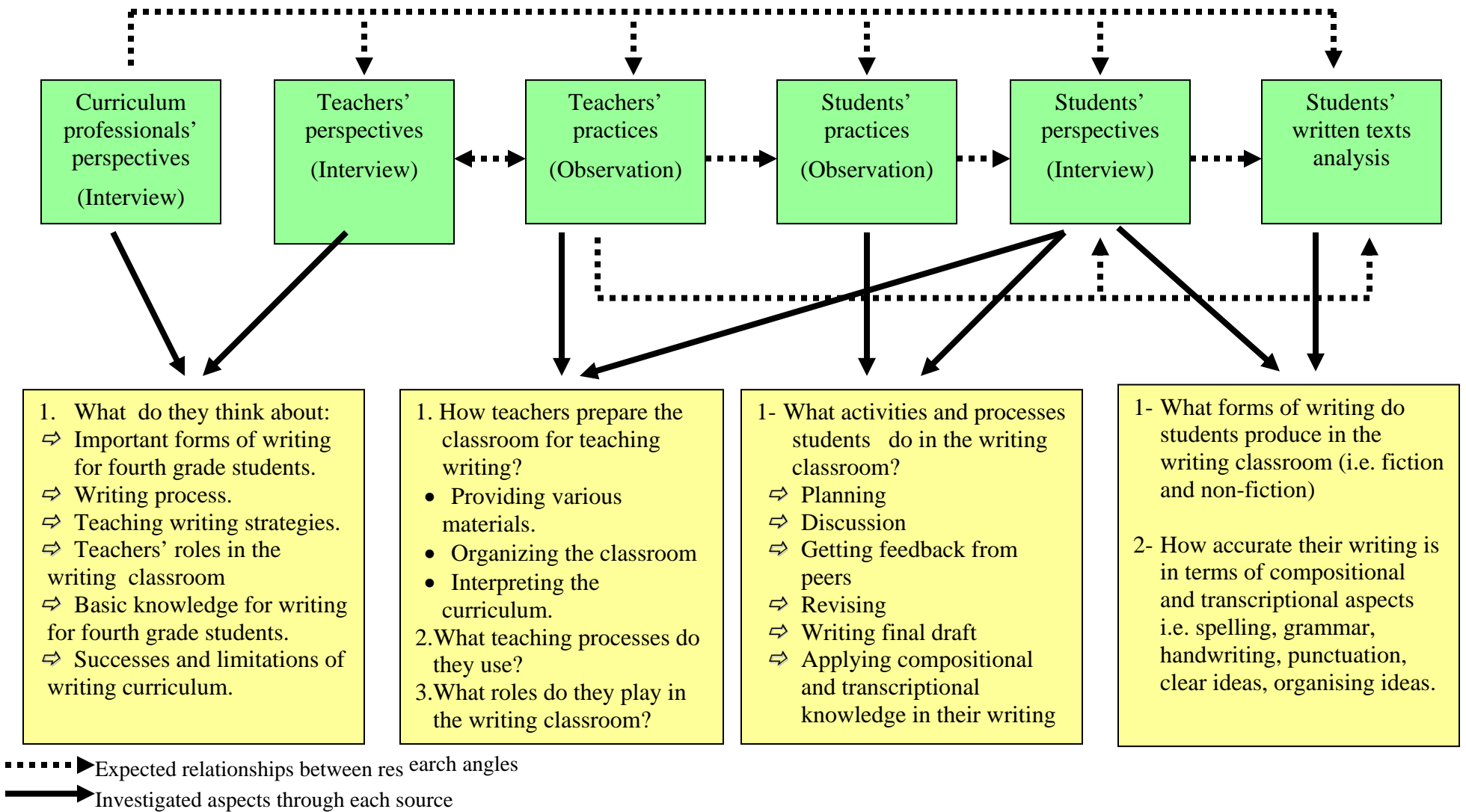
The last criterion of case study approach was mentioned by Yin (1994) has an influence on the overall design of this study. Therefore, teaching and learning Arabic writing was explored 'through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context' (Creswell, 1998, p61).

In addition, key aspects of teaching and learning writing were explored through reviewing the literature that also influenced the overall design of this study. Various aspects were included to be examined within this study, as indicated below:

- ⇒ Writing pedagogy (e.g. reading various genres, dissection, group work, individual work (Topping et al., 2000 and Riley & Reedy, 2000).
- ⇒ Teachers' roles in the writing classroom (e.g. coaching, guiding, providing writing materials and encouraging) (Burden, 1990; Wray & Medwell, 1991 and Wray, Medwell, Poulson, and Fox 2002).
- ⇒ Knowledge and skills for writing (e.g. transcription knowledge such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation, and grammar and compositional knowledge such as generation and organisation of ideas) (Kos & Maslowski, 2001).
- ⇒ Writing processes that students go through in order to produce sensible texts (e.g. planning, discussing, drafting and revising) (Graves, 1983).
- ⇒ Writing forms and genres (e.g. fiction writing such as stories and non fiction writing such as reports, letters and essays) (Cobine, 1995; Harada 2002; Hedge; 2000; Kress, 1994 and Novelli, 2001).

The figure 4.1 summarises the overall framework informing the research design of this study. Previously stated aspects also influenced the content of the instruments that were used to collect the data of this study which will be explained later on in this chapter. However, before exploring sources of evidence (i.e. methods and instruments) that were used in this study it might be helpful to discuss resource of information (research sample) as this might help the reader to follow the discussion in the former phase.

Figure 4.1 The overall framework informing the research design:



4.4.1 Research Sample (Resource of Information):

The assumption of this study is that if the researcher wants to have some kind of understanding of the reality of the social life, it is important to achieve this reality from the peoples living this reality (Bogdan& Biklen, 1992). In other words, to collect the information about the phenomenon's meaning, it is recommended to be taken within its social context (All Wright, 1988; Holliday, 2002 and Silverman, 2000). On the other hand, one of the key case study concepts is that if the researcher aims to look for depth and meaning rather than a broader approach it is better to base the research on a relatively small sample (Yin, 1994). In addition, Jorgensen (1989) and Simpson& Tuson, (1995) have argued that if the research does not seek measurable or quantifiable outcomes, traditional methods of probability sampling for large samples is inappropriate thus, a small sample can be considered advantageous. Thus, the sample of this study included the subjects closest to and involved in the phenomenon: namely, teachers, students and curriculum professionals. Also the sample involved small number of schools and within each school a small number of teachers and students have been chosen.

Basically, this study was conducted in fourth grade classrooms for two reasons. Firstly, grade four is a transitional grade between the two cycles of the BE stage: cycle one which includes grades one to four and cycle two which includes grades five to ten. The students in the end of grade four are transferred automatically to the cycle two of BE which, demands high skills and ability in writing. Secondly, fourth grade students are expected to have, from the last three grades, basic skills of writing which enable them to write for different purposes. Thus, I thought that this grade might represent how students are taught writing and what knowledge and abilities they have in writing and how the BE writing curriculum

prepares them to cope with cycle two and future life demands?

The sample of this study was based around four BE schools- in the Muscat region. Muscat region as I mentioned in chapter two is one of eight administrative regions in Oman. Muscat as all other regions is divided into smaller districts called *wilayats*. This study was conducted in the Muscat region in three different *wilayats*: Alaamirat; Alseeb and Alghobra. I chose the Muscat region to conduct this study for two reasons. First its *wilayats* reflect, to some extent, different socio- economic levels. Second, besides the original population of Muscat region many families moved to Muscat from other regions for employment reasons. Thus, to some extent, the population in Muscat might reflect the socio-cultural features of the population in other regions of Oman.

Four schools were chosen from three different *wilayat*, two schools are located in a low socio-economic level area ,and many of their students talk non-Arabic languages at home, while the other two schools locate in a high socio-economic level and many of their students talk Arabic language.

In each school two teachers were chosen. I planned to choose eight teachers but one of the four schools offered three teachers, so the total number of teachers that participated in this study was nine teachers instead of eight. On the other hand I tried to find two teachers with different specialisation and different years of teaching experience. However, as the BE is a new system, the Ministry of Education tried to choose experienced teachers to teach in the BE schools. Therefore, most teachers chosen within this study had no less than seven years experience in teaching; only two teachers had two years experiences. The teachers with two

years experience were trained in the new teacher preparation programme at the local college of education to be field teachers. The other seven teachers had different specialisation one specialised in Arabic language, two specialised in Islamic Education, two specialised in Social Studies and one specialised in Archaeology/ Education. Information about each teacher was gained through an instrument (Appendix 4.1) that was given to each teacher before starting the fieldwork procedures.

In addition, from each of the nine observed classrooms, a group of four students were chosen from each classroom. Each group included two females and two males with different achievement levels. The total number from the nine classrooms was (37) students.

Furthermore, as I explained in the last chapter that one of pilot study's reflections was the need to include curriculum professionals as a major resource of information for this study. Therefore, four Arabic language curriculum professionals were included in the sample of this study. Three of them were Omani and one was Jordanian: PC1 (Omani female), PC2 (Omani male), PC3 (Jordanian male) and PC4 (Omani female). The following table illustrates the participants from the four chosen schools.

Table 4.2 Resources of information of this current study:

Schools		Teachers		Students			Students' written texts	
N	Socio-economic level	N	Specialisation	Experience years	N	Gender	Achievement level	
S1	Low socio-economic level	T1	Education (Field Teacher)	1 year	P1	M	Low	2
					P2	M	Low	2
					P3	F	High	2
					P4	F	High	2
		T2	Arabic Language	23 years	P5	F	High	2
					P6	F	High	2
					P7	M	High	2
					P8	M	High	2
		T3	Islamic Education	11 year	P9	F	Low	2
					P10	F	High	2
					P11	M	Low	2
					P12	M	High	2
S2	High socio-economic level	T4	Social Studies	7 years	P13	F	Low	2
					P14	M	High	2
					P15	F	High	2
					P16	M	Low	2
		T5	Social Studies	15 years	P17	F	High	2
					P18	F	Low	2
					P19	M	High	2
					P20	M	High	2
S3	Low socio-economic level	T6	Education (Field Teacher)	1 year	P21	F	High	2
					P22	F	High	2
					P23	M	High	2
					P24	M	High	2
		T7	Islamic Education	12 years	P25	M	Low	2
					P26	F	High	2
					P27	F	High	2
					P28	M	Low	2
S4	High socio-economic level	T8	Archaeology/ Education	14 years	P29	F	High	2
					P30	F	High	2
					P31	M	Low	2
					P32	M	High	2
		T9	Islamic Education	17 years	P33	M	Low	2
					P34	F	High	2
					P35	M	High	2
					P36	F	Low	2
					P37	F	High	2

As the research sample is closely related to the ethical issue and access to schools, this issue will be presented before explaining the research instruments and its implementations.

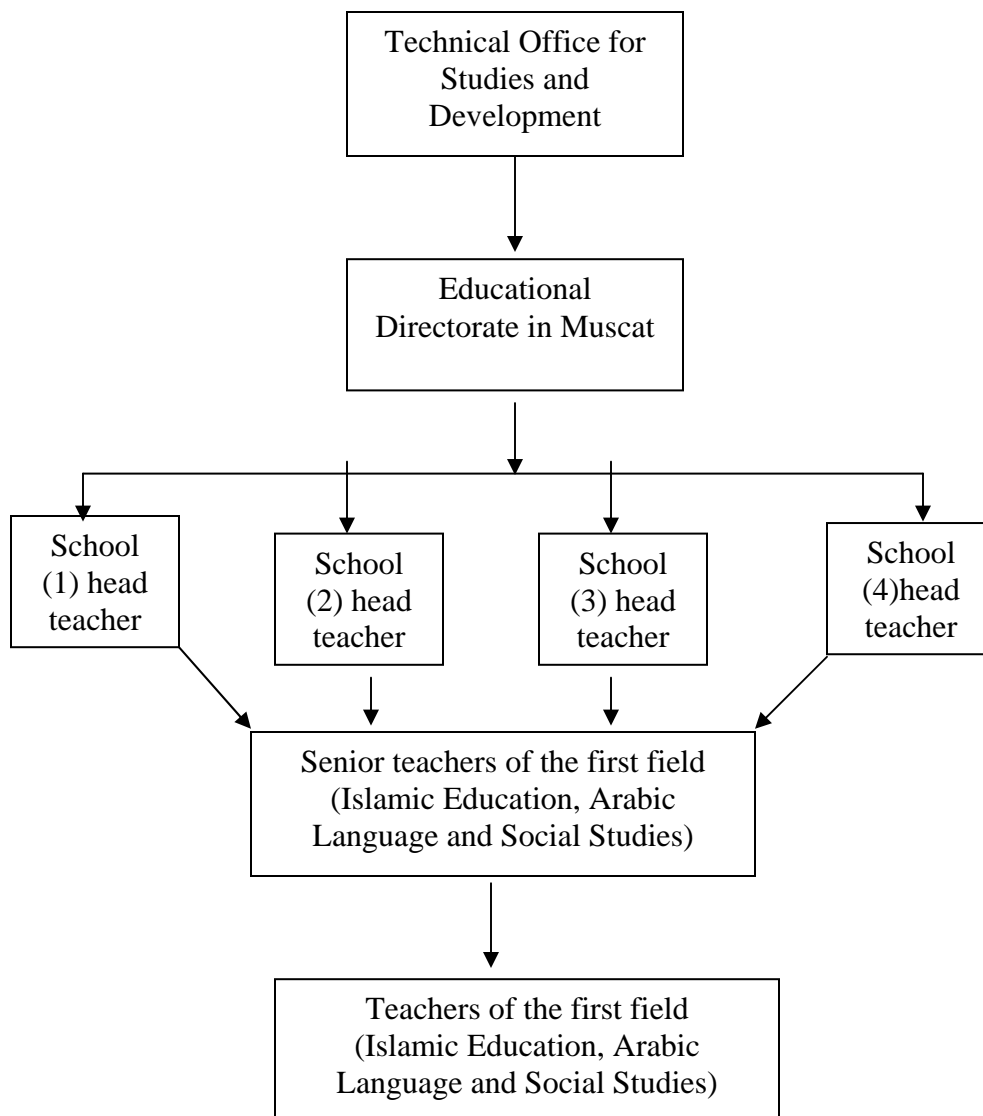
4.4.2 The Access to Research Setting and Ethical Issues:

There are ethical problems related to access within the research setting. One may be the physical restriction or denial to examine particular parts of the setting. Those problems are common to all researchers who engaged in fieldwork. Negotiating access is therefore, an important early stage in the process of the research. Within this study, getting access to schools and to teachers was a problematic issue in the pilot study. First of all, getting official authorisation from the Ministry of Education took longer, and more procedures than was expected. This led to some delay in the pilot study plan. Thus, this issue was taken into consideration in the main fieldwork.

Access was carefully obtained for each school, through official permission from the Ministry of Education, and the Department General of Education in the Muscat region. In addition, permission from head teachers of each school and teachers were obtained. In order to get access to the Omani schools a letter from the Education Department in the University of Bath to the Ministry of Education in Oman was also obtained (see Appendix 4.2). In this letter the situation of the researcher and her objectives in accessing to schools was clarified. This letter was sent to the Technical Office for Studies and Development in the Ministry of Education which asks for details about the research, who and what will be involved in schools and the purpose of the visit. Thus, they ask for looking into research instruments.

Figure 4.2 below explains stages and phases that I went through to get access to teachers and students. These phases started with the permission letter from the Technical Office for Studies and Development, the Educational Directorate in Muscat region to access each of four studied schools and finally getting access from each school individually.

Figure 4.2 Access to Muscat region schools



In addition, in this study the original plan was to use a video-camera to record classroom practices for accuracy reasons. One of the pilot study reflections was on the appropriateness of using a video-camera. All fourth grade teachers are females and because of some socio-cultural factors most teachers refused to collaborate with me. After long discussions and explanations, I got permission from two teachers who agreed to cooperate in the pilot study. Therefore, prior to the main fieldwork, contact with the teachers was made to ensure their participation and agreement. Also, to assure the confidentiality of the participants a consent form that includes; purpose of the study, procedures of the fieldwork and description of how the collected data will be used within this study, was established for the main fieldwork. Both I and the teachers signed this form (see Appendix 4.3).

Additionally, the pilot study indicated that the teachers were conscious and careful in their responses, especially, in the issues related to the writing curriculum and in-service training issues. This is due to the fact that the teachers know me as one of the Arabic language curriculum department's members, so they thought that any criticism on the new policy and curriculum might affect them as teachers. To avoid biasing the research's results, telling the studied subjects any things related to researchers official position was avoided. In addition, the purpose of the study manifestly was explained. However, the issue of the potential conflict between my position as an official of the Ministry of Education and my role as a researcher for a PhD in a UK university undertaking fieldwork in the Omani schools, is one that undoubtedly initiated this study and its conduct and outcome.

Sources of Evidence and Data Collection Methods:

The methodology literature indicated that the advantage of using different methods and instruments was that the findings generated from each method can either support or question the findings of another method, thus, validating various interpretations and explanations. Miles & Huberman (1994) discussed the advantage of combining between different methods to enhance the reliability, or trustworthiness, of one data source as compared with another, and the process of weighing data with respect to its source. In addition, Yin (1994) mentioned that data supplied by more than one source authorised confirmation, comparison and verification, but also enables the situation to be looked at from a variety of angles. Arksey & Knight have argued that:

‘It is not simply a way to ensure or challenge the reliability of one piece of information by getting other information. It is more about looking at the same phenomenon from different angles’ (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p21).

Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) identified at least six sources of evidence in case studies: documents, archival records, physical artefacts, direct interview, participant observation and interviews. An area of interest in this study was to explore how Arabic writing is taught for fourth grade students in the BE schools and how this influences students’ writing.

In view of this study interest in exploring the issue of teaching and learning Arabic writing from the participants’ interactions (Simpson & Tuson, 1995) and own emic perspectives (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994), as well as the influence of classroom practices on students’ writing, and their perspectives about writing, three methods of data collection were adopted: participant observation, direct interviews and document analysis (i.e. students’

written texts). In addition, documents such as student's textbook, teacher's guidebook and Arabic language curriculum were used as fundamental information for this study.

In this section each method will be discussed in terms of its advantage and disadvantages and how it was implemented in the study.

Observation:

Observation is a method described as being a key means by which data is collected within qualitative approaches (Spradley, 1980). Although its epistemology is described as being situated within a qualitative framework, it is not necessarily a qualitative method, but it can also be utilized within a more quantitative investigation. It is used extensively in a quantitative manner in educational research, where it is frequently used for hypotheses testing (Neuman, 2000 and Simpson & Tuson 1995). However, it has been criticised by researchers who believe that classroom can be seen beyond counting its events, since individual event can be interpreted and tell 'a story about classroom life' (Wragg, 1997, p10).

Qualitative observation on the other hand, is considered as a valuable source to investigate face-to-face interaction in the classroom context, allowing being close to the phenomenon. The evidence from research indicates that classroom observation is an appropriate method to gain deep insight and accurate information about classroom context and practices (Bourke, 1985; Brindley & Schneider, 2002 and Graham et al., 2002). Therefore, the way in which observation was employed within this study is highly influenced by the qualitative approach. For one, this method aims to obtain data that provided me with insights into how people interact with each others within a particular context. Also it is about investigating

patterns of behaviour within specific situations and setting to arrive at descriptions that highlight what goes on in the writing classroom and how social interaction takes place (Jorgensen, 1989 and Simpson & Tuson, 1995).

In addition, qualitative observation allows supplementing data through other various methods as part of the investigation (Simpson & Tuson, 1995). Jorgensen (1989) suggests that while observation is the primary means to collect data, various other strategies may be pursued at the same time. Most common are casual conversations and interviews. Within this study the classroom observation was followed by individual interviews, observed teachers and students were asked about their practices in the observed writing classroom to gain a correct insight and understanding about the classroom practices.

Needless to say that, observation has been criticised on various accounts. The first criticism was concerned with the principle means of recording the data, note taking, it is implied that note taking increases the chances of observer bias as the recordings may be less about what actually happened, but more about what is thought to have happened (Simpson & Tuson, 1995). However, there are some suggested methods of recording observed phenomena besides note taking such as, video-tape and audio-tape. In this study both note taking within a semi- structured observation instrument and video-tape recorder were applied. Although, using a video-tape is time consuming concerning analysing recorded data, it is easy to record images and sound that appear in the classroom; it is straightforward to record any specific situation and detailed and sequential events that need to be focused on during the observation. In addition, it can be replayed at any time if the researcher needs to confirm any events.

Secondly, the issue of the researcher's role within the setting needs to be considered. It is suggested that there are various degrees of participation a researcher can adopt once he or she enters the field. Burgess (cited in Waddington, 1994) suggests a variety of roles ranging from complete participant to complete observer, with intermediate roles of participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant, according to the amount of interaction with the participants (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Within research settings chosen for this study the role adopted by me was a participant observer for two reasons. Firstly this study aimed to record the usual classroom practices as it happens in the every day classroom life, without any interference from me on the classroom setting and interactions. Secondly, due to the educational situation of the schools, teachers have to complete their lessons and curriculum content within a time frame, so any disturbance from outsiders may lead them to bear additional efforts which they dislike. A further issue, as highlighted earlier in the discussion of ethical issues was the potential conflict between my role as a researcher for a PhD and my usual professional role within the Ministry of Education. This meant that I needed to minimize any suggestion to the teachers that I might be in the classroom in a professional capacity and viewing their work from a critical stance, however unintended this might be on my part.

Implementation of the observation:

After undertaking the pilot study, it was clear that there were a number of issues on which I needed to reflect and to give consideration. One of the problems that arose was the refusal of female teachers to be video-recorded by a man. This meant that the video- recording needed to be done by myself, or to find a female to do so. However, one of my plans in the observation process was to sit with a group of students and take notes while they are

working, besides the video- recording for teacher's practices and their interactions with students. Therefore, it was difficult for one researcher to do both processes at the same time without any help. On the other hand, it was difficult to find any female who had experience in videoing that could go with me to different schools. Consequently, I went to the Media Section in the Ministry of Education to see what they could advise as a solution for this problem. They provided me with a high quality video camera with an auto- zoom and a stand to be placed in the classroom which moved when necessary. They trained me to be able to deal with and position the camera so I could ask any free teacher in each school to just stand behind the camera and move it when necessary. This solution was beneficial to do the observation in an appropriate manner, as an arrangement with the Information Resource Centre teacher in each school was made to help me in recording the writing lessons.

The observation processes in this study had to be done before applying any interviews with teachers or students for two reasons. First, one of the purposes of this study is to observe the natural situation of Arabic writing classroom without any effect on teaching and learning processes while discussing any issue with the teachers before the observation might influence their practices. Second, it was observed from the pilot study that this would influence the teachers' practices in the classroom. In an attempt from them to please me (as they know my position; a professional in the Arabic language curriculum department) they tried to emphasise in their practices the aspects that had been discussed with them in the interviews.

Interview:

Interviews employed as a qualitative method were designed open-ended to some extent (e.g. semi- structured or unstructured) to elicit descriptions of specific instances and events, since this type of interview was flexible and allowed the respondents to give detailed information about the topic (Denscombe, 1998). Denzin described the interview as 'the favorite methodological tool of qualitative research' (Norman, Denzin, and Lincoln, 1994, p353). In this study open- ended interviews for teachers and students and curriculum professionals were implemented in order to gather as much as possible information about teaching and learning Arabic writing within the study focused aspects. An open ended, semi-structured interview was adopted in this study for several reasons. It is a more flexible technique than other interview methods (i.e. structured and unstructured interviews). The semi-structured interview enables the researcher to explore in- depth interviewees' emic perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing without any limitations on their responses. The open ended questions give participants freedom to express their perspectives as it does not seek 'dry facts'. Cohen referred to advantages of open ended questions in the interview:

'they are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that may go into more depth if he chooses, or clear up any misunderstandings; they encourage co-operation and rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a true assessment of what the respondent really believes' (Cohen, Manion, Morrison and Morrison,1989, p313).

On the other hand, an individual interview technique was adopted in this study. It is an appropriate technique in the case of this study because time for each participant, was limited and varied from one to another. Thus, individual interview technique was flexible enough to deal with the time issue while other techniques such as group or focus interviews are difficult to arrange and control. Actually the interview as it was defined has been

recommended to be one to one conversation for more flexibility and achieving the purpose of the study.

‘Interview is a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research- relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research- objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation’ (Cannell & Kahen, 1968, p527).

The open- ended interviews were used, in this study, as a supporting technique for the observation method obtaining unobserved information such as perspectives and attitudes and feeling. It was used for different purposes and in different manners. First of all, it was used to explore perspectives of both Arabic writing curriculum professionals and Arabic writing teachers. Secondly, it was used to examine students’ perspective about teaching and learning Arabic writing. Thirdly, it was used to explore both teachers’ and students’ perspectives about particular actions in the observed classroom aiming to understand their behaviour in particular aspects; in other words understanding the respondents’ world more clearly (Neuman, 2000). Arksey & Knight (1999) argued that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is on a persons’ mind and to find out, from them, things which cannot be observed directly about meaning that underpin their lives, routines behaviours and feelings. They suggested that interviews focus on the informants’ understanding rather than the accuracy of the interviews’ account.

Each piece of information that was gathered from each participant in this study has individual importance in understanding the phenomenon of teaching and learning Arabic writing from different angles. For example, to understand the aims and foundations of teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools it was essential to interview the

Arabic curriculum professionals. They are responsible in preparing the curriculum and in training teachers how to implement the curriculum. Teachers on the other hand, play a crucial role in this study, they are responsible for classroom teaching and the quality of classroom practices, but also they are persons who have strong influence on students' success or failure in writing (Burden, 1990). Students were also a key resource of information for this study as subjects, they provide this study with useful information about classroom practices and how it influences their perspectives about writing in general and their performance in writing in particular.

Implementation of students' interviews:

Fourth grade students are one group of the participants who were interviewed in this study. This is because one purpose of the recent study was to find out the influence of classroom practices on students' perspectives about writing as well as to understand their behaviours in the observed classroom. Therefore, interviewing the students in this study was an attempt to understand their perspectives about Arabic writing and some of their observed practices in the writing classroom.

Thirty seven students were interviewed from four different schools involving nine classrooms. These students were interviewed individually on the following day of the observation. The interview with each student was tape- recorded and it lasted for 20 to 25 minutes, however, some students took more than 30 minutes. I did not interrupt students' as long as they were talking about the topic.

The thirty seven students were interviewed individually. One plan of this study was to interview the eight students in each school in one day. Therefore, I had to be in the school early in the morning so that I could interview all target students in each school within the same day. However, my attempts in this manner did not succeed in all researched schools because of the absence of some students on the day of the interview. So I had to go in another day to complete the interview with the students. All the interviews with students were recorded using a cassette recorder. In addition, each interview with students started with some questions about the student such as his/her name, school name, and class. Although I had previous information about each student, most of these questions were purposed for two reasons, to encourage students to talk and to feel comfortable in their responses and to be able to give more in-depth answers. I tried to ask the questions in a friendly way speaking in the students' informal dialects, in an effort to help the students understand the questions. To 'break the ice' between me and students each interview started with a conversation about general issues, such as what do you like in the school? What activities do you do in school? This social conversation led to the main body of interview questions.

The interview with students went smoothly. The only thing that confined me was that the low achievers were sometimes afraid to talk or answer the questions. I respected their situation and gave them freedom to talk as much as they wanted to and stopped when they wanted to with an effort to ask them all the questions in the interview schedule.

Implementation of teachers' interviews:

One objective of this study was to investigate teachers' perspectives about teaching Arabic writing and to understand the classroom practices from teachers' points of view. Thus, the nine studied teachers were interviewed two days after observing their classrooms. On the following day of the observation I provided the teachers with the video-tape to watch their recorded lessons and put down some comments (i.e. concerning their practice in the classroom) for discussion in the interview that was going to be conducted the next day.

Interviews with teachers were completed two days after the observation of their classrooms. This was for two reasons: firstly, to have time to transfer the data from a video-camera or a cassette to video- tape cassette, secondly to give teachers an opportunity to watch the video- cassette and comment on their practice (e.g. explaining some aspects in their practices regarding teaching methods and roles they play in the classroom, and some of students' behaviours). The interviews took place when the teachers were free. A stimulated recall approach was used in the teachers' interviews. This demanded preparing a place that included a television and a video to watch when it is needed during the interviews. In the beginning of the interview I intended to ask some general questions, in order to create a sociable environment and build a relationship with the teachers.

All interviews with teachers went smoothly. Most interviews were tape- recorded and lasted 45 minutes, however, some of them lasted one hour, especially interviews with the teachers who had free time. It appeared that the teachers were pleased to talk about issues related to teaching and learning Arabic writing. Moreover, unlike the pilot study, participating teachers in the main study talked more easily about their perspectives about

the new curriculum without any concern of my official position. Yet, teachers with little teaching experience years were partly afraid to talk about both their practices and the theoretical aspects of teaching Arabic writing. It appeared to me that they still lacked the confidence to talk about investigated aspects.

Implementation of curriculum professionals' interviews:

One of the pilot study reflections was the need to investigate curriculum professionals' perspectives about teaching Arabic writing. This is to understand the phenomenon from different angles as well as to gain further information about the writing curriculum. Thus, four curriculum professionals were interviewed. All the four interviewees are responsible for preparing Arabic curriculum and training Arabic teachers.

Interviews with curriculum professionals were conducted in the Arabic curriculum department in the Ministry of Education during the work day. Before conducting the interviews with curriculum professionals, they asked to have the questions prior to the interview. They claimed that they needed to prepare answers as they cannot remember every thing about aims, foundations and contents of the Arabic writing curriculum unless they return back to their documents. Thus, a copy of interview schedule was given to each professional in advance. The interviews were conducted on different days according to the availability of each of them. Having an office in the Arabic curriculum department during the field work helped me to access to these professionals easily. Each interview with curriculum professionals was tape- recorded and lasted one hour. The interviews went as a social conversation between me and interviewees as all of them are my colleagues.

Students' written texts:

One major objective of this study was to investigate how classroom practices influence the outcomes (i.e. students writing). Therefore, samples of students' written texts were collected and analysed. The purpose of collecting students writing was twofold: first to identify writing forms that are created by fourth grade students in the BE schools; second to find out the quality of students' writing in terms of transcriptional and compositional aspects. It was mentioned in chapter three that the term 'transcription' in this study signifies the writing aspect that includes spelling, punctuation, grammar and hand writing. Whereas the term 'composition' indicates the writing aspect that deals with; ideas, text organisation, vocabulary and meaning in the written text.

Seventy two pieces of students' written texts were collected. Two pieces from each student were collected at different times and forms of writing. The first piece of writing was produced by a student in the observed lesson. These collected pieces of writing are structured writing; as they were related to the curriculum content. The second piece of writing was collected after one month of observation. Teachers were asked to give a free writing lesson, giving the students their freedom to write what they want (free writing). Written pieces of all students in the classroom were collected (almost 240 pieces of various forms of writing). This is to ascertain what students like to write, and their ability to write acceptable piece of writing, aiming to examine the extent to which classroom practices influence students' writing.

Fieldwork procedures:

The fieldwork according to what has been stated went through different processes and procedures. Table 4.3 below displays the fieldwork procedures which indicates that observation process was the first procedure conducted in each school followed by students' interviews, then teachers' interviews and finally collecting students written texts. In addition, it indicates that interview with curriculum professionals was conducted in the last stage of fieldwork procedures. This assisted me to discuss with them some issues that were observed in writing classrooms or were mentioned by teachers in the interviews, this was to get rich and full clarifications and interpretations for these issues.

Table 4.3 Schedule of fieldwork procedures:

Fieldwork procedures time scale	Schools			
	School (1)	School (2)	School (3)	School (4)
Observation	16/2/2004	23/2/2004	29/2/2004	8/3/2004
Students' interviews	17-18/2/2004	24/2/2004	1-3/3/2004	9-10/3/2004
Teachers' interviews	19/2/2004	28/2/2004	3/3/2004	10/3/2004
Collecting students written texts	16/2 and 16/3	23/2 and 23/3	29/2 and 29/3	8/3 and 7/4
Interview procedures time scale	Curriculum professionals			
	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP4
	7/4/2004	7/4/2004	10/4/2004	14/4/2004

The intention of using different sources although was to insure some validity of the data, as one of case study techniques; it is also an attempt to achieve some kind of objective reality. As this study aimed to investigate the phenomenon of teaching and learning Arabic writing, for any respectable findings, it should present different points of view of the actors who take part in it. In this case both observation and interviews provided various types of information that enrich the findings of this study. Table 4.4 below displays the different resources of information relating the research methods to the research questions.

Table 4.4 Resources of information relating the research methods to the research questions.

Source	Research methods	Research questions
Teachers	Observation	1- How Arabic teachers teach Arabic writing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How they organise a writing classroom? ▪ What teaching methods they use? ▪ What aspects they emphasise? ▪ What roles they play in the classroom?
Students	Observation	2- What four grade students do in the writing classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How they interact with each other? ▪ What writing processes they go through? ▪ What aspects they focus on while writing?
Teachers	Interview	3- What teachers think about teaching and learning Arabic writing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What they think is important knowledge for writing? ▪ What they think are important forms of writing for fourth grade students? ▪ What they think about teaching writing methods and teacher's role in the writing classroom? ▪ What they think about the writing processes? ▪ What they think about their practices in the observed classroom? ▪ What they think about the writing curriculum, its successes and limitations?

Students	Interviews	<p>4- What students think about teaching and learning Arabic writing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What they think is important for Arabic writing? ▪ What forms of writing they like to create? ▪ What they think about a freedom in choosing writing topic? ▪ What they think about writing process? ▪ What teaching method they like in writing lessons?
Students	Written texts analysis	<p>5- How the classroom practice and teachers' perspective about writing influence students' writing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What forms of writing fourth grade students create? ▪ What is the quality of students' writing in terms of compositional and transcriptional aspects?
Curriculum professionals	Interview	<p>6- What curriculum professionals think about teaching and learning Arabic writing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the aims and foundations of the writing curriculum of fourth grade students in the BE schools? ▪ What they think is important knowledge for writing? ▪ What they think are important forms of writing for fourth grade students? ▪ What they think about teaching writing methods and teacher's role in the writing classroom?

From what has been presented in the prior table some of the research questions were adapted to be included in research instruments. The next section presents research instruments that were used in this study explaining how they were developed, piloted and modified.

4.4.4. Developing and Piloting Research Instruments:

I have outlined earlier that observation and interview methods were main approaches in this study; four instruments for data collection were developed and piloted: observation instrument, student's interview instrument, teacher's interview instrument and curriculum professional's interview instrument.

The four instruments relied on five main aspects related to the teaching and learning of Arabic writing, that were derived from reviewing the literature, as I mentioned in chapter three and earlier in this chapter. These main aspects are: writing pedagogy, teacher's roles in the writing classroom, knowledge for writing (transcription and compositional aspects, writing process (e.g. planning, discussing, drafting and revising) and writing forms. All the four instruments were written in English language and discussed with the supervisor then translated to the Arabic language to be implemented in the Omani context. In this section each instrument will be discussed.

Developing and piloting the observation instrument:

The original observation schedule was designed to cover the following aspects:

- ❖ Classroom setting and materials.
- ❖ Teaching writing methods.
- ❖ Teacher's roles in the classroom.
- ❖ Writing processes students go through.
- ❖ Knowledge that is emphasised in the classroom (i.e. transcriptional and compositional aspects).

The observation instrument started with a section about general information about the observed lesson (see Appendix 4.4).

The pilot study has some reflections on the observation instrument content and shape. For example, the original observation instrument included the previous aspects that I aimed to observe. Yet, the pilot study indicated a need to include another free section about other observed aspects related to practices in the classroom. This section was included to provide me with a space to take notes of any important aspects related to the teaching and learning of Arabic writing that appears during the observation and not related to any of the last items.

In addition, one plan of this study was to discuss some of students' practices, during the classroom observation, with both the student himself and his/her teacher when interviewing them. This was to gain wide information about the students. However, the original observation instrument did not include a space to take notes about each student which was a problematic issue during the observation and when analysing observation notes. Excluding a space for each student in the original observation instrument led to miss some important information about each student. This obviously required changing the observation instrument to include a separate section about each student to enable me to take detailed notes about each student and his/her behaviour.

Developing and piloting the student's interview instrument:

The student's interview instrument was designed to cover the following aspects:

- ❖ Information about the student.
- ❖ General information about what she/he likes in the school.

- ❖ Arabic writing forms and important aspects in writing.
- ❖ Teaching strategies and teacher's roles in the Arabic writing lesson.
- ❖ Writing processes and activities in the classroom.

There are also some questions about some observed practices of each student in the writing lesson. These questions helped me understand why each student behaves in a particular way, especially in the aspects related to the writing processes. In addition, there are some questions about student's written text; the form he/she produced, the aspects he/she emphasised in his/her writing (see Appendix 4.5).

The only thing that emerged during interviewing the students in the pilot study was the need to probe some questions to gain clear and enough information about discussed issues.

Developing and piloting the teacher's interview instrument:

The teacher's interview instrument was designed to cover the following aspects:

- ❖ Information about the teacher.
- ❖ Knowledge for writing and writing forms.
- ❖ Preparations for a writing classroom.
- ❖ Writing strategies and teacher's role in the writing classroom.
- ❖ Writing processes.
- ❖ Teacher's perspectives about the observed lesson.

Some aspects that were mentioned by students in their interviews or recorded during the observation (i.e. about each student individually or all students in general) were also included to be discussed with their teachers in order to gain clear information about the students and deep understanding about the phenomena.

Moreover, the original instrument was designed into two separated interview instruments. The first interview instrument was proposed to focus on teachers' perspectives about teaching and learning writing in general, and it was planned to be conducted a day prior to the classroom observation. The second interview instrument was planned to focus on teachers' perspectives about their practices in the writing classroom and was planned to be conducted on the following day of the classroom observation. However, according to the piloting reflections the two teachers' interview instruments were combined in one instrument in a manner that includes questions about both teachers' perspectives, how writing should be taught and about their real practices in the writing classroom. This was for two reasons. First, to ensure that teachers' practice will not be affected by an outsider's influence. I found in the pilot study that teachers tried to emphasise, aspects that were discussed in the first interview. Second, ensuring the availability and cooperation of the teachers was important. I found that they have only one or two free hours in a school day, and they were involved in different activities in those two hours which meant that they did not have time for any additional work. Setting the teachers two times for two different interviews put more pressure on them. Therefore, the final version of the teacher's interview instrument was modified to be one instrument that involves two parts. The first part explores the teachers' perspectives about theoretical aspects in teaching and learning writing. The second part involved questions about teachers' practices in the observed lesson. At the end of the first part the teacher was given some time to watch the recorded lesson. In addition, they were given freedom to pick the points that they wanted to talk about otherwise I followed the questions which were included in the interview schedule.

Furthermore, during the interview in the pilot study teachers mentioned some aspects related to the writing curriculum success and limitations and the in-service training programmes. This led me to include a section about general comments about curriculum and any other aspects that the teachers liked to talk or comment about (see Appendix 4.6).

Developing the curriculum professional's interview instrument:

The pilot study turned up the study focus from a 'partial picture' to a 'fuller picture' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In other words, the original focus of the study was on examining writing classroom practices and teachers' and students' perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing. However, considering the analysis of the pilot study data, which indicated that both teachers and students stated a significant influence of the Arabic writing curriculum on their practices. Thus, it was vital to involve Arabic curriculum professionals as a part of this study. This was to gain a fuller picture about teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools. The curriculum professionals' interview instrument was developed for this purpose and it covered the following aspects:

- ❖ Writing curriculum aims and foundations.
- ❖ Knowledge for writing.
- ❖ Writing forms.
- ❖ Writing processes.
- ❖ Teaching writing strategies.
- ❖ Teacher's roles in the writing classroom.
- ❖ Some concepts of teaching and learning writing (e.g. giving the students freedom to choose their topics, writing for various purposes, and awareness of audiences) (see Appendix 4.7).

Unlike students' and teachers interview schedules, curriculum professionals' interview schedule was not piloted because it was decided to be included according to the pilot study reflections. However, this instrument was given for one of the Arabic language curriculum professional (not one of the four professionals involved in this study) to comment on it and minor corrections were made according to his comments.

Research instrument is usually associated with validity and reliability issues; therefore, the next section will examine the validity and reliability or replicability issue.

4.4 Validity and Replicability:

It is difficult to get rid of threats of validity and replicability in qualitative research. Yet qualitative researchers can reduce it if they pay attention to the possible threats throughout research procedures (Burns, 2000 and Cohen et al., 2000). This section highlights the arrangements and preparations that were undertaken to secure validity and replicability of this study.

The term validity in quantitative research is defined as an instrument that measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe (Merriam, 1998). The validity of research is assessed under three categories of validity: construct validity (when subjective judgments are used to collect data), external validity (to know whether a study's findings are generalisable beyond the immediate case study) and internal validity (concerns with causal case study) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Patton, 1990, Yin, 1994). In this study efforts were made to increase the validity of this study through applying more than one research method so the data from one method can support and prove the data from another method.

In addition, the data was collected from different resource of information as was explained earlier.

Replicability on the other hand is a synonym of reliability that is defined as a consistency over time, over instruments and over a group of respondents (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 117).

This means that the same procedures used by other researchers should produce the same results. Yin (1994) gave an example to explain reliability:

‘In accounting and bookkeeping, one is always aware that any calculations must be capable of being audited. In this sense, an auditor is also performing a reliability check and must be able to produce the same results if the procedures are followed’ (Yin, 1994, p. 37).

However, in social science research, it is hard to replicate or guarantee the same result, because human behaviour is never static (Bassegy, 1999 and Merriam, 1998). Therefore, replicability in qualitative research can be regarded as a ‘fit’ between the researchers’ records and data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched (Cohen et al., 2000). In this sense, reliability is redefined as the ‘dependability’ of the research, so that systems are in place to ensure that data collection methods are consistent with findings and provide audit trails for confirming results (Guba& Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, to increase research replicability, Silverman (2000) suggests that the investigator should utilise techniques such as making plans for carrying out the research, well-designed methods, representative sampling, and fieldwork. All of which play a major role in reducing the threats against replicability and validity of the research. Therefore, in this study an action plan was designed to guide the actions during the different stages of the implementation of this study. This is to ensure that the research stages were conducted as planned and data were collected at the appropriate time, to reduce threats to reliability.

Moreover, the literature also suggests that adopting a triangulation approach is likely to enhance the replicability of the research findings (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, in this study observation, interviews and students' written texts analysis were implemented as different methods to collect this study data; this then possibly leads to produce trustworthy findings.

4.5 Data Analysis:

The purposes of this study were three-fold: to explore how actually Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools; to explore what teachers, students and curriculum professionals think about this issue and lastly to explore how this influence students' writing. Therefore, the design and the analysis of data in this study were guided to help me to achieve these purposes.

I have mentioned throughout this chapter that qualitative approach was adopted in this study. Therefore, forms of qualitative data analysis were also adopted to analyse the data. The common approach that is adopted by qualitative researchers is to analyse the data through an inductive approach which is associated to some degree with grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), although not all researchers who use inductive approaches to analysis would classify their approach as grounded theory. This is in contrast to a deductive approach in quantitative research, which is based on prior assumptions and theories in the researcher's mind (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

On the other hand, as one of this study aims is to analyse students' writing to identify how teaching writing in the BE schools influence their writing; content analysis approach was also utilised. However, it is not clear from methodological literature to which category;

inductive or deductive approach content analysis is related to. In the following section I presented the inductive theoretical framework that were adopted in this study to analyse both observation and interviews data, as well as the content analysis framework that were adopted to analyse students' written texts.

4.6.1 Analysing Observation and Interviews Data:

In the qualitative research pure induction is impossible to be the only form of data analysis approach, but several forms of research are more induction in nature than others. An inductive approach was employed, to analyse observation and interview data, although the analysis was not entirely inductive as some analytic categories were derived from the semi-structured schedules used for interviews and observation. For example, the main categories of the data were derived from the main questions included in the interviews and observation instruments. The inductive approach based on coding and categorising the data seeking for the theory that will emerge from the research strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The main goal of data analysis, as Bassey (1999) states, is 'an intellectual struggle with an enormous amount of raw data in order to produce a meaningful and trustworthy conclusion which is supported by a concise account of how it was reached' (Bassey, 1999, p. 84). In this study, in order to obtain trustworthy conclusions, I have carried out the observation and interview data analysis through different stages, which were suggested by Bogdan & Biklen (1992) and Thomas, (2003). These stages were adopted as an analytical framework for data analysis of this study. The research identified several stages that qualitative researchers might go through.

- 1- Organising and sorting the data (interview transcripts, observation notes, and other written documents) in folders or computer files in order to access the data when starting the analysis task. In this stage similar data (i.e. interview transcripts and observation notes) are kept together and numbered to be easy to recognise when analysing the data.
- 2- Reading the data carefully several times, making a start of developing coding category lists and writing down any ideas or diagrams, which emerge.
- 3- Creating some generic codes to suit unfamiliar words or phrases which were used by participants.
- 4- Re-reading the data and assigning the coding categories abbreviation or numbers and choosing units of data (e.g. themes and paragraphs) and join them to the coding categories. This is a 'test to discover the workability of the categories' that have been created, accordingly some categories can be altered and others can be created.

The data analysis procedures of this study have followed the framework identified earlier and it went through different stages.

The first stage was transcribing interviews of the nine studied teachers, the thirty seven students and the four curriculum professionals. The transcriptions were written in Arabic language as the interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, the national language of Oman, the context of this study. I found that analysing the data as it has been given by participants will assist me to read transcriptions many times and go deeply into what has been said and done in the classroom practices and in interviews.

To transcribe the observed events and aspects that were video-tape recorded, I watched the video-cassette many times and wrote down, manually, in the observation schedule the

events related to investigated aspects of this study which, I did not take during the observation when taking notes. So there was a manual record (transcription) of the observation for each studied teacher and student.

To organise the interview data I have established folders for each group (i.e. teachers, students and curriculum professionals), each folder includes a file for each participant including his/her detailed information and a code for each person according to his/her position to be known when analysing the data. For example, PC1 is the code that was given for the first curriculum professional that I have interviewed, T1 on the other hand refers to teacher number one in first school, while P1 refers to student number one in teacher's number one classroom. By looking at each code it was easy for me to recognise each participant, see table (4.2).

In order to generate themes from the interviews and observation transcripts, I read each single interview (9 interviews of teachers and 37 interviews of students and 4 interviews of curriculum professionals) and 9 observations schedule several times. Coding and categorising procedures were adopted to highlight the main concepts and themes of each interview and observation. During the coding stage, colouring was used to highlight the main themes by which it became easy to recognise that each colour is related to which theme in order to be able to draw a whole picture of each interview and observation (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This process involved what Miles & Huberman (1994) named as developing coding categories and generating themes.

Then sub-coding was done for each theme in the file of each group. For example, under the theme knowledge for writing two sub-categories (i.e. transcriptional and compositional

knowledge) were identified, and under each sub- category the coding identified many other categories. For instance, the sub- categories founded under compositional knowledge are vocabulary, meaning, ideas and imagination. After coding and sub- coding three new folders, for teachers, students and curriculum professionals were created to include data of each group that was organised according to the themes. For example, in the teachers' folder all data from the nine teachers that related to the theme (knowledge for writing) were put in the same place. This is a process in which the 'researcher takes a voluminous amount of information and reduces it to certain patterns, categories, or themes' (Creswell, 1998, p. 145). This process was important to help me to see the 'big picture' (Hycner, 1985). Seeing the big picture provided me with a deeper understanding of these categories and themes and how they were related to each other. Moreover, understanding the deeper meaning of the categories and themes helped me to exclude unrelated data, bearing in mind Marshall & Rossman's (1995) advice that 'careful attention to how data are being reduced is necessary throughout the research endeavour' (p. 113). However, this process was the most difficult one during the interview data analysis because it consumed a lot of time to reduce and categorise the themes under main and sub-themes.

The final stage in the data analysis process was summarising the data under each theme and interpreting it to be able to make some compressions and to find some relationships between presented information.

4.6.2 Analysing Students' Written Texts:

Content analysis was adopted to analyse students' written texts. Content analysis is 'a quantitatively oriented technique by which standardised measurements are applied to

metrically defined units' (Bauer, 2000). This indicates that content analysis procedures provide systematic and quantifiable data through the process of studying a particular content carefully, and then categorising relevant issues by coding them and counting their frequencies (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This process may ensure a high degree of objectivity in dealing with qualitative data (Jupp & Norris, 1993). Yet, content analysis can also be used in a qualitative manner. It is recommended that prior to conducting content analysis approach; the researcher needs to bear in mind questions such as what I want to know and why I want to know it (Cohen et al., 2000 and Merriam, 1998). The purpose of these procedures is to identify the way in which content analysis can assist the researcher to achieve his/her objectives. For the purposes of this study, content analysis was used to explore what forms of writing fourth grade students create, and to what extent they emphasise transcriptional and compositional aspects in their writing; rather than to count the frequencies of the content. Therefore, two aspects were looked at when analysing students writing:

- Forms of writing, such as story, letter, and report as were identified in the literature review chapter.
- Accuracy of writing in both compositional and transcriptional aspects.

These two aspects were assumed to provide me with supportive evidence about what forms of writing fourth grade students are taught and what they actually like to write. In addition, another assumption is that it provides evidence about the extent to which students are required to go through the writing processes: planning, drafting and revising. Furthermore, it gives an indication about the extent to which the students are provided with guidance to emphasise compositional and transcriptional aspects in their writing.

4.6 Conclusion:

In this chapter I have outlined the research methodological framework, the research design and data analysis phases, explaining and justifying choices and approaches taken. The next section of this thesis presents the research findings which are organised in three different chapters according to the emerged themes of the observation, and interviews data and according to the six angles of this study: curriculum professionals' perspectives, teachers' perspectives, teachers' practices, students' perspectives, students' practices and students' written texts.

Chapter 5 Knowledge and Understanding about Writing

5.1 Preview to Data Analysis Chapters:

As outlined in chapter four this study adopted case study approach in order to examine teaching and learning Arabic writing for fourth grade in the BE schools and how this influence students' writing and their perspectives about writing. In order to gain deep and rich information about teaching and learning Arabic writing in BE schools in Oman, several sources of evidence (i.e. observation, interviews and analysis of students' written texts) as well as different resources of information (i.e. curriculum professionals, teachers and students) were utilised. All these sources provided rich data to answer the main question addressed by this study which was: how Arabic writing is taught to fourth grade students in the BE schools and how this influences students' writing?

The data that constitutes the findings were gained from observing classroom practice, and by interviewing curriculum professionals, teachers and students and analysing students' written texts.

The findings of this study were organised around the key themes or categories that emerged from the data. These themes were approached firstly from curriculum professionals' perspectives as they gave a general picture about the case study of teaching and learning Arabic writing to fourth grade students in the BE schools. Then the themes were discussed in relation to the classroom practices of both teachers and students. After that, they were examined in relation to teachers' and students' perspectives on the teaching of Arabic writing. Finally they were discussed according to students' written texts. This part of the

data helped to answer the second part of the central question.

The findings of the case study were organised in the thesis within three chapters (i.e. five; six and seven). This is because the findings included many angles and themes; thus it needed consideration. The three chapters were organized according to the key themes as following. Chapter five addresses knowledge and understanding about writing. It includes the findings related to knowledge for writing in relation to both transcriptional and compositional aspects, knowledge about the writing processes and knowledge about writing forms and some aspects related to writing forms such as freedom to choose writing topics, writing for different purposes and audiences. In summary, this chapter includes the answers for the following sub- research questions:

- What knowledge is considered in teaching and learning Arabic writing?
- What writing processes do fourth grade students go through when writing?
- What forms of writing are fourth grade students taught?

Chapter six on the other hand, addresses writing pedagogy and teaching processes. It deals more closely with classroom practices and teaching methods, classroom setting, group work and resources for teaching writing. It also deals with teachers' roles in the writing classroom. It includes answers for the following sub- questions of this study:

- What writing pedagogy and teaching processes are used in teaching Arabic writing?
- What roles Arabic teachers play in the writing classroom?

Chapter seven examines the key issues related to teaching and learning Arabic writing. It identifies some of the main issues that influence teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools in Oman. This chapter deals with strengths and limitations of the writing curriculum in the BE schools. However, prior to this, the aims and foundations of the writing curriculum will be presented.

5.2 Introduction to Chapter 5:

What type of knowledge is considered in the teaching of writing to fourth grade students in the BE schools was one of the questions addressed in this study. The term knowledge for writing, in this study, includes all aspects that help students to be able to compose or to create acceptable written text such as transcriptional aspects (e.g. spelling, punctuation and handwriting) (Kelly, 1998) and compositional (e.g. imagination, generating ideas and organising the written text) aspects (Collins, 1998), writing processes (e.g. planning, drafting and revising) (Graves, 1983) and knowledge about writing forms (genres). Therefore, the data sets presented in this chapter deal with the basic knowledge needed for writing and it includes four main themes or categories: transcriptional knowledge; compositional knowledge, knowledge about the writing processes and knowledge about writing forms.

I highlighted in the literature review chapter that one of the reasons for my interest in this issue came from the debate among educational researchers about the relative importance of transcriptional or compositional knowledge in teaching writing. In this study new views and perspectives from an Arabic context were explored about this issue.

There was also some evidence that indicated how going through the writing processes assists in improving one's writing (Graves, 1983). Some researchers (e.g. Murray, 1972) considered planning as a basic process that should be given more time than other processes, while others (e.g. Sommers, 1980) considered revision of written texts as a basic process that helped to enhance the quality of writing. In this study some other evidences were explored about how writing processes are considered in teaching and learning Arabic

writing.

On the other hand, many researchers for a long time (e.g. Britton et al., 1975; Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1986 a, b) have recommended teaching primary school students different genres. However, it seems that most schools around the world still teach a limited range of genres. In relation to this issue, more recent evidence was also explored in this study.

I outlined earlier, in the introduction to the data analysis chapters, that each theme included in this study was examined from six different angles (i.e. curriculum professionals' perspectives, teachers' perspectives, teachers' practices, students' practices, students' perspectives, and students' writing). Therefore, the following themes that I included in this chapter, knowledge for writing are discussed within all previous angles.

5.3 Transcriptional Knowledge:

Transcriptional knowledge was one of the themes that emerged within the findings of this study and it seemed to be, as will be identified later, the aspect of knowledge for writing that was highlighted by all participants. Three core aspects within the theme of transcriptional knowledge were identified in the data: spelling, handwriting and punctuation. This finding broadly corresponds with the literature on literacy and writing (e.g. Graves, 1983; Kelly, 1998 and Kress, 1994) in terms of aspects included in the transcriptional knowledge. In the next sections, I will identify how these aspects were identified by the participants, emphasised in the observed writing classrooms and were implemented in students' writing.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

All four curriculum professionals were asked what they thought was the basic knowledge

needed for writing? All of them mentioned transcriptional aspects as key knowledge for writing. After long thinking, one of them, for example, stated to answer the question:

“There are spelling rules students have to consider in their writing, there are also some grammatical aspects, as well as punctuation. Students should consider all these aspects when writing” (CP1).

It might not be surprising that curriculum professionals mentioned spelling, grammar and punctuation as basic knowledge for writing. This is because, as discussed in chapters two and four, the major aim that the Omani writing curriculum seeks to achieve is enabling students to write accurately. Therefore, the Arabic language curriculum was designed in a way that writing lessons come in the end of each unit in the students' textbooks. The unit includes many tasks and skills: the first one is reading, and then students learn some spelling rules such as particular Arabic characters, vowels and some punctuation marks and their uses. Students also are taught some grammatical rules, such as rules about different forms of verbs and nouns and pronoun. At the end of each unit, students are required to write some sentences or short paragraphs about the reading topics with an emphasis on particular aspects in spelling, grammar and handwriting.

The purpose of using reading text to teach the students language skills is to integrate all Arabic language skills, so that all skills help the students in their reading and writing. In other words, reading text is considered as a core, and the students are taught language skills through it, which is recommended by many researchers (e.g. Goodman & Goodman, 1992 and Wilkinson, 1986a). However, in the Omani schools, this approach might help the students to learn Arabic language skills through the content, but it cannot create writers

who can write for different purposes because it limits the students to particular types of writing.

If the curriculum professionals, in their aims when developing the writing curriculum, had emphasised transcriptional aspects as basic knowledge for writing, one would have expected the teachers, who are interpreters of the curriculum, would emphasise the same aspects. However, some teachers might have other perspectives about what is important for writing (Brindley & Schneider, 2002).

Teachers' perspectives:

Most teachers (eight of nine) also outlined transcriptional aspects as basic knowledge to be developed by students in order to be able to write. However, the teachers prioritised these skills, according to their points of view. Here is an example of what was stated by one of the teachers:

“Their spelling ought to be right; the handwriting should be clear as well as the punctuation. I focused on spelling mistakes and sentence structures, as you saw that one of the students used the structure of the sentence wrongly. Thus, I have to inform them about these aspects so they consider it next time” (T3).

The teachers mentioned transcriptional skills as a following order: spelling, handwriting, sentences structure, and punctuation. According to most teachers' views, spelling and handwriting were counted as two basic skills that students need to capture in order to be able to write. This view accordingly might impact students' perspectives about writing (Kos & Maslowski, 2001).

The structure of the sentences was the third aspect that was emphasised by the teachers as a

basic knowledge for writing. Only four teachers underlined this aspect as an important thing for writing. Although four teachers from nine, is not a small number, I believe that not all teachers count the structure of the sentence as knowledge for writing. This might be because the teachers in the first cycle of the BE are forbidden to teach grammar as rules rather as exercises, and grammatical pattern. However, there are some teachers, as was mentioned by one of curriculum professionals (PC3), who behave contrary to the curriculum instructions and teach grammar as rules.

Unexpectedly, punctuation is hardly mentioned by the teachers; only two teachers (T3 and T9) counted punctuation as vital aspect for understanding the meaning in the written texts. This might mean that punctuation is not as necessary as spelling, handwriting and sentence structure are. Teachers' attitude toward punctuation was surprising because although only one teacher from the nine teachers mentioned it, the two teachers in the pilot study emphasised punctuation as basic knowledge for writing. This is because the teachers who participated in the pilot study emphasised punctuation in their practices. Therefore, it was likely to emphasise it when talking about basic knowledge for writing, whereas, all the teachers in the main study did not give attention for punctuation in their practices in the writing lessons, thus, it is likely to overlook it in the interview. This conversely could be a reason for the difference in the nature of texts that the teachers taught in the pilot study and that were taught in the main study. Yet, this claim is debatable as each teacher in the pilot study taught different topics. The first teacher taught the students to write a complete paragraph about the topic. Therefore, the students used different punctuation marks such as full stops, commas, and question marks. On the other hand, the second teacher taught a topic that required separate sentences. In spite of that, students' writing evidenced using

more than full stops as they additionally used commas.

In contrast, although the teachers in the nine observed classrooms in the main study taught similar topics and texts that were taught by the teachers in the pilot study; their practices did not indicate any emphasis on punctuation. Thus, I argue that it is not a matter of difference in the nature of topics, as all teachers teach the same topics and the same curriculum. Yet, it is a matter of teacher's belief about what is important and what is not. Some teachers enact the curriculum in a very narrow manner. For example, in spite of the fact that the Arabic language curriculum separated some lessons for punctuation exercises in order to train the students to employ it in their writing, most teachers did not mention it as an important aspect for writing. What teachers say might reflect their practices, but they also might overlook some aspects that they emphasise. This is what will be found in the next section.

Teachers' practices:

By observing teachers' practices in the writing classrooms, it emerged that all teachers considered transcriptional knowledge important in teaching writing. Their focus on this aspect appeared in different manners: For instance, some teachers (T6, T7, and T9) started their lessons with a revision of some spelling and grammatical aspects. They, for example, asked their students to complete sentences with appropriate words or asked them to dictate some words on the board. This of course indicates how the teachers are keen to assure that their students mastered grammar and spelling rules, so they are able to write accurately. Additionally, spelling and handwriting were the main aspects that were considered by most teachers when assessing writing of the groups or individual's writing or even before

students start writing. For example, one of the teachers (T3) gave some directives for her students before they start the individual writing, which is the last stage in teaching writing process as will be identified in the next chapter, she mentioned:

“Each one of you has to rely on himself, use a sharp pencil and don’t forgot the diacritics”
(T3).

Asking each student to rely on him/herself when writing individually seemed to me as a way of measuring each student’s ability to ‘transcribe or rewrite’ accurately from his/her memory what she/ he already had written in group work. This is because the teacher knows that at the end of the lesson the students will write similar or the same sentences that they wrote in group work. Yet, she might also know that the accurate spelling helps her to distinguish high achievers from low achievers. This situation seemed to me as an evaluation environment rather than writing environment, which is recommended to be considered as a social activity. Some teachers, who are not keen on measuring students’ ability in transcribing, write the text on the board and ask the students to copy it, so they ensure accuracy in students’ writing.

Handwriting in addition, was given an appropriate consideration in the observed classrooms as most teachers asked the student who have neat handwriting to write on the transparency or on the work paper in the group work and on the board. Furthermore, they encouraged their students to write neatly. It is obvious from the last directives of T3 who asked her students to use a sharp pencil which, I believe, is a way to insure clear and neat handwriting.

It was mentioned earlier that only one teacher stated punctuation as vital aspect for writing. In the observed classrooms the evidence indicated that, all teachers neglected punctuation completely in their practice. Some reasons were given earlier for this issue.

There was a surprising issue, regarding grammatical and spelling aspects recorded in some classrooms (e.g. T2, T3, and T5). Some students in these classrooms made several grammatical mistakes many times without any corrections by the teachers. For example, T2 when assessed the work of one of the groups she judged that they were worthy of the highest score she explained: *“Their work is correct and complete; thus I will give them a full mark”*. However, examination of the written work indicated that it included some spelling and grammatical mistakes. One can argue that this teacher maybe wanted to go beyond the script to the meaning and ideas. Nonetheless, it seemed to me that the three teachers ignored these mistakes because they did not recognise them. Rather than thinking their aims were going beyond the script mistakes. The evidence from observation supports this claim as the teachers repeated the sentences with the students and accepted them without any comments. Although this type of unawareness of obvious mistakes in students’ writing is unacceptable from Arabic language teachers, it is expected from teachers, who are not specialised in Arabic language. For example, T2 specialised in Islamic Education. Nevertheless, the influence of teachers’ specialisations on their unawareness of grammatical aspects in students’ writing cannot be generalised. As there were some teachers, who had a different specialisation than Arabic language, (e.g. T7) indicated awareness about different linguistic mistakes in students’ writing. For example, T7, who specialises in Islamic education, corrected the students when one of the groups was presenting their work and she saw some mistakes in their writing:

“Although there are some spelling mistakes in the work of this group, it is not important to correct them now since the meaning is right” (T7).

T7 was aware of students’ mistakes, but she aimed to ignore them because she was keen on the meaning more than transcription and was able to articulate this explicitly in the interview. In an attempt to gain more understanding of T7’s view in terms of transcriptional aspects she was asked in the interview why she did not focus on students’ writing mistakes especially the explicit mistakes, she stated:

“This lesson is a writing lesson not spelling and grammar lesson. Therefore, I cannot punish them because of their spelling mistakes... I will do that if it was dictation lesson, but what is important for me now is that, the students understand what they have to write about” (T7).

This view corresponds to current, orientations in teaching writing that emphasises meaning, imagination and creativity more than linguistic mistakes (e.g. Bennett, Desforges, Cockburn and Wilkinson, 1984, and Collins, 1998). T7 aimed to develop students’ ability in composition and creative writings so as to defer spelling and grammar. Yet, the major attention in the writing curriculum and accordingly in the writing lesson in the fourth grade was given for accuracy rather than for creativity. If this is the major aim of the writing curriculum, it is necessary then for the teachers to focus on spelling and grammatical mistakes. Otherwise, the students might neglect transcriptional aspects in their practices (Martine, Arcy, Newton and Parker, 1976).

On the other hand, the interview with T7 evidenced that this teacher did not adopt this theory on the account of its necessity in teaching and learning writing; rather she had another real reason for that. She stated that most students in her classroom are weak in

writing because of the society, which does not encourage them in their study. Thus, when she sees the students trying to write she feels that they are making good progress so she does not want to discourage them by showing them their mistakes. She believes that by doing that she is encouraging them to write. She expresses her view about this issue in the following interview excerpt:

“I want them at least to write... this is enough for me, I don’t want them now to revise, I just want them to write” (T7).

There is no evidence from research indicating that neglecting commenting on students’ work may encourage them to write. Yet, the evidence from research indicated that correcting students’ work especially when marking or scoring the work has negative effects on some students; as it might frustrate low achievers (Black et al., 2004). On the other hand, the feedback on students’ work has a positive influence in developing and improving their work (ibid.). Providing students with comments and a feedback on their work could be done in an embarrassing way, which might disappoint the students. However, it also could be given in a way that scaffolds and constructively develops students’ work. Additionally, discussing pieces of students’ writing provide them with opportunities to learn various aspects of the language, such as grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. As well as it provides them with composition conventions such as organisation, linkage and relevance. However, I believe that the situation of this teacher is an expected result of students’ weakness in writing as it is difficult for teachers to cover all aspects in merely one lesson. Therefore, they, sometimes, overlook many aspects and try to end the lesson by writing the text on the board and ask the students to copy it.

Students’ practices are affected by their teacher’s behaviour, when it deals with their

writing. If the students feel that the teacher does not give attention to writing mistakes they make in their writing they will not care about the revision process. This requires the teacher to be explicit about the aspects of writing she is intending to focus on and consistent in following this through in actual feedback. Inconsistencies in teachers stated intentions and what they actually gave feedback on was described by Bennett et al., (1984), who highlighted that students quickly picked upon what teachers actually did, rather than what they said they were going to do. That is to say, students' practices are almost led and controlled by teachers' practices in the classroom (Martine, et al., 1976), as will be illustrated in the following section.

Students' practices:

Observing students' practices reflected two main issues regarding transcriptional aspects. Firstly, almost no student considered punctuation when writing. Some students used full stops, whereas others did not use any punctuation marks at all. In contrast, the most important aspect for the majority of the students was handwriting. This is an expected reaction from the students to their teachers' habitual direction about the importance of neat and tidy writing and their disregarding of punctuation. Students usually respond to what they think is a vital demand from the teacher (Bennett et al., 1984). Ultimately, the norm is that students with neat handwriting automatically do the writing task that the group wanted to produce. For example, in the classroom of (T6) one of the students explained to his group:

“I will write because my handwriting is neat and we want to produce good piece of writing” (P 23).

However, while he was writing another student (P22) was correcting his spelling mistakes, which means that some students think that neat handwriting is more important than spelling. On the other hand, there were some students who are aware that writing is not merely neat handwriting rather writing also should be accurate. In general, most students were conscious of making their piece of writing neat. Only few students considered correct spelling in their writing. The emphasis on spelling was only observed in one group in the classroom of T6 from all observed groups in the nine classrooms. This might be due to several reasons: first, most students in the remaining eight observed classrooms worked individually although they were set in groups. This meant that they did not give attention to discuss spelling mistakes in each others' writing within the group (e.g. classrooms of T2, T3, and T9). Second, only high achievers did the writing task in the groups, thus there was no need to revise the spelling mistakes in the work (e.g. classrooms of T1, T4, T5, and T8). Third, some groups only produced one sentence, which rarely included spelling mistakes (classrooms of T7).

Although curriculum professionals, and accordingly the teachers, focused on enabling fourth grade students to master transcribing many students still had problems in transcribing. Evidence derived from observing students' practices in the classrooms indicated a lack to transcriptional aspects among some students. Some students could not write the text in their textbooks (e.g. P9 and P11) and some tried to copy the text from their friends (e.g. P2, P25, P28), some wrote the text wrongly (P4, P8, P21). This means that focusing on transcriptional aspects more than compositional aspects did not help all students to master transcribing skills, rather depriving the students of the compositional

aspects might mean that the students lost the ability to develop both the transcribing and composing skills of writing.

Research has indicated that lacking to transcribing may lead the students to abhor and refuse writing, especially ‘when the odds on getting the spelling right seem so stacked against them’ (Czerniewska, 1992). However, giving the students some freedom to write what they like to write might help in developing their writing ability (Hart, 1996). In contrast, limiting the students to mastering transcriptional aspects and forbidding them the opportunity to compose and create different forms of writing, basing on the assumption that students ‘are not ready for it’ (Bennett et al., 1984, p115) might limit students’ understanding of writing as will be discussed in the following section.

Students’ perspectives:

Students’ experiences in the classroom in terms of the transcriptional aspects have influenced their perspectives about writing in general. Most students (25) mentioned handwriting as the most important aspects for writing, while spelling was the second aspect they mentioned. It seems that the students received this perspective about handwriting from their teachers who prefer the student who has neat handwriting to be the writer in the group. In addition, most teachers let the student with the best handwriting to write on the board, which all students like to do. Thus, each student tried to make his/ her handwriting neat to have a chance to write on the board. Moreover, teachers always give a high score or any encouragement to the students with neat handwriting. One of the students mentioned this issue explicitly.

“If my handwriting is neat the teacher gives me good mark. One day my teacher told me

that my handwriting is better than her handwriting” (P18).

It is expected then for the students to think that good writing means neat handwriting. The situation did not only appear in the Omani schools, as the evidence from research (Bennett et al., 1984; Kos & Maslowski, 2001) has indicated that writing for many young students means neat handwriting. The findings of Kos’s and Maslowski’s study illustrated that the children considered handwriting as the most important aspect for good writing followed by spelling, while ideas and vocabulary took secondary importance. However, when the children were in the group work and their work was scaffolded by the teacher and peers, they reflected more emphasis on compositional aspects such as generating ideas, planning, and organisation of the text. Therefore, the researchers argued that the teachers' practice in the writing classroom has a vital impact on children's' views about writing.

Nevertheless, this perspective is not a view of all students, as I mentioned earlier, that some students, especially high achievers, believe that writing is more than neat handwriting. For example, in order to gain further understanding about some of students’ (i.e. P22 and P23) behaviours in the classroom of (T6), I asked P22 why she did not write and let P23 write in spite of his inaccurate writing, she stated that,

“He does not know to write; he thinks that neat handwriting is the most important thing in writing, he never considered accuracy” (P22).

It is expected that the students will consider handwriting and spelling as vital aspects for writing as they were considered by teachers as key aspects for writing. Yet, the unexpected thing that some students think that punctuation is necessary for writing where their teachers neglected the punctuation aspect. One of the students (high achieving female) for example,

expressed her perspectives about what is important for writing:

“I don’t have problem in writing, my handwriting is very neat and also I use punctuation. I consider handwriting too much because the handwriting helps to have clear writing. For example, there are some girls their handwriting is very big and they write in a small piece of paper so their writing is not clear and they do not complete the text. Therefore, I try to make my handwriting medium so the reader can read my writing” (P34).

P34 mentioned punctuation and handwriting as important aspects for good writing. This could be because this student is taught writing by T9 who believes in the importance of punctuation. However, one can ask why the other three students from the same classroom did not consider punctuation when talking about what is important for writing. That is why I believe that the main reason that let P34 to consider punctuation as a main aspect for writing is her talent in writing, as she used to write and read in the school broadcast rather than her teacher’s influence. I believe that even T9 does not give punctuation the same amount of attention that is given for spelling and handwriting.

The common view among students was almost similar to the teachers’ view, which is that punctuation is not very important. This is clear in this statement,

“The common punctuation marks we use are: commas, full stops, and question marks... we don’t use punctuation so often in our writing...” (p32).

Although the writing curriculum gave equal attention to all transcriptional aspects, the data indicated that teachers focused on some aspects and neglected others. Thus, I argue that the only person who can be blamed of having students who think that writing means neat handwriting is the teacher. Teachers’ perspectives and practices regarding transcriptional

aspects did not only influence students' perspectives about writing but it also affected their writings, as will be discussed next.

Students' written texts:

It was mentioned in the methodology chapter that, for the purpose of this study, seventy four pieces of students' written texts were analysed. 37 texts were structured writing produced in the same observed lessons and 37 texts were free writing produced in free writing lessons.

In terms of transcriptional aspects, all collected written texts were analysed looking at handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. The result of this analysis identified that: the handwritings of most students are readable and many of the texts are neat. Moreover, the common punctuation mark that appeared in students' writings was the full stop. This might be a consequence of types of writing the students produces in writing classroom. Most analysed texts, especially the structured writing texts were the type of texts that included separate sentences, which do not require more than a full stop. However, many of the free written texts were full texts. Still most students did not use anything other than full stops and commas. This could be due to the students not being accustomed to write full texts, so they do not know how to apply punctuation marks when writing full texts or maybe they are not guided to give attention to punctuation. Thus, I believe that it is a matter of teachers neglecting punctuation more than a matter of text type.

On the other hand, most students made many spelling mistakes in their writing. The spelling mistakes are common among low achievers. Although the students in most observed writing classrooms copied the text from the board, many spelling mistakes emerged in their writing. In the interview I asked some students, why they had spelling

mistakes in their writing in spite of copying the text from the board. From their answers, I perceived that these students copy the text without comprehension. Writing thus, is not only some sketched characters to be copied from books or from the board; it is also meaning and understanding the meaning, which help the students to write correctly.

In addition, in most thirty seven texts that were produced in the observed classrooms, the structure of the sentences was correct. Yet, this does not mean that all students are able to structure their sentences properly rather it is because most texts (30) were copied from the board. In contrast by looking at the 37 free written texts, many of them reflected students' difficulties in the sentence structure and other grammatical aspects. For example, by reading students' free writing, the first impression I received was the influence of classroom practice on types of writing the students produced. Students wrote separated sentences in most writing lessons. Therefore, in their free writing texts some of them tended to use separated sentences type of texts with numerous grammatical and spelling mistakes. Here are some translated examples of students' free writing:

"I went to the book fair.

I bought books.

I bought stories.

I bought the Prophet Mohammed's story" (P11).

Another student wrote:

"I went to the park

I went to school

Trip to the park

*I went with father stream" *(P9).*

P9 wanted to say "** I went with my father to the stream*" but she lacked the writing skills, which caused many grammatical and spelling mistakes in her writing. (For more details about transcriptional aspects in students' writing see (Appendix 5.1) where all these aspects were identified by using particular letters (i.e. S means spelling, P means punctuation, G means grammar and the handwriting can be recognised from the neatness of the text).

The students not only have problems in transcribing, but also they struggled in composing a meaningful complete text. This is because compositional aspects were given less attention by both curriculum professionals and teachers as will be identified in the next section.

5.4 Compositional Knowledge:

Compositional knowledge was another theme or category that appeared in the data of this study. It was mentioned by all participants in this study. The sub themes that were mentioned by the participants as sub categories of compositional knowledge were not different from what were included in the literature. Compositional aspects were included in the literature are varied such as, ideas, meaning, vocabulary and imagination (Collins, 1998). Some researchers (see Hyland, 2002) believe that punctuation relates to compositional aspect because it is related to the meaning. However, I believe that punctuation is more related to the meaning when reading rather than when writing. Therefore, in this study punctuation was included in the transcriptional aspect, as students in the Omani schools learn punctuation as rules and apply it as part of transcribing not as part of meaning.

Although participants of this study mentioned several compositional aspects that they

thought are important for writing, some aspects included in the interview instruments such as imagination, ideas generating and organisation. These aspects used to probe detailed information from the participants about compositional aspect.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

Curriculum professionals mentioned applying new vocabulary, ideas and organisation of ideas as important aspects for writing. In this view CP3 stated

*“We give the students many styles of writing to help them to write. We vary these styles from stage to another. From that the student learns how to organize (*his) ideas when he wants to write a story, or when he writes a poem from his mind” (CP3).*

What was stated by CP3 is a vital aspect in teaching writing according to recent theories; see (Collins, 1998). By learning different forms of writing, the students learn new compositional knowledge about writing such as generating new ideas and structuring the text. However, what is stated by CP3 conflict with the implemented content of the writing curriculum, as varying writing forms do not exist in the writing curriculum of fourth grade. Therefore, I argue that what was included in CP3's statement might be something that CP3 believes ought to be included in the writing curriculum.

In addition, sometimes the participants tend to mention aspects that they think will please the researcher, rather than saying the reality. Nevertheless, in this study the advantage is that my previous position, as one of the professionals in the department of the Arabic language curriculum, allowed me to discuss the aspects that do not reflect the reality with curriculum professionals, as will appear in chapter seven.

*(His) here refers to both male and female. This is because in the Arabic language, the norm is to use the masculine gender to refer to both male and female. Therefore, it is rare to see in the Arabic literature he/she; his/her as it appears in the English literature.

However, the question that rose here is if the curriculum professionals believe that teaching the students different forms of writing will help them in generating new ideas and creating different forms of writing, then why did they not develop the writing curriculum in such a way?

It is difficult to answer this question; as there are many factors that control curriculum development. This idea does not necessarily reflect all curriculum professionals' beliefs. It was known that the curriculum is developed by a team of curriculum professionals rather than an individual. In such a situation, just the common and agreed ideas are adopted; therefore, finding some differences in the curriculum professionals' perspectives is expected. However, the teachers actually implement what is included in the real curriculum not the theoretical beliefs in curriculum professionals' minds. Thus, it expected that teachers' perspectives would reflect the reality in terms of compositional aspects. Yet, it is also possible that the teachers might mention some theoretical aspects that they desire to be included in the curriculum.

Teachers' perspectives:

Teachers' viewpoints about compositional aspect as basic knowledge for writing were clearer than what was stated by the curriculum professionals. From what teachers stated, many aspects or themes were identified.

▪ Vocabulary:

All nine teachers mentioned vocabulary as vital aspect for writing; they thought that, students could not compose if they do not have enough vocabulary. They mentioned that learning new vocabulary helps the students to employ them in their writing. For example (T4) mentioned:

“Firstly the vocabulary is very important for the student, which means, that when the student obtains new vocabulary or a group of useful words he will be able to compose or to write about the picture in appropriate way. Yet, if he doesn’t have vocabulary, he will not be able to write” (T4).

This point of view complemented what was emphasised by researchers, who concluded that the lack in shared vocabulary among the students meant a lack of knowledge of range of texts see (Czerniewska, 1992). However, I also believe that limiting the students to particular types of texts may cause limitation in the vocabulary and the language that is used in different forms of writing, which is the case in fourth grade curriculum.

▪ **Meaning:**

Although only one teacher mentioned meaning as key aspect for writing, I presented it as the second aspect because it is related to the vocabulary. Unless the students are able to use the vocabulary to add an appropriate meaning to their written texts, enormous amount of vocabulary will be useless. However, the evidence from this study indicated that most teachers were satisfied with vocabulary as an important aspect for writing. Only one of the teachers stated that the vocabulary does not make good writing by itself if it does not add meaning to the text.

“The most important thing is to compose using new vocabularies; however the sentence should include comprehensible meaning. For example, you saw the girls who stated ‘cooperation is the essence of this life’. This is a complete sentence includes sophisticated vocabulary, but it does not involve right meaning” (T5).

Looking at the example that was stated by T5 indicates that some students have some superior vocabulary, but they do not know how to use them appropriately in social

contexts. In other words, socially, cooperation is essential for life, yet it is not essence of it. Therefore, the teacher did not accept the sentences that were given by the student. In spite of the significance of the meaning for writing, it was only mentioned by one teacher and I believe that she mentioned it accidentally. This is because she remembered, while talking about what is essential for writing, the situation of the girl who used excellent words with wrong meaning. In this situation, this teacher explained to the girl “*your vocabulary is good but the meaning is wrong*”. Therefore, she emphasised meaning as an important aspect for writing. I argue that the other teachers did not mention meaning because it is part of ideas. Meaning cannot be reached if students are not able to generate new ideas and organise them which adds meaning to their writing.

▪ **Ideas:**

Generating ideas and organising them in appropriate way is another theme mentioned by five teachers. They claimed that the sequence and correlation of ideas are important aspects for writing. For example (T6) described this as:

“The ideas ought to be sequenced and include the content that composition is required...the first thing for me is that, the students talk about the ideas in front of the teacher” (T6).

In addition, (T8) detailed:

“The sequence of the ideas is important not only in students’ writing, it is also important for their life. This helps them to have a well organized life” (T8).

In each statement an important aspect was emphasised; these aspects harmonise with recent theories and approaches in teaching writing. T6 for example, mentioned that the oral

discussion is an appropriate manner that assists the students to identify their ideas and organise them in a proper way. This approach has been emphasised by many researchers such as (Graves, 1983 and Wilkinson, 1986 a). However, I believe that the discussion is necessary and valuable when students are required to generate new ideas and write about different topics. Nevertheless, when the discussion is limited on the same ideas that are already included in the reading texts, it will not be more than recalling the same ideas, which is the situation in this case study.

T8 on the other hand, mentioned that students' ability to organise their ideas for writing might enable them to organise their everyday life. This point of view is related to Halliday's functional theory of language, which considered language for life. He stated that we learn language and learn through language (Halliday, 1975). Students might benefit from writing skills to be implemented in their everyday life and vice-versa. Though, students cannot generate new ideas without imagination.

▪ **Imagination and thinking:**

Just one teacher (T7) emphasised imagination as an important aspect for writing. T7 linked this aspect with topics that were included in the writing curriculum. She stated that, if the students could not imagine the characters of the story or the picture of the animal; they will not be able to write about it.

“Student has to have extensive imagination to be able to write” (T7).

This teacher seems to be a supporter of the philosophy which states; more attention should be given for thinking and composing in the writing lessons (Bunting, 1998). The evidence from research (e.g. Hart, 1996) indicated that utilising students' imagination and experiences in the writing lessons can help developing students' composing and

transcribing. Yet, does the way that Arabic writing is taught in the Omani schools benefit developing students' imagination, and thinking abilities in order to be able to generate new ideas? I believe that in the Omani context curriculum professionals and accordingly teachers are very keen on ensuring accuracy in students' writing without thinking about what students can write and what they like to write. Therefore, I argue that T7's view about imagination reflects individual perspective rather than reflecting the reality of the writing curriculum content. This claim about limitation in the efforts that are offered to develop students' imagination and thinking was supported by evidence derived from teachers' practices in the writing classroom, which will be discussed in the following section.

Teachers' practices:

The evidence derived from observing teachers' practice in the writing classrooms indicated that compositional aspects were given less attention than was given to the transcriptional aspects. Many aspects included in the teachers' perspectives were not evident in teachers' practices. However, they were not completely ignored. The attention that was given to this aspect appeared in different ways. It appeared when assessing students' writing. Most teachers considered the right meaning and ideas when correcting students' writing. This was also evident when teachers asked students to order the writing ideas, by asking each group to write about particular idea that related to the topic. Most teachers tried to identify some ideas related to the topic that help the students to write the text. However, they did not guide the students to organise the ideas in a way that would help them to get a well-organized text. This might be due to the nature of the text. The nine observed teachers taught different forms of topics. The topic in two classes with T2 and T3 was about giving directives for others about bad behaviour and commendable deeds. The topic required the

writing of unconnected sentences, so there was no need to organise ideas, as the lesson was more related to grammatical drills. In the three other classrooms with T1, T4 and T5 the topic was about the benefit of the cooperation for the society. This topic required giving some ideas about the topic, as separated sentences not as a full text. The two topics did not require the teachers to focus on generating sequential ideas, as some unconnected ideas were sufficient. Thus, the emphasis of the sequence of ideas was not clear in these five classrooms.

On the other hand, the topic in other two classrooms with T6 and T9 was a summary of a story that students learnt in the reading lesson. This topic demanded a focus on organising the ideas of the story to have a reasonable summary of the story. Yet, both teachers did not guide their students appropriately to achieve this aim. Thus, in both classes the students failed to write the text by themselves. In contrast, in the classroom of T7, the emphasis of organising the ideas was clearer. It could be because the topic necessitated sequential ideas, as it was an expository text, about the Oryx in Oman, which required some organisation for the ideas to generate a paragraph. I believe, according to what T7 stated in the interview, that this teacher believes in the importance of organising ideas, so she practices what she believes. However, I do not mean that other teachers do not have same belief, rather the emphasis of this belief differ from one to another. In addition, the evidence that was derived from observing only one lesson might be not enough to claim that the teacher did not consider compositional aspects in their practices. Nevertheless, this limitation in the observation data was strengthened by the data that was derived from other resources such as students' perspectives and their writing.

The question that needs to be discussed here regarding the compositional aspects of writing is; what ideas the teachers train their students to generate and organise. Although T7, in my point of view, was better than the rest of the teachers in training the students to organise the ideas appropriately, the students did not generate new ideas they just rewrote the same ideas that were included in the reading text. Training the students to generate and organise new ideas appropriately are potential skills, especially for young students. It helps them in their present and future writing. Alternatively, lacking this skill means lacking a vital aspect in the process of writing as we will see in the following section.

Students' practices:

Unfortunately, unlike the transcriptional aspects, the compositional aspects of writing were not given appropriate attention in students' practices. Most students in both; group work and individual work did not consider the sequence of ideas, meaning of the sentences and text organisation while writing. For example, when P3 was working in her group work, she wrote a correct sentence in terms of spelling and sentences structure but the meaning was unclear and did not reflect the question's requirement. However, not one of the group's members tried to correct this sentence, which led the teacher T1 to correct the sentence. This could be because the students in the group did not see the sentence, as although they were working in group, almost each one was working individually. It also could be because the students did not recognise that the meaning of the sentence that was written by P3 was wrong. In both cases, the students need to be trained how to read each others work and give appropriate feedback.

On the other hand, in the individual work, it was difficult to see any student correcting the

meaning or organising ideas while writing the text. This is because all students were copy the text from the board so there was no chance for them to generate ideas, or even to think about the meaning of the text individually. If students did not have a chance to share their own ideas with their peers and the teacher, it is expected that, they will not recognise the value of compositional aspects for writing. This is what will be seen in the next section.

Students' perspectives:

When students were asked about what is important for writing, unsurprisingly not one of them mentioned anything about the compositional aspect, neither about ideas nor about vocabulary and meaning. Students' perspectives about compositional aspects reflected lack of knowledge about them, as it appeared in P30's statement.

"It is important for writing to have neat handwriting and right spelling. Ideas are not very important" (P30).

One can assume that this student is unclear about the explicit relationship between writing and ideas, vocabulary, and meaning. However, the question that appears accordingly is why the students consider handwriting and spelling as main aspects for writing and neglect ideas, vocabulary and meaning. The answer might be that most teachers give a great emphasis in their directives in the classroom for spelling and handwriting with little attention to the meaning and ideas (Kos & Maslowski, 2001). Yet, it is not only the teachers who are responsible for this situation; it is also partly a result of the way that the writing curriculum was designed to teach writing. The writing curriculum restricted teachers and students on particular types of writing. This led to the ignorance of compositional aspects. Additionally, asking the students to copy the text from the board at the end of the writing lesson is likely to deprive the students of any opportunity to think

and imagine what they need for their texts and how to organise them. Therefore, it was expected that students' written texts might not reflect explicit evidence about considering ideas, meaning, and imagination as will be discussed next.

Students' written texts:

The 37 written texts that were collected from observed classrooms did not reflect students' consideration of compositional aspects in their writing. This is because most of them were copied from the board, as mentioned earlier, so if there is any consideration of compositional features (e.g. ideas, meaning, and text organisation) in these texts it reflected the group work and teachers' writing rather than the individual work. On the other hand, by analysing students' free writing, the evidence indicated that the students have ideas to write about, as various ideas were included in the free writing texts. However, most students lacked the skills to organise their ideas, as well as lacking an appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas. Therefore, the meaning they included in their writing was unclear. This is, as I mentioned earlier, an expected consequence of the way that students are taught writing and the way that they were used to write. The students are unfamiliar with free writing; they used to have ready-made written texts. Neither the curriculum content, nor classroom practices gave much attention to free writing. Therefore, when the students were asked to produce a text from their own ideas they faced several difficulties in creating meaningful texts. Students' free writing also reflected a lack in writing process such as planning, drafting and revising, which was the third theme related to knowledge for writing.

5.5 Knowledge about Writing Processes:

It was highlighted in the literature review chapter that many researchers (e.g. Britton 1982 and Murray, 1972) since the early 1970s have identified different processes that writers go through. These processes then were further developed by Graves (1983) who focused on the practice in the writing classroom and identified various processes such as drafting, revision, conferencing, and publishing the piece of writing. These processes were considered by many researchers (e.g. Brindley & Schneider, 2002; Burden, 1990; Catanach et al., 1997 and Nuser, 1998) as vital process in teaching and learning writing. In addition, the research found that the students can benefit by giving them a great rate of writing and revision strategies to write successfully (Hyland, 2002). Therefore, it was important to know what processes fourth grade students in the BE schools go through.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

By asking curriculum professionals about the writing processes some of them (e.g. CP3) expressed all processes of writing explicitly. In contrast some of them (e.g. CP1) did not mention the same processes that have been identified in the literature, but they mentioned some terms that might have the same meaning of the common writing processes. For example, CP1 mentioned:

“In the beginning the student should have a background about the topic, and then he should write the ideas in a sequenced and connected way. During writing the student should consider linguistic and spelling aspects... then when he finishes, he should revise what he wrote” (CP1).

In the first section of CP1's statement she mentioned *“background about the topic”* as one

of the writing processes that the students ought to go through. This phrase might include the meaning of 'planning' process which means organising one's information into appropriate manner to be written down. However, she did not explain, neither explicitly or implicitly, how the students can have a background about the topic. It is possible that she recognises that there is only one way for fourth grade students to have background information about the topic which is reading texts in students' textbook.

Another process was mentioned by CP1 is revising she mentioned it explicitly, however it limited the revision on only linguistic and spelling aspect. She meant by linguistic aspects grammatical aspects and sentence structure. Yet she did not mention any aspect related to revising ideas and text organisation. This again supports my previous claim that the curriculum professionals are keen on providing the students with transcriptional skills more than compositional skills. In addition, she mentioned only individual revision while the recent theories and research (Czerniewska, 1992 and Graves, 1983) has given appropriate attention to peers' revision, as the students can be audiences for each other's writing.

From what has been mentioned, it seems that curriculum professionals, theoretically, perceive the importance of the writing processes in teaching writings. Yet, practically most of these processes, except revising, were neither emphasised in the writing curriculum nor were teachers trained on them. This might reflect curriculum professionals' lack of awareness of the writing processes necessary for the primary stage of schooling. On the other hand, it might reflect curriculum professionals' awareness regarding the writing curriculum content and design. Therefore, students do not need to go through all writing processes. The curriculum professionals only gave explicit attention to the revising process.

It is possible then that the teachers might also envision the writing processes as theoretical concepts rather than as practical processes. This is what will be discussed in next section.

Teachers' perspectives:

The teachers mentioned many processes that they thought students should go through in their writing. The processes that were mentioned by teachers were presented according to the order that they appear in the real practice of these processes. Writing processes are recurrent and generative (Hedge, 2000) and should not be considered as a liner sequence of processes. However, I followed the logic frequent of these processes (e.g. logically planning comes before revising and publishing comes after drafting), to make sure, that I analysed all data related to the writing processes.

▪ Thinking before writing:

It is a first process that was mentioned by all teachers. One of the teachers stated that:

“The student should think how to organise his ideas; which sentences he is going to start with? Then he start writing” (T5).

I argue that the term “thinking before writing” refers to planning process. However, it seemed that the teachers believe that fourth grade students are still too young to be able to plan for their writing. It is as if the teachers considered planning as a great process that only adults can do; whereas planning could be done in different ways according to the task and students age. In his point of view Bereiter & Scardamalia (1982) suggested using brainstorming and discussion to help the students to identify their ideas and plan for their writing. However, what goes in the BE schools is different from what has been mentioned by Bereiter & Scardamalia; as in the BE schools all discussion focuses on some existent

ideas that are included in the reading text. Thus, the ideas that students discuss are already there and what teachers do is just reminding the students with the existed ideas.

▪ **Drafting:**

Although most teachers ask their students to prepare for the lesson at home, only two of them (i.e. T3 and T4) stated that preparation at home helps the students to organise their ideas by drafting the text beforehand. This could be for three reasons; first teachers know that most students do not prepare for writing lesson by drafting the text, as some just re-read the reading unit again. For example, T3 explained

“We encourage the students to do a first draft at home when they prepare for the lesson, but most of them do not do that (T3).

Second teachers realise that preparing at home is not very beneficial for students, as they will not write more than what is included in the reading unit. Third, most teachers are unfamiliar with this drafting process, as most of them used to write the text on the board, so the students copy it. This means that students do not need to draft since at the end of writing lesson they copy the text from the board.

▪ **Revising:**

All teachers mentioned revising as a basic process for writing; for example T1 explained

“Of course students should revise because they were trained on spelling and punctuation. So the student ought to revise his writing in the light of what he already studied. This will make him more confidence about his writing, and he will feel that he did a special work” (T1).

This teacher identified two issues: first, why the students have to revise. Second, what they

have to revise? She stated that students have to revise because they learned spelling and punctuation, so they have the basic knowledge that should be used to revise their writing. On the other hand, spelling and punctuation are key aspects that students ought to revise. The limitation in revised aspects is seen in the last statement and it might be seen in classroom practices. However, before discussing teachers' practices in the writing lesson, in terms of the writing processes, some aspects related to the revision process needs to be clarified.

First, although punctuation was rarely mentioned and emphasised by teachers in the writing classroom, T1 mentioned it as one of aspect, which should be revised by students in their writing. This means that teachers sometimes do not mirror the reality, or they ask the students to revise punctuation when only the focus of the unit is punctuation. It has been identified in chapter two that writing lessons in the fourth grade considered as an application of all skills that students learn during the unit. For instance if the students were taught punctuation marks in the unit they are required to apply these punctuation marks in the writing lesson at the end of the unit; otherwise punctuation is neglected.

Second, in spite of the agreement among all teachers about the importance of revision, some teachers mentioned that not all students are able to revise.

“Actually only high achievers revise what they write but low achievers cannot revise. They lack the writing skills, so how they can revise their writing if they cannot write” (T3).

It seems that T3 only thought about individual revision ignoring the importance of peers' support in revising each others' work. T3 appeared to be a pessimistic teacher; while teachers should think how they can help low achievers to learn from peers' feedback and to

encourage them to try revising their own work. It seemed to me that T3 failed to encourage her students to write and subsequently to revise their writing.

Third, T7 identified how revising is done she explained:

“If we have time we revise the text on the board. We take the best written text and revise it together in the classroom. We revise ideas, spelling and the sequence of ideas and every thing. (T7).

T7 mentioned that she takes the best text and not the weak texts to be discussed in the classroom which, I believe, is the common approach among most teachers. Teachers usually discuss good texts to be taken as an example by others, especially in terms of spelling and handwriting while weak writing samples are neglected. Although it is useful to show the students some good examples of writing, so they learn from it, yet it is also useful to present some weak examples to be discussed, as students better learn from their mistakes.

Fourth, corresponding to T7, T4 mentioned that revision process is done if there is time.

“Revising the work is important, but sometimes we don’t have enough time to revise” (T4).

This means that the writing processes are not taken by teachers as key aspect in teaching and learning writing, rather they apply these processes either if there is time in the lesson, or if it comes accidentally. This led me to ask the teachers whether they think that writing processes are important, or not, and why?

Most teachers stated that the writing processes are important. They mentioned many reasons why they believe this to be so. These reasons are summarised in the following points: making the students confident about their writing; helping the students to write

well-organised, connected, clear and completed texts; helping the students to get high scores in writing and making students' writing accurate.

The identified reasons correspond to reasons were mentioned in the literature (Nuser, 1998 and Pinsent, 1998) in supporting the importance of the writing processes. This means that if we saw that the teachers are not applying these processes in the classroom this does not mean that they do not recognise the significance of these processes, rather they are unaware of what the writing processes means and how to be applied. Reasons behind teachers' unfamiliarity with the term writing processes could be due to the fact that most teachers do not have Arabic language specialisation. Thus, there is no chance for them to be aware of these types of terms in their preparation- training. Although this could be key reason but it is not the only one. I believe that the short comings in the Arabic writing curriculum and in the in-service training programme can be significant reasons. It is not only the curriculum in Oman which prevented the students from learning writing through these vital processes. The Arabic literature (e.g. Nuser, 1998) also indicated that secondary school students in Jordan lack experience in learning about the writing processes such as planning, revising and drafting. In contrast, many researchers in most English speaking countries such as the US, the UK and Australia (e.g. Britton et al., 1975; Graves, 1983; Kress, 1994 and Smith, 1998) have recommended teaching writing through an emphasis on different processes of writing.

More evidence about fourth grade teachers' attitude toward the writing processes were gained from classroom observation, as will be discussed in the following section.

Teachers' practices:

Planning for writing was applied in the same way that was mentioned by teachers in their interviews. They either, take their students in a discussion process to lead them to the ideas of the text, or they ask their students to prepare at home for the writing lesson. Each student comes to the classroom knowing what he/she is going to write. It seemed to me that T3, T4 and T8, asked their students to prepare for the writing lesson. Therefore, some students in the classrooms of these teachers came with drafts of the texts.

On the other hand, if we considered preparing at home for writing lesson as drafting, so there is only some students who draft. Yet, if we considered drafting as a process done in the classroom, the evidence indicated that no teacher encouraged students to go through the drafting process. This might be because the teachers know that students do not need to draft, as in the end of the lesson they copy the text from the board. If there is any one of the students went through drafting process, this is not to develop their writing but to make their textbooks neat and clean.

Teachers' practices in addition, evidenced that they considered the revising process. The revision process in most classrooms was undertaken when the groups were presenting their work on the board, the teacher asked other groups to comment on other groups' work under her control and directives. Almost all revisions focused on transcriptional aspects. However, some teachers also gave some attention to compositional aspects, such as meaning of the sentence. Yet, their focus on the meaning was only limited on sentence level not on all text meaning. This is because most texts were written as separated sentences.

Many researchers see (Hyland, 2002) stated that, because not all students manage to write in the same way, they need to real strategies that help them to set up a plan, to search for information related to the topic and to revise the form and the substance. Yet, it is unlikely to see fourth graders go through different processes of writing in their practices. This is because students' practices are controlled by teachers' practices and teachers' practices evidenced applying the writing processes in very narrow and limited manners. To support this claim the following section will identify the writing processes that students went through in the observed classrooms.

Students' practices:

It was mentioned earlier that most teachers in the observed classroom discussed with their students the ideas related to the topic. Yet, observing students' practices as groups evidenced that few students in the nine focused groups planned for their writing or thought what they were going to write in group work. The common behaviour among the nine observed groups is that when they were given the writing task to work on, one high achiever, who is able to write with little help from other members in the group, took the responsibility to write the task. This means that only this student is the one who thinks and decides what to write according to the demands of question.

In terms of drafting, no student drafts his/her writing in all observed classrooms in order to develop their work, rather, as I mentioned earlier, only three students (P10, P13 and P29), prepared for the lesson at home and wrote a draft of the text. Then when the teachers asked them to write the text, they copied some sentence from what they already written at home. To get more and deep information about what students thinking about the writing

processes, the 37 student were asked about the steps they go through to write their texts. Their responses will be discussed in the following section.

Students' perspectives:

Before asking them about the writing processes, the students were indicated their written texts and asked if they thought about, discussed and revised their written texts. Most students were satisfied with their writing, and identified some processes that they went through to produce their texts. Surprisingly, the students mentioned the same processes that were mentioned by the teachers, as well the same terms that were used by the teachers, such as, thinking before writing and revising. However, unlike the teachers, the students mentioned another process which is presenting the work. The processes that were mentioned by students are:

▪ Thinking before writing:

Twenty three students mentioned thinking before writing as basic process they do before writing. One of the students mentioned:

“In the beginning we need to think what to put here and there, then we revise what we wrote and see the spelling. And then we give it to the teacher” (P5).

It is clear that P5 used a plural, as she wanted to say that this is a regular process all students in the classroom do before writing. However, she did not identify what she meant by thinking and how they think before writing. Is it thinking about the question that they are asked to answer in writing, or thinking about the sentences and vocabulary that they should use to write the answer? Yet, P10 identified what thinking before writing means as she mentioned:

“The first thing is to think and see what the teacher is saying, specifically see her

explanation for the topic” (P10).

So thinking, in this student’s view, means following teacher’s explanation and directives. This, I believe, is the common way that students use to think or plan for writing, as all students are required to write about the same topic and the same ideas.

On the other hand, another student mentioned different way of thinking about the topic:

“In the beginning we deliberate and discuss what we are going to write then we write” (P30).

Discussing and deliberating with peers is another way of thinking about the text, but I mentioned earlier that discussions were rarely used and in a very narrow way, as teachers’ explanation and directives controlled the discussions. This might be because at the end of the lesson the students write to be assessed by the teacher, so it is better for them to follow what she says.

Another technique that was only mentioned by T34 who is a high achieving female, and gets appropriate support from her parents, she stated:

“Actually the most important thing in writing any text is to think about the title of the text, as there is no text without title otherwise no one will understand it. From the title we can know what we need to write and what we will talk about. Therefore, before writing I think what I will write and what will be the title? In addition, I need to know what is the story will be about, so I can choose the right title” (P34).

It is obvious that P34 was talking only about herself. She used the pronoun (I) so she was not generalising what she does in terms of the writing processes, as P30 did in the previous

statement, as she used the pronoun (we). P34, according to what she mentioned, about getting support and encouragement at home* and at school. Therefore, she has some experience in writing for different purposes. This could be the reason why she uses this technique to plan for her writing in order to produce a good written text.

▪ **Drafting:**

The drafting process was mentioned only by one student (P34). This was an expected result of unfamiliarity with the term drafting by both teachers and students, as has been clarified earlier. P34 used the drafting process not because she was trained to use it rather it is one of her techniques in writing at home.

“To write, I prepare myself by bringing many papers and writing more than one draft. This needs more than one or two hours, therefore, I do this thing at home. After that I revise the words and the sentences, then rewrite the text in another paper. Then I revise it again, as there could be some mistakes in punctuation and words, then I write the text as a final draft by using a pen not a pencil, as this time I write it neatly” (P34).

It seems that P34 uses drafting process as a way to receive to an appropriate version of her writing. However, the appropriate version for P34 seems to be the one that is written accurately and neatly. She might check the meaning and continuous prose, but not as much as seeking the neatness and accuracy.

▪ **Presenting the work in front of the students:**

The presentation process is one of aspects that was included in the BE system not only in the writing lesson, but rather in all lessons. Two students mentioned this process as basic part in their writing processes, one of them stated that:

* I had ample data regarding the influence of family on students. However, as a result of limiting the length of the PhD thesis I discarded most of these data and the discussion related to it.

“We think, write, revise, rewrite the text neatly and finally we present what we wrote (P16).

Although this process was only mentioned by two students and neither curriculum professionals nor teachers mentioned it, I believe it should be considered as basic process for writing and the teachers should guide students to practice it. This is because, although it was not mentioned in the literature as one of writing processes, it includes many benefits for students. By presenting their work the students discuss what they wrote with their peers and revise their writing according to peers’ feedbacks. In addition, they learn how to present their work for different audiences.

▪ **Revising:**

Twenty two students mentioned that they revise their writing. They explained that they revise for several reasons, but the most important reason is to make their writing neat and accurate in order to get high scores and to please the teacher. For example, P21 explained that

“I revise because I want my writing to be neat and clear. I revise to see if there is any spelling mistake in my writing” (P21).

It seemed that the majority of the students were keen in revising spelling and neatness in their writing. Therefore, some of them mentioned that they do not like their texts, because it includes many mistakes and it is untidy as they did not revise it. In contrast, the students who liked their written texts mentioned that their writing is good, because it was revised. This view is alike to the conclusion of Hyland (2002) who stated that revising helps the students to achieve 'good' writing.

Students' written texts:

Most texts that were written in the observed classroom were copied from the board. Therefore, I could not rely on them to examine if students had practiced the writing processes while writing or not. Even if some of these written texts included many mistakes. This led me to believe that these texts had never been revised. I used the collected free writing texts to support my claim about the writing process. By analysing 37 texts, I found that 18 of them included many writing mistakes in meaning, ideas, sentence structure, and spelling. Many students wrote unclear texts, which included limited and uncorrelated sentences. Other students wrote texts included numerous mistakes in spelling and grammar. This might be a reason that the students did not revise their writing. Yet, it also might be because the students were not familiar with free writing, as they were not used to write free written texts. All what they used to write was prescribed type of writing, as will be discussed in the next section.

5.6 Knowledge about Writing Forms:

Forms of writing is another issue that this study was interested to investigate. Although there are particular forms or genres of writing recommended to be taught for primary school students (Hedge, 2000). There is still a contradiction between what is recommended by some theorists (e.g. Kress, 1994) who recommended teaching various genres and what is taught in schools; see (Al-Hashmi, 1995 and Wilkinson, 1986a). In addition, there is a disagreement between what is taught in schools and what is preferred by the students (Casey & Hemenway, 2001).

Many forms of writing have been identified in the writing literature such as transactional,

expressive and poetic writing (Britton et al., 1975) and personal, social and creative writing (Hedge, 2000). Similar forms appeared in the Arabic literature (e.g. creative and functional writing) (Khatter et al., 1990 and Madkour, 2000). Yet, what forms of writing are taught to fourth grade students in the BE schools? In this section, different perspectives will be identified by exploring the views of curriculum professionals, teachers, and students as well as by analysing classroom practices and students' writing. In relation to writing forms, views about freedom in choosing writing topics as well as writing for different purposes and audiences will be explored.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

When curriculum professionals were asked about this issue, they identified their perspectives about writing forms from different angles. For example, one of them explained:

“It is possible for fourth grade students to write a report about something they did, I mean from his real life. We should train the students to write different forms, because composition divided to functional writing and creative writing and includes forms such as story, report and letter” (CP1).

CP1 identified two types of writing that are possible to train the students on; functional and creative writing. Usually any writing curriculum is developed according to these two types of writing. However, the actual writing curriculum of fourth grade includes neither of them. This explains why CP1 used the word “possible” as she thinks that there is a possibility for fourth grade to be taught these types of writing, but also she understand that the curriculum misses both of them. This claim was supported by what was mentioned by CP2 who stated:

“Actually in the writing curriculum the topics were linked with reading lessons.

Considering forms such as story, letter and reports all these forms are important, but are deferred for high stages” (CP2).

From CP2’s statement, it is clear that curriculum professionals, theoretically, perceive the importance of teaching the students various forms of writing. However, they have their own reason of excluding any of these forms of writing in the curriculum, as CP2 mentioned that these forms of writing are *"deferred for high stages"*. It seems that curriculum professionals have forbidden fourth grade students from learning different forms of writing because they think that the student in this grade are still young to learn these types of writing. In contrast, researchers such as (Casey& Hemenway, 2001; Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1986a) have recommended teaching primary students several forms of writing. In addition, some of curriculum professionals are aware of the importance of teaching fourth graders different forms of writing, as it was stated by one of them:

“Teaching different forms of writing for students is important, because this will develop students’ thinking capacity, enable them to write in several areas and develop their capacity in reading and writing” (CP4).

CP4’s statement indicates the contradiction between curriculum professionals’ viewpoints. Some of them supported teaching the students different forms of writing, while some think that fourth graders are still young to learn different forms of writing, which may be a reason of restricting them to topics related to reading texts.

In the reading lessons the students learn different types of texts, such as stories which are Islamic stories or non- fiction stories, some poetic and informative texts, which is the most common. However, in the writing lessons the students are deprived of creating these forms of writing, as the curriculum limited them to producing some sentences, summarising

reading text or writing about their opinion about the reading texts, while all other forms are delayed to high stages. It seems that curriculum professionals have not considered that primary stage students should be prepared for coming stages (Kress, 1994) so at a high stage they not struggle with many forms of writing that they never learnt before. This certainly demands, providing the students with basic skills of composition, training them on writing different forms of texts for different purposes and audiences, and giving them some freedom in choosing their own topics (Graves, 1983).

When curriculum professionals were asked about some concepts like freedom in choosing writing topics and writing for different purposes and audiences, they stated some interesting aspects. In terms of freedom in choosing writing topics, the four curriculum professionals agreed to give the students free writing but not in all lessons, as students should also be taught prescribed topics and forms to write about. One of them mentioned that:

“It is good to give the students a freedom in choosing their writing topics, especially in the creative writing; giving the student freedom to write a story he heard or any incident happened to him. However, it is also important to vary between the two manners; giving students free writing topics and particular writing topics” (CP1).

The question that rises here is, if curriculum professionals believe that, combining between free writing and prescribed writing is vital, why then did they not apply this view in the writing curriculum? Why did they not offer a space for free writing? Is it because they are concerned about students’ ability or because the curriculum lacks the correct foundations? It seems that curriculum professionals developed the writing curriculum according to their

own foundation rather than considering research findings and students' actual needs and capacities. This is because in Oman we lack the research that provides the curriculum professionals with some foundations about students' needs and capacities in writing. On the other hand, when developing the writing curriculum, curriculum professionals were strict in choosing reading and writing topics. They considered that these topics should suit and are related to the Omani society and Islamic customs and values. This could be one of the reasons that the students are forbidden the freedom to choose their own topics. Yet, does this mean forbidding the students to write for different purposes and audiences?

The curriculum professionals were asked about the idea of writing for different purposes and audiences. Their answers gave the impression: that they do not mind the idea, as their answers included this expression "*this is a good idea*" without any other comments. This short answer might imply that curriculum professionals admit that the writing curriculum content has not emphasised writing for different purposes and audiences, thus they cannot comment on something that they did not emphasise in the curriculum. In addition, it might also mean that they are not familiar with the terms (writing for different purposes and audiences), as they needed some explanation for the two concepts. Nevertheless, it is unsurprising that curriculum professionals do not understand these concepts as none of Arabic literatures, as I know, included the concept (writing for different purposes and audiences). Although most of Arabic literatures (e.g. Khatter et al., 1990 and Madkour, 2000) included various concepts in the area of teaching writing, such as free writing, functional writing, writing for life and creative writing, there is no indication of the term 'writing for different purposes and audiences'. What was mentioned by CP4 supports my claim that curriculum professionals are unfamiliar with the term writing for different

purposes. This was evident in CP4's following response.

“It (she meant writing for different purposes) is really necessary; I train my children on functional writing. One day they asked me to give them permission to play with their bicycles, and then I told them to write me a letter asking for permission and explaining why they want to play with bicycles. They wrote the letter with a help from their aunt” (CP4).

It is clear that CP4 used the term “functional writing” to answer my question about writing for different purposes. Although the concept functional writing might imply the meaning of writing for different purposes, yet, the term functional writing, as was mentioned in the literature review chapter, merely deals with particular forms of writing such as letters, reports, cards, which is opposite to creative writing, which includes forms such as narrative and poems, while writing for different purposes is a comprehensive concept that includes both functional and creative writing.

In addition, it appears that CP4 believes in the importance of writing for different purposes. However, she does not have the power that allows her to employ this concept in the writing curriculum; whereas she has freedom to train her children on what she believes is important. It seems that curriculum professionals consider that there will be some low achievers, who need extra time to learn the basic skills of writing so if they were given more additional activities, they might fail and abhor writing lessons. Nevertheless, curriculum professionals, I argue, have disregarded high achievers who need extra activities, as their performance is higher than only mastering basic skills and they might get bored in the writing lessons. I mentioned earlier that curriculum professionals seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept of writing for different audiences. Yet, one of them mentioned that:

“Considering the audience is one of Arabic key theory in teaching speaking, one of rhetorical concept in our Arabic literature mentioned that ‘for every situation there are right things to say’. This means that we should talk to people according to their level of thinking and according to the situation. However, the problem is that our curriculum still promotes the students to write for scores. Although, there is no scores in the BE, the other ways of assessment still lead the students to only write for the teacher” (CP3).

The idea of writing for different audiences was given significant attention since previous decades by many researchers (e.g. Britton et al, 1975; Martine et al., 1976 and Wilkinson, 1986 a, b) who were interested in developing teaching writing methods. For example, in his study Britton et al, (1975) found that, 85% of students’ writing was done for their teacher as an examiner. Although the study of Britton was done in the 1970s, what has been mentioned by CP3 corresponds with Britton’s finding in terms of considering the teacher as a main audience for students’ writing. This means that teacher’s role as assessor is more obvious than being an encourager. These were curriculum professionals’ perspectives about writing forms and writing for different purposes and audiences, so what would be the teachers’ views about these issues.

Teachers’ perspectives:

Teachers’ perspectives about writing forms is not different than that of curriculum professionals, as the teachers believe in the importance of teaching the students different forms of writing. However, the teachers have stated particular forms of writing that they think are important to be taught for fourth grade students. Story was the first form that the teachers thought is necessary to be taught for the students. Eight teachers mentioned that

the students desire stories at this age (age of ten).

“In this stage I think stories are appropriate form for fourth grade students. As you saw that, the story that the students played in the classroom attracted them, so they then can be able to create similar story. There is an opportunity for students to imagine, compose, and use all skills he learnt” (T1).

This point of view parallels what has been stated by some researchers (e.g. Britton, 1977 and Kress, 1994) who recommended utilising stories to teach the children reading and writing, as children enjoy retelling stories. Therefore, stories can be used to develop students’ ability to be creative writers (Wilkinson, 1986 b).

Letters were the second form of writing that was mentioned by T2 only who stated:

“For me the most important form of writing is letters. In this age, I think the student should be able to write a letter for his teacher or for his mother. In the old curriculum of the GE, there was a sample of letter for the teacher and for the mother. Unfortunately in this curriculum there is no emphasis on writing letters” (T2).

It seems that T2 taught writing for fourth grade students in the GE schools and recognised that training the students on writing letters was useful for them. However, as none of the other eight teachers taught the old curriculum of fourth grade, they did not mention letters when talking about writing forms. I argue that sometimes teachers’ experience affect their perspectives. For example, T1 thought that letters and reports are not appropriate for fourth graders because they do not have a background about writing letters and reports. She stated that the forms of writing that were included in the writing curriculum are enough for fourth graders. This is because she believes that curriculum professionals are more knowledgeable about what is appropriate for the students more than her. It is unsurprising for this teacher

to have this belief, as she is an inexperienced teacher (i.e. two years). The surprising issue was to hear from T3, who is an experienced teacher (i.e. 11 years) that, only high achievers can write letters. Therefore, she was pleased that letters were delayed to the next stages. However, these two teachers have different number of years experience; both of them did not teach such forms like letters and reports. Therefore, it is possible that they were not certain about what forms of writing are appropriate, as they cannot be certain about something they did not teach before. Thus, I argue that the number of years of experience might influence teachers' perspectives and practices. Yet, other different social and practical factors have an influence on teacher' perspective and practices.

In relation to forms of writing, teachers were also asked about their perspectives about freedom in choosing writing topics. The shared perspective among most teachers (5) was that not all students are able to write from their own choice. T3 explained:

“Students’ achievement level is low so they cannot create and think by themselves. They need help in thinking about appropriate topics” (T3).

It seems that most teachers have structured their view and practices according to what they were given in the curriculum and limited their students on it, so they feel that the students cannot do more than what they are doing now. This view neglect students' real abilities and needs.

However, this view cannot be generalised as the senior teacher (T9) has another belief, as she believes that giving the students freedom to write what they like will let them to: *“breath by their words and will develop their creativity and thinking” (T9).*

These were two contradictory views regarding freedom in choosing writing topics. In the middle there is another point of view, freedom in choosing writing topic, is an important idea but the students also need to be taught some particular topics and forms, which mean combining between the two approaches. This idea corresponds with curriculum professionals' views, as both believe that giving the students' freedom in choosing their own writing topics all the time will limit them to writing particular topics, while they should be taught various topics and forms. When I asked T4 about giving the students freedom in choosing their own topics, she expressed the following view:

“This is a good idea but, to be honest, this should not be in all writing lessons. The variation is required in the writing lesson. I do not want to let the students write about topics. Therefore, it is appropriate to give them some freedom to choose what they want to write. However, there is a difference between students, so the freedom in choosing writing topics may suit some students, but it is difficult for others” (T4)

This teacher was moderate in her point of view; she though combining between, freedom in choosing writing topics and what was included in the curriculum is the appropriate approach for students. The difference in teachers' views might be due to several reasons such as experience years, specialisation, and school environment. However, I believe that the position of the teacher has also some influence on their perspectives. T9 for example, who thought that the students should be given a freedom to write what they want, is a senior teacher. Her position drives her to explore new approaches and techniques in teaching so she can train other teachers on these techniques. Thus, she appreciated the idea of freedom in writing and was enthusiastic about it. In contrast, T3 and T4 seemed that they prefer what is included in the curriculum rather than free writing; as low achievers, who are

many in each classroom, cannot write from their mind. These teachers seem to be ignoring high achievers and gifted students, who need support enhancement and some space in writing lessons to develop their capacity in writing.

Teachers also were asked what they think about writing for different purposes. Most teachers (8) were interested in the idea of teaching students to write for different purposes. One of them mentioned, that “*writing is for life*” (T5) and the students are supposed to be able to write for different purposes in their life. T5 in this view stated that

“I believe this is a good idea, it gives the students some variety, not only stories, but they also can be creative in generating letters and cards. We need to help the students to use writing in their life, to express their feelings or to meet their needs by writing a letter or a card” (T5).

T5 has identified an important concept in teaching writing, which is ‘writing for life’ that is in line with genre theory that considered writing as an access to the society surrounding the students (Kress, 1994 & 1997 and Wilkinson, 1986b). In addition, T5 and other teachers mentioned many other reasons to explain why writing for different purposes is important such as: to help the students to get rid of the boring topics, to prepare the students for the next stage, to link the students with the life, to help the students to use different structures of sentences and various vocabulary and to help the students to express themselves and their needs. Yet, if the students were taught how to write for different purposes, they would also have to consider the audience for their writing. When the teachers were asked about what they think about writing for different audiences, the answers reflected unfamiliarity with the term. Therefore, this question had not taken further, as it seemed that all teachers

recognised that all students' writings are merely done for the teacher, so the teacher is the only audience for students' writings. Since all teachers apply the same curriculum, it is likely to see all teachers' practices in terms of writing forms are similar. Although some teachers apply free writing lessons sometimes. However, free writing lessons were not included in this study. This is because the aim of this study is to examine the usual situation of teaching writing rather than examining uncommon situations that are done by some teachers occasionally.

Teachers' practices:

It was difficult to identify many aspects in teachers' practices in terms of writing forms, as all the nine teachers taught curriculum topics. Five different topics were taught in the nine observed classrooms, which were described earlier in this chapter. All five topics were limited, as they were summarising and comprehensive type of writing. Only two teachers T2 and T9 at the end of writing lessons asked their students to do some extra writing as homework. T2 asked her students to collect some of prophetic traditions about the topic they learnt (i.e. good behaviours). Although this task might not develop students' ability in writing, however it teaches them to search for appropriate information that is related to the topic, which is one of writing process. T9 alternatively asked her students at the end of the writing lesson to create similar story of the shepherd and the wolf. This enquiry may be a manner to develop students' imagination and composing ability. However, not all teachers apply these types of activities as most of them restrict on what is included in the curriculum. It is likely that these forms of writing which are taught in the writing classroom have an effect on students' practice in the classroom.

Students' practices:

Writing forms and topics that are obligatory for the students to write had some influence on how they practiced in the classroom and how easy was writing for them. By observing students' practices in the classroom, it seems that all students were used to particular types of writing. Therefore, they did not add so many aspects to what they are obliged to do, as they limited themselves on particular vocabulary and sentences. Students sometimes memorised the sentences of the reading text and wrote them down. This was more obvious in the classrooms of T6 and T9 as students were required to summarise the story of the shepherd and the wolf. Students, somewhat, did well in the first section, which demanded summarising the story, even though, some of them had memorised it rather than summarising it. However, in the next section, which required writing about the message, they benefited from the story, most of the students failed to write the correct answer. Some students who wrote about the second section memorised what was explained by the teacher rather than giving their point of views.

In addition, the students in the classroom of T1, T4, T5 and T8 struggled when writing about the topics, as it demanded writing about topics that were not included in the reading texts. In other words, the reading text does not include the answer to the writing question (i.e. writing topic). For example, in the classroom of T8, students were required to write about how every one in the society can assist the police in their work.

The student could not answer this question easily and needed great support and help from their teacher to get some ideas to write about the topic. A similar situation happened in the classrooms of T1, T4 and T5 as students also were asked to write about the benefit of the cooperation for the society. Students in the three classrooms started to bring up some

suggested ideas, which were taken from the text, but the answer was not included in the text. Therefore, they also demanded obvious support from their teachers. To conclude, the topics and forms of writing and the manner of teaching these forms led the students to a narrow way of composing. This limitation in the writing forms did not only affect students' practices but it also influenced their perspectives about writing forms.

Students' perspectives:

To examine students' perspectives about writing forms they were asked about: what do they like to write? And whether they like the forms of writing included in the writing curriculum or not? They mentioned many forms of writing that they like to write and learn to write. The most common form of writing that was mentioned by students (24) was story. This is normal as children usually like retelling stories (Riley & Reedy, 2000). However, the special finding in the Omani context was that religious stories have a priority. Fifteen (15) students mentioned that they like religious stories; stories about the Prophets in general and stories about the Prophet Muhammad in particular. In this view P1 stated:

"Yes I like writing I like to write stories about prophets and about exciting stories" (P1).

On the other hand P30 mentioned:

"I like what is included in the textbook. I like most prophets' stories because it is nice and useful... I like to write about Prophet Mohammed and about things he did in his life I wrote an essay about Prophet Mohammed" (P30).

These two examples were from two different students; one was a low achieving boy from school (S1), which was located in a low socio-economic level community, while the second student was a high achieving girl from school (S4), which was located in a high socio-

economic level city. Although these two students were different in terms of gender and achievement level, they mentioned similar types of stories that they enjoyed to read and to write about. This may explain the reason for many aspects, such as similar individual tendencies, as many people might share the same favourite texts. I argue that there is a socio- cultural influence on students' preferences in reading and writing texts. Many families in Oman encourage their children to read Islamic books and stories. In addition, school atmosphere also encourages Islamic reading and writing.

However, the students not only like religious stories, they also like different forms of texts such as, science reports and fiction stories. If all these forms of writing are not in the writing curriculum the question that comes to the mind is how did the students learn to like writing these forms of texts? The answer can be derived from what was stated by the students themselves, as it seems that many factors influence students' writing. Some families provide their children with different resource for reading and writing such as stories, journals, computers and internet access, which were mentioned by 10 students. For example, P26 mentined:

“my father buy me some stories and I read and summarise them like the story of a faithful dog ” (P26).

Also the teachers of other subjects such as, Islamic Education and Science infelence students' writing, as was mentioned by 16 students, P8, for instance, stated:

“I like to write stories about prophets and reports about animals and birds and fish” (P8).

In addition, there are school activities such as, school broadcast, journal and trips, which encourage the students to practice different forms of writing. This aspect was mentioned by

some students who participate in school activities and use information resources centre to read different forms of books and stories. In this view P34 mentioned

“some times they (teachers) choose me to participate in school activities and parties. I like to write the programme of school broadcast ” (P34).

in addition, P28 said:

“sometimes we write reports about trips we go on, our teacher (x) asks us to write report when we go on any trip. We wrote a report about our trip to the police school, we wrote about things we saw in the school” (P28)

This means that even if the students are not required to write different forms of writing in the Arabic language lessons, they are required to write for different purposes through different subject matter lessons, as well as through participating in school activities which is related to the idea of ‘writing across curriculum’ (Martine, et al., 1976). This could be a beneficial chance for students to develop their writing and overcome the limitation of the Arabic writing curriculum. However, not all students have the chance to do all these extra writing activities as mostly high achievers who participate in these types of activities. Therefore, it is vital to include various forms of writing in the writing curriculum. It is likely that students’ written texts that were produced in the observed classroom will not reflect anything more than what they were given in the writing classroom.

Students’ written texts:

To examine how students' written texts reflect different forms of writing and topics, I used students texts that were produced in free writing lessons. This means that students’ texts that were produced in the observed classroom were excluded, as they simply reflect forms of

writing that are taught in the official curriculum. The free written texts that were collected from free writing lessons reflected some new forms of writing that were not included in the writing curriculum, yet students preferred to write about. However, the free writing of two classrooms of T2 and T3 were not taken as examples of free writing; as it seemed that the topics were chosen by the teachers, and not by the students. For example, in T2's classroom all students wrote about sport, and it is unlikely that all students like to write about sport. On the other hand, the students in the classroom of T3 wrote about animals, which also cannot be accidental.

Another teacher (i.e.T6) seemed to have given her students some examples that they can write about such as, letters and greeting cards. Therefore, all students in the classroom limited themselves on these two particular forms of writing. The writing of students of this classroom reflected that they lack the ability to write a complete letter, as each one wrote only two sentences in his/her letter. The rest of students' free written texts reflected what students like to write about, which were stories. It was mentioned earlier that twenty four students explained that they like to write stories. Fifteen students of them stated that religious stories have a priority in their writing. Nevertheless, the free writing texts indicated that only one student (i.e.P17) wrote a religious story, while the rest wrote either fiction or true-life stories. All fiction stories were taken either from school textbooks or from children stories. Conversely, non-fiction stories reflected some stories that happened for the students in their everyday life. From analysing students' free writing text it appeared that teachers (e.g. T5 and T9), who trained the students on free writing, succeeded in boosting confidence in their students, so they produced complete and meaningful texts with minimal writing mistakes. On the other hand, students, who were not trained to practice

free writing, produced uncompleted texts with numerous mistakes in spelling and sentences structure.

5.7 Conclusion:

This chapter has presented and discussed findings from the data relating to the theme of knowledge for writing. Four sub themes were included under this key theme, which were transcriptional knowledge, compositional knowledge, knowledge about the writing processes and knowledge about writing forms.

The evidence from analysed data indicated that transcriptional aspects were given significant attention by both curriculum professionals and teachers. This accordingly affected students' perspectives about what is important for writing as they thought that handwriting and spelling are key aspects for writing, and accordingly this affected their writing. In spite of the attention that was given for transcribing, students' written texts reflected a significant lack in writing accuracy, especially in terms of spelling.

Unfortunately, unlike the English language where punctuation is given appropriate attention when teaching and assessing writing; punctuation is neglected in Arabic writing in all stages. The noticeable attitude among the teachers toward punctuation was negative, as most of them indicated that in this stage, punctuation is not fundamental. It is difficult therefore, to expect from the students to consider punctuation in their writing if the teachers did not believe that punctuation makes difference in the meaning of any written texts.

Whilst Omani teachers can be criticised for focusing on handwriting and neglecting punctuation, they are not responsible for neglecting aspects such as imagination and creativity in writing. This is because the writing curriculum has not included such aspects

and the teachers are required to stick quite strictly to the curriculum content.

There is no doubt that almost all research on writing and its teaching emphasises the importance of both the compositional and transcriptional aspects. However, the debate is about what should be the priority when teaching writing for young students: thinking and imagination or spelling and punctuation? As was mentioned in the literature review chapter, there are two approaches regarding compositional and transcriptional issue; one emphasises teaching young students spelling and punctuation exercises before asking them to compose, in contrast, the second emphasises focusing on composition first and transcription comes later see (Bunting, 1998). However, I argue that advancing one aspect and delaying another might not benefit the students in their writing development. Combining between both aspects and separating them at the same time can be beneficial. Students can be taught transcriptional aspects independently away from the composition lessons, where the teacher should be focusing on developing students' thinking, imagination and creativity in writing while still emphasising accuracy.

Arabic writing teachers are not muddled about what to focus on and what to delay this is because the Arabic language lessons the students are taught transcriptional aspects in different lessons to the writing lessons. However, the writing curriculum does not emphasise compositional aspects such as thinking, imagination, generating and organising ideas. This is, as I mentioned earlier, because the curriculum professionals believe that the students at this stage are 'still not ready' to write from their own thoughts. They believe that the most important aspect for the students in this stage is to master writing skills such as spelling, punctuation and handwriting, which enable them to write different forms of

writing in the coming stages. We can assume that, curriculum professionals do not know students' ability in writing because they are not dealing with them in the classroom rather they deal with documents. However, it is unlikely that the teachers do not know their students' ability and needs. Some teachers believe that the students in the primary stage are still young to write from their mind and imagination. These teachers seemed to be unaware that the child comes to the school bringing with them much more knowledge (from home) about writing than that they are provided at school (Graham, 1998). Clay (1975) mentioned that even the lines that are drawn by the child included a message that he/she wants to communicate to others (Clay, 1975 cited in Pinsent, 1998).

Some learning theories see (Bennett et al., 1984) stated that students need an appropriate time in learning and practicing any skill to be able to master it and to become an automatic process in their work. Thus, curriculum professionals' orientation to focus on one aspect of writing and to delay another is arguable. Teaching different skills can go in a parallel way to the point that some of these skills are mastered by students and become automatic processes in their practices, while other skills might need longer time to be mastered. The curriculum developers were keen on achieving one main goal which was enabling the student to acquire the transcriptional aspect of writing; namely correct spelling, neat handwriting and sentence structure. This resulted in neglecting the compositional aspect which involved; generating, formalising and organising ideas as well as using imagination in writing. Ultimately, this led to the emergence of students who were skilful in the transcriptional aspect of writing; however they were deprived from the compositional aspect of writing. In addition, this also resulted in the appearance of students who were underprivileged of both compositional and transcriptional aspects. These students never acquired the transcriptional skills and they were

disadvantaged from the compositional skills. The high achievers mastered the necessary skills such as spelling, punctuation, handwriting and grammar; however, they did not develop the skills to create and organise new ideas or the skills to use their imagination for writing. On the other hand, the low achievers were deprived from both aspects of writing. Neither the emphasis on the transcriptional aspect helped them to write nor were they granted with the opportunities to think and express their own ideas. These opportunities could have given the students the chance to achieve writing skills through composition and self-expression.

In addition, the Arabic writing curriculum for fourth grade and consequently the classroom practices, neglected the social and cultural experiences and background children come with. Theorists such as Vygotsky have long recommended that the knowledge, that the child already has, needs to be utilised and developed, not ignored by limiting the child to transcriptional skills (Vygotsky, 1978, p87). In spite of the findings and recommendations from different researchers (e.g. Albajjah, 1999; Britton et al., 1975; Czerniewska, 1992; Graves, 1983; Hart, 1996; Khatter et al., 1990; Kos & Maslowski, 2001 and Madkour, 2000) who have emphasised teaching different genres for primary school students, the data of this study indicated that students in the Omani schools are deprived of variety of writing activities that develop creativity in their writing. It has been seen that schooled literacy in Oman is narrow in its conceptualisation of writing and that it inducts fourth grade students into very limited range of writing. Initially what is included in the writing curriculum and taught in the writing classrooms by all teachers is little; it is not more than two types of writing: summarising, explanative which are more related to comprehensive writing. I mean by comprehensive writing the type of writing that is used to insure students' understanding of the information included in the reading texts. Some teachers apply extra

writing activities such as stories, reports, and cards as well as sometimes schools activities such as schools broadcast, journals and trips help in developing students' writing in particular forms such as reports, articles, stories and poems. However, these forms of writing are only employed by some teachers, so these activities benefit only some students.

Furthermore, although fourth grade students mentioned that they like reading and writing different genres, teaching about genres received less attention than teaching writing. Unfortunately, curriculum professionals seemed unaware that genre is one of most important aspects of teaching writing and is an essential skills for students to succeed in writing. Even if some teachers used to teach several forms of genres such as, stories, reports and letters, the evidence from students' analysed written texts indicated a lack in the structure of each type of genre. Most teachers do not give their students basic features of genres, therefore, they write without essential knowledge of genres. As a result, the students try to memorise or imitate the stories, which they read, and they become their models of writing even though they were presented for them for different purposes. Sometimes the teachers give sufficient direction and details of using genres in writing, which guide the students to produce a good quality of writing (Kress, 1994). Yet this is rare in the Omani schools, as I believe that most teachers in Oman lack the knowledge of the structure of different genres.

Many studies indicated that the awareness of audience help in developing students' writing abilities see (Britton et al, 1975 and Martine et al., 1976). When students realise that they write to communicate with the reader, they try to choose appropriate words to clarify their ideas and express themselves. Strange (1988) considered asking students to write letters

using the same topic for different readers and exchanging letters with other students as practical strategies that encourages the students to write for wide range of readers. The evidence from analysing students' free writing indicated that they have a sense of audience as the cards and letters they wrote for their friends and mothers included some words that express their emotions and feeling. However, limiting fourth grade students to particular forms of writing led them to be used on limited forms of writing. Therefore, their free writing texts reflected obvious weakness in producing complete letters and cards, as they are not used to these type of writing.

Developing students' senses of audience help them to understand communicative function of writing (ibid) and develop their writing performance. However, how can the teachers develop the sense of audience among the students if the teachers are unfamiliar with this concept, because they were not trained on it? The teachers need to be trained on the structure of different forms of writing in order to be able to scaffold students' ability to write for different purposes and audiences. In addition, they are also required to be aware of different strategies that can be used to develop students' performance in writing. Writing pedagogy and teaching processes that are used in teaching Arabic writing for fourth grade students will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Writing Pedagogy and Teaching Processes

6.1 Introduction:

I have discussed the data relating to knowledge for writing in the previous chapter. The data sets presented here include the themes related to writing pedagogy, teaching processes, teaching resources(e.g. pictures, books and boards) and teacher's roles in the writing classrooms. All these four themes are related to classroom practices. However, they will be discussed not only as it was observed in the writing classrooms but also from several points of view; namely the curriculum professionals, the teachers and the students.

The curriculum professionals set the theoretical directives and the policy that is interpreted by teachers in the writing classrooms. Therefore, discussing each theme will start with curriculum professionals' perspectives followed by teachers' perspectives and their practices. Then students' practices, perspectives and written texts will also be discussed.

6.2 Writing pedagogy:

Researchers such as Alexander (2000) differentiated the terms teaching and pedagogy. Although these two terms are often used interchangeably he identified some differences between the two terms. He stated that teaching is an act while pedagogy includes the act of teaching as well as the policies and theories that direct the act of teaching. Writing pedagogy theme is related more to the theoretical views; therefore, I only examined it from curriculum professionals and teachers' perspectives.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

All curriculum professionals stated that writing pedagogy in fourth grade is based on three

stages. The first stage starts with a discussion, where the teachers ask the students some questions to help them to think about the topic and identify ideas. Then accordingly in the second stage the students create their written text. The third stage is where the teacher corrects students' written text. To identify these stages of writing pedagogy, CP1 for example, mentioned:

“Certainly, teaching writing ought to start with oral composition by asking the students some questions to extract ideas from them. These questions should bring out particular ideas. The students are then requested to write the text according to these ideas. And finally the text is corrected by the teacher” (CP1).

The three stages included in the CP1s' statement will be discussed according to what has been mentioned in chapter five about types of writing that fourth grade students are required to create (i.e. summary, explanatory and comprehension writing). This is to find out the influence of these types of writing included in the writing curriculum had on the way that Arabic writing is taught for fourth grade students.

For instance, it seems that curriculum professionals had considered the classroom discussion of topics as an integral requirement for writing pedagogy. Researchers (Graves, 1983 and Murray, 1972) have considered prewriting or discussion before writing as a basic part of writing process that should be done by students and be encouraged by teachers. But in Oman, curriculum professionals failed to acknowledge that in writing lessons, discussions should serve the purpose of assisting the students to generate new ideas. Discussion with peers and the teacher yields creative written texts rather than the recitation of the same ideas that were included in the reading texts. However, as I mentioned in the

last chapter, freedom in choosing topics and discussing ideas with the teacher and the peers (Graves, 1983; Hart, 1996) seemed to be missing in the writing classrooms.

The second stage is the writing of the text by the students themselves. In Oman there are two approaches to writing. The students either have prescribed writing where they are required to write about the same topic after discussing the ideas in the classroom, or assessment writing where each student has to write individually without any discussion, as CP explained:

“Writing for assessment is to differentiate between high achievers and low achievers. I have to allocate a special lesson and ask the students to write under my control” (CP3).

This means that students either become dependent where the teacher discusses with them each sentences, or they become independent where they write without any help, for assessment purposes.

In the final stage teachers are required to assess or to correct students’ writing. However, do the teachers have the assessment criteria? This does not appear to be so otherwise they would not have written the text on the board and let the students copy it. Actually what the teachers do in the Omani schools cannot be considered assessment rather it is a “double checking” of students’ spelling and handwriting. The teachers lack, not only the assessment criteria, but they also need to realise that writing is more than spelling and handwriting.

When assessing or correcting students’ writing it is recommended that teachers take some examples of students’ writing to be discussed or to be assessed by peers in order to provide the writer with some feedback which might help them to improve their writing. Thus, the assessment should not aim only to distinguish high achievers from low achievers rather to

assist the students in their writing as well as to provide feedback in the teaching processes (Torrance & Pryor1998). Hyland (2002) mentioned that assessing students' writing is a significant tool for the teachers to discover students' strengths and weaknesses as writers. This enables them to challenge the students further. Assessing students' writings in the Omani schools is usually done by the teacher for the purpose of measuring students' achievement levels in order to help the students who need help through special lessons called '*supporting lessons*' where each student gets support in his/her weak skills. However, in these lessons the major focus is given to basic skills such as spelling, handwriting and grammatical aspects.

Although all curriculum professionals (4) mentioned the same stages that writing pedagogy goes through, there were differences in their views about the application of these stages in the classroom. Two of them did not even mention how to apply writing pedagogy in the classroom. One of them (CP3) stated that writing pedagogy could be applied individually or as group work, while CP2 considered group work as a main approach in teaching writing.

Group work is one of the BE concepts that was derived from the student- centred education philosophy (Ministry of Education, 2001b) where students cooperate and depend on themselves to learn rather than relying on the teachers. Curriculum professionals are required to adopt and employ group work in the Arabic curriculum. In addition, they are required to train Arabic language teachers to apply the group work approach in their teaching. However, the evidence indicated that curriculum professionals' academic and social background reflected on their perspectives toward group work. For example, CP2,

who used to visit the BE schools and has experience on how teachers teach writing, stressed the group work approach as a main approach in teaching writing in the BE schools.

He explained:

“The approach that is useful in the writing lessons is a group work approach. There is also individual work but the approach that we adopted is a group work” (CP2).

Unlike CP2, the other three professionals have minimum connection with school practices, as most of them work in the curriculum department, developing the curriculum and writing students' textbooks. The conflict between the intended curriculum and its implementation in the real setting of the classrooms is an issue that the teachers constantly complain about. This is because the curriculum is developed and the activities are established without considering the reality in classroom practices. Therefore, the implementation of the curriculum and the accompanying activities faces several problems. On the other hand, there are some activities and practices that the teachers think are useful for their students, but are rejected by curriculum professionals, because they believe that they might disrupt students' learning. This is a complex issue because the curriculum professionals rely on their theoretical experiences in their perspectives, while the teachers rely on their practical experiences in their perspectives. So which perspective should direct writing pedagogy; the theoretical point of view or practical point of view? I believe that writing pedagogy is a critical aspect, therefore, when establishing the curriculum and the associated activities both theoretical and practical points of view should be taken in the consideration. This is because the growing body of educational research suggests that ‘it is not only behaviour in the classroom which influences students' learning but also teachers' knowledge, values, beliefs, theories and thought processes (Poulson, et al,2001). Naturally in the centralised

educational system, not only teachers' beliefs and theories which influence students' learning but also curriculum professionals' beliefs and theories and experiences affect students' learning and teachers' practices. This is because all activities and curriculum content are set on by curriculum professionals. Thus, if the curriculum professionals lack experiences about the reality in the classrooms, this will ultimately cause drawbacks in the writing pedagogy.

Although teaching pedagogy in the BE schools seems to be relying largely on the group work approach, contrary to this the individual work is recommended by most of curriculum professionals. For instance although CP2 mentioned that group work is adopted he mentioned that:

“Of course I believe that the individual work is better than the group work approach, why? Because there are many factors that influencing the work in group work. For example, in each group you will see that the high achievers, dominates the work and he does not give chance for others to participate, while when the work is done individually each student will work and activate his mind” (CP2).

It was surprising to find that the curriculum professionals who are the responsible people for training the teachers are not very enthusiastic about the group work approach, while teaching writing is recommended to be done through interacting with others. The problem is not in the group work itself, rather than that it is in the implementation of the group work. It is unlikely that the students will participate effectively in the group work unless they are taught how to work co-operatively in groups. In addition, the teachers are not convinced when it comes to applying the group work appropriately unless they are properly

trained on the dynamics of group work.

In addition, CP3 mentioned an unexpected aspect relating to writing pedagogy. He considered writing as a task that can be completed at home (homework) and stressed the value of copying the written text from books, journals or even from the Internet. CP3 believes that copying the written text from any resource of information might help the students to learn different aspects. He described this,

“The student can write at home. Some teachers don’t allow the students to write at home; they say that the student might let someone else write for him. However, I think that he can use some books to write or can get help from books as he will learn some vocabulary and will gain ideas that could be beneficial to his writing in the future” (CP3).

In contrast, all other three professionals disagreed with this idea. They mentioned that copying the text from books will not, in any way, help creativity. Books can be useful resources for information and ideas for writing. If students are allowed to copy from books then they might gain some information about the topic, and learn new vocabulary, but they refrain from thinking about their own ideas, knowledge and experiences. Thus, the benefit in developing writing ability is little, as copying is not part of composition. Students should read different resources about the topic but when writing they should utilise this information to create meaningful written texts. I have mentioned in the literature review that teacher’s guidebook of fourth grade recommends *“in writing, students should be like a Bee rather than like an Ant”* (Ministry of Education, 20000).

According to the curriculum professionals’ views, it seems that the preference in writing pedagogy at the fourth grade is the individual writing approach, so that each student can be

measured in terms of his/ her vocabulary and writing accuracy. In addition, some of them even do not mind if the students copy the text from any resource as long as it provides them with new ideas and vocabulary, which help them to write about the topic. I have earlier mentioned that curriculum professionals' academic and social background mediates their belief system. So it can be seen that the teachers will also interpret curriculum policy according to their social/ academic background as well as according to school or classroom context. This will be discussed in the next section.

Teachers' perspectives:

The teachers were asked to identify what they think about teaching writing. They expressed many views about what they actually apply and what they think should be applied. They mentioned different approaches that they actually implemented in the observed writing classrooms and what they think should be applied. For example, T2 stated that:

“I start with discussing the topic; I discuss the topic with the students by asking them some questions about the topic to know what they are going to write about. Then I ask the students individually or in a group to write about the topic. However, teaching students to write a particular topic in fact needs two separate lessons. The students are required to work in groups to write the text, present it in front of the classroom and then write it individually. All the above mentioned processes need more time” (T2).

What has been mentioned by T2 seems to be a creative approach in writing pedagogy as it allows the students to discuss the ideas with each other, work in groups as well as work individually. Three aspects need to be discussed about T2's statement.

The first aspect is the time required in teaching writing for each lesson. Writing lessons in

the fourth grade classrooms incorporate many activities such as discussing ideas, group work, presenting written texts, correcting group work, and individual writing. Therefore, both teachers and some of curriculum professionals (e.g. CP3) believe that each topic needs more than the allotted time to be taught. However, I argue that the students do not need all these activities unless they are very weak and unable to gain the knowledge and master the writing skills without the diversification of the activities. These activities could be helpful if the students are required to do creative writing. This would scaffold their imagination and assist them to generate new ideas. Unfortunately, this is not the case in this study context.

The second aspect is students' presentation. I have mentioned in the previous chapter that this process is another new concept that was included in the BE. The teachers also regard this process as an important task that helps the students to be brave and face different audiences (e.g. their teacher and peers). The presentation of their work in front of others and getting feedback help the students to develop their work. However, according to the situation in the BE schools I argue that the presentation process might be helpful for some students rather than all students, as most teachers usually nominate only high achievers to present the work. In addition, some teachers ask all groups to write on the same subjects and similar texts, which make the students uninterested to listen and follow the presented work.

The third aspect of T2's statement is with regard to group work and individual work. Although the teachers apply both individual and group work approaches in different contexts, there was no agreement among them about which is better for teaching writing.

four teachers supported group work as basic technique in teaching writing. On the other hand, three teachers mentioned that individual work is better for teaching and learning processes. These teachers have the similar views to that were mentioned by some teachers in the study of Dunne and Bennett (1990). Namely, that group work is not necessarily an appropriate approach for teaching writing, rather it is an ideology dictated by the new system. Apart from these two views there was a third view, which proposes combining the two approaches. Two teachers supported this belief. One of them mentioned that:

“We have to swap between the two approaches to break the routine; the whole lesson is a combination of group work or individual work in the classroom” (T2).

T2 believes that combining between the two approaches in one lesson creates variety in the classroom and makes the students more dynamic and active. These teachers mentioned some advantages of the group work that can benefit both the teacher and the students. On the other hand, the teachers who did not support group work identified some disadvantages of the group work. The table below indicates some advantages and disadvantages of the group work according to teachers' perspectives.

Table 6.1 Advantages and disadvantages of group work from the teachers' perspectives:

Issues	Advantages	Examples	Disadvantages	Examples
Role and division of work	High achievers are supporters and guide the low achievers.	<i>"...the low achiever, who can't write will be able to write or compose, as he can find help if he made a mistake"</i> (T3)	Create dominant and passive students	<i>Students work in groups; however, you definitely will see in each group two or three in the corner, who won't participate in activities with the group"</i> (T6).
Meta-cognitive issues	Thinking together helps the group to create good writing.	<i>"I can't get better sentences and structures from each student individually than that I get from groups"</i> (T5).	It does not help the teacher to evaluate each student individually or to know each student's abilities.	<i>"I would like to let the students work individually this will help me to know each student's level"</i> (T7)
Social issues	It creates a sense of competition among groups and possibly a sense of collaboration among the members of each group.	<i>"Varying writing topics among the groups certainly creates competition and work environment among them"</i> (T4).	It creates discontent and frustration among the group members especially between girls and boys and between high achievers and low achievers.	<i>"When I ask the students to sit near each other to collaborate in their work, they do it but in a dissatisfied way. Then they quickly return back to their places far away from the boys and vice versa"</i> (T9)

As group work is a new approach that was introduced recently in the new educational system (BE) in the Omani schools it is expected to see some teachers rely completely on it, regardless whether it suits the situation or not. In contrast, some teachers might apply the group work approach without conviction. In both these cases the group work approach might cause some drawbacks on students learning. Johnson & Johnson in 1975 stated that the group work approach has some advantages that improve students' learning (cited in Dunne & Bennett, 1990). Collaborative learning has a positive influence on students' achievement, self-esteem and the relationship between the students. However, other researchers (e.g. Bennett, et al., 1984) have found that group work can hinder students' learning if it is not applied in a proper way. For example, it was found that in mixed gender groups, students tend to break down into pairs or trios according to their gender. The finding of the recent study also agrees to the above explained finding. This could be considered a socio-cultural factor influences students' behaviour towards working in mixed groups. However, there is no concrete evidence has indicated which is better for students' learning, single sex or mixed sex groups work. One can argue, in terms of providing students with an appropriate environment for learning, that the single sex group work might allow more opportunities for peers' help and encouragement. This does not imply that all students prefer to work with same sex peers. Thus, teachers need to be flexible when organising the groups in a way that will assist students' collaboration and learning.

Another issue in group work lies in the way of grouping the students. According to Bennett (ibid) and from findings of the recent study, it seemed that the common way is grouping the students basing on their achievement level. This way of organising the groups might lead to individual domination in the group work, which means that some low achievers

automatically become sidelined. This is because their level does not allow them to participate in the tasks, and thus, they are left out, while high achievers tend to dominate the work in the group. This of course does not suggest that putting same achievement level students in each group can solve this problem. Dunne & Bennett (1990) have mentioned that there is no problem in putting high attaining students together in a group as they can collaborate and participate in working out the task. However, teachers need to support and give more time and attention to a group of low achievers to be able to assess and assist each student in the group. Hence, careful planning and through innovative methods the appropriate collaborative work can be done in mixed achievement levels groups. For this both teachers and students need to be trained on how to make the work in the groups effective.

It is likely that teachers' perspectives about writing pedagogy tend to reflect their practices in the classroom. However, one can see some differences between teachers' practices and their perspectives for two reasons. Firstly some teachers might be trying to please me. They might say and do what they believe that I want to hear and see, rather than what they normally practice. Secondly, some teachers seek to apply different strategies and techniques, but they are obligated to employ particular methods and approaches because of curriculum restrictions. Therefore, they mentioned different methods in the interviews but they practice what they are requested to do. On the other hand, we also can find some teachers who really practice what they believe and say. All these issues will be identified in the next section.

6.3 Teaching Processes:

In the observation instrument, I included a section for teaching processes, I divided this section into three sub sections: the introduction to the lesson, the main part of the lesson and the conclusion of the lesson, and I recorded my observation notes according to these sub sections. Therefore, in this section, I presented teaching processes as they were implemented by teachers in the observed classrooms.

6.3.1 Introduction to the Lesson:

There were substantial differences between the observed teachers in terms of introductions used in the writing lessons. These introductions varied according to the writing topic. For example, T1 started the lesson with a play, which was done by some students, and then she asked them to explain what they understood from the play. The play expressed the topic of the lesson, which was about co-operation. On the other hand, to convey the co-operation topic, T4 let her students listen to a recorded story about collective work. Another teacher T3 started with presenting some pictures on the board and asking students to talk about them and to write a sentence on the board to express each picture. The pictures reflected the topic of the lesson, which was about bad behaviour and commendable deeds. T5 started her lesson by asking students to read from the text. T5 was the only teacher who linked writing lesson with reading. Although the writing topic is completely related to the reading topic or about the reading topic, no teacher, except T5, started the writing lesson with reading. When I asked this teacher in the interview, why she started her lesson by asking the students to read the text, she stated that it is important to remind the students with the reading topic and some vocabulary that was applied in the text. To emphasise the link between

reading text and writing T5 picked vocabulary from the reading text, wrote them on cards and presented them on the board to help the students in their writing.

Three teachers (T6, T7 and T9) started their lessons by asking students some questions to help them to create ideas about the topic. The norm in the writing lesson is to initiate the lesson with a special question designed for composition. However, only one teacher (T8) started her lesson directly by the question. She asked one of the students to read the question, and then gave them a minute to think about it. Then she asked some students to explain what they understood from the question. When T8 was asked in the interview about her approach, she mentioned that understanding the question's request is half of the answer. In other words, she believes that if students understood the requirements of the question (i.e. writing topic), it will be easy for them to answer and write about the topic.

These different types of introductions for the writing lesson are essential methods to assist the students to think about what they are going to write. It is a type of brainstorming that considered by some researchers (e.g. Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982) as a way that assists the students who have difficulty with the topic and content. For example, letting the students listen to stories and watch plays is counted as forms that young students enjoy and like to imitate. Thus, it is likely that these types of introductions could assist the students to imagine or recall similar stories and events they had experienced in their life that form topics for their writing. However, do fourth grade students in the BE schools really struggle for topics and content? Do they require teachers' assistance in searching for topics?

Actually, the introduction used by the teachers seemed to be a customary procedure that they are used to implementing in their lessons. Teachers do the introduction part to motivate the students for the lesson. Nevertheless, if we consider that most teachers ask their students to prepare at home, what is the point of the introduction part? Let us assume that not all students are familiar with the lesson, as all of them do not prepare at home. Thus, the introduction for the lesson is to stimulate these students for the lesson. This is not the case in the writing lesson, as the students are already familiar with the topics. This is because all writing topics are constantly linked with reading lessons as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, I argue that what teachers do in the introduction part of the writing lesson is an additional, habituated part, which does not motivate the students for the writing. However, it might be helpful for reminding the students about the topic and its' content, especially low achievers.

The proper introduction, in my view, is the one that introduces various topics to the students and helps them to search in their memory and retrieve any information and content related to the topics to produce a creative text, that make connection between students experiences and their writing (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982).

One might argue that it is unexpected that all students can find in their memories enough information and content to write a complete and meaningful text. Therefore, in the main part of the writing lesson teachers can scaffold the writing processes for students to go through successfully. Yet, if the students are familiar with the topic and ideas, as I illustrated earlier, what instructional strategies do teachers use in the main part of the lesson? This will be addressed in the upcoming section.

6.3.2 The Main Part of the Lesson:

The main part observed in the writing lessons relied on group work, where teachers asked their students to work in groups to create written texts. One of the teachers (T1) wrote the same topic (question) on papers and put them in envelopes and asked one of the students to play a role of post man and give each group an envelope. Then each group worked on the task that they are required to do (writing about the topic). T1 asked all the groups to write on the topic. Therefore, the written works of all these groups were similar, and when each group was presenting their work, other groups were not so interested in listening to them, as they had almost similar texts.

T2 and T3 on the other hand, taught the same topic and used the same techniques and materials. These two teachers used two techniques in the main part of their lessons. Both teachers showed the students different pictures and asked the students to write sentences explaining each picture. T2 asked the students to work in groups to describe the pictures. T3 on the other hand, asked her students to work individually, to explain the pictures and write the explanation on the board. T3's technique, in my point of view, appeared more effective as it gave a chance for each student to think about the picture and write on the board, while only one or two students in each group, actually, worked in T2's classroom. This of course does not suggest that the group work approach is inappropriate; rather the task and time given to complete it were not appropriate to be accomplished in groups. Asking the students to work in groups without clear rules negates the advantages of the group work.

In the second technique T2 and T3 asked the students to work in groups and they gave a worksheet for each group. These worksheets included some sentences about bad behaviour and good behaviour, and they asked the students to follow these examples to create similar sentences on the topic. Although the two teachers asked the students to work in groups, it appeared that the students worked individually, as each student wrote a sentence without any discussion and collaboration with others. The evidence that I received from the two groups within these two classrooms was that the two teachers and the students did not apply any aspects of the group work, except the physical setting and organising the classroom. The earlier research indicated that classroom practices lead the students to have experience and imagination about teachers' implicit aims (Bennett, et al., 1984). It appeared to me that students in both classrooms relied through experience, that the important thing for their teachers is to have the right answer, regardless who created it or how. Thus, the students in the group work tried to work toward this aim and think quickly to get the right answers.

If the students are keen to achieve teachers' implicit aims, they are more likely to follow teachers' explicit directives. One of the directives of T2 and T3 for the students when working in -groups was to "*work quietly*". This directive might lead the students to work individually in -groups to ensure the quietness, in addition to the right answer. Although quietness is a vital aspect in the classroom environment but, requiring quietness in the groups while working and collaborating is unusual. Teachers need to be careful while giving directives for students and they need to consider that the students need some space to talk and discuss with each other (Dunne & Bennett, 1990).

Unlike these two classrooms, the collaboration among the groups in the T4's classroom was obvious. T4 asked her students to work in groups and to co-operate whilst writing some sentences about different topics (i.e. each group writes about a topic, which is different from others). Then each group presented the work and the teacher discussed the work of each group with the students. I believe that because the writing topics were varied among the groups, this led the groups to be more active when presenting the written texts. This situation was the same with teachers T5, T7 and T8. However, this situation was completely different with T6, who gave the students many activities as the main part of the writing lesson. Students did three different activities within 20 minutes. In the first activity, the students were asked individually to pick up a worksheet, read the question and answer it orally. Then she asked one of the students to summarise the story (the writing topic was summarising a story of a shepherd and a wolf), then she summarised the story and asked the students to listen to her summary. After that, she asked the students to work in groups and each group had to write a summary about one section of the story. These three activities, ended in the same results, and led the students to confusion. They had no idea of what to write at the end of the lesson, as the teacher did not connect the writing topic (composition question) with these activities. I assume that because of her minimum years of experience (two years) she wanted to perform in the observed classroom to satisfy me and the senior teacher, who attended the observed classroom.

On the other hand, T9 applied two activities. The first one was an oral activity in group work. She asked the students to summarise the story (story of a shepherd and a wolf) orally. The second activity was writing. She asked the students to work in groups and write two sentences summarising a section of the story. The important aspect here is that

although the students were asked to summarise only one section of the story, most of them when asked to present their summary they narrated the whole story. This, in my point of view, is a result of: first, the teacher did not identify the section that each group had to summarise. Second, the story was too short to be further summarised by the students. It appeared that the students thought that there was no advantage in summarising only a small part of the short story.

Considering all these activities which took place in the observed classrooms, a question rose regarding why teachers need to apply all these activities? The answer could be to scaffold students' writing. There is no doubt that scaffolding is an important aspect in teaching and learning writing, especially for young writers. Children need to be supported in their writing until they arrive at a point where they can perform at the required level independently without teachers' support (Vygotsky, 1978). Yet, I wanted to find out in which aspect fourth grade teachers were scaffolding students' writing process? From my point of view, the basic aim of teachers' scaffolding in the observed classrooms was to help the students to create accurate written text. This claim was derived from the practices in the observed classrooms and from what was included in the writing curriculum content. Actually, what fourth grade teachers did can be referred to as "feeding rather than "scaffolding", as all activities that took place in the observed classrooms did not utilise different cognitive processes of writing. This is because all topics were specified and limited to particular forms.

Students however, need to go through activities such as, thinking about topics, generating ideas, organising them in an appropriate way and translating these ideas in an accurate

written text. Writing is a social collaborative activity between students and teachers. Some researchers (e.g. Grainger, 2005 and Graves 1983) have mentioned that teachers need to write with their students. This provides the students a motivation and co-operative feeling for writing. In addition, this enable the teachers to understand the processes the writer goes through when writing, which assist them to understand students' needs and provide them with the appropriate support. It is expected then that the teachers will conclude writing lesson by creating a working environment where each student finishes his/her writing and allows peers to give feedback. This will create opportunities for each student to improve his/her writing. Therefore, it is vital to explain how Arabic teachers concluded the writing lesson? This will be discussed in the next section.

6.3.3 Concluding the Lesson:

Most teachers used the same conclusion, which was asking the students to write or to copy the text in their textbooks. However, with four teachers (i.e. T1, T2, T5 and T6) the lesson time had finished before the students finished writing the text. Therefore, these teachers asked their students to write the text at home as homework. The rest of the teachers (T3, T4, T7, T8 and T9) gave themselves extra time to conclude their lessons. They asked the students to write the text before the lesson finished, and they also had some time to correct students' writing. I found that setting aside time at the end of the lesson to correct students' writing was important for both the teacher and the students. For example, while T9 was correcting students' writings she found that there was a linguistic mistake in what was written on the board and the students had copied it from the board without realising it. Therefore, she had a chance to tell her students about it, and correct the mistake. However, from this event, there is evidence that the students accept what their teacher says and does

even if it is wrong. This is because they consider the teachers as examples that they should follow. Although the teachers are considered models for their students, they are in the end human beings and might err. Thus, the students need to be trained to have the confidence that they sometimes can actually be more accurate than their teachers. Therefore, they should be encouraged to discuss some unclear issues in their teachers' speech or work.

In addition, in the concluding stage some teachers such as, T3 and T9 gave their students some writing tasks to be done at home as has been identified in the last chapter. These types of homework might be useful in developing students' writing. Although the topics of the homework were specified, the ideas and the meaning are from the students' thoughts or from their conference.

A general picture that was seen from methods and techniques used in teaching Arabic writing in the observed classrooms can be summarised in the following points: First, most of the work was done in a group work approach. This was not because it is the appropriate way for teaching writing, rather because it is one of the BE system notions and anyhow it should be conducted. Thus, I argue that the group work in the BE schools, especially in the writing lesson almost is superficial rather than practical. All the students in all nine observed classrooms seated in groups and most activities were organised to be done in groups. However, most of the students worked individually, or only one or two students in each group did the work, and the rest of the students sat without any contribution. These are expected consequences due to scarcity in training sessions on teaching methods, especially on the group work approach. Since the 1960s the concept of group work was incorporated in the work of many theorists such as Vygotsky (1962). Many educational

researchers in the US and the UK (e.g. Bennett et al., 1984; Dunne & Bennett, 1990 and Graves, 1983) recommended this approach. However, the group work approach only recently has been introduced to the BE schools. Therefore, further emphasis on this approach is needed.

Second, teachers in the BE schools still have an inadequate understanding of group work concepts and techniques for its implementation. This might be due to the fact that curriculum professionals are unconvinced and do not believe in the importance of group work approach in teaching writing. Therefore, they do not put emphasis on training the teachers on using the group work in the writing lessons. Thus, although both teachers and students mentioned some advantages of group work, they stated many disadvantages of this approach. I believe that before introducing any new approach, policymakers need to think about the people who will apply it in the classroom and the importance of training them properly. The purpose of this is to enable them to teach the students effectively. Yet, unless Arabic curriculum professionals as trainers believe in group work as an effective approach in teaching writing, Arabic teachers cannot receive appropriate training on the group work approach. And accordingly the students will not be able to work collaboratively.

Third, there were many activities in the writing lessons yet, independent activities were few; the teacher led all the activities. The only individual work the students did was to copy the text in their textbooks at the end of the lesson. Each individual student is not given freedom to choose his/her own topic; express his/her own ideas, translate his/her ideas in a meaningful written text and discuss with peers to receive feedback from them.

Researchers (e.g. Graves, 1983), in order to develop students' creativity in writing,

encouraged teachers to provide students with a social and collaborative writing environment in the classroom, where the student receives help from both the teacher and peers. The students therefore, need to be permitted to choose their own topics. This will encourage them to share their writing with their peers and teacher and to reflect on their own development as writers. However, the way of communication in most observed writing classrooms seemed not to differ from the (IRE) interaction pattern that identified by Torrance & Pryor (1998,p44), which consists of 'three parts, starting with the teacher's initiation for the lesson followed by students' responses and then teacher's evaluation'. In most observed classrooms, the students in their group work were quiet and interaction between the group members was infrequent. On the other hand, in the two observed classrooms during the pilot study there were different types of interactions and discussions between the students in the groups. They discussed all aspects related to their written work together before presenting it to other students. This type of interaction was expected to be found in all BE schools. However, surprisingly quietness and individuality was observed in group work in the observed classrooms. This situation may be due to many reasons. The first reason is socio- economic, as the school chosen for the pilot study was located in a high socio- economic city. However, this cannot be a main reason, as two of the observed schools in the main study were also located in high socio- economic cities. Curriculum content could be another reason, but the curriculum content used in the main study was the same as the one used in the pilot study. The third reason could be the teaching methods that were used in teaching writing; yet, teaching methods used in the pilot study were almost similar to these that were used in the main study. Therefore, I argue that the main reason can be attributed to the teachers themselves and how they accustomed their students to

behave in the group work and co-operate with each other in creating the written text together.

It seems that the students in the pilot study were more daring to express their opinion than those in the main study and the relationship between them and their teachers seems to be friendly and encouraging. What I found was that the relationship between the teachers and their students in the main study was “formal” and “dry”. Students were frightened of their teachers and this prevented them from being active, and confident enough to freely express their opinion and work. This situation cannot be due to in- service training and years of teaching experience, basically, because all teachers in the BE schools received the same in-service training and have almost similar years of experience and specialisation. Therefore, I argue that there are many other factors for the students’ activeness in the classroom and their collaborations in group work. However, teachers’ beliefs can be counted as a main reason for how the teachers behave in the classroom. The teachers in the pilot study believed very much, that the students have to do most activities and they just have to guide them. Thus, the teachers behaved according to this belief (student- centred education). Teachers of the main study believed in the same concept, yet they were also convinced that the students have to be controlled. Thus, the opportunities of independent work in most observed classrooms were few. In addition, the two teachers in the pilot study had the ability to develop methods and techniques of teaching writing that made the students active and enjoy group work. Yet, there is no significant evidence to indicate that the teachers of the main study attempted to vary writing activities and techniques to help the students actively interact in group work. However, it is likely that only a few teachers have the ability to develop their teaching skills and processes, especially in Omani schools, where

teachers are exhausted by many tasks and school demands. So it is important to train all the teachers on different strategies and to encourage them to be creative in the teaching processes rather than expecting them to be innovative in developing teaching strategies. If the students were trained to follow the teachers, their practices are expected to reflect teachers' practices and directives, as will be identified in the next section.

Students' practices:

Regarding teaching processes used in the observed writing lessons, several practices appeared. For example, the students in the classroom of T2 were given a writing task and were asked to work in groups to produce a written text. But what happened was that each student wrote a sentence in the worksheet without any discussion and revision of each other's sentences. This, from my point of view, was an expected result of the teacher's directives for the groups. The teacher asked each student in the group to write a sentence independently. She thought that by doing that she would ensure that each student would participate in the group work. However, she did not perceive that she made each student busy thinking about the sentence that he/ she is going to write without giving attention to what other members in the group have written. Despite this, seating the students in groups and directing them to work in quietness is like using a traditional approach with a new appearance. Teacher's directives to the students to remain quiet at work led them work without talking to each other, but at times they used gestures to communicate.

This type of teaching was found clearly with two teachers, T2 and T3. Both teachers were from the same school (S1). Therefore, I thought that this way of teaching might be due to socio- economic factors as school's environment and location influences teachers' practices in the classroom. However, this does not appear to be the only reason, as T1 is also from

the same school and she encouraged her students to work collaboratively. Another reason can be teachers' habituation to traditional instruction methods, as T2 and T3 have long experiences teaching in the GE schools using traditional teaching methods that are based on whole classroom instruction. They appeared to be still employing the old concepts of teaching methods such as working silently, independently and individually, while group work requires talking and discussing with each other. Thus, I argue that it could be easier to prepare new teachers to use new approaches and techniques rather than training the teachers with long experience to change their habitual practice toward new approaches. Since it is impossible to cover all new schools with new teachers, it is necessary for experienced teachers to receive appropriate training in a way that can change their practices, as well as their beliefs toward the new approaches.

The consequences of the way that the students were directed to work in the group work limited the students to merely one manner of discussion, which was teacher to student communication. Communication and the discussions were very rare among the students themselves. In my view, it is difficult to create a generation that can work collaboratively in teams, if their teachers are not capable to properly facilitate group work.

The result of the lack to cooperative skills among the students was that many groups presented wrong answers and uncompleted written texts. It is natural to find that some students that do not master writing skills. However, it is unusual to have a piece of written text produced by a group of students full of mistakes, since the aim of the group work is the collective effort, in which the students help each other and recognise their own strengths and weakness (Bennett et al., 1984, p153).

Perhaps students' talk about what they like and dislike in the classroom practices provides more evidence about the appropriateness of teaching processes that were used in the writing lessons. This will be discussed in the next section.

Students' perspectives:

To understand students' perspectives about teaching processes, they were asked about the observed writing lesson in terms of what they liked and what they disliked. Most students (30) stated that they liked the observed writing lesson, and they gave several reasons for that. For example, P8 stated

"I enjoyed writing lesson because I liked the questioning, the discussion and writing on transparency" (P8).

In addition (P9) mentioned that

"I liked writing lesson because we practiced several activities...we worked in groups and then we read our work" (P9).

From students' statements these aspects could be summarised as reasons of liking writing lessons: working in groups; using a discussion; using various activities; using many teaching resources such as plays, listening to recorded stories; being active and participating in the classroom activities; the writing topics being interesting and having freedom to write by themselves. The students liked the various activities and resources that were used in the observed classrooms. However, some of them mentioned that these activities and resources are not always used. For example P10 explained:

“The students were active and we learnt several aspects about commendable deeds. This lesson differed from other lessons, as the teacher implemented materials she did not use to utilise before. I mean especially in the writing lessons she did not use to bring materials such as overhead projector and transparency. The teacher used to read the writing question and let us write...” (P10)

This statement indicates that some teachers used some additional activities and resources to express themselves in order to please me. Most of them know me as one of the Arabic language curriculum professionals; and in spite of informing them to conduct their lessons as they would in their usual lessons, they acted otherwise. Some teachers might be used to applying writing lessons in a routine fashion without using different activities and resources. Therefore, their students felt the differences between usual lessons and observed lessons.

In addition, the students mentioned other techniques they liked in the writing lessons such as, presenting the work in the classroom and the discussion. These two issues will be discussed and explained later on. Like the teachers, the students also stressed group work as a significant issue that was either liked or disliked in the writing observed classrooms. Although most students stated that they liked the group work approach, some of them identified a number of disadvantages of it. These can be identified from the following table.

Table 6.2 Advantages and disadvantages of group work from students' perspectives:

Issues	Advantages	Examples	Disadvantages	Examples
Role and division of work	It gives opportunity for some high achievers to play leader role.	<i>"In the group work, I ask my friends in the group what ideas they have; if I like their ideas I write them... I have to listen to the ideas from all students in the group then I choose the best sentences and write them down..."</i> (P34).	The competition between same achievement level students creates troubles between them.	<i>"I wanted to write but (x) became angry, he wanted to write. He pulled the pen from me then he wrote"</i> (P22)
Meta-cognitive issues	High achievers help and encourage low achievers. It makes the work easily and faster.	<i>"There was a girl in my group, who didn't know how to read or to write, and she never participates in the classroom, I encouraged her and then she became a high achiever..."</i> (P34). <i>"I like to work in groups because when I work alone the work is difficult and I can't finish, but in groups we co-operate"</i> (P13).	It makes low achievers feel dissatisfied as sometimes high achievers do not help them or sneer at them.	<i>"I asked (x) to help me but she refused"</i> (P9). <i>"There is a boy called (X) he is very weak, he does not understand any thing at all"</i> (P20).

Meta-linguistic issues	It reduces writing mistakes.	<i>“I wrote the text because other students might err in spelling” (P24).</i>	Having different opinion in the same time might create mistakes.	<i>“I like to work alone because other students confuse me” (P19).</i>
Socio-cultural issues	It makes the work done socially.	<i>“When I write alone I feel lonely. Therefore, I like group work more, because if you work by yourself no one helps you” (P11).</i>	It creates selfishness among some students. As they do not like other students to take their ideas without offering any efforts. Working in mixed gender groups opposes some students’ customs	<i>“They take the ideas that I say, they do nothing” (P21)</i> <i>“I don’t know I don’t like to work with girls” (P35)</i>

The previous table reveals that some students liked group work irrespective of their achievement level. This could be for two reasons. First, the low achievers may like group work because it gives them a chance to rely on high achievers and to hide behind them. Alternatively, it provides a possibility for high achievers to dominate the work and play the leadership role in the group.

On the other hand, there are some other students who preferred individual work for many reasons. These reasons differ according to students' achievement level. High achievers for example, do not like group work because they think that other students take their effort without any participation (e.g. P21). They maybe confused by others, which lead them to error (e.g. P19). The low achievers mentioned the lack of help they receive from high achievers as a reason to explain why they do not like the group work approach (e.g.P9). However, they did not attribute their dislike of the group work to the embarrassment they feel when high achievers force them to work. This could be because they were afraid to talk about their weakness. Although this reason was not mentioned by low achievers it was apparent when observing the students working in groups, especially in the classrooms of (T3) and (T5) and it was mentioned by some high achievers (e.g. P20).

The finding of this study, regarding the disadvantages of working in groups, corresponds to other researchers' findings. For example, Gere & Stevens (cited in Cohen 1994, p95) found some incidents of unproductive even hostile verbal exchange in some groups, as students hurried through the group work in a 'robot-like monotone'. However, the group work approach has also many positive results on students' writing development. According to the findings of some researchers (e.g. Herrmann, 1989 and Topping et al., 2000), the group work approach helps apprehensive or blocked writers to become more fluent and can provide audiences that offer feedback that help writers to develop their writing. This though necessitates some support and supervision from the teachers. If some students feel free to talk and respond to the teacher when they work individually, this does not mean that the group work inhibits students' participation in classroom discussion, rather the essence of the problem is that the students were not appropriately taught to work as groups in a

friendly and a free environment.

In addition, it is possible that working as groups help in developing students' work, but if the work needs new knowledge, it is also possible that the group work does not improve it (ibid). Peers can help each other in recalling the inter knowledge but they cannot provide proper support in creating new knowledge, especially in primary stage. In this case, students need an expert to scaffold their work. Otherwise, the work produced in the groups could be inaccurate and weak as the low achievers do not have the ability to write accurately and high achievers reject to be exploited by others (e.g.P21).

It is likely that the group work, as any social activity, if not well organised and supervised by adults, and if the members are not trained to work collaboratively, this will cause several disadvantages. If the students are not well trained to work collaboratively in the group work, the positive aspects may alter to negative aspects. For example, most teachers trained the students to appoint a leader for their group who is mostly one of the high achievers. This leader is responsible to do the writing work as well as presenting the work in the classroom. Some boys refuse to have female leaders and refuse to collaborate with them or even to get help from them. Furthermore, some students (boys and girls) refuse to work in mixed gender group (e.g. P35 and P37). These types of socio-cultural aspects influence the work in the groups. So these aspects should be considered when organising group work activities. This can be achieved by utilising various group work strategies that can assist the students to reduce the social impact on their perspectives and practices. Students must be convinced that group work was created for learning purposes (Cohen, 1994). It was implemented to help the students to learn and to improve their performance, not for other

purposes (e.g. creating friendship between boys and girls), which is unaccepted in the Omani society. Accordingly, the students can behave in a way that helps them to talk and discuss their work with another gender without embarrassment.

Some teachers (e.g.T9) taught their students some concepts that encouraged them to cooperate with each other, such as 'sinking or swimming together' (Johnson, 1999). However, it seems that the teachers did not teach them how to apply this concept practically and effectively. Students need to know that any success or failure of the work means success or failure of each member in the group and practice this concept.

Some students think that they can finish the work quickly in group work because they cooperate with each other, but actually in most cases the work finishes quickly because high achievers do the whole work. The classroom observation indicated that the group, which tried to collaborate to do the work, took longer time to finish the work than that was taken in the group that high achievers dominate the work. Nevertheless, dominating the work by high achievers benefits some low achievers, as they do not have to put any effort in the group. They just take the ready-made work and copy it in their notebooks. Therefore, it is likely that the low achievers think that the work is easier when it is done in a group, while high achievers think that the work is easier if it is done individually; as they do not need the help of others.

Another issue related to the group work is reduction of writing mistakes that might occur in the individual work. Yet the question that comes to the mind is that, does the group work reduce low achievers' mistakes or does it just reduce the mistakes of the work that is done in the group? It seemed to me that working in groups reduces the writing mistakes in the

work that is done in the group, as it mostly is written by one of high achievers, so the possibility in having mistakes is little. This will not, in any way, help low achievers to reduce their writing mistakes since they are passive. Each student in the group needs to be encouraged to participate in the group work, regardless of whether he/she makes mistakes as other students in the group can help in revising the work and reducing the mistakes. Yet, this requires the allocation of enough time for the groups to think, discuss, help each other and encourage each other to participate in the work.

An important issue in the group work that needs to be mentioned here is that although some teachers ask all groups to work on the same topic, all students stressed that they prefer a variety of topics, so that each group can write a different topic from the other groups. The students mentioned many reasons for this; for example P19 explained:

“If we write similar things there is no benefit. We will not benefit because all groups write about the same thing, so we will not gain any thing... but if each group writes about different topic, we can learn about many topics, and all students benefit from that” (P19).

It appears that the students are keen on writing about different topics in group work, because this makes them active and create competition between them. However, when the students talked about writing about different topics they did not mean having a variety of topics to write about. It is just splitting the writing task up into some ideas or sections and asking each group to write about particular section. Then the teacher chooses from each group a sentence to be written on the board, which at the end makes a complete paragraph about the main topic to be copied by the students. This, to some extent, makes each group feel that their written contributions are different from other groups. However, the disliked

practice for them is when the teacher demands all groups to write about the same idea. This makes the students bored from the repetition, especially when each group presents the work.

So once again, it is a question of how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools? Group work and peers' feedback might not be appropriate to the way that Arabic writing is taught in the BE. This is because the students are restricted on particular topics included in students' textbooks and linked with reading subjects. What the students do during the group work is recalling the same ideas and information that they have already learnt in the reading lessons. This approach to writing does not stimulate students' higher thinking abilities in generating new ideas and writing in appropriate ways. Students need to be granted freedom to choose their own topics, to think about new ideas, to share and discuss their writing and ideas with peers. Proper group work and collaborative learning can help to achieve these aims.

I believe that, before asking the students to work in groups the teachers need to be trained how to apply the group work approach effectively. Teachers are the most important people who are acquainted with students' needs, backgrounds, and abilities. Therefore, if they understand group work concepts, advantages and drawbacks, they can adapt group work in a way that complements their students, in order to develop their students' writing abilities. Yet, how can the students be trained effectively to work and collaborate, if the teachers themselves were not trained appropriately to apply group work approaches? Some Arabic curriculum professionals, who are responsible of teachers training, believe that the group work approach is not appropriate for teaching and learning writing.

Regarding the teaching processes used in the observed writing lessons, there is an important aspect that needs to be discussed. This aspect is about asking the students at the end of the writing lesson to copy the text from the board. Although this is an easy way to complete the writing task, there is no approval among the students about it. Some students stated that they do not like copying from the board, while some stated that they prefer to copy the text from the board. The surprising issue is that the students, who do not like to copy from the board, think that by writing the text from their memory, will give them the freedom in writing. Actually, the students are not creating the text by themselves, but instead of copying it, they transcribe it from their memory, and they think that this is challenging work, which low achievers cannot do. This means that the fourth grade students in the BE schools have a very narrow understanding of freedom in writing and it is just limited to transcribing the text from the memory.

One of the high achievers, who did not like to copy the text from the board stated:

“The student can write by his own, he can says “teacher excuse me I want to replace this sentence with another”. The teacher doesn’t mind, which means that she gives every one his freedom in writing” (P34).

This is from a student whose teacher at the end of the lesson asked the students to copy from the board. P34 did not copy the text from the board, rather she wrote it from her memory. Therefore, she thought that any student can have freedom to write from his/her memory. This means that the maximum freedom the fourth graders have in writing lessons is writing the discussed and the identified text from their memory, rather than copying it from the board. However, the freedom in writing, according to researchers, (e.g. Graves, 1983 and Hart, 1996) is a freedom in choosing writing topics, creating new ideas, choosing

the form of writing that the students enjoy creating.

The type of freedom that is given in the Omani schools, in my point of view, does not develop students' creativity in writing, rather it measure students' comprehension and writing accuracy, while the students need to be given a chance to have extensive opportunities for freedom in writing. They need freedom that helps them to think, generate new ideas and express themselves, as well as to share their writing with peers and discuss it with their teacher. This cannot be done if the students are limited to particular topics and forms of writing, but more over it cannot be done if the students recognise that at the end of the lesson they are going to copy the text from the board. If teaching processes did not give the students a confidence to identify their ideas, and create their own text, ultimately they will be forbidden from writing freely. This will likely influence their creativity in writing (Gallimore & Tharp, 1992), as will be identified in the next section.

Students' written texts:

Because most teachers adopted teaching processes that, depended on asking the students to copy the written text from the board at the end of the lesson; all collected texts from each classroom were similar. Rarely can one see differences between the collected texts from each classroom; as some students preferred writing the text from the memory rather than copying it from the board. Therefore, the difference between the copied texts and those that were written from memory is mainly in the sentence structure, rather than in the content.

On the other hand, students, who did not get enough time to copy from the board, wrote uncompleted texts with many mistakes. In the classroom of (T1) for example, the students did not have time to copy from the board. Therefore, when I asked the teacher to collect the

written texts of the four students, who I focused on in the observed lesson, she did not find any written text from any of the four students. Thus, she asked one of high achievers to write the texts instead of the four students. When I checked the texts I found the same handwriting and sentences in all four texts. I asked the teacher to let the students know that I focused on the observed writing lesson and they had to write the texts by themselves. The surprising issue was that when I analysed the four students' written texts I found that three texts of P1, P2, and P4 were uncompleted and full of spelling mistakes. This means that the students were not able to write by themselves without copying from the board. In order to strengthen my claim, the free written texts of these four students were analysed and the findings confirmed this claim, as only one student (P3) wrote a complete and correct text.

All the students in the classroom of T2 completed their written texts and there was no spelling mistake in their writing. This is not because the students are used to write by themselves; but this is because the writing task was easy, as it just required writing three sentences about requesting other people to do good behaviour and avoid bad behaviour. In addition, most sentences were written on the board so that students could copy them. However, this might not be strong evidence to indicate that the students cannot write by themselves, as most students in this classroom wrote in their free writing completed texts with minimum mistakes. This can be argued on that the written texts of these four students were about same topic, which is (sport). Although the students wrote about different aspects of sport, it seemed that they prepared the texts at home, which did not help to identify their writing abilities.

In contrast, the students in the classroom of T3, who were taught the same topic that was

taught in the classroom of T2 and went through similar teaching processes, wrote uncompleted written texts. This was because the teacher did not write the text on the board. Only high achievers (P10 and P12) produced correct written texts. Students' free writing had strengthened this claim as, again only (P10 and P12) produced complete texts, while the other two students (P9 and P11) produced unconvincing written texts, which was full of spelling and grammatical mistakes. In addition, these texts lacked complete ideas and meaning.

Students' writings in all observed writing classrooms reflected similar situation. Namely that, in the classrooms, where the teachers write the text on the board, most students' writings were complete and accurate, while in the classrooms, where the teachers did not adopt this approach, students' written texts were incomplete and inaccurate. The conclusion that I arrived at according to the evidence derived from students' written texts, was that, in spite of all instructional strategies and activities that the teachers applied in the writing lessons, the students were not able to transcribe the text by themselves, at the end of the lessons, as they used to copy the text from the board.

Teachers did not only use various activities, but they also used different teaching resources to support their writing processes, and to help the students in their writing as will be identified in the following section.

6.4 Teaching and Learning Resources:

Teaching and learning resources are strongly related to teaching processes and the practices in the classroom (Washtell, 1998). Therefore, it was important to explore what teaching

resources the teachers adopted in the writing classroom. Some researchers such as Riley & Reedy (2000) mentioned resources as one of fundamental aspect in teaching writing. They identified many types relevant to be included in the writing classrooms such as stories, samples of formal and informal letters, pens, and papers. So were the resources that were used in the Arabic writing classrooms similar to what has been mentioned in the literature, or there were different teaching resources? In addition, what do both the teachers and the students think about these resources?

According to data collected from the classroom observation, all nine studied classrooms included some basic resources such as students' textbooks, board and pictures. However, some of teachers also used other different resources, such as overhead projectors and transparencies. The following table indicates some common and uncommon resources that were used by teachers in the observed classrooms.

Table 6.3 Common and uncommon resources used in the observed classrooms and mentioned by teachers in the interviews

Types of resources	Resources	Examples
Common materials	The board	All the nine observed teachers used the board either to write the text on, or to let the students write on it. T7 for example, relied completely on the board *
	Student's textbook	Student's textbook was used at the end of the lesson. All teachers asked the students at the end of the lesson to write the text in their textbooks. Only one teacher (T5) used the textbooks to read the reading text from it besides writing the text in it.
	Pictures	Six teachers used pictures in their lessons for different purposes. For example, three of them used pictures in the introduction phase to help the students to identify the writing topic. Other three teachers used pictures in the main phase of the lesson to identify writing ideas and to create some useful sentences.
Uncommon materials	Transparencies and overhead projectors	Three teachers used overhead projector. T2 and T3 used this tool in presenting students' writing (group written work), while T9 used it to present a picture related to the writing topic.
	Plays	Three teachers used plays in their writing lessons. T1 used the play in her introduction part for the lesson. T5 and T6 used it in the end of the lesson.
	Listening to stories	T4 and T6 used recorded stories to let the students to listen to it. Both of them used it in the introduction phase to give the students additional information about the topic.

Resources mentioned by teachers in the interviews.	Books, journals and stories	In the interview most teachers mentioned different resources for teaching writing. For example, T8 mentioned books, journals and stories as vital resources in teaching writing. she explained: <i>“Also we can use transparencies, different types of pictures, Textbooks themselves are considered as resources, also stories, books journals and newspapers” (T8).</i>
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*T7 stated in the interview that she desired using other resources Thus, the only reason of relying on the board in her classroom could be referred to the disproportion for the lesson.

From the previous table it is clear that there is a variety of resources that were used in the writing classroom. The resources ranged between common resources, which were used by most teachers, uncommon resources, which were used by few teachers and resources that were not found in all observed classrooms but were mentioned by some teachers in their interviews. The board was the main equipment for all nine teachers, which might be the case for most teachers around the world. According to my experience as a teacher and as a member in the Ministry of Education, I envision a writing classroom as a picture of a student with paper writing down his/her ideas, or I visualize it as a beehive, where students work together; discussing their ideas and sharing their writing with others, in order to have feedback from their teacher and peers. In both cases the board might be used for brainstorming when students think about their ideas. However, as has been mentioned in the table (6.3), in most observed classroom the board was the main tool that was used by all teachers in different stages in their teaching processes.

The student’s textbook was the second resource that was used in all observed classrooms. The main purpose of using this resource was to write or to copy the text in it. This is

because the student's textbook included all skills and activities that students should learn. I believe that the Arabic language curriculum professionals, when adopting this policy, aimed to integrate all Arabic language skills and activities in one resource. This could be a useful policy in a way that allows the students to see the language as integrated set of skills, and processes as each process helps another. However, the misinterpretation of the language integration concept or what is called 'whole language philosophy', which was recommended by many theorists (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Halliday, 1975 and Vygotsky 1978), limited the students in only one resource of knowledge and information. In addition to this, it also limits students' writing to half a page or six lines. Students are not given the freedom to express, and write their ideas in the way they want and as much as they can.

Pictures on the other hand, are the third resource that was used in the writing classrooms. However, I mentioned earlier that, it was used in a narrow manner. Only one teacher in the pilot study used drawing pictures in developing students' thinking, imagination and writing. Vygotsky (1978) in his learning process theory, considered drawing as one of the stages that the child goes through in his writing development. This theory was supported by research findings. For example, in his in-depth case study Hart (1996) found that one of his case studies went through many stages starting with drawing until she arrived at a stage, where she became able to produce meaningful and creative writing. Thus, pictures can be utilised by the teachers not only to motivate students to the lesson, but also to break the routine of teaching by offering more attractive methods to develop students' imagination and writing.

Whatever, the resources were used in the writing classrooms, the teachers should be aware

of the fact that any resource or equipment will add to learning process, if they only used in appropriate ways. Sometimes these resources waste teachers' time without assisting the students in their learning. In contrast it might be used to brainstorm and motivate students' writing as well, as to help students obtain different feedback from their teachers and peers. However, from what I have observed from the activities in the classrooms of T5 and T6 for example, was that play was not necessary for the lesson. Therefore, T5 forgot to do the play in the appropriate time. Unfortunately, most teachers, who have visitors in their classrooms attempt to employ different resources, even though they are not essential for the lesson and do not add value for students' learning. It actually might cause confusion for the students, as the occurrence with T6, who employed a play at the end of the lesson, which took about 10 minutes. Yet, it seemed that it was not necessary and the teacher could have utilised this time by helping the students to write the text. None of the students in this classroom wrote that text in the lesson, rather all of them wrote the texts after the lesson. All of those texts were incomplete and unrelated to the demands of the topic.

One of the teachers mentioned in the interview that, although she did not use several resources in the observed lessons, she used to apply various types of resources in writing classrooms such as books, journals and stories. Books and stories according to researchers (e.g. Riley & Reedy, 2000) are vital resources in teaching and learning writing. However, they were not included in any of observed classrooms, and were only mentioned by one teacher. It is possible that these types of resources are rarely used in the Arabic writing lessons in the Omani schools.

From my point of view, it seems that the teachers understanding of the importance of

resources for teaching and learning is theoretical rather than practical. This was apparent in their interviews, as many of them mentioned various advantages of using different resources in the writing classrooms. For example, T1 mentioned that:

“We use the resources to motivate the students and direct their attention to the lesson. Resources attract the students to the lesson, unlike the routine lesson.... I used one resource, which was a picture and it encouraged the students to be alert and attentive and it might develop imagination and thinking habits. It also identified the topic and the ideas easily and clearly” (T1).

T4 in addition, mentioned that:

“Pictures and flash cards for example, assist students, who need some help; it provides them with new vocabulary and synonyms, that will stay in their mind for a long time and help them to compose easily” (T4).

From these two statements, I summarised the advantages of using different resources as following: It transfers writing lessons from boring routine lessons to an interesting active lesson; it facilitates thinking and imagination ability among students; it encourages students to be alert and active; it clarifies writing topics easily; it helps students retain information; it transfers abstract ideas to be concrete ideas, which helps students to write about it and it helps low achievers to comprehend easily.

No one can deny the benefit of using different resources in developing students' abilities in writing. However, the resources that were used in teaching Arabic writing are little and most of them were not utilised to develop students' abilities in writing, as has been identified earlier. All the resources that were used in the observed classroom could create independent students, who can work with some guidance and encouragement from the

teachers. However, it seemed that most teachers in the BE schools like to dominate the work and thus, limit student's roles to be a mere listener and copier. In the next section, more details regarding teachers' roles in the writing classroom will be discussed from different angles. Before discussing teachers' roles in the writing classroom, it might be useful to mention that there is an overlap between teachers' roles and processes they used in their practices. Thus, some concepts, which were previously mentioned in the teaching processes section, will also appear in the next section.

6.5 Teachers' Role in the Writing Classroom:

The literature in education reveals that the term student- centred education was first invented by western educators in the early nineties (Goodman & Goodman, 1992). However, there are still some attempts to link this concept with effective teaching, especially with teachers' roles in the classroom (ibid). There have been tremendous advancements relating to the Omani educational system in an attempt to catch up with educational development in the world. Therefore, the Omani educators adopted this concept and applied it in the BE schools in the 1998. Student- centred education became one main concept of teaching and learning processes in the BE schools, as opposed to teacher-centred education. This means that teachers' roles in the classroom should be changed from controller and dominator to guide and coach. Teachers are required to be mediators between students and learning by supporting learning processes not by controlling and interfering with students' learning. In addition, teachers should support students in pursuit of knowledge by creating various activities and learning environment in their classrooms. In other words, being a coach and a guide means helping students to solve problems rather than giving them a solution. This means that teachers should empower

students by valuing what students know, what they can do, but mostly by appreciating their work. This accordingly requires teachers in the BE schools to be trained on new roles to achieve the goals of student- centred education, such as, creating students, who are able to learn with little support and guide from teachers.

Writing is considered by researchers (e.g. Czerniewska, 1992) as a learning process more than a teaching process. The teacher's role in this case is supposed to be supportive and flexible. Teachers must encourage students, and support their writing by providing them with the appropriate environment for writing, and guiding them through writing process (Hyland, 2002).

This study regarding teaching and learning Arabic writing is a case study that needed to be explored from different angles. Therefore, it was not enough to observe the types of roles the teachers play in the writing classroom; rather it was vital to explore teachers' roles in the writing classroom from different perspectives (i.e. curriculum professionals, teachers and students).

Curriculum professionals' perspectives:

Curriculum professionals mentioned that the concepts of the BE have changed teachers' roles from merely promoters of knowledge to be guides, coaches and inspirers. In addition, they stated that Arabic language teachers should be exemplars for students in terms of using formal Arabic when speaking to their students. Curriculum professionals expect the Arabic teacher to be moderator who can produce creative writers. CP1 for example, stated:

“The teacher plays many roles: she is a guide, advisor and a model that students follow. Therefore, she should consider using formal Arabic when teaching written composition” (CP1).

From CP1’s statement it is clear that using standard Arabic is one of basic aspects that the teachers have to consider when teaching writing. This might be for couple of reasons. First, most teachers use different dialects from formal Arabic that is used in writing. Second, the teachers are the most influential people for the students. Therefore, the students might follow the language used by the teacher. So if teachers do not use formal Arabic when they teach, the students will not learn how to use the formal Arabic in their written language. Using formal Arabic is a major problem in the Omani schools, especially in Arabic language lessons, where students have to learn how to speak, to read and to write using formal Arabic fluently. The written language in Oman is different from everyday dialects, in terms of vocabulary and grammar and spelling, as it was identified in chapter two. The evidence from research conducted in Oman indicated that the prevalence of different Arabic dialects and non-Arabic languages have had a significant influence on students’ achievement in learning the Arabic language, especially writing (AL-Gattami, 1995 and Al- Kalbani, 1997). Therefore, it was recommended that the students should be trained to use formal Arabic when speaking in the Arabic language classroom. In addition, the teachers are required to use formal Arabic when teaching, so the students are accustomed to the formal Arabic, which they are required to use in their writing (Ministry of Education, 2000).

However, limiting the students to the formal Arabic, when writing, means restricting them

to a particular type of writing that is focused on linguistic aspects and this might control their ability in writing. Therefore, students' experiences and social background need to be incorporated in their writing, and inadvertently from these written texts students can learn some linguistic aspects. This is because the evidence from research suggests that, the lack in linguistic skills affects students' writing abilities (Hart, 1996).

The CP1 also mentioned other roles that the teachers are supposed to play in the writing classroom, such as guides and advisors. In my point of view, CP1 meant expressing these roles to explain that the teachers should get rid of the traditional roles of being promoter of knowledge. Teachers should guide the students for the knowledge and help them to learn by themselves. This view was also expressed by CP3 who stated:

“What I wanted to say is that the teacher is the mediator who can take student's hand and make him a creative person... She can encourage creative students to present their writing in school broadcast, journals and activities” (P3).

By comparing between curriculum professionals' perspectives about teachers' roles and how they designed the writing curriculum, some contradictions appears between their perspectives and the curriculum content and directives, that they provided the teachers with. How can we expect the teachers to encourage creativity in students' writing, while the curriculum that the teachers implement does not include any features of creative writing? Naturally, the teachers will not do more than what they are required to do, especially if they are not encouraged to implement additional activities. This is because many teachers believe that curriculum professionals have the expertise to determine what the students need.

It seems that curriculum professionals recognise, theoretically, what students require, and what the teachers should do, but practically they failed to interpret these theories to suitable curriculum and content. Thus, I argue, that what the curriculum professionals stated were their desires rather than the reality. This is because the types of roles, which were mentioned by CPs rarely, appeared in the writing classrooms. This is not because the teachers do not want to play these types of roles, but because the writing curriculum does not include roles such as guides and innovators of creative writing. On the other hand, counting the teachers as exemplars is a vital role in the Omani context, where the students, especially young students believe in their teachers more than they believe in their parents. The students think that their teachers cannot go wrong and therefore, they follow them blindly both in their deeds and in their words. This argument was supported by what was observed in the writing classrooms, which was explained in the last chapter, regarding teachers' failure in perceiving students' writing mistakes. More evidences in terms of the teacher's roles in the writing classroom will be discussed in the next section.

Teachers' practices and perspectives:

Surprisingly when teachers were asked about the roles they play in the writing classroom, they mentioned the same theoretical notions, which I argue, are memorised by every one works in the BE system. Most teachers mentioned a students- centred education as a concept that they rely on. Accordingly, the teachers mentioned many roles they act in the light of the BE concepts. Nevertheless, what the teachers did in the classroom is different from the roles they mentioned in the interviews. The following table indicates some roles as were mentioned by the teachers and as were observed in the classroom.

Table 6.4 Teachers' roles in the writing classrooms according to teachers' perspectives and their practices:

Main Roles	Sub roles	Teachers' perspectives	Teachers' practices
Questioning	-	-	This role was recorded among all teachers in their practices.
Guiding	Following the groups and directing them	<i>"I was passing through the groups to follow their work and help them if they need help"</i> (T6)	Seven teachers in the observed classrooms were crossing the groups following their work.
	Providing students with learning resources	-	Some teachers provided their students with pictures or flash cards, which help them to write. This was observed in classrooms of T2, T3 and T5.
	Listening to the students and discussing with them their ideas.	<i>"Teacher's role is to discuss with the students, see their ideas and listen to the student. The main role is done by students, and the teacher only directs and guides"</i> (T2)	Some teachers provided the groups with feedback and asked other students to provide their peers with comments and feedback for their work. This type of guidance was observed in the classrooms of T2, T8 and T9.
	Guiding the students to the correct writing	<i>"I guide them to see, if they started wrong I direct them, I tell them that this answer is incorrect and try again"</i> (T7)	-
Encouraging	Encouraging students' work	<i>"I encourage the students by the scores or by pleasing card and sometimes, I give them presents"</i> (T5)	All the nine studied teachers encouraged their students. Giving the good group, which wrote correct answers, had neat handwriting, and little spelling mistakes high scores was the common type of encouragement among all teachers.

	Encouraging creative writing	<i>“We encourage the students; as there are some superior students we present their works in school journals, and some of them participate in the story writing competition... We help them if they have problems in spelling, punctuation; we encourage them to come to us when they need any help” (T2).</i>	-
Assessing	Correcting students’ writing Enhancing students’ performance	<i>“ I also mark students’ writing and see the mistakes they make to solve them” (T9) “I reinforce groups’ work. The group that does not consider accuracy in writing; I mark down its level from A to B. Any person that does not get reinforcement feels that his work is not useful and feels disappointed” (T8).</i>	Assessing students’ writing was one of the major roles that all the teachers played in the observed classroom. Some teachers’ such as T4 and T8 made the group work as a competition among the groups.

From the table above we can see that there were some differences between the roles that were mentioned in the interviews and that were recorded in the classroom observation. Four different types of roles emerged from the data collected from the classroom observation and teachers’ interviews. Most roles that were mentioned by teachers were observed in the writing classrooms except one role that is encouraging the students to participate in schools journals and broadcast. This is because only one writing lesson of each teacher was observed, and so I was not able to see the additional activities that the teachers adopt outside writing classrooms. However, some of the teachers have mentioned some extra activities they employ to develop students writing. Although this study has some limitations in observing writing classroom, the data collected from interviewing teachers and the students enriched the findings of this study.

Regarding the questioning role, although all teachers played this role in all observed classroom, it was limited to one manner of questioning that was similar to what was described by Torrance & Pryor (1998). This is based on three sequential parts of talk starting with initiating the topic by the teacher followed by students' response then teachers' evaluation. (P44). In all observed classrooms, the questioning among the students was rare. It appeared to me that the teachers were not confident about their students; therefore, instead of being mediators, they still played the roles of intervention and domination (Goodman & Goodman, 1992). This could be due to the fact that the teachers want to finish the lesson in the determined time. Thus, if they give a chance for the students to interfere in the questioning process this might waste the lesson time, so they will not be able to complete the lesson in the allocated time. However, I believe that if the teachers organised their lesson in an appropriate way, they will facilitate the questioning process to create a social interaction between the students with each other and the teacher with the students.

Guiding the students is one of the roles that the teachers were required to play for effective teaching in the writing classroom (McAnish, 1992). In this study guiding students took several approaches. The most significant of these approaches was following the groups during their work. However, in analysing this approach it was evident that the teachers were merely practicing a routine procedure. Consequently, the students were doing what they had been accustomed to doing oblivious to the teacher's guidance. In other words, in spite of teachers' passing through groups, there were still some students who hid behind other students and were only watching what other students were doing. Vygotsky (1978) has mentioned that the teacher in the learning situation needs to appear in the role of

mediator guiding and supporting the students, but not controlling them. The teacher therefore, needs to give each group some time to hear what they are saying, and how they are collaborating with each other, in order to see what problems they have and guide them to solutions (Tudge, 1992).

Teachers also need to encourage the students and motivate them to produce better work. Psychologists (e.g. Stanovich, 1992) mention that reinforcement helps students to develop positive self-esteem. Encouragement in addition, could enhance students' ability (Abou-Hatab, 1996) and accordingly might generate creative writers. Lack of encouragement on the other hand, makes the students abhor writing lessons. The teachers in the observed classrooms diversified the forms of reinforcement (i.e. by words, gifts and scores) in order to encourage the students and to activate them.

Assessing students' writing on the other hand, was considered by researchers (e.g. Hyland, 2002) as a significant tool for the teacher to discover students' strengths and weaknesses as writers. Yet, in the Omani schools, according to the evidence derived from classroom observation, assessment in writing is used only to measure students' ability in transcribing. The teachers in their interviews mentioned different roles, as well as they played various roles in their practices. However, most of them played these roles inappropriately. In spite of that, it seemed from what they were saying that they realise the importance of these roles. They mentioned many reasons to explain why teachers play different roles in the writing classroom. Although these reasons appeared logical and similar among all teachers, there were some surprising reasons, which need explanation. T5 explained some of these reasons, she stated:

“Why should the teacher feed the students every thing? Why should she do every thing? Where is student’s freedom? Why do we have to restrain his capacities, especially in these days, when the student became open minded by being exposed to technology, and the Internet. The student sometimes can have better ideas than that the teacher has. Sometimes a child’s comprehension is broader and does not require spoon feeding from the teacher. Students only need to be encouraged then they will feel that they want to give more; if we as adults feel like this (referring to encouragement), so you can just imagine what child feels like” (T5).

This teacher has identified reasons why the teacher should not be only a prompter of knowledge; rather she should be a guide to knowledge by helping students to search for it, and by encouraging them in their learning process. From the last statement, these two following reasons can be derived: the effect of new technology on students’ way of learning and thinking, as well as encouragement makes students more active and creative, and without encouragement students might be disappointed. The evidence from the classroom practices revealed that although teachers encouraged their students, they are still controllers of the whole learning process. This therefore, will not create independent students.

It is likely that teachers’ directives will control students’ movement in the classroom; just as curriculum professionals’ directives control teachers’ behaviours. Some teachers gave allusions to support this claim. For example, some of the teachers stated that they do these roles not because it is important for students, but because they were ordered to do so. Two teachers (i.e.T4 and T9) gave this reason, one of them explained:

“The student in the BE schools is the centre of educational process. The student talks,

works and explains; I just guide and advise him because we need the learning process to be self-learning; this is what they emphasised for us in the BE” (T4).

This teacher, as I mentioned earlier, has teaching experiences in another country. Therefore, when she stated this statement, it can be assumed, that she wanted to express her situation; that she is not doing these things out of her personal connection, rather she is ordered to do so. This can be found in her words *"this is what they (i.e. curriculum professionals) emphasised for us in the BE).*

The problem in the BE schools is that the teachers are not allowed to do or add any thing to the teaching process prior to taking permission from supervisors and curriculum professionals. Therefore, they are always afraid of applying innovative ideas, or even saying any thing without explanation. It seems that the teachers are still not aware of how to applying many concepts of the BE system because they were not trained properly. In addition, the teacher’s guidebook that is provided for teachers does not contain innovative instructional suggestions.

Another point that needs to be mentioned here is that when the teachers were asked why they passed through the students while they were working, all the teachers mentioned that they do so to help the students if they need help. Only one of them (T9), who was a senior teacher in school (S4) mentioned that:

“For me, for example, I follow the groups in their work to make sure that none of the students is distracted or absentminded; they will consider that teacher's passing through the groups mean that she will catch them if they are found distracted. This makes them alert, so there is no opportunity for any one of them to be absentminded” (T9).

T9 plays a similar role envisaged by the old traditional role of supervisors, who are keen on catching teachers' mistakes in the classroom more than guiding and advising them. T9 according to her view, as well as her practices moves around the groups not to help the students, rather to catch absentminded students. This issue accordingly influenced her students who seemed to be afraid of her. Although teachers should encourage all the students to participate in the group work, they should do it in a way that encourages all students to work, but not by making them afraid of teacher's movement between the groups.

Teacher's roles in the classroom, according to teachers' perspectives depend on factors such as: students' achievement level and teachers' habitual behaviours. Students' achievement level has a major impact on the various roles that teachers play in the different classrooms. This is true in practices, as from my own experience as a teacher in preparatory and secondary schools, I had taught the same lesson in different modes in different classrooms. Although the teacher might plan and prepare the lesson in one way, students' levels and the learning situation in different context control her strategies and practices. She, sometimes, needs to use particular techniques to suit students' needs and levels. Therefore, one can see that, the same teacher plays different roles, such as guiding encouraging, advising and discussing in one classroom, and merely relays on presentations in teaching the same topic in another classroom, according to students' level. T1 explained this point:

“Certainly, teacher's roles differ from one classroom to another according to students' levels. For example, I can teach the same topic in classroom (4/5) differently than teaching

it in classroom (4/2) depending on students' level" (T1).

Teachers are required to abide by particular roles and strategies. However, applying the same strategy and applying the same roles with all students may cause ignorance for some students, so they will be left behind. Therefore, changing the roles according to students' level is an aspect that should be considered by both teachers and curriculum professionals.

Teachers' habitual behaviours also influence the teachers' roles in the classroom. Teachers are sometimes required to play particular roles in the classroom; however it is difficult for them to get rid of their habits and traditional manners of teaching. This factor was mentioned by a senior teacher, who is responsible of supervising Arabic teachers in the school. This allows her to observe how the teachers act in different lessons, and she described her views on this aspect:

"I comeback and say all this depends on the teacher. There are some teachers who prefer the ease. Therefore, they write the text on the board and the students copy it. This makes correcting students' writing easier. There are other teachers who emphasis the necessity that students should write by themselves, so they can identify their abilities and achievement level" (T9).

Although T9 criticised the teachers who like the routine work and write the text on the board, it was interesting to note that she was also amongst the teachers who wrote the text on the board and asked the students to copy it. On the other hand, there are some teachers, who promoted discussion in the classroom. They guided the students to learn by themselves with some guidance and advice from them. Some teachers alternatively, preferred to feed the knowledge, which is easier and faster for the purpose of finishing all

lessons in a particular time. Sinclair & Coulthard (1982) have argued that what students say is controlled and structured by teacher's moves (cited in Torrance & Pryor, 1998, p44). This led me to argue that it is possible that teachers' roles might affect students' practices in the classroom, as will be explained in the next section.

Students' practices:

Classroom observation indicated how teachers' roles in the classroom have an effect on students' practices and behaviours. Some examples of these practices will be described in the following points.

In the classrooms of T2 and T3, the students were very quiet sitting in groups and were required to work in groups, but they worked individually. This is because both teachers asked the students to work quietly. This issue has already been explained before, in the group work section. On the other hand, in the classroom of T7 the students were guided to answer in complete sentences. This approach had a significant influence on students' practices. Students in this classroom considered answering questions in complete sentences (i.e. that includes all sentences basic elements noun, verb and its supplements), and not just in one single word as most students do. Therefore, when they were discussing the work produced in group together, they were keen on writing the answer in complete sentences, even though some questions could be answered in only one word. For instance the group that I focused on during the observation was asked to work on this topic:

What are the other names of Oryx (Almaha)? Students could have written two words, (i.e. *Bin-Sawla and Alwedaihy*) but when they started to write the answer, they were keen to write:

Almaha has two other names, it is called Bin-Sawla and Alwedaihy.

The students not only used complete sentences in their writing but also in their oral answers. By using this technique, T7 tries to help the student to use a standard Arabic when talking and writing. However, I believe that although this strategy could be useful, it has not been used appropriately in the observed classroom. This is because the answers to the questions 'that were asked by the teacher were taken from a reading text. Thus, what the students were doing was just reciting reading text, rather than structuring new sentences. Since the teacher's guidance has an influence on students' behaviours, teachers should utilise this by guiding the students to think, talk and create different texts using their own words and sentences (Freire, 1970 cited in Goodman & Goodman, 1992), instead of recalling what is included in the reading textbook.

The two last examples helped to identify how teachers' roles in the classroom have influenced students' practices. However, more evidence in this aspect can be derived from what has been stated by students in their interviews.

Students' perspectives:

To identify the influence of teachers' roles on students, they were asked to describe how the teacher helps them in their writing. Students identified various roles that the teachers do to help them in their writing. These roles were presented according to their frequency.

Correcting students' writing in terms of spelling, for example, mentioned by most students, one of them stated:

"The teacher tells us how to spell the letters to know how to write, so we do not have mistakes and get high scores" (P5).

Guiding the students in terms of handwriting was the second role was stressed by students, which appear in the following statement:

“The teacher helps us and teaches us how to write in neat handwriting, she taught us from first grade how to write then we learnt how to write” (P7).

Encouraging the students in their writing was another role of Arabic language teachers according to the students as the following excerpt suggest,

“She encourages high achievers. She gives them gifts and encourages them during the school broadcast. If a student’s notebook is very neat she shows it to all students, and she says: be like this student” (P3).

Guiding and encouraging the group work was the last role of Arabic teacher as was mentioned by students, as appears in the following statement.

“Teacher X (T8) helps us and asks us to co-operate, so that the group does not drown” (P31).

From the last four roles that were suggested by the students, it seems that teacher’s guidance in transcriptional aspects: spelling and handwriting, was the vital role that the teacher plays in the writing classroom from students’ point of view. This, as explained earlier, is due to the attention that the teacher gives to correcting writing mistakes and neat handwriting, as opposed to other aspects such as ideas and meaning. It is expected then that the students will see the teacher as a “spelling and handwriting corrector” as none of the students mentioned teachers’ role in guiding them in the area of compositional aspects and creative writing. This takes us again to the issue of how students understand writing;

namely what they believe about what writing is. Most students considered writing as accuracy in transcribing and neat handwriting.

Comparing between teachers' perspectives about their role as a guide and students' views, it can be seen that the students were more specific in their views. The teachers mentioned that they guide the students in their writing in a general way, but the students specified the type of guidance that they get from the teachers, which focuses more on transcriptional aspects.

In addition, the students were more specific in identifying the way that the teachers encourage them in their writing. The statement of P3 presented earlier explains one of the useful techniques that her teacher (T1) uses to encourage the students in their writing. Showing the students some examples of neat notebooks of high achievers is the technique adopted by this teacher. By using this strategy, the teacher on one hand, reinforces high achievers and, on the other hand, motivates other students to write neatly. However, there is still a limitation on the teachers' encouragement and enhancement; as they focused merely on handwriting and spelling. There is no evidence that was found from teachers' and students' practices and perspectives to indicate that teachers guided and encouraged the students for creative writing. Only one teacher mentioned that one of her students got a high status in a story competition across Muscat schools. However, this is rare, as it is only applies to one or two gifted students, who has a talent for this out of the whole school. This type of encouragement is also limited on schools' competition rather than on everyday practices in the writing classrooms. Therefore, none of the thirty seven observed students mentioned any aspect about teachers' encouragement in creative writing.

Guiding the group work is another role that was mentioned by both the students and the teachers. Students have mentioned one of the concept that group work was based on which is “swim together or drown” this concept was heard and recorded only by two teachers T8 and T9, who are from the same school (S4). Therefore, some of the students who are from school (S4) mentioned this concept. It seems that the other seven teachers do not use the same concept with their students. However, as has been discussed earlier in the group work section, that although the teachers guide the students orally to work as groups the students still lack training on working collaboratively. Thus, it is not a matter of mentioning or not mentioning the group work concepts, rather it is a matter of how these concepts are applied and activated in the classroom.

Students’ work therefore, does not reflect more than what the teachers do in the classroom. Three students for example, who are from different classrooms and different schools, explained how the teacher helps them in their writing. One of them explained:

“She helps us, she writes and we copy after her in our textbooks” (P8)

Therefore, students’ writing reflected this particular role of the teacher. The key aspect, that the teacher’s roles influence students’ writing, is in encouraging neat handwriting and correct spelling, as well as assessing students’ writing in terms of the two previous aspects.

6.6 Conclusion:

This chapter has highlighted some issues relating to writing pedagogy, (i.e. stages of writing pedagogy in fourth grade, individual work and group work); teaching processes

(i.e. introduction to the lesson, main part of the lesson and concluding the lesson); teaching resources and teachers' roles in the writing classrooms. To specify, it was mentioned in the last chapter that the main focus of writing lessons in the fourth grade is on helping students to produce accurate and neat texts. This is because curriculum professionals believe that fourth grade students who are in the age ranged of 9-10 years cannot do more than recalling and rewriting the same ideas of reading texts. Therefore, they have instructed the teachers to adopt a particular writing pedagogy based on specific steps. By doing this, curriculum professionals instructed both the teachers and the students to apply a very narrow function of writing. Thus, they are creating a limitation in the students' and teachers' concept about writing. Limiting students' understanding of writing to merely a transcribing tool and hindering other functions of writing.

Many researchers (Graham, 2001; Gutierrez, 1994 and Hart, 1996) considered writing as a socio-cultural need. Both the teachers and the students need to be instructed in their classroom practices and guided in their perspectives to consider writing as a creative and social activity that help the students to deal with life. However, this cannot be completed unless the writing curriculum content is changed in a way that considers writing according to its functions. Writing is a communicative medium and is used for different purposes and audiences in various social contexts (Czerniewska, 1992). This is opposed to seeing writing only, as a mode of learning (Emig, 1977) that represents knowledge and develops students' understanding of particular topic (Pinsent, 1998). Accordingly, teaching processes, teaching resources and teachers' roles in the writing classroom need to be directed toward these aims.

New writing pedagogy, the group work approach, several teaching processes and learning resources were mentioned by curriculum professionals, teachers and students, and were also implemented by teachers in the writing classrooms. However, all of these teaching processes and teaching and learning resources were used in a very narrow manner. This is because the writing curriculum aims are limited on enabling students to transcribe rather than to compose. Arabic writing curriculum aims and foundations and what teachers think about the writing curriculum and the BE policy are other themes that emerged in this case study. All these issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Teaching and Learning Arabic Writing- Successes and Limitations

7.1 Introduction:

I identified themes related to knowledge for writing and writing pedagogy and teaching processes in the last two chapters. This chapter presents data sets related to the Arabic writing curriculum of the BE schools; its aims, foundations, successes and limitations. In addition, it highlights some factors that appear to influence writing pedagogy in the BE schools, such as the assessment system and teaching resources and the in-service training programmes.

The first section of this chapter includes the basic information about the Arabic writing curriculum of fourth grade in the BE schools according to curriculum professionals' perspectives. I included the data related to the writing curriculum in this chapter to help in interpreting some findings presented in the last two chapters and in developing the conclusion of this thesis. One might argue that if this study aims to investigate how Arabic writing is taught, it should focus on observing the practices in the writing classroom. However, I mentioned in the methodology chapter that this study adopted a case study approach. Thus, it was essential to explore the case of teaching and learning Arabic writing in the fourth grade in the BE schools in Oman from different angles. Moreover, I believe that discussing general information about the writing curriculum will help to give a clearer picture about how Arabic writing is taught, and this might support, or contradict the data obtained from classroom practices and participants' perspectives. This is because; at the end, the teachers are interpreters of the curriculum and the students are receivers of the

curriculum. However, some of teachers are keen on adding what suits their students, as discussed in the last two chapters. Therefore, it is possible that presenting the writing curriculum aims and foundations at this stage will offer a support to a reasonable interpretation and explanation of some findings related to this recent case study of the teaching and learning of Arabic writing at fourth grade in the BE schools.

Any new curriculum is likely to have some beneficial aspects along with some shortcomings (Poteet, 1992). Thus, it was important to identify both these aspects of the writing curriculum in order to come up with recommendations to overcome the shortcomings. The second section of this chapter deals with aspects related to the Arabic writing curriculum in terms of successes and limitations. It deals with the curriculum in its narrow definition, as a project that includes aims to be achieved, methods and activities employed to achieve the goals and evaluation methods and instruments to assess the success of the project (IBE & UNESCO, 2001) in addition, it deals with the curriculum in its wide definition as a set of courses and instructional experiences offered to students inside or outside the classroom (Poteet, 1992). Namely, this chapter will identify the successes and limitations in the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in terms of curriculum content; teaching processes, teachers' training; assessment system. Moreover, it will include other aspects that influence the teaching and learning of Arabic writing such as school activities.

One might ask if this study aims to evaluate the Arabic writing curriculum. The answer will be no, namely because this study is an explorative study that aims to explore and understand how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools. However, I believed that in

order to explore and to understand how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools, it is not enough to only observe the practices and ask the participants about their practices. This is especially relevant in the Omani schools, where the teachers and the students are restricted to the curriculum. So it was important to explore teachers' perspectives about the successes and limitations of the writing curriculum that they deal with. In addition, to this, teachers' views on the limitation of the writing curriculum were discussed with curriculum professionals in order to get a deeper and wider insight about the main question of this study which is:

How Arabic writing is taught to fourth grade students in the BE schools in Oman, and how does this influences their writing?

7.2 Writing Curriculum Aims and Foundations:

The four curriculum professionals, who participated in this study, are responsible for developing the fourth grade writing curriculum and training Arabic language teachers. Therefore, they were the only ones who were addressed regarding curriculum aims and foundations. They appeared to be the only participants, who could provide accurate and detailed information about Arabic writing curriculum aims and foundations.

7.2.1 Writing Curriculum Aims:

Curriculum aims assist in the selection and implementation of the content material and activities. Therefore, it was important to explore what Arabic writing curriculum professionals aimed to achieve from the writing curriculum of fourth grade. The major aims of the writing curriculum of fourth grade can be found in this statement.

“Certainly, the first thing we aim from the writing curriculum was to enable the students to

write a complete and connected text, to write accurately considering punctuation and spelling (CP1).

According to CP1, enabling the students to write continuous prose with an impetus to the accuracy in terms of spelling, punctuation and handwriting is the key aim of the writing curriculum. In this statement, there is a link between compositional and transcriptional aspects which is normal for any writing task (Graham & Kelly, 1998). However, which one has to be given priority is an arguable issue

In the statement of CP1, it is clear that the compositional aspects were placed at the head, while transcribing and accuracy were put as a second aspect of writing. In contrast, CP3 explained:

The thing that we focus on is that the student should write eight lines without linguistic mistakes” (CP3).

In this statement, it seems that the emphasis was on the transcriptional aspect as the reference is to achieve a certain amount of accurate prose. This can be deduced from the way that CP3 has presented his view, which gives an impression that accuracy is more important in students’ writings at this stage. Although CP1 in her statement gave accuracy only secondary importance for writing, all curriculum professionals have given priority to transcribing. In addition, by looking into the curriculum content most writing lessons do not require more than writing some sentences about different topics with consideration to writing accuracy. Thus, I argue that according to curriculum professionals’ perspectives as well as from curriculum content the key aim of the writing curriculum of the fourth grade was to enable the students to write accurately. It is derived from more than one source of

evidence, and is likely to be stronger than that which is taken from one source which is CP1's perspective.

Limiting the curriculum aims to transcriptional aspects has a significant influence on classroom practices, the knowledge was emphasised in the writing lessons and accordingly on students' understanding of writing. On one hand, it led teachers to focus their practices on enabling the students to transcribe accurately and neatly. On the other hand, teachers' emphasis when assessing students' writing focused on transcriptional aspects. This accordingly, led the students to understand writing as recalling some sentences that they had memorised from reading text and writing them down in the paper.

Another aim underlined by curriculum professionals is included in this statement.

“The aim of this curriculum is linking the reading text with the writing task in order to expand students' vocabulary” (CP2).

To teach the students how to apply the new vocabulary in their writing was the second aim mentioned by the curriculum professionals. In this statement, there is an explicit link between reading and writing. However, it was evident from the above statement of CP2 that the aim of linking reading with writing is to help the students to apply the new vocabulary that was studied in reading lessons into writing. This means that reading was not used to provide the students with different forms of language that would assist them to structure their written texts. It is suggested in the genre theory in teaching writing, as Kress (1994) stated that ‘genres and textual forms include specific and ideological contents, which are important for learning writing skills’ (Kress, 1994).

In the writing lesson in the BE schools the students are required to write on particular topics related to the reading text using the same vocabulary and sentences included in the reading text. Although reading texts represent various types of genres, the students are not required to create similar type of genre, rather they are asked to write some sentences and lines that are usually answers in response to question or request from the writing lesson. The major goal of linking writing with reading is to ensure students' comprehension of the reading text, and to ensuring accuracy in their writing. Thus, the students do not benefit from the reading text to develop their imagination and creativity to produce similar genres.

Students need some vocabulary and phrases that would scaffold their writing. It is important to consider, that each student comes to school with a variety of experiences; from a particular socio- cultural background and that should be utilised in the writing classrooms (Bunting, 1998 in Graham & Kelly, 1998 and Hill, et al., 2002). Limiting the students to particular vocabulary and sentences may help them to spell accurately some vocabulary and memorise a number of phrases, but it is unlikely to teach them how to write for different purposes. This issue probably will affect students' ability in writing, as has been identified in chapter six. The students were restricted to particular types of writing. Therefore, they failed to write other forms of writing when they were required to write free- writing texts.

Another CP mentioned an additional aim, which links between oral and written composition, he stated:

“It is important for the students to be able to talk at least for three minutes using standard Arabic, while in writing, the students should be able to write at least eight lines without any

linguistic mistakes” (CP3).

Several Arabic and English researchers (e.g. Al Kalbani; 1997; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Kress, 1994; Madkour, 2000 and Wilkinson, 1986a) have mentioned that oral composition based on a discussion assists in developing students’ writing abilities. Through discussion students’ brainstorm and their information about the writing topic is widened. In addition, they are provided with some feedback about their writing (McAnish, 1992). Therefore, it is vital to link oral composition with written composition, as part of the writing curriculum aims.

However, the statement of CP3 included two separate aims; one related to speaking and the second related to writing. It seems that, CP3 intended to separate the two aims, as Arabic language curriculum developed to achieve the two aims separately: enabling students to speak fluently, using the standard Arabic, in addition, to providing students with writing skills. In other words, speaking, as one of the major skills of Arabic language, has given attention in the first three grades (1-3). There are separate lessons to train the students to speak fluently by providing them with some pictures and asking them to talk about them. Yet in the grades (4- 10), speaking is not separated from other skills rather it is included in all Arabic language lessons, even though accuracy in speaking is still one of the main aims of Arabic language.

Researchers such as Al Kalbani (1997) mentioned that the lack of oral composition led to difficulties in written composition among the students. This is especially, true in the Omani context, where the students come from diverse backgrounds and use different languages other than Arabic language. In addition, many of them speak different dialects, while they

are required to use a formal Arabic language in their writing.

However, as we viewed in the last chapter, the oral composition (discussion) in the writing lessons is not implemented in a manner that supports the students in their writings. This is because although the students use standard Arabic when discussing the writing topics, they are required to talk about the same topic of the reading text. Thus, they more or less, repeat the reading text, rather than talk about wider ideas, or their own ideas. Most sentences and words used in the oral composition are taken from reading texts, rather than created from the students' wider knowledge and background. The formal Arabic in Oman differs from the dialects that are used in everyday communication (in terms of vocabulary and grammatical aspects). Therefore, I believe, that the students need to be given opportunities to discuss and talk about a wider range of genres used in the society, such as formal and informal letters, greeting cards, shopping lists and reports. This will then allow utilising their dialects in generating ideas and creating various genres. Writing should not be only for schooling purposes, but it should also be for communicating with the society (Wilkinson, 1986 a).

To sum up, the three previous aims, which were mentioned by curriculum professionals (i.e. enabling the students to write a continuous prose with an impetus to the accuracy in terms of spelling, punctuation and handwriting; teaching the students to apply the new vocabulary in their writing and linking oral and written composition) seem to be general. There are no specific aims for the fourth grade writing curriculum to guide the teachers to focus on particular topics and forms of writing. Not only the limitation appears to be in the generalisation of the writing aims, but also appears in limiting the teachers to particular

content to teach, without any space to choose what suit their students. The formal limitations imposed the teachers on teaching particular content.

Curriculum aims in addition, are dependent on the foundations that the curriculum professionals based on when developing the writing curriculum. Therefore, it was important to identify the foundations that the Arabic writing curriculum of fourth grade is based on.

7.2.2 Writing Curriculum Foundations:

In general, curriculum development is based on theoretical, educational, and psychological foundations. Therefore, it was vital to understand the foundations that the writing curriculum is based on. In this study curriculum professionals were asked about the foundations that they adopted when developing the writing curriculum. They mentioned different foundations. For example, CP2 stated that:

“The first foundation we considered was students’ age and their inclinations in terms of topics they like to write about, and linking the writing topics with reading texts in order to provide students with vocabulary to allow them to speak and write” (CP2).

In addition, CP3 mentioned that:

“We first focus on functional composition, which means applying the linguistic aspects in writing. This is an important matter...I mean to apply the linguistic aspects in writing, as well as to apply writing for life” (CP3).

From the above two quotes, many foundations can be identified:

First, considering students’ age and their needs was one foundation that was mentioned by

all CPs. It is an essential concept that should be considered when developing the curriculum of any subject. Students' age and needs are vital factors that influence teaching and learning processes. Therefore, several researchers and theorists, such as Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky recommended applying appropriate teaching strategies such as teaching by playing when teaching children (see Goodman & Goodman, 1992). Nevertheless, neither students' age nor their needs are considered when the writing curriculum was developed, as already discussed in chapter five.

Second, linking writing with reading was another foundation of the writing curriculum that mentioned by curriculum professionals. Linking writing with reading is an important aspect that was stressed by researchers. Collins (1992,p45) for example, mentioned that, 'the more children read, the more their writing reflects wider horizons'. Curriculum professionals in Oman acknowledged that the two activities (reading and writing) reinforce each other. However, they did not apply this concept appropriately. I believe that when curriculum professionals linked writing topics with reading texts, they thought that they were assisting the students in their writing. However, I argue, that limiting the students to writing some sentences about reading texts restricted the students in several ways: their creativity; their imagination; their vocabulary, their ideas, as well as their accuracy.

Third, focusing on functional composition was another foundation mentioned by curriculum professionals. CP3 stated a couple of ways that they were utilised to apply functional composition. The first way was connecting linguistic aspects with writing task. I believe that curriculum professionals thought that by utilising writing lessons to train students on some of linguistic aspects (grammatical and spelling aspects) that they were

applying the concept of functional writing. However, I argue, that what students do in the writing classroom are grammatical drills, rather than functional writing. This is because the students are not required to apply grammatical aspects in their own writing rather they apply them in some sentences that are derived from the reading texts. Therefore, most students made many writing mistakes when they were required to write their own texts. Many researchers, such as Graves (1983); Kress (1994) and Vygotsky (1978) concluded in their research that teaching writing as a mechanical skill could not create writers, because written language is not just about writing of letters and words. Therefore, the recommended approach was teaching writing for life.

CP3 stated that another way of applying the concept of functional writing was by linking writing topics with students' life. This concept, as I mentioned earlier, is a key concept of teaching writing, as recommended by many researchers (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978, Graves, 1983 and Kress, 1994). Nevertheless, the evidence from classroom observation, teachers' and students' interviews indicated that, all writing topics are not related to students' life. Writing topics were more linked with grammatical aspects and reading that aims to provide students with knowledge and information.

To sum up, all previously stated foundations are vital aspects for any writing curriculum, especially considering students' needs and linking writing topics with students' life (Kos & Maslowski, 2001). Nevertheless, by looking at the writing curriculum documents (i.e. students' textbooks and teacher's guidebook) we can see that, there is no concern regarding "students' needs" and no "link between writing and students' life". Specifically, by looking at the writing topics in the writing curriculum (see chapter two) they are neither related to

students' needs nor to their life. Most topics appear to be informative topics related to Islamic morals and national and social issues. The teachers and the students supported this claim about lack of connection between curriculum topics and students' needs. This has been identified in chapter five. Limiting the students' to narrow topics and granting few opportunities for writing leads to a limitation in students' abilities in writing and their understanding of writing (Al- Hashmami, 1995; Castleton, 2004 and Grainger, 2005).

In addition, to teachers' and students' perspectives about writing topics, some of curriculum professionals supported this issue, as one of them explained:

“Practically, relating writing topics with students' inclinations and needs was not considered extremely vital. However, linking reading with writing was considered extremely important, as students are provided with vocabulary that helps them to speak and write” (CP4).

The comparison between the three statements of CP2, CP3 and CP4 reveals a contradiction in the curriculum professionals' perspectives about the curriculum foundations. Theoretically, all of them are aware of the key foundations for the writing curriculum. Only some of them confessed that the curriculum lacked clear foundations, and that some foundations were implemented in a narrow manner. The contradiction in curriculum professionals' views concerning writing curriculum foundations indicates that there is no agreement among curriculum professionals about the teaching of Arabic writing in the BE schools. Therefore, I claim, that there are no clear and concrete aims and foundations for the writing curriculum in a way that is obvious for all people who are dealing with the curriculum. This accordingly, led to a vague understanding of writing, and this was exemplified by teachers' and students' ability to differentiate between composition and

transcription.

The limitation in the curriculum foundations is likely to lead to a drawback in the knowledge and forms of writing that are emphasised in writing classrooms as well, as in classroom practices. This is because the knowledge that is emphasised in the writing curriculum and forms of writing that are included is supposed to be selected and introduced according to curriculum aims and foundations. If there are no clear and warranted aims and foundations of the writing curriculum, neither teacher nor students will understand what writing means, how it should be taught and learnt, what should be considered as composition and what should be considered as transcription? Thus, the Arabic writing curriculum needs to be reformed in a way that writing aims and foundations are clear for those involved with the writing curriculum. In addition, curriculum content should address students' needs and inclinations, as well as teaching writing for life. In the next section other issues related to curriculum successes and limitations will be identified.

7.3 Arabic Writing Curriculum Successes and Limitations:

Unlike the last two chapters, where the discussion on any theme started with curriculum professionals and ended with students, the discussion of this theme will start with a discussion on teachers' perspectives and end with curriculum professionals perspectives for two main reasons. First, most aspects that were mentioned by the teachers as limitations in the writing curriculum were later discussed with the curriculum professionals in order to explore their explanations and interpretations of teachers' views. As curriculum professionals are responsible at teachers' training and curriculum development. Thus, it was better to see what teachers stated and then what curriculum professionals thought about each issue was mentioned by the teachers. Second, students' views on the curriculum will

not appear in this chapter because they were not asked explicitly about their views on the curriculum directly. However, students' implicit views about the curriculum can be found in the last two chapters. The students were asked about the observed lessons and the forms of writing they are required to write and what they actually like to write.

7.3.1 Curriculum successes:

Considering the definition of curriculum, as the whole experiences that students go through in the school. The curriculum not only means students' textbook, rather it includes aims, content, teaching strategies, teaching, learning resources and assessment methods. Therefore, when teachers were asked about what they think about the curriculum, they mentioned many aspects, that they thought were successful facets in the writing curriculum. These aspects can be summarised in three aspects: curriculum content, the group work approach and teaching resources.

Curriculum content was the first aspect that was mentioned by the teachers, as a successful aspect in the writing curriculum. They mentioned that the topics that were included in the curriculum were important for students' life. Namely, they teach the students some vital concepts such as morals and values. In addition, linking writing topics with reading text helps the students to write accurately and to develop their writing skills. In this point of view T2 stated that:

“What are included in the curriculum are appropriate topics that help to develop students' values and morals. In addition, the new curriculum familiarises the students with writing topics better than the old curriculum does” (T2).

This was a surprising statement since most teachers in their interviews, especially when

talking about writing forms stated that one of the writing curriculum's drawbacks is the limitation in varying writing topics and forms. However, it seems that T2 in the first section of her statement was not talking about how curriculum content was appropriate in developing students' writing abilities; rather she was talking about instilling principles and values in the students. On the other hand, in the second section she stressed that the curriculum familiarises the students with composition. This claim probably is true, but in a very narrow way. I mentioned in chapter five when talking about knowledge for writing and forms of writing that all writing topics were linked with reading topics, so all that students do is based on explanatory and comprehension writing, rather than composition.

Familiarising the students with composition, according to various studies (Wilkinson, 1986 a, b and Kress, 1994) can be done by providing various genres and written texts for the students. This enables them to be familiar with the forms of writing and the language that is used in each form which could help them to develop their imagination, and shape their writing (Hill, et al., 2002). However, in this study, it was evidenced that the common orientation among the teachers is the keenness to enable the students to write accurately, and the curriculum approach helps them to achieve this aim. This, on the other hand, could mean that the fourth grade teachers have a narrow definition or understanding of composition. They called what I have identified as "explanatory and comprehension writing", written composition. Yet, one cannot blame the teachers for this narrow or inaccurate understanding of composition as they were trained and guided to follow this understanding through teachers' in-service training and teacher's guidebook.

The second aspect that was mentioned by most teachers, as one of successful aspects in the

BE curriculum is the group work approach. The teachers mentioned many reasons for success of group work approaches such as: helping the students to work together, assisting each other, and helping to focus on the low achievers. All these aspects were identified in the last chapter.

Teaching resources was the third aspect that the teachers mentioned as successful part in the BE curriculum. For example, T3 explained that:

“Various teaching and learning resources are now available; while in the past preparing teaching resources was totally teacher’s responsibility. Now there are audio-visual resources. In addition, the teacher can create some resources by herself according to the lesson’s requirements” (T3).

Although T3 thought that these resources in the BE schools are appropriate, some teachers in contrary (e.g. T5) thought that these are still not enough. It seems that T3 was talking about the resources in general, while, T5 focused specifically on the resources for teaching writing, which, I believe, are rare. Even the audio- visual resources that exist in the BE schools such as videos, tape recorders and computers, as well as books are rarely utilised for developing students’ writing. Although one can argue that if these resources are available in the schools, the fault lays with the teacher for not utilising them and not with the limitation of the curriculum. However, I claim that, neglecting these resources in the writing classroom might be the teachers’ fault, but it is also one of curriculum drawbacks. This is for a couple of reasons: first, the Learning Resource Centres in the BE schools are always occupied and the teachers have a minimal chance to use the centre. Second, as I mentioned earlier, most teachers usually follow the directives that are given in the teacher’s

guidebook. Thus, if there are no directives to use the resource centre to apply particular lessons, they will not use it. In reality many teachers tend to apply curriculum directives, rather than innovating new methods. This could be one of the writing curriculum's drawbacks, yet it is not the only limitation of the BE curriculum, as the teachers mentioned many drawbacks which will be identified in the next section.

7.3.2 Curriculum Limitations:

The curriculum drawbacks that were mentioned by the teachers can be summarised in the following three aspects. Curriculum content also was the first area that mentioned by all the nine teachers, as one of the writing curriculum limitation. Although five teachers, as was identified in the last section, mentioned that the content of the curriculum is appropriate for fourth graders, all nine teachers mentioned that the content is inappropriate. I have explained earlier that the contradiction in teachers' views in terms of curriculum content might be because the teachers talked about the issue from different points of view. In the beginning, the teachers talked about the content in terms of the morals and values included in reading topics. Yet, when they talked about the content in terms of the variety in the writing topics and form, their views changed, and they mentioned different limitations in terms of curriculum content.

The teachers explained that the students are required to write the text in their textbooks, and this does not provide them with any flexibility to write as much as they want rather, it regulates students' writing to limited number of lines (i.e. five to six). T5 stated some issues related to the content of the writing curriculum:

“I think the curriculum has limitations in many aspects. First, look at the form of the

writing textbooks; they (i.e. curriculum professionals) limited the writing to some specified lines, which are difficult to write in. In addition, they limited the students to write a number of bounded lines, in order to control their writing. Sometimes the students may need to write long sentences; Moreover, all writing lessons are just based on one form of writing, which is writing five sentences or writing four sentences”(T5).

In addition, teachers explained that the curriculum content lacks the variety of writing forms, such as story, letter, and report.

“It is very limited, there is no variation. Other forms of writing like writing fiction stories, letters to a friend or card, which are important to deal with the reality of life, were neglected. We want to teach the student writing, to enable him to use it in his life to express his feelings, sensations, or to serve him by writing a letter, or card. Yet, these aspects unfortunately, do not exist in the curriculum.” (T8).

The teachers also mentioned that the curriculum content does not prepare the students to write for life; it does not help the students to express their needs and feelings. T7 for example stated:

“There should be allocated time between the lessons for free writing, where the student can choose the topic that he wants. This will help him to talk about everyday life and the reality he goes through.” (T7).

Furthermore, the teachers argued that most writing topics are abstract and not related to students’ needs and interests. T9 explained that:

“The entire curriculum almost includes “dry and boring” topics about police, army co-operative society. Where are the summarising stories and writings about adventures or

individual events that, the student go through? The curriculum lacks fictional aspect, dialogue and composing about pictures. They (curriculum professionals) deal with fourth grade students as older students, and they do not know that they are still in the childhood stage.” (T1).

In addition, according to the teachers, the curriculum content does not encourage reading, which is a basic resource for writing. T5 mentioned:

“There is no encouragement for reading, which is the most important thing in life and the crucial resource for writing. Students without reading cannot write or compose but if they read, they can create some new ideas. Unfortunately, the teacher is restricted to comply with the curriculum.” (T5).

According to the teachers, curriculum content also limits students’ imagination and thinking ability. One of them explained:

“It is not appropriate because it does not develop students’ imagination. There is no creativity; it is just like memorizing reading texts and rewriting them. Developing students’ thinking and imagination is important, because the students have a wide imagination. However, by this curriculum they limit students’ thinking and imagination.” (T9).

In addition, the teachers mentioned that the curriculum content is not able to produce creative writers, as there are no free writing lessons. In this point of view T4 stated:

“Fourth grade curriculum actually cannot produce creative writers. How can we create creative writers if there is no chance for free writing lessons and freedom in writing?” (T4)

Furthermore, the teachers stated that there is no gradual progression in curriculum units, as all of them are abstract and inflexible. T6 for example mentioned:

“There is no gradual sequence in the curriculum content, there are some topics which are difficult for fourth grade students and there are some topics that the students do not know anything about, such as historical topics. Yet, there are some topics such as stories that have not been included in the writing curriculum.” (T6).

The teachers also stated that there are some writing activities, which were included in the curriculum. However, there is not enough time to apply them in the classroom, which makes these activities useless. The following script explains this view.

“Actually due to the limitation in time we cannot adopt extra activities that could develop students' writing abilities.” (T4).

Finally, they mentioned that there is no writing unit which connects writing with drawing.

T5 stated:

“From my experience I think that students like to write about pictures but our curriculum does not include such things.” (T5).

All the limitations of the writing curriculum content that were stated by teachers indicated that curriculum professionals were keen on teaching first cycle students the basic skills of writing; namely transcribing skills, such as spelling, handwriting and punctuation. To ensure first cycle students obtain basic skills of writing, led curriculum professionals to ignore students' abilities, their experiences, backgrounds and needs. They limited students' writing on very narrow types of writing. The curriculum limited the students on some grammatical drills and routine and repeated exercises. This limitation in the curriculum

destroyed the sense of creativity and discovery, which are basic features of childhood (Abou- Hatab, 1995).

In addition, the limitation in the writing curriculum might affect high achievers and low achievers differently. In high achievers it might prevent their creativity. However, the limitation in the curriculum might affect low achievers in two ways. In addition to preventing their creativity, it will also limit their attainment of transcriptional skills. Hence, they will end up with little experiences, knowledge and skills. This is because the curriculum does not build and develop on their experiences and knowledge. On the other hand, they were not taught appropriately to gain new skills and knowledge. I believe that teaching the students the basic skills of the language does not suggest limiting them to these skills and hindering them from useful skills, such as discovery and creativity. In addition, basic skills and linguistic knowledge are taught in separate lessons and then can be developed functionally through students' writing and through enjoyable topics and exercises that attract young students such as playing, drawing and discovery which are recommended by many researchers and theorists (e.g. Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1977 and Vygotsky, 1978).

Furthermore, the limitation in the curriculum content influenced teaching methods in several ways. First, as most writing topics are related to reading and the aim of writing lessons is to ensure students' comprehension of reading, this hindered the students from going through different key processes of writing, such as planning for writing, generating new ideas, discussing the ideas and getting feedback from peers. This is because the types of writing that the students create do not require more than memorizing and understanding

the reading texts. I believe that this approach of teaching writing influenced curriculum professionals and teachers' perspectives about the advantages of the group work approach in teaching writing. Although many researchers, such as (Cobine, 1995 and Graves, 1983) have recommended group work as a beneficial approach in teaching and learning writing especially journal writing and exchanging letters and cards, the majority of curriculum professionals and teachers believed that group work is not the appropriate approach for teaching writing.

I mentioned earlier that the curriculum, in its broad definition, as whole experiences that students go through in school includes different elements, such as content, teaching processes and assessment methods. Teaching methods and the teachers' training programs was the second aspect that was mentioned by the teachers, as one of the BE curriculum inadequacies. Four teachers mentioned several aspects of curriculum limitations in terms of teaching methods and teachers' training such as:

There is no variety in teaching writing methods. T5 explained this issue:

"We are restricted to particular teaching methods. I like to vary my teaching methods, I have tried many times to create new approaches, but I do not know what to do further."

(T5).

The teachers have neither proper nor enough training in teaching methods. T8 said that:

"Regarding teaching approaches, we did not receive proper or enough training. We created some approaches by ourselves." (T8).

Some teachers tend to adopt an easy way of teaching, such as writing the text on the board

and asking the students to copy it without teaching them how to write by themselves. This view appeared in the following script:

“Because there are no appropriate teaching methods, some teachers tend to use easy teaching methods. They write the texts on the board and ask the students to copy it; they do not encourage the students to write by themselves.” (T8).

The teachers are required to finish the content in a limited time, which pressurises them and makes them rush. T9 explained that as a following:

“As we are obligated to finish the curriculum within a particular time this leads to some shortcomings in specific aspects. The lesson time does not allow us to cover the three levels of students; high achievers can write; the middle level students can collaborate but the low achievers are ignored. However, I am forced to finish all lessons. If I give attention to all the students, I will run out of time and lessons will accumulate (T9).

Sometimes the teachers are afraid of using new teaching techniques, as it may cause problems for them with the supervisors. This issue also mentioned by T9:

“To be honest, I am afraid to prepare new teaching approaches, as the supervisors might object to it. They might ask who told you to do that” (T9).

Although all teachers mentioned the previous aspects, T9 elaborated on explaining the shortcomings in the teaching methods and in-service training. This might be because T9 is a senior teacher, which means that she is closer to the curriculum professionals, and the supervisors. In spite of that, she felt that she could not perform to develop teaching methods, as she mentioned:

“I am not terrified but I do not want to put myself in a questioning situation. I mean I am a

senior teacher if I did this thing the rest of the teachers will follow me, and this could be considered as an incitement. Of course, I am aware about students' needs, but there are concrete steps we have to follow in teaching writing. This is from the in- service training workshop. When they (i.e. curriculum professionals) conducted the workshops they told us that the teaching writing steps are so and so” (T9).

So if the perspective of the senior teacher on the training programme is negative, so what will be the perspective of other teachers? I would expect that they would be more controlled by the senior teachers' and the supervisors' directives. It is likely to have this situation, especially since all the teachers in the Omani schools are compelled to abide by curriculum directives even if they are not appropriate for their students.

I argue what was mentioned by teachers, regarding the shortcomings in teaching methods, is due to the limitation in the writing topics and forms. The included writing topics and forms do not give enough opportunities for teachers to vary their teaching methods. This is because all what teachers aim to achieve is to enable students to write some separate accurate sentences, most of which are derived from reading texts. I believe that the dullness and routine in teaching writing methods might be reduced if writing topics and forms were varied.

In addition, most teachers that were included in the main study appeared not to have enough motivation to create additional activities for writing, as they restricted themselves to the curriculum regardless of its limitations. Although there are some teachers, who were more creative and innovative, the majority of the teachers tended to restrict themselves to

the curriculum.

Directing and encouraging the teachers to be creative in their teaching could be one of the solutions to the problem. However, without an obvious document and directives about what and how writing should be taught, most teachers will not put in additional effort to develop their teaching strategies. This requires a variation in the writing curriculum content and teaching methods. This, I believe, is one of appropriate ways that might guide the teachers to be innovative in teaching writing.

Even if the teachers tended to be innovative in coming up with some new activities and teaching strategies, they might face rejection from supervisors who restrict themselves to curriculum directives. Curriculum professionals give some directives for supervisors to be flexible with teachers and give them some freedom to create new activities and strategies. Yet, it seems that the supervisors themselves are still tending to the traditional approaches of teaching. Therefore, reforming by adopting creative and innovative instructional strategies appears to be a responsibility, and a risk they are unable to bear without permission from the curriculum professionals.

Hence, the curriculum professionals, who are responsible of developing Arabic language curriculum and training teachers, are still restricting themselves to the traditional teaching methods. This led to further drawbacks and limitations in teaching and learning Arabic writing. So there is a critical need to improve teaching and learning of Arabic writing, by making bold decisions to adopt innovative strategies in teaching and learning writing. The curriculum also needs to be based on practical research that depends on educational and psychological theories.

Assessment was one of the areas that were reformed to match the new curriculum aims and foundations. As I mentioned in chapter two that in the BE system the students of first cycle (grade one to four) are transferred automatically, without exams, to the next cycle, even if they are very low achievers, who cannot deal, and adapt the requirements of the second cycle. Three teachers mentioned this issue, and identified some assessment aspects that they thought are not appropriate for the students, which are:

Assessment system does not create any competition among the students. There are no exams or scores to distinguish high achievers from low achievers; as in the end of the year all students pass to the next stage. In this view T2 stated:

“Students are usually competing for scores but now there are no scores which means that there is no competition” (T2).

It leads families to be careless about their children’s learning progress, as all students pass without any exams, for example T5 mentioned that:

“I was teaching in the GE school, where some parents come to the school and protested about their children's achievement levels. However, now there is no measure to distinguish one student from another, as there are just some symbols that the parents cannot comprehend” (T5).

It is possible that mentioning assessment as one of the curriculum limitation by only three teachers does not necessarily mean that other teachers do not have the same point of view about it. However, I believe that most teachers focused on the curriculum content, as they were not asked particularly about the assessment aspect; rather they were asked about the curriculum. Thus, I argue that most teachers have the narrow definition of the curriculum

which considers the curriculum as content only rather than a project that includes aims, content, methods and assessment. Therefore, only three of them mentioned the assessment system as part of curriculum limitation.

However, my experience in visiting the BE schools and interacting with many teachers at these schools indicated that most teachers are not convinced with the new assessment system that is based on system of symbols. In addition, it has no influence on the students and their families, as all students at the end of the year are promoted to the next stage.

There are two types of assessments used for fourth grade students in the Omani schools. In the GE schools, fourth grade students are required to take exams at the end of the year in order to decide whether they can be transferred to the next grade or to remain in the same stage for another year. On the other hand, in the BE schools fourth grade students are promoted automatically to the next stage. Both types of assessments are debatable. Some believe that grade retention can help the low achievers to improve, and enable them to go to the next stage after that. On the other hand, others believe that there is no benefit in repeating the same grade again, as it might frustrate the low achievers and lead them to abhor the school, and it is also demanding financially (Ministry of Education, 2001b). Grade retention means creating many classrooms to be able to take in the new students and repeating students. Therefore, the policymakers thought that it is better to let the students move to the next stage, as they will learn with time what they could not learn in the earlier stages.

The new assessment system relies on continuous assessments and the reports that the teachers write about each student at the end of the year, which will be used by the teachers

of the next stages. It is true that the assessment should not be used to punish the students, rather it should be used as 'feedback' and 'feed-forward' for teachers and students (Black & William, 1998), which seems to be the aim of the assessment system in the BE schools. Yet, it seems that the concept of learning for life, or learning for the sake of learning is not appreciated in the local culture. Thus, the questions that came to my mind are: Do the assessment instruments (i.e. daily observation card, student's self impression card, final report of student's performance), that are used in the BE schools help to achieve these aims? Are the final reports, completed by the teacher about each student, taken in consideration by the teacher in the next grades? Do low achievers get appropriate attention from the teachers in the next grades to be able to cope with the demands of the new grade? Do students pay attention, or make an effort to develop their learning abilities in the next stages?

These questions rather need more research before they can be answered. Yet, what I discovered from most of the teachers is that they do give low achievers some attention. Low achievers are given some support lessons in the basic skills. It is possible that many teachers will not neglect giving additional support for low achievers. How about the students themselves? How do they feel when they know that all students are promoted to the next grades without exams? In our religion there is a lot of emphasis on reading and learning. The first word of the holy Koran was 'recite' or read. This signifies the importance of learning in the Islamic culture. However, in modern society the rapid development led people to neglect most important tool of learning, namely reading. The culture also emphasizes the importance of grades therefore; unless learning is associated

with grades many students and parents will do not give attention for learning process. Thus, what we need is changing peoples' beliefs about learning. Learning should be for life rather for grades.

Most of these issues regarding the drawbacks of the curriculum, as I mentioned earlier, were discussed with curriculum professionals to get additional information, which will help to interpret the previously stated issues. These issues were not only mentioned by the teachers, but also explained by the curriculum professionals and will be identified in the next section.

Curriculum professionals' perspectives about the writing curriculum:

The questions that were discussed with the curriculum professionals were derived from the points that were mentioned by the teachers and are directly related to curriculum contents, teaching methods and in- service training programme. However, the assessment issues were not discussed with them because there is another department responsible for assessment issues, and it is not part of the recent study.

The first issue that was discussed with the curriculum professionals was about teachers' claims that they did not receive appropriate in-services training on the new curriculum. The curriculum professionals mentioned that all teachers, who teach in the BE schools were trained in order to know the curriculum content, and how to teach this content. Yet, because it was difficult to cover all aspects about the curriculum in the training programme, which lasts only one week, many of the aspects were included in the teacher's guidebook. In this guidebook, the teachers were given some practical examples of teaching Arabic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One of curriculum professionals

stated that:

“Actually, when we write any school textbook, or reform any curriculum we train the teachers, who are going to teach this new curriculum. We put the teachers in the picture, and explained to them the philosophy on which the new curriculum relies on, to bring awareness about the curriculum. We give the teachers practical lessons in each skill, and we discuss with them the teaching plan, that is included in the teacher’s guidebook. In addition, we discuss their ideas and suggestions in relation to teaching Arabic language skills” (CP3).

CP3 mentioned how the teachers are trained in order to enable them to teach any new curriculum. However, he did not point out that the curriculum professionals do not train all Arabic language teachers, as they only train the senior teachers and supervisors. The rest of the teachers receive training from these supervisors and the senior teachers in their schools. This training might not be similar in terms of quality and duration, to the training that the supervisors and the senior teachers received directly from the curriculum professionals. The figure 2.4 in chapter two identifies the two stages of in- service training programmes.

In addition, he did not mention that during the one week training session the teachers are trained on three different subjects; Arabic Language; Islamic Education and Social Studies. In the first cycle of the BE (grades 1-4) the teachers are trained to be field teachers, which means teaching more than one subject matters. The teachers, who teach Arabic language, Islamic Education and Social Studies for example, are called the first field teachers, as described in chapter two. Therefore, the lack of the in-service training was a key issue that was mentioned by most teachers. A week of training on different issues related to three different subjects was not sufficient for the teachers to master the required instructional

strategies and to perceive the new teaching concepts.

Although the training aspect was mentioned by the teachers as the key issue, the curriculum professionals did not explain it. It is unlikely that curriculum professionals are unaware that this might be a problem for most teachers. However, they do not have any other suggestion or solutions for this aspect, as they are obligated to deal with it as it is. The curriculum professionals have a limited time to develop the curriculum, and to train the teachers. Additionally, the idea of having a field teacher is one of the concepts that was introduced to the BE schools by policymakers. If the in- service training programme is inappropriate, it will ultimately affect teachers' performance, which accordingly will influence students' learning.

When the curriculum professionals were asked about the curriculum and its content, they expressed different points of view as limitations of the BE system. One of the major limitations was the time that was allocated for curriculum professionals to write students' textbooks, teacher's guidebook and teaching resources. In this aspect CP4 explained:

“The problem is that we are obliged to finish writing student's textbook, and training the teachers in a limited time. Therefore, the writing curriculum has not been developed according to scope and sequence, and this is why you can see some easy lessons in fourth grade curriculum, and difficult lessons in third grade curriculum. Thus, I think that, we need enough time to reform our curriculum according to the scope and sequence” (CP4).

The last statement indicated how the policymakers restricted curriculum professionals to meet deadlines to do all procedures of curriculum's development, which caused limitations in the curriculum and in the teachers' training. For example, CP4 mentioned that because

of the time shortage the Arabic curriculum was not developed according to a scope and sequence. A scope and sequence is supposed to be used by curriculum professionals as a tool to organize and categorize the content of any curriculum according to some educational and psychological criteria, such as content's appropriateness to students' ages and abilities.

The limitations of the new curriculum are not only caused by the policymakers, but also curriculum professionals had an impact on the writing curriculum as it was explained in the next statement.

“Actually what is included in the writing curriculum indicates that these students were not given enough confidence in their abilities and capacities to compose and create” (CP2).

This statement indicates that there is a contradiction among the curriculum professionals themselves. Although some try to put the responsibility of any limitation on the policymakers, some of them admit to taking some responsibility for it. From my experience as a participant in a committee for developing Arabic curriculum, it was evident that the problem in developing Arabic language curriculum is that the various opinions of the curriculum professionals were not considered, and at the end the view of the top person is implemented. Naturally, some curriculum professionals disagree with what is included in the curriculum, but it is not possible for them to change it. Some curriculum professionals for example, have a belief that young students can be good and creative writers, if they were given a chance to do so. On the other hand, some believe that the students in the first cycle should be provided with only basic skills of reading and writing. They advocate teaching different forms of writing in higher stages.

However, CP3 defended the curriculum professionals' responsibility regarding the limitation in the curriculum content by blaming again the policymakers, he explained:

“Teaching Arabic language these days is different from the past; earlier we relied completely on art, poem, and Koran. Therefore, it was creating innovation among the students. Now they (i.e. policymakers) refuse to enhance the memorising talent of the students. Policymakers always ask us to reduce the amount of art and poems that the students should memorize. The creativity is related to reading. How can the student be creative if he doesn't read different forms of written texts?” (CP3).

CP3 mentioned that the limitation in students' abilities to be creative is not caused only by the limitation of the writing curriculum content, but it is also because of the directives of policymakers, who reduced the emphasis on memorization. It is possible that what is stated by the CP3 is true in terms of reducing the amount of memorized texts. However, I believe that while the policymakers agreed to reduce the amount of material that emphasises memorising, they did not advocate reducing the number or variety of reading texts. In addition, there is no evidence indicating that memorizing large amount of art texts and poems help in the formation of creative writers. However, the new theory of teaching writing recommends providing the students with various genres in order to help them in their writing (Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1975).

In addition, CP3 confessed that they limited curriculum content to particular form of texts because they believe that fourth grade students are still too young to read different forms of text.

“Our concern is that the students in the fourth grade are still too young to master reading skills. Therefore, we did not give them many art texts and poems in the reading curriculum,

as they will learn these forms of text at higher stages” (CP3).

The problem then is not merely caused by the policymakers, but it also is due to the belief of curriculum professionals about the capacities and abilities of students. This, as I mentioned in the last two chapters, led to limiting students’ writing abilities to creating different forms of writing.

The curriculum professionals were not satisfied with blaming the policymakers for the limitations in the writing curriculum. However, they also believe that teachers have a significant influence on limiting students’ abilities in writing. All curriculum professionals mentioned that most teachers neglected writing lessons. One of them stated:

“Teachers should give more attention to writing lessons; as writing is important in students’ life. However, unfortunately, composition is not taught in a right way, and this is the reason for students’ weakness in composition. Sometimes, the teachers use writing lessons to teach other linguistic skills” (CP1).

According to my experience, as an Arabic language teacher, I support CP1’s claim, as many teachers tend to neglect writing lessons. However, I believe that this was due to teachers’ unawareness of the importance of writing. Therefore, they neglect writing lessons and use them to teach other skills of Arabic language, such as grammar and reading which they think are more important than writing. Nevertheless, we cannot simply blame the teachers for this situation, as the curriculum professionals also have to take responsibility. This is for couple of reasons: first, there are no clear objectives and content for the writing curriculum (Al Hashmi, 1995 and Al Kalbani, 1997). Second, in their academic preparation, as teachers as well as in the in-service training, the teachers are not trained

appropriately how to teach writing. Therefore, they consider writing lessons, as additional lessons that can be utilized to teach other important skills. The evidence from research indicates that students' writing ability could not be developed unless they take writing lessons seriously (Riley & Reedy, 2000). However, it is likely that the students will not consider writing as an important process if the teachers do not give it the attention it deserves (Graham et al., 2001). Similarly, the teachers will not consider writing as a basic process for the students unless they see that it is given priority in the Arabic language curriculum.

7.4 Conclusion:

In this chapter I have discussed Arabic writing curriculum from different angles, namely its aims and the foundations, as it were identified by curriculum professionals and its successful and limited aspects according to the teachers and curriculum professionals. The evidence indicated that there are limitations in the writing curriculum aims, as it is restricted only to general aims that might not help the teachers to create additional writing activities. On the other hand, the data revealed some contradictions among the curriculum professionals regarding curriculum foundations, especially in terms of linking writing content with students' needs and life.

Successes and limitations of the BE in general, and of the writing curriculum in particular were also discussed. The findings illustrated some disagreements among the teachers and curriculum professionals about the successes and limitations of the curriculum. For example, some teachers considered curriculum content as one of curriculum successes, while others mentioned that there are limitations in the writing curriculum contents by

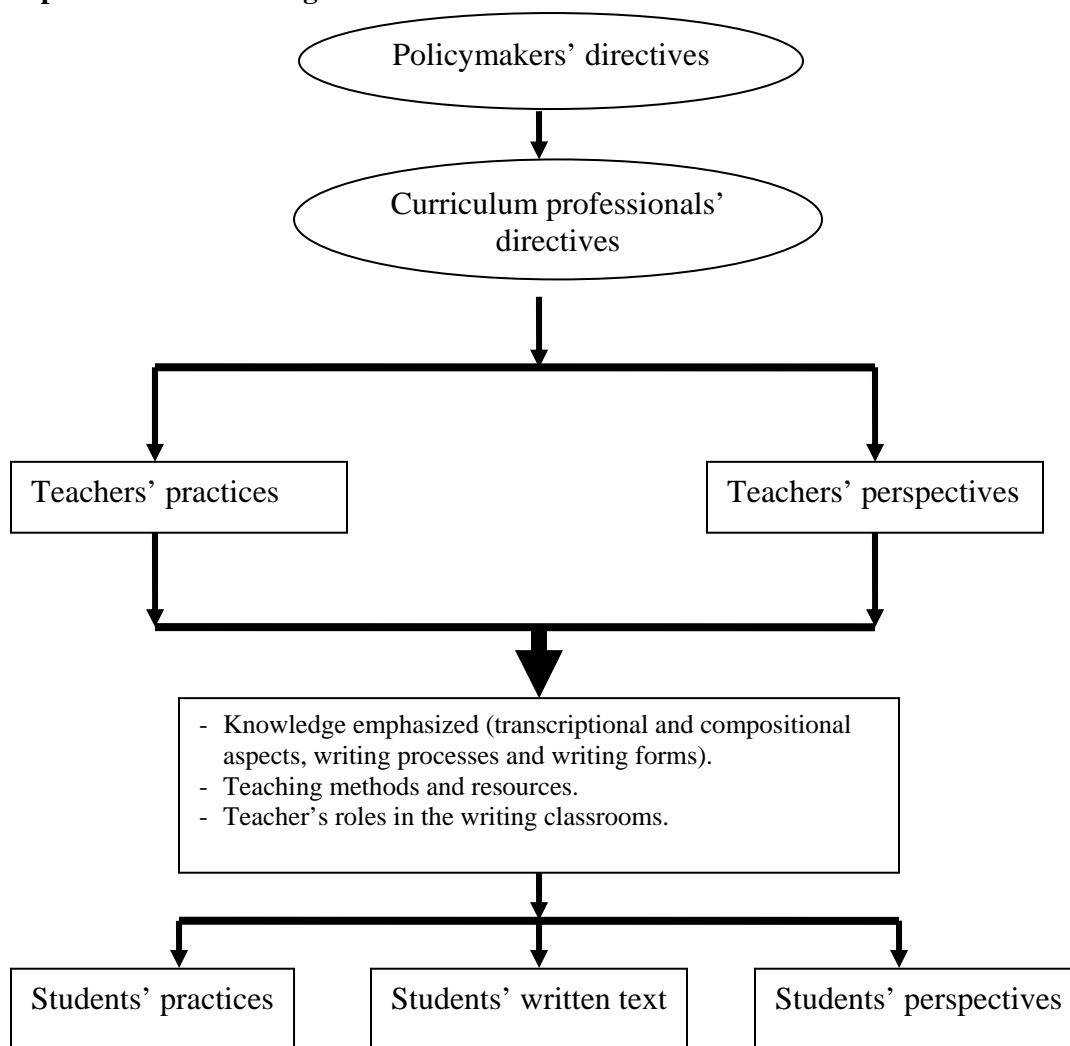
stating several aspects of the limitations. In addition, most teachers mentioned some significant limitations in the writing curriculum in relation to curriculum content, teaching recourses, teaching methods, teachers' training and assessment system. All these aspects were considered as vital aspects that influence teaching and learning writing.

In parallel to Brindley's and Schneider's study (2002), which indicated that the directives that teachers received from the policymakers influenced their practices, the findings of this recent study indicated that the limitations or drawbacks in the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the BE schools cannot be merely attributed to the teachers. However, there are many factors that affect teachers' practices in the writing classrooms. The evidence in this study manifests that the curriculum is the key factor that influence teachers' practices in the writing classroom and their perspectives about writing. As the curriculum is developed by curriculum professionals, I argue that curriculum professionals are responsible for the teaching and learning writing drawbacks. On the other hand, as curriculum professionals are directed by policymakers, I believe that the limitation in the Arabic writing curriculum is also policymakers' responsibility. Although accepting curriculum professionals' directives differ from one teacher to another, as some teachers accept all directives, while some try, if there is any possibility, to adapt these directives in a way to suit their students and correspond to their beliefs, most teachers restrict themselves to curriculum directives.

To conclude, teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools is affected by several factors; namely, policymakers' directives, curriculum professionals directives and teachers' practices and beliefs. All these factors influence students' writing, and their perspectives about writing. The following figure indicates the case study of the teaching and learning of

Arabic writing in the fourth grade in the BE schools, and the factors that influence it, and how all these affect students' practices, writing and perspectives about writing.

Figure 7.1 the case study of teaching and learning Arabic writing in the BE schools, and factors that influence it and how all these factors affect students' practices, writing and their perspectives about writing.



The prior figure summarised the findings of this case study, and how several factors influence students' practices in the writing classroom, their perspectives about writing and their writing. This figure assists me in drawing out the conclusion chapter of this thesis, which is the upcoming chapter.

Chapter 8 Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction:

This study, which investigated teaching and learning Arabic writing in the fourth grade BE schools, make significant contributions to knowledge. The contribution of this study is not only of relevance at the local level; rather it also will make important contribution to the knowledge at the regional and international level. This is because, this study is the only qualitative study investigating the teaching and learning Arabic writing in classroom setting in Oman, and it is one of the few Arabic studies written up in the English language in an English speaking country.

This study will add to the knowledge of teaching and learning writing in several areas. First, it obtained rich data related to the teaching and learning of Arabic writing. Therefore it might provide the English speaking researchers, who are interested in investigating educational aspects in the Arabic speaking countries with practical information about how the Arabic writing is taught in one of Arabic speaking countries (i.e. Oman). Second, this study also might benefit both English and Arabic researchers in terms of literature review, methodology, as well as the key findings culminated from this study. Third, this study investigates teaching and learning writing, which has traditionally been given little attention compared to reading, particularly in Arabic countries including Oman, in spite of the importance of writing for the students at the academic and social level. The lack of studies in this area is evident, as there are only two studies conducted in Oman in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing. In spite of the significance of the primary stage in preparing students for higher stages, none of the studies in Oman were conducted at the

primary stage. Therefore what makes this study unique is that it is the only study conducted at the primary stage in the BE schools. Fourth, since the BE is the new system introduced by the educational reforms, there is a great need to examine and explore its success and limitations in order to further understand the impact of the new system on the teaching and learning of Arabic writing.

This study thus will provide curriculum developers with some guidelines regarding how to teach writing, what aspects should be emphasized and what should be given less attention. Fifth, this study is one of the few educational studies using qualitative methodology. Therefore, this study will offer several opportunities for Arabic researchers to apply such methodology in their studies in order to obtain rich and naturalistic data that will help them in understanding the phenomenon being studied from the subjects' perspectives.

Moreover, this study adopted a case study approach, which required using various methods to collect the data such as, participant observation, semi structured interviews and document analysis. The case study approach also required collecting the data from several resources of information (i.e. curriculum professionals' perspectives, teachers' perspectives, teachers' practices, students' perspectives, students' practices and students' written texts). This assisted in investigating the phenomenon of teaching and learning writing from different angles, and helped to focus attention to some aspects that were missing in others' studies, such as the impact of the policymakers and curriculum professionals on teachers' and students' practices, their perspectives and accordingly on students' performance in writing. In addition, investigating teaching and learning writing from different angles helped to obtain a fuller picture about how Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools, and

what aspects are emphasized, and what aspects are neglected.

All these aspects, as they are extremely beneficial for Omani policymakers, curriculum professionals, and practitioners in the Omani context, however, they will also be useful for all Arabic countries, as most Arabic countries apply similar policies, curriculum and teaching methods. Furthermore, this study also can be a valuable resource for policymakers, curriculum developers and teachers in English speaking countries in several areas. First it will help the policymakers to understand what aspects are limiting and successful of the BE system, particularly in terms of time and freedom given to curriculum professionals in developing the curriculum and training teachers. This study provides some evidence suggesting that incorporating both the teachers and the students in the processes of reforming or developing the curriculum will increase the curriculum success and will insure improvement in curriculum implementation in the schools. This is because the students have their own interests in terms what they like to write and what they are able to do. In addition, the teachers have their own innovative beliefs regarding teaching processes and their students' needs. Second, this study will provide curriculum developers with some suggestions in terms of: deciding on curriculum content, introducing new teaching methods that will enhance students' abilities in writing and assist in the preparation of in-service training programs. Ultimately, all these aspects will help in improving teachers' performance in the classroom. Third, it will assist the practitioners in improving their practices by employing various writing activities which will help students to write not only for academic purposes, but for life. It provides teachers with evidence indicating that the primary stage students, in general and fourth graders in particular, have the ability to do more than what is included in the official curriculum. Therefore, the teachers should

develop students' imagination and writing abilities by providing them with various genres, learning resources and opportunities that will encourage them to produce several types of genres. In addition, the study will assist the teachers by providing them with some suggestion on how to successfully apply the group work approach, by encouraging and guiding the students to work collaboratively and cooperatively with each other in the various processes of writing; namely planning for writing, discussing ideas, revising writing and presenting the group work. This accordingly will help the teachers to change their traditional roles of being controller of the work to become facilitator of learning, guides, coaches and encouragers.

These issues are addressed in this concluding chapter, which includes four sections. The first section describes the overall design that was used to investigate teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the fourth grade in the BE schools in Oman. In addition, this section describes the research methodology detailing methods of triangulation between the various data sources. The second section presents the key findings of the case study of the teaching and learning of Arabic writing in the BE schools. Section three accordingly depicts the implementations of the key findings of this study and relating them to the literature. Section four makes recommendations for teaching and learning Arabic writing for the primary stage according to the key findings of this study. The fifth section reflects on the limitations of the study, suggesting the direction of further research in this area.

8.2 The Overall Research Design:

The motivation to carry out the study arose from the needs of Oman, as an Arabic nation, to develop students' writing and composition and to train them to write for life (Al Hashmi,

1995). This is because writing is an essential method that rescues the socio- cultural documents for different generations. Writing is considered one of the main communication mediums among people. In addition, the writing process is an integral prerequisite of occupational life (Ministry of Education, 2001). Therefore, the ability of writing is essential for social life. Providing Omani students with writing and compositional abilities is one of the responsibilities of the school and the society. A question of interest in this study therefore, was how writing is taught in the BE schools and how this influences students' writing and their perspectives about writing?

The significance of this question is substantiated by the introduction of the new educational system (BE) in the academic year 1997/1998 in order to overcome some of the shortcomings of the old educational system (GE) and to replace it gradually. One of the shortcomings of the GE was students' difficulties in writing. Most of the students writing were in the form of incomplete texts, with numerous transcribing mistakes (e.g. spelling, sentence structure and punctuation). Upon examining teaching and learning Arabic writing at fourth graders in the BE schools, I was able to identify some successes and limitations of teaching and Arabic writing and the writing curriculum. In the light of the findings of this study and theories of teaching and learning writing, I generated some suggestions and recommendations for curriculum professionals and teachers.

This study investigated the way that Arabic writing is taught to fourth grade students and its influences on students' writing and their perspectives about writing. Thus, the key issue was to explore and understand the phenomenon of teaching and learning Arabic writing from different angles. To attain this aim I selected qualitative research approach. Mainly,

this is because this research approach seeks to understand and interpret the world through its participants and its subjectivity through rich descriptive data (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). Therefore, the qualitative approach seemed to be an appropriate approach for this study for a couple of reasons. First, the primary focus of this study was to depict a picture of what happens in the Arabic writing classrooms and qualitative methods seemed to be appropriate in assisting and understanding the full picture of the subject of study (Cohen et al., 2000). Second, this study intended to examine the participants' (i.e. teachers, students and curriculum professionals) emic perspectives towards the way that Arabic writing is taught in the BE schools. The qualitative methods are useful not only in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena, but also in understanding the phenomena from participants' point of view (Yin, 1994).

As the aim of this study was to explore answers for two main questions 'how' and 'why', a case study research approach was used to gain a deep and fuller picture about the case of teaching and learning Arabic writing at fourth grade. I adopted a case study approach in its definition as a 'bounded system' that could be a programme, an event, an activity, a group or an individual in order to keep a firm focus upon the particulars of, and to understand the complexities of the case study. In addition, it provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories, or principles (ibid, p, 181). Therefore, the sample of this case study was chosen from subjects, who were closely related to the phenomenon of teaching and learning writing, namely the teachers, the students and curriculum professionals. The case of teaching and learning Arabic writing was investigated from different angles: teachers' practices, students' practices, curriculum professionals' perspectives, teachers'

perspectives, students' perspectives and students' writing.

I decided to explore the case study of teaching and learning Arabic writing from the previously stated angles for several reasons. First, by reviewing the literature I found that most researchers investigated teaching and learning writing only focused on one aspect. The researchers either focused on the teachers or on the students, and this provides only a partial picture about teaching and learning writing. I believe that the teaching and learning process includes two key-cores, the teacher and the students. Therefore, I decided to include both the teacher and the student in this study. On the other hand, to understand the practices, it was important to ask the participants about their practices. Thus, teachers' and students' emic perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing were examined. In addition, students' writing samples added some more evidence about what students are taught in the writing classroom, and what is emphasized when teaching writing.

Adopting the case study approach allowed me to apply different research methods, such as observation, interviews and document analysis (i.e. analyzing students' writing). Classroom observation provided me with a chance to examine the real practices of the teachers and the students in the writing classroom. Accordingly, this granted me a partial picture about the case study. In addition, the interviews enabled me to understand why the teachers and the students behaved in particular way in the writing classrooms, and what their views about writing were? Analyzing students' writing samples on the other hand, gave evidence about means of writing to the curriculum professionals and to the teachers, how it is taught and what aspects are emphasised.

The findings of the study indicated that there are limitations in the definition of writing, or written composition in the writing curriculum. The writing process is limited to spelling, handwriting, sentence structure and punctuation. This accordingly, resulted in limitations in writing forms and topics to focus on i.e. informative and comprehensive types of writing. This means that the freedom in choosing writing topics was not granted. In addition, writing topics were linked with reading topics and students were limited on them. The key findings of this study will be presented in the next section.

8.3 The Key Findings of This Research:

As stated in the end of chapter three, the literature described many aspects in teaching and learning writing (1) knowledge for writing, which includes transcription aspects, compositional aspects, writing forms and the writing processes (2) writing pedagogy and teaching processes (3) teacher's roles in the writing classroom. All these issues were examined in this study. The key findings related to the previous issues will be discussed according to their key themes, as were presented in the last three chapters.

8.3.1 Knowledge for Writing:

I mentioned in chapter five that the theme knowledge for writing in this study included four main aspects: transcriptional knowledge, compositional knowledge, knowledge about the writing processes and knowledge about writing forms.

The significance of examining compositional and transcription knowledge in this study was to provide new views about which is more important in teaching and learning writing: transcription or compositional aspects (Pinsent, 1998)? The evidence from this study indicated that curriculum professionals and accordingly the teachers gave transcriptional

aspects more attention than that was given for compositional aspects. The curriculum of Arabic writing of the first cycle of the BE schools seeks the development of students' basic skills in writing, such as spelling, handwriting, punctuation and some grammatical issues. This accordingly prompted the students to view the writing process as neat handwriting and correct spelling. This is a consequence, of the emphasis on transcriptional aspects in the writing curriculum, and by the teachers in the writing classroom. However, this study found that some teachers enhance their practices with some activities that they believe might develop students' abilities in thinking and generating new ideas. In contrast, there are some other teachers, who limited themselves on the curriculum content and neglected important aspects included in the curriculum. For example, some teachers neglect the punctuation in spite of its importance for accurate and meaningful writing (Madkour, 2000). In addition, there was a difference between what teachers mentioned about the importance of compositional aspects and their practices in the writing classroom. Although this might be due to the limitation in the classroom observation, as only one lesson was observed for each teacher. The evidence from other resources, such as students' practices, their perspectives, and their written text indicated limitations in the application of punctuation and compositional aspects.

The writing processes seemed to be well known by both curriculum professionals and teachers. However, it is neglected in the curriculum and in the classroom practices. It was simply left to chance and spare time in the lesson. The teachers mentioned that they revise, or ask the students to draft and rewrite if there is time in the writing lesson; otherwise they do not consider these processes in the writing lesson. This accordingly affected students' writing, as their written texts indicated limitations in planning, drafting, revising and

rewriting. Many researchers, such as Graves (1983); Murray (1972) and Nuser (1998) have considered the writing processes as a manner of developing students' thinking, imagination and writing abilities. The only process that was emphasized by most teachers and students in their practices and perspectives was the revising process. However, their emphasis on revising process was limited to revising transcriptional aspects, especially spelling and sentence structure. This could be due to the fact that the curriculum emphasizes transcriptional aspects more than compositional aspect. In addition, some teachers believe that revising should be limited to high achievers, because low achievers cannot write, so they cannot revise. This was not an enthusiastic view. Instead of encouraging all students to write and revise their writing, teachers limited this process to high achievers only. No attempts were made to diagnosing the writing problems or to allocate appropriate solutions to the problems that challenged the rest of the students.

Teaching various forms of writing (genres) for primary school students was and still is one aspect that is recommended by many researchers (e.g. Kress, 1994 and Wilkinson, 1986 a, b). Both curriculum professionals and teachers, who participated in this study, emphasized the importance of teaching fourth grades different forms of writing. Nevertheless, the curriculum of fourth grade in the BE schools is limited to narrow forms of writing. Basically, it was limited to what I referred to as a "comprehensive writing", rather than composition. This is because some of the curriculum professionals and teachers believe that fourth graders are still too young to learn and to write different genres. Those who believe in the importance of teaching different forms of writing were not the one who took the decision about what should be included in the curriculum, as it is a decision of policymakers in the curriculum department, who are in most cases removed from the

reality experienced by practitioners in the schools.

In addition, some teachers believe that students should be taught different forms of writing and recommended some genres for primary stage students such as, stories, letters, cards and reports. On the other hand, others believed that fourth graders still too young to think and imagine and what was included in the curriculum is enough and appropriate for them at this stage. These teachers either have few years of experience, so they believe that what is decided by curriculum professionals is appropriate, or they teach in schools that were located in a low socio-economic level area, such as schools one and three (S1 and S3). However, I am not suggesting that there is an association between low socio-economic level area and acceptance of curriculum professionals' view. Further research needs to be conducted to substantiate this view. This is because the students themselves mentioned different high interest genres, such as stories and cards which were not included in the writing curriculum. Some of their free written texts represented some of their favorites.

With regard to writing forms; giving students freedom in selecting high interest writing topics is an issue that has been recommended by many researchers such as Casey & Hemenway, 2001; Graves, 1983 and Hart, 1996). These researchers found that the freedom in selecting writing topics helped in developing writing ability of their case studies, and it made the students enjoy writing lessons. However, the findings of this study indicated that although curriculum professionals and teachers liked the idea of giving the students the freedom to choose their own topics, they also thought that prescribed topics were important. They provide a reasonable explanation for their perspective. They believe that if they give the students freedom to choose their own topics, they might stick to particular

forms and topics and neglect others. For example, most children prefer writing stories more than reports and essays (Casey & Hemenway, 2001), and if they were not required to write different genres they might stick on writing stories. This means that they will not be able to write different genres in the future. Therefore, both curriculum professionals and teachers thought that combining the two, free writing and prescribed writing might be useful. This finding corresponds to some researchers findings (e.g. Casey & Hemenway, 2001). Fourth grade students in the BE schools in Oman seem to be unaware of the freedom in choosing writing topics, as they are not used to it. Since fourth grade students are required to write, or to copy the text from the board, their understanding of freedom in writing is to write from the memory instead of copying the texts from the board. The students think that they need to link their writing to classroom topics. However, students need to be given confidence and freedom to write what they like to write in order to be independent in their writing, as well as in their decision.

Writing for different purposes was an aspect that both curriculum professionals and teachers agreed on. Nonetheless, writing for different audiences was a new concept to them. To conclude, relying on particular forms of writing caused unawareness among curriculum professionals and teachers. This accordingly, led to weakness in students' writing abilities. Students' free writing reflected that the students have the ability to write for different purposes and audience, but they do not have the skills and the ability to express their ideas into completed and meaningful written texts.

8.3.2 Writing Pedagogy and Teaching Processes:

Writing pedagogy and teaching methods were given appropriate attention by researchers (e.g. Al- Hashmi, 1995; Brindley & Schneider, 2002 and Topping et al., 2000), who recommended many strategies in teaching writing, such as paired writing, collaborative writing and journals writing. This was based on different teaching and learning resources (e.g. writing framework and samples of written texts). From what has been presented in chapter five, six and seven I concluded that writing pedagogy in the BE schools is translation of objectives of the writing curriculum. In other words, the teaching processes reflected what the students are required to learn in writing lessons, and for what purposes. I have mentioned earlier that writing in the BE schools is considered as a method for students to learn transcriptional aspects, as well as, it is a way to measure students' understanding of reading texts. Thus, all teaching processes were adapted towards achieving these aims. Any addition from teachers to the teaching and learning process in the Omani schools is rare. Most teachers comply with the directives they receive from curriculum professionals from training programmes, or from the directives included in the teacher's guidebook.

Keeping in line with student- centred approaches the BE schools have adopted the group work approach to teaching and learning in the classroom. However, group work was not always preferred by some of curriculum professionals, teachers and students. Most of them recognized the many advantages of the group work; however, they appeared to stress the disadvantages. I mentioned in chapter six that these disadvantages can be resolved. The success of the group work approach in teaching and learning writing depends on the curriculum professionals' beliefs. Unless curriculum professionals are convinced in the

importance of the group work approach, and effectively train teachers on it, it is difficult to envision classrooms, where students work in collaborative groups, discuss, participate and get feedback from each other. This also depends on how curriculum professionals view writing and what they expect students to do in the writing lessons. In addition, this depends on writing practices that applied in the classrooms. If writing is considered as a communicative activity, that is taught to communicate with others, and is learnt by communicating with others, then group work might be beneficial. Alternatively, if the students are merely required to write for comprehensive purpose and to transcribe accurately, group work might not be as beneficial. In addition, in the writing lessons all teachers used several teaching and learning resources. These resources were mainly habitual and were used as part of routine classroom practices, rather than to enhance students' learning. Therefore, in the observed writing classroom many effective resources, such as samples of written texts stories, books, cards, letters and reports were lacking.

8.3.3 Teachers' Roles in the Writing Classroom:

Changing teachers' roles in the classroom is one of the recommendations for effective teaching that was emphasized by researchers (e.g. McAnish, 1992 and Moll 1992) and the Ministry of Education in Oman (Ministry of Education, 2001b). I have mentioned in chapter three that students-centred education is one of the BE concepts, where the students should depend on themselves to learn with some guidance and encouragement from the teacher. The finding of this study indicates that, both curriculum professionals and teachers, theoretically, have mentioned some effective roles that teachers should play in the writing classroom. However, practically, in the writing classroom, most teachers still play the role of a controller, where the teacher controls all activities and students are respondents and

receivers who answer and talk when they are required. Although some teachers guide and encouraged their students they regulate their guidance and encouragement on limited aspects such as, right spelling and neat handwriting rather than encouraging the students and guiding them to be creative writers.

8.3.4 Curriculum successes and limitations:

All the previously stated aspects of writing such as knowledge for writing, writing pedagogy and teaching processes are related to the curriculum. The majority of teachers linked the limitation in teaching and learning writing with the curriculum and training. On the other hand, teachers and curriculum professionals mentioned many successful aspects of the curriculum.

▪ Curriculum Successes:

Areas of curriculum success according to the teachers can be categorized into three key areas: The first area of success referred to by the participants is the curriculum content. Some teachers mentioned that the topics included in the writing curriculum are appropriate for fourth graders. Yet, I believe that this success is limited to the reading content that links the students with their society and culture. However, most teachers criticized writing curriculum topics because they limited the students to particular forms of writing and dry and boring topic, thus, inhibiting students' imagination and creativity. The second key area of curriculum success was mentioned by the teachers is learning resources. Teachers mentioned teaching and learning resources as a successful area in the BE curriculum. The teachers in the BE schools were provided with some teaching resources such as flash cards and pictures. However, when it came to writing lessons there was a lack in teaching and

learning resources that specifically targeted writing such as books, stories and samples of different genres. Therefore, I believe, that what the teachers meant when considering teaching resources as a successful area in the BE curriculum was general resources that were used in teaching and learning different skills of Arabic language, rather than resources pertaining to teaching writing in particular. Thus, some teachers considered the lack in the teaching and learning resources, as one of writing curriculum drawbacks.

The third main area considered to reflect the success of the BE curriculum is the group work approach. Although most participants (i.e. curriculum professionals, teachers and students) mentioned the difficulties facing the implementation of the group work approach, they however, acknowledged that group work was one of the most successful aspects in the BE. The teachers mentioned some advantages of group work, such as enabling them to focus on all students, as well as helping the students to finish the work quickly. Group work, in my point of view, is a necessary approach, which helps both the teacher and the student in their teaching and learning processes if it is applied appropriately.

▪ **Curriculum limitations:**

In contrast, the limitations in the BE curriculum according to teachers and curriculum professionals were organized into three categories: curriculum content, teaching methods and teachers' training and assessment system.

Curriculum limitations:

In the last section, I mentioned that according to some of the teachers, curriculum content was one of the curriculum's successes. On the other hand, according to the majority of the teachers, curriculum content was one of the categories of the BE curriculum limitations. I

explained the contradiction among the teachers about the curriculum success and limitation in terms of the curriculum content. I argued that the teachers believed that the Arabic language curriculum topics were appropriate because the student learned various topics about their society and culture, as well as values and morals. However, when it came to the writing topics, the majority of the teachers stated that writing curriculum content lacked a variety of writing forms, limited students' imagination and thinking ability, did not connect to students' needs and interests and did not encourage reading, which is a basic resource for writing.

In addition, the teachers mentioned that curriculum lacked free writing lessons, as most writing topics are prescribed, restricted and related to reading texts. Several researchers (see Moll, 1992) stated, in order to develop students' abilities in writing and to create creative writers, students need to be given freedom in choosing their own writing topics. Thus, limiting the students to prescribed topics led to limiting their thinking ability and imagination.

Furthermore, the teachers pointed out that the topics were not organized according to a scope and sequence. Therefore, one can envision difficult topics in the beginning of the unit, while some easy topics came in the end of the unit. Although this issue has not significantly influenced students writing, however, I believe, that writing topics should be organized according to a clear scope and sequence so each form of writing is taught according to its significance and suitability for students. Otherwise, students might not get a clear understanding of what they are required to learn in the writing lessons and what the aim of learning a particular topic before or after another is. As a result of the limitations in

the writing topics, and forms, some teachers attempted to implement some additional activities. However, these teachers did not have enough time to implement additional writing activities, such as connecting writing with drawing. Researchers such as Vygotsky (1978) mentioned drawing as basic stage of writing. Therefore, it was recommended to link writing with drawing to make writing an interest activity. In addition, drawing helps the students to develop their imagination, and to generate new ideas.

The writing curriculum not only limited the students on particular forms of writing and topics, it also restricted them to a number (i.e. 5 to 6) of lines in their writing textbook. The usual approach in teaching writing is to let the students write as much as they want, and whatever they like to write. It is surprising that the Arabic writing curriculum restricted writing to a limited number of lines. This approach might help to organize students' writing and encourage all students to complete the included lines. However, it restricts students' abilities in writing.

Teaching methods and teachers training:

According to classroom observation and teachers' perspectives, this study indicated that there was no variety of methods for teaching writing. The teachers are required to finish the textbook content in a prescribed timeframe. This puts them under pressure to complete the curriculum content, so they do not vary instructional methods. Because of this pressure, some teachers tend to use traditional ways of teaching. For example, they write the text on the board and ask the students to copy it, without teaching them to write by themselves. This issue certainly affected students' development of writing skills in several ways. It created passive students, who wait until the end of the writing lesson to copy the text and

accordingly caused limitations in students' writing abilities, performance and school achievement.

On the other hand, the teachers, who develop their teaching activities, fear to use new teaching techniques, as it may cause problems for them with their supervisors. At the same time the teachers have neither proper nor enough training on teaching methods. The inflexibility among the supervisors created teachers, who do not make any attempts to develop their teaching skills and strategies and rely mainly on what they get in the in-service training programme. I mentioned earlier that the in-service training programme has many limitations and drawbacks according to the teachers' perspectives, which mean that the experience that the teachers get from in-service training programme is insufficient for teaching writing.

Curriculum professionals explained that one week professional training for the BE programme was insufficient because it did not cover all aspects about the curriculum. By stating this, curriculum professionals blamed the policymakers, who specified the training period for the programme. Thus, due to the time limitations, the curriculum professionals only train the supervisor and the senior teachers. The rest of the teachers are trained by supervisors and senior teachers in the school. In addition to the time limitations, there were other restraints in the training programmes. For example, the curriculum professionals failed to mention that training programme relied on theoretical aspects more than practical aspects. Therefore, I believe that the limitations of the new curriculum are not only caused by the policymakers. However, the curriculum professionals also limited the contents and teaching methods that were taught in the teachers training programme. This might be due to

the fact that, each curriculum professional has a different belief about developing Arabic language curriculum. The members of the committees, who make the final decision about the curriculum content, are not necessarily curriculum professionals. In many cases the decisions are made by policymakers, who lack the technical expertise in the developing Arabic language curriculum.

The limitation in the curriculum content and teaching methods affect the way Arabic writing is taught. Although some teachers try to develop their teaching skills and knowledge, but most teachers in general rely completely on what they get in the in-service training programme, and what is included in the teacher's guidebook. Other teachers however; neglect aspects in the curriculum by selecting to implement what they are comfortable with, and neglecting other aspects. Therefore, the curriculum professionals implied that the teachers are directly responsible for limiting students' abilities in writing, because most teachers tend to neglect writing lessons.

Assessment:

Assessment system is one of the aspects that reformed to match the new curriculum aims and foundations. It relies on transferring the students to next stages automatically without exams. Teachers criticized the new assessment system stating that the assessment system does not create any competition among the students. The purpose of the new assessment was to create life long learners, where students would be learning for the sake of learning rather than for passing and examination. However; teachers did not, conceptually, understand the purpose of the new assessment. Thus, many teachers failed to implement the continuous assessment process.

8.4 Implications and Recommendations:

On the basis of the findings of this study this section suggests the following implication and recommendations for the policymakers within the education system in the Arab world in general, and the Omani context in specific, in teaching and learning Arabic writing in primary stage, especially at fourth grade.

8.4.1 Implications and Recommendation for curriculum content:

A key issue facing the implementation of the Arabic writing curriculum in the BE classrooms is that most teachers lack the understanding of the writing curriculum objectives, and the importance of composition in developing students' literacy skills. These skills are an integral aspect of students' overall development. The implication of this lack of understanding had led many teachers to neglect writing lessons by using these lessons to teach other Arabic language skills, such as reading and grammar. The evidence from research indicated that students' writing ability could not develop unless they take writing lessons seriously (Riley & Reedy, 2000). However, it is more likely that the students will not consider writing as an important process if the teacher did not give it appropriate attention (Graham 1998). Similarly, the teachers will not consider writing as a basic process for the students unless they feel that it is given an appropriate attention in the curriculum (Al-Hashmi, 1995 and Al-Kalbani, 1997) and in the in- service training program.

Therefore, it is vital to clarify the objectives of the writing curriculum and the importance of writing in developing students' learning abilities and in their future life. If this is achieved, the writing lessons will be taken seriously by the teachers and the students. This

also can be accomplished by targeting writing in the professionals training programs.

The Arabic writing curriculum design did not emphasise the differences between transcription and composition. In other words, the Arabic writing curriculum was designed in a way that writing lessons are utilised to emphasise transcriptional aspects, and to ensure students' ability in using these aspects when writing. The implication of this was the lack of clarity among teachers, between transcription and composition. This accordingly resulted in teachers emphasising transcriptional aspects of writing, such as spelling, handwriting and grammar in the writing lessons. This accordingly led to neglecting compositional aspects, such as imagination, generating ideas, and organizing the text.

It is therefore, recommended that curriculum professionals, and accordingly the teachers need to consider the differences between composition and transcription, in order to be able to put appropriate content for written composition lessons. In the writing lessons compositional aspects, such as creativity, imagination, ideas, organization and the structure of the text should be given a specific focus and attention (Collins, 1998). In addition, the students need to be taught transcriptional aspects such as, spelling and handwriting (Kelly, 1998) in separate lessons. This of course does not imply that these aspects should be ignored completely in composition lessons. Yet, students' written texts could be used as a useful medium through which the students learn transcriptional aspects.

The findings of this study indicated that some curriculum professionals and teachers believe that fourth graders are still too young to plan, draft and rewrite. The implication of this issue is that most teachers lack the understanding of the importance of the writing processes in developing students' writing abilities. In addition, the students lack the skills

to apply the writing processes. The researchers such as Graves (1983) and Nuser (1998) argued that the writing processes help the students in thinking about their topics, organizing their ideas and ensuring accuracy in their writing. Curriculum professionals and teachers therefore, need to acknowledge that if the students were trained on these processes in the early stage, they will consider them as crucial processes for their writing in the next stages.

As a result of lack of clarity in the writing objectives, the Arabic writing curriculum is limited to a few types of genres, which are taught to fourth graders. The implication of this limitation in writing genres is that many students complete this stage of schooling (i.e. fourth grade) with minimal skills, focusing mainly on summarizing reading texts, and giving their opinion about the texts. In addition, teachers lack the expertise about the structural aspects of different genres. As a result when students attempt to write a different genre, they lack the required skills. Although students should be taught about particular topics that related to their societies and culture, they also need some space for free writing so that they can write about their interest. This is because many researchers (e.g. Graves, 1983 and Hart, 1996) found that giving the students freedom to choose their own writing topics helps them to imagine and to be creative writers. This accordingly enables them to write for different purposes and audiences. In contrast, limiting the students to particular topics and forms of writing might causes narrowing students' creativity and imagination. This might lead the students to abhor writing lessons and writing itself (Casey &Hemenway, 2001).

It is therefore, recommended that the writing curriculum content should encompass the various genres and their structures. Including different forms of writing in the primary

school curriculum is one of the aspects that was and is still recommended by researchers see (Bunting, 1998). Since early stages students need to be taught the function of writing, as a mode of communication and a manner to access the society (Al- Bajjah, 1999). Students need to be familiar with the structure of each form of writing, so that they can write down their ideas in the form that they prefer. Some students, especially in the primary stage like to write stories, some like letters and some like writing reports. To sum up, the evidence from research (e.g. Casey & Hemenway, 2001) indicated that in order to attract the students to writing lessons, the writing curriculum or programme should be based on some concepts in teaching writing such as: the students should choose their own topics, teachers should model the writing process by writing along with their students, teachers should provide the students with real audiences and purposes and opportunities for lots of writing and publication. This accordingly, requires providing the teachers with the knowledge and skills for teaching different genres.

In addition, the findings of this study indicated that the students are restricted to the formal Arabic when writing. The implication of this issue is that the students become keen on the linguistic aspects, and this limited their ability in writing. Therefore, it is recommended that students' experiences and social background need to be utilised in their writing, and from these writing the students can learn some linguistic aspects of the standard Arabic. This is because the evidence from research suggested that the lack in linguistic skills might affect students' writing abilities (Hart, 1996).

8.4.2 Implications and recommendation for teaching methods and classroom practices:

One of the limiting factors of the curriculum is that teachers are forced to abide to a prescribed writing curriculum and limited topics. There is a clear lack of freedom and flexibility in selecting and teaching the writing topics. As a result students are required to write low interest topics, such as informative topics. Even when they are given a chance to choose their own topics, most students continue to write about text related topics. This is because they have been accustomed to limiting their writing to text based topics. The free writing lessons, as stated by many researchers such as (Casey& Hemenway, 2001; Hart, 1996; Hilton, 2001; and Kos & Maslowski, 2001) creates self-confidence in students and provides the students with a freedom to choose their own topics, ideas and writing approach. Hart (1996) for example, in a case study found that, giving the students freedom in choosing their own topics was one of major factors that helped her case study (Annette) to create her own strategy to develop her writing ability. In addition, Casey &Hemenway (2001) found that restricting the students to particular topics led them to abhor writing lessons, while free writing led the students to adore writing lessons. Therefore, the writing curriculum needs to include some lessons for free writing that encourage the students to be creative writers and to work with their peers in discussing their writing and getting some feedback from them.

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that, group work was the main approach that was used in teaching and learning Arabic writing. Although, the group work approach was preferred in teaching writing by some of curriculum professionals, teachers and students, it was disliked by others. The supporters of group work identified a number of

advantages of group work. On the other hand, the detractors of group work mentioned several disadvantage. However, as I have mentioned in chapter six, the difficulty in applying group work can be resolved if the group work approach is applied in an appropriate way. In this study, the implementation of the group work approach was reflected in several classroom practices in the writing lessons. For example, in some group work the high achievers controlled and performed all the required tasks, where others were passive members of the group. In other groups, the teachers would distribute the same tasks for all the groups, and this created a lack of interest among the students in discussing the topic. In addition, the groups did not find the exercise beneficial. Therefore, I believe that curriculum professionals need to understand and believe that writing is a communicative activity, and is better learned by communicating and collaborating with peers (Harrmann, 1989). Thus, the group work approach is an appropriate way for students' communication and collaboration. In addition, the teachers should be provided with basic concepts of the group work approach, such as sinking, or swimming together (Johnson, 1999). They also should be guided to the application of these types of concepts and how to encourage the student to work collaboratively. Furthermore, the writing curriculum should include some writing activities, such as journals writing, exchanging letters that guide the teachers to use the group work approach (Czerniewska, 1992).

In addition, the finding of this study indicated that although the student in the BE schools set in groups, they are required to work quietly. The implication of this was the lack of collaborative skills among the students. Therefore, it is vital for the teachers to believe that to activate group works in the writing classrooms, the students need to be active, talk and discuss their ideas with each other rather than to be receptive students. This is because

there is no collaborative work that can be done without discussion and talking. In addition, teachers should encourage the students to discuss their ideas, and to write with each other by providing a collaborative environment. In order to achieve this, the teachers should give clear rules of group work, and should explain to the students that group work requires helping and supporting each other, providing each other with feedback for their work and providing peers with some suggestions and ideas. In order to create active groups, the teachers also need to conduct some writing activities that endorse the students to be active and work together collaboratively. In addition, to that, the students need to be provided with several and various learning resources such as: samples of different genres (e.g. letters, stories, shopping lists and reports); pictures; books and presentation tools (e.g. board and overhead head projector).

Using various resources in the writing lessons appropriately might attract the students to the lessons, help in developing their abilities in writing and could create independent students, who can work with some guidance and encouragement from the teachers. However, the findings of this study indicated that the resources that were used in teaching Arabic writing were little and most of them were not utilised appropriately, as the majority of the teachers were used them to please me rather as basic aspect for writing lesson. The implication of this is that instead of benefiting from the various resources, the students were confused by the resources which wasted lesson's time without helping the students in their writing. It is therefore, recommended that the teachers should be aware of the fact that any resource or equipment will only add to learning process if they used in appropriate ways. Teaching resources should be used in a way that provide the students with, ideas and information for their writing, motivate and scaffold their writing and help them to obtain

different feedback from their teachers and peers.

8.4.3 Implications and Recommendations for assessment:

The findings of this study also indicated a lack in teachers' understanding of new assessment objectives and criteria that based on continuance assessment. This is because the teachers were not trained appropriately on the new assessment objectives and criteria. In addition, they were not trained appropriately on how to implement the new assessment instruments (e.g. student's portfolio; daily observation card, student's self-impression card, final report of student's performance). Therefore, the majority of the teachers had a negative opinion about the assessment system in the BE schools. They consider the automatic transferring of first cycle students to next cycle without exam, as a reason of decreasing the competition among the students. In addition, it led the families to neglect their children's performance in schools. Therefore, teachers' criteria for assessing writing focused mainly on skills, such as handwriting and grammar in the final draft of written text; rather than assessing the processes that the students do in order to create written texts. Most of the teachers would basically write the final format of the text on the board for the students to copy to insure the neatness of the students' copybooks, neglecting entirely the various writing processes, such as planning, drafting, revising and rewriting.

To resolve this issue I recommend implementing the following. First, the teachers need more information and training about the assessment system, in order to be able to apply it appropriately. Second, the assessment should not consider as an instrument that measures students' performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black at el., 2004), rather assessment should be seen as a system that seeks developing both students' and teachers' performance.

The teachers need to use assessment outcomes as feedback to develop their practices, teaching performance, teaching and learning resources and the taught programme. Third, the final reports that are written about each student are particularly a vital portfolio of information. The teacher should utilise the information that was included in these portfolios to establish activities that suite students' needs according to their achievement level. By doing this the students will feel that although all of them passed to the next stage automatically, they are different in their performance and levels. This accordingly might encourage low achievers to develop their performance. Fourth, the students need to have confidence to participate in assessment by assessing their own performance and identifying their weaknesses. Fifth, the family should be informed about the assessment system so that they can follow their children and help them in the learning processes.

8.4.4 Implications and Recommendations for teachers training programmes:

This study indicated that teachers received little in-service training on the new teaching methods and the new assessment system. The implication of this issue is that the majority of the teachers in the BE schools lack clear understanding of the new curriculum objectives, the skills and rules to implement the new teaching methods and assessment. In addition, most teachers still are unaware about student-centred education, and still play the role of a controller, where the teacher controls all activities and students are respondents and receivers, who answer and talk when they are asked to. Although some teachers guide and encouraged their students, they limit their supervision and encouragement on limited aspects, such as right spelling and neat handwriting, rather than encouraging the students and guiding them to be creative writers. Therefore, I suggest that training programmes need to be developed in several aspects. First, the duration of the in- service training programme

needs to be longer as (one-week) is not enough to train the teachers on different aspects in different subjects (i.e. Arabic Language, Islamic Education and Social Science). Second, most teachers mentioned that they lack practical training, that guides them to teach particular skill and process properly. Even though, the teachers need theoretical information about the subjects that they teach however, they also need practical examples in teaching different skills of Arabic language. The teachers can read the theoretical information about the subjects from books and literature. Nevertheless, they get practical examples of teaching processes, mainly through the in- service training programmes. In addition, the teacher should be trained to apply practically the concept of student- centred education, and how to be coaches and guides and encouragers for their students.

Furthermore, training programmes are limited to the beginning of the school year. However, I believe that teachers' training programme should be continuous to cover teachers' needs, according to their regular practices. According to their visits to schools, curriculum professionals should explore teachers' needs, and the skills that they need to be trained on. This will help the curriculum professionals to arrange, and organise appropriate training programmes for them.

8.5 Limitations of the study and direction for future research:

In any field of research, there is nothing that could be termed as an ideal study. Each study has its limitations according to its nature. This study, as I mentioned earlier, is a case study research, investigating teaching and learning Arabic writing in fourth grade at the BE schools in Oman from different angles. The first angle is curriculum professionals' perspectives. The second angle is teachers' practices. The third angle is teachers'

perspectives. The fourth angle is students' practices. The fifth angle is students' perspectives. The sixth angle is students' written texts. This investigation was achieved through qualitative research methods that included interviews, observation and students text analysis. Although rich data about the case of teaching and learning Arabic writing was obtained, this investigation was limited in terms of contexts and subjects. The upcoming section highlights the limitations of this study.

This study was conducted in only four schools in the Muscat region. So there are many other schools, which might have reflected different aspects in teaching and learning Arabic writing. Thus, further studies need to be conducted to cover a number of different schools in the Muscat region for the purpose of exploring and identifying the states and patterns of teaching and learning Arabic writing in these schools.

Additionally, this study was conducted in the Muscat region, whereas the other regions in Oman were not covered in this study. I believe that these regions have their own unique socio- cultural features that reflect the cultural diversity of the Omani society. Therefore, additional studies need to be conducted in these regions to investigate if there are any differences in patterns of teaching and learning Arabic writing among these regions.

Furthermore, this study observed teaching and learning Arabic writing in nine writing classrooms. In other words, nine teachers participated in this study. Thus, only one lesson of each teacher was observed. This means that the teachers were not observed while teaching different topics, and applying different activities. The finding of this study revealed that some teachers limited themselves to the curriculum. On the other hand, other innovative teachers conducted extra activities that aimed at developing students' writing

abilities. Therefore, I suggest that additional studies need to be conducted in order to explore effectiveness of these activities. These activities could be highly beneficial for other teachers in the field.

This study examined teaching and learning Arabic writing in the fourth grade. However, it is integral to explore teaching and learning Arabic writing in different grades. For example, I believe that teaching and learning writing in fourth grade is directly related to teaching and learning writing in grade two and three. Therefore, further studies are required in grade two and three in order to further understand the aspects examined in this study (i.e. knowledge for writing, teaching processes and teacher's roles in the classroom). Additionally, these aspects are needed to be investigated in the higher grades (five to ten) in cycle two of the BE schools.

In addition, this study indicated some differences in teachers' perspectives and practices according to their years of experiences and specialization. However, it did not examine gender differences among teachers, as all participating teachers in this study were females. Thus, further studies need to be conducted to examine male teachers' practices and perspectives about teaching and learning Arabic writing.

Reviewing earlier studies revealed that researching the teaching and learning of writing focused on either the teacher or the students or both of them. However, examining the influence of the curriculum on classroom practices was rare. I have explained this as a reason why teachers in the western countries (English speaking countries) are not directly affected by curriculum restraints. Although in these countries there is a national curriculum that guides and directs the teachers in their teaching processes, the teachers are still given

some freedom and flexibility to decide what to teach, and what to focus on. In contrast, the teachers in Oman are completely restricted to follow the prescribed curriculum. Therefore, further studies need to be conducted in order to explore the influence of the policy, and the prescribed curriculum on the teaching and learning of writing.

This study as other research (e.g. Hughes & Greenhough, 2003) suggests that the family has an impact on teaching and learning writing. However, this issue was not explored in depth in this study. Therefore, I believe that further research should be directed toward considering this as a vital issue that needs to be explored in different contexts.

I mentioned earlier that this study examined the teaching and learning of Arabic writing from six different angles: curriculum professionals' perspectives; teachers' practices; teachers' perspectives; students' practices; students' perspectives and students' written texts.

Through this study I found that it was vital to triangulate curriculum professionals' perspectives with other angles to get rich data. For example, triangulating curriculum professionals' perspectives with teachers' perspectives indicated some contradictions between curriculum professionals and the teachers. Teachers' perspectives reflected issues related to the implementation of the curriculum, which was not considered by curriculum professionals, such as the differences between students' achievement levels, students' real needs. Therefore, I believe that in order to get a fuller picture about classroom practices it is vital to include both curriculum professionals and teachers who implement the curriculum. This is because each group will identify the issue from a different angle, which will clarify the gap between the theoretical aspects and the practical aspects in teaching

writing.

In addition, through this study I found that in order to gain a realistic picture about classroom practices, it is crucial to triangulate teacher's practices with students' practices and their perspectives. This is because some teachers tend to please me by changing their routine practices and varying their teaching strategies, and using various resources. However, the students depict the real picture about what goes in the writing classroom. In this study, most teachers in the observed classrooms used several teaching materials, such as flash cards, pictures and overhead projector. When I asked the students about what they liked in the observed lessons they mentioned the variety in the teaching resources, as one of the aspect that they liked. The students added that the teachers did not always use these materials.

In this study I also found that discussing with the students about their own written texts can encourage them to talk about their perspectives on their writing and the writing lessons in general. Therefore, I recommend the importance of using several methods to probe children's perspectives.

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Appendices

Appendix 4.1 Background information about the teacher

Dear teacher,

This form is one of the research instruments on teaching and learning Arabic writing for fourth grade students in the Basic Education schools.

The information that you will give will be used for the research purposes and your cooperation with the researcher will help to achieve the research aim.

So please complete this form in adequate way.

Thank you for your support.

The researcher,

Background information about the teacher

Name:.....

School:.....

Classroom:

Date:.....

1. How many years teaching experience have you had?

.....
.....

2. What type of teacher- training courses have you taken?

.....
.....

3. What was your specialisation in the teacher-training course?

.....
.....

4. What curriculum subject- matters have you taught during your work as a teacher?

.....
.....

5. What curriculum subject- matters you are teaching now?

.....
.....

6. What type of in- service training in connection with Arabic language and writing have you undertaken since you became one of the Basic Education schools teachers?

.....
.....

Appendix 4.2 Official permission letters to access to research setting

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
University of Bath
Bath
BA2 7AY

Tel No: 01225 386545
Fax No: 01225 386113
Email: ed.doc@bath.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF
BATH

Director of Technical Office for
Studies and Development
Ministry of Education
Oman

17 December 2003

Dear Sir/Madam

Ms Masooma Al Ajmi : PhD at University of Bath

Ms Masooma Al Ajmi is a full time student on the PhD programme in the Department of Education at the University of Bath. She began her studies in March 2002 and is being supervised by Ms Louise Poulson and Dr David Skidmore. Registration on the degree programme may continue until March 2006 and can be extended on application to the Director of Studies. The title of Ms Al Ajmi's thesis is:

Teaching and Learning Arabic Writing for Fourth Grade Students in the Basic Education Schools in the Sultanate of Oman: Practices, Beliefs and Perceptions

We should be most grateful if you would be kind enough to allow Ms Al Ajmi permission to carry out her fieldwork in the Basic Education Schools in Oman. If you need any further information, please contact us. We should be very happy to supply you with more details of Ms Al Ajmi's studies.

Thank you very much.

Yours faithfully

Dr Felicity Wikeley
Director of Studies for Research

Appendix 4.3 Consent form

Dear teacher

The researcher is conducting a research in the area of teaching and learning Arabic writing for fourth grade students in the Basic education schools. Applying this research demands:

- ❖ Observing Arabic writing classroom.
- ❖ Interviewing the teacher who was observed in the writing classroom.
- ❖ Getting some professional background information about the teacher.
- ❖ Interviewing the four students who were focused on in the observed classroom.
- ❖ Collecting two samples of written texts of the four students from two different lessons in two different topics (two pieces of writing from each student).

All information will be collected through last resource will be confidential, and will be used for the research purposes. In addition no name of the participants will be used in manner which reflects the participant's identity.

By your cooperation with the researcher you are contributing in the research which may benefit the Arabic writing curriculum and pedagogy in the Omani schools.

All thanks for your faithful collaboration with the researcher.

The researcher

The teacher

عادة (4)

عزيزتي المعلمة:

تقوم الباحثة بإجراء دراسة عن موضوع تدريس التعبير الكتابي لتلاميذ الصف الرابع الأساسي. ومن متطلبات هذا الدراسة الآتي:

- ❖ تسجيل مشاهدة صفية لحصة من حصص التعبير الكتابي باستخدام الفيديو.
 - ❖ إجراء مقابلة مع المعلمة التي سيتم تسجيل حصة التعبير لديها.
 - ❖ أخذ بعض المعلومات الخاصة بتخصص المعلمة والمواد التي تقوم بتدريسها
 - ❖ إجراء مقابلة مع الطلاب الأربعة الذين سيتم التركيز عليهم في أثناء المشاهدة الصفية.
 - ❖ جمع عينات من كتابات الطلبة الأربعة في موضوعين مختلفين (عينتين لكل طالب).
- علما بأن جميع المعلومات التي سيتم الحصول عليها عن طريق المصادر السابقة سوف تكون سرية ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي. ولن تستخدم الأسماء بالشكل الذي يشير إلى شخصيات المشاركين في البحث. وبتعاونكم مع الباحثة في تطبيق هذا البحث فإنكم تساهمون في إجراء دراسة علمية قد تعود ببعض النفع على مناهج التعبير الكتابي وطرائق تدريسه في مدارس السلطنة. فلكم من الباحثة جزيل الشكر والتقدير على حسن تعاونكم.

المعلمة: غادة الحيساني

غادة الحيساني
٢٠١٤/٤/٢٤ م

الباحثة:

مصنومة

Appendix 4.4 Observation instrument

General Information about the observed lesson:

Name of the teacher:..... **Classroom:**.....

School:..... **Date:**.....

Time:..... **Duration of the lesson:**.....

1. What is the topic of the lesson?

.....
.....

2. What are you going to do in the lesson?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Observation instrument

Section (1) writing classroom setting and materials:

1. How is the class organised for teaching and learning writing (e.g. seating and display)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....

2. What materials are used in the writing classroom?

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.....

.....

Section (2) teacher's roles in the classroom and teaching strategies she uses:

3. What role does the teacher play in the writing classroom?

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.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4. What teaching strategies does the teacher use in the writing classroom?

◇ Introduction

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.....
.....
.....

◇ Main part:

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.....
.....
.....
.....

◇ Conclusion:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Section (3) writing processes students go through:

5. What do students do in the writing classroom?

◇ All the students in group.

.....

.....

.....

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◇ Student (1) Name:

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.....

.....

◇ Student (2) Name:

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.....
.....
.....

◇ Student (3) Name:

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◇ Student (4) Name:

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.....

Section (4) other observed things related to practices in the classroom

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Appendix 4.5 Semi- structured interview schedule for fourth grade students in the Basic Education schools

Section (1) information about the student*:

1. Tell me some information about yourself?
 - ❖ Your name?
 - ❖ Your school?
 - ❖ Your classroom?
 - ❖ What language do you talk at home with your family?
 - ❖ Date of the interview: Time:.....

Section (2) general information:

2. Tell me about things do you like in the school:

Probe:

- ❖ What activities do you do in the school?
- ❖ Do you like Arabic language lessons? Why?
- ❖ What do you like in the Arabic language lessons?

Section (3) Arabic writing forms and knowledge for writing:

3. What forms of writing do you like?

Probe:

- ❖ Do you like Arabic writing?
- ❖ Why?
- ❖ What makes you like writing?
- ❖ What do you like to write?
- ❖ Why do you like this type of writing?
- ❖ Do you like to choose your topic by your self?
- ❖ Why?

Besides recording these information notes will be taken of these information of each student

4. What do you need to know to make you write effectively?

Probe:

- ❖ Do you think writing is difficult or easy?
- ❖ Why?
- ❖ What do you need to learn to makes writing easy? For example spelling, hand writing, punctuation, sentence structure, generating idea and organising them.

Section (4) teaching strategies and teacher's roles in the Arabic writing lesson:

5. Did you like the writing lesson that we recorded?

Probe:

- ❖ Why?
- ❖ What did you like in the lesson?
- ❖ Did you like the way the teacher taught writing?
- ❖ What other ways would you like the teacher to use in teaching writing?
- ❖ How does the teacher help you in your writing?

Section (5) writing processes and activities in the classroom:

6. What writing processes do use to write effectively?

Probe:

- ❖ What do you want to tell me about your piece of writing?
- ❖ Did you plan before writing?
- ❖ Do you like what you have written?
- ❖ Why?
- ❖ Did you revise your writing?
- ❖ Why?
- ❖ Do you think your writing is good?
- ❖ Why?
- ❖ What things make your writing well?
- ❖ I saw/ heard you in the classroom doing / saying (.....)Tell me about it.
- ❖ Do you want to say any things else?

Thank you,

The researcher,,,,,,,,,

Appendix 4.6 Semi- structured interview schedule for Arabic language teachers of Fourth grade in the Basic Education schools

Section (1) Information about the teachers*:

Can you give some information about yourself?

Your name?

School name?

Your observed classroom?

Date of the interview:.....

Time:.....

Section (2) Knowledge for writing and writing forms:

1. What do you think are the important things that need to be taught to students in the Arabic writing lessons?

Probe:

- ❖ Compositional aspects (generating ideas and organising them)
- ❖ Transcriptional aspects (e.g. spelling, punctuation, handwriting).
- ❖ Knowledge about sentence structure grammar.
- ❖ Vocabulary.
- ❖ Why?

2. What types of writing do you think are important to be taught for students?

Probe:

- ❖ For example report, letter...
- ❖ Why?

Section (3) Preparations for writing classroom:

3. How should teachers prepare for writing lessons?

Probe:

- ❖ Classroom setting.
 - ❖ Materials.
-

* Besides recording this information, notes have been taken of each teacher

Section (4) Writing strategies and teacher's role in the writing classroom:

4. What strategies, teaching techniques and approaches are be used in the writing classroom to develop student's writing?

Probe:

- ❖ For example using models, framework, and discussion.
- ❖ Why do you think this is important?

5. What roles do teachers play in the writing classroom?

Probe:

- ❖ For example guiding and encouraging
- ❖ Why?

Section (5) Writing processes:

6. What types of writing processes are important for students to go through to develop their writing ability?

Probe:

- ❖ Before writing
- ❖ After writing.
- ❖ For example planning, revising?
- ❖ Why do you think it is import?

Section (6) teacher's perspectives about the observed lesson*:

7. What do you want to tell me about the lesson that has been recorded in your classroom?

Probe:

- ❖ Strategy you used.
- ❖ Your roles.
- ❖ Students (some interactions or behaviour of the four students)

* The videotape will be given for each teacher one day before the interview to give her some time to watch it and find the aspects that she wants to comments on regarding her practices.

- ❖ Materials.
- ❖ Knowledge and skills you emphasised.
- ❖ Why do you think this aspect is important?
- ❖ How does it help in students' writing development?

Section (7) General comments:

8. Do you have any comments you want to say about teaching and learning Arabic writing in the Basic Education schools?

Probe:

- ❖ Successes
- ❖ Difficulties

9. What do you think about the following concepts: giving the students freedom to choose their topics, writing for various purposes, and awareness of audiences?

Probe:

- ❖ Why?
- ❖ How you apply it in the writing classroom?

Thank you for cooperation

The researcher,,,,,,,,,

Appendix 4.7 Semi- structured interview schedule for Arabic language curriculum professionals

Name:.....

Position:.....

Date:.....

Time of interview:.....

Section (1) Writing curriculum aims and its foundation:

1- What are the aims of Arabic writing curriculum?

Probe:

❖ Why do you think these aims are important?

2- What are the foundations that you based the Arabic writing curriculum on?

Probe:

❖ Why?

3- How was the writing curriculum organised to achieve its aims?

Probe:

❖ Why was it organised in this way?

Section (2) Knowledge for writing and writing forms:

4. What are the basic knowledge and skills that you focused on in the writing curriculum?

Probe:

❖ Why?

5. What forms of writing did you focus on in the fourth grade writing curriculum?

Probe:

❖ Why do you think these forms are important?

Section (3) Teaching-writing strategies:

7. What teaching writing strategies, techniques and approaches are emphasised in the teacher's guide and in-services workshops?

Probe:

- ❖ Why do you think this is important?
- ❖ How did you train teachers to use these strategies?

Section (4) Writing as processes:

7. What types of writing processes are important to be taught for students to develop their writing ability?

Probe:

- ❖ Why do think these processes are important?
- ❖ Did you stress them in the writing curriculum?
- ❖ How?

Section (5) Some concepts of teaching and learning writing:

8. What do you think about the following concepts: giving the students freedom to chose their topics, writing for various purposes, and awareness of audiences?

Probe:

- ❖ Why?
- ❖ How did you apply it in the writing curriculum?
- ❖ What else do you want to add related to teaching and learning Arabic writing?

9. what do you think about these aspects which were mentioned by some teachers:

- ❖ Limitation in the content of the writing curriculum.
- ❖ Limitation in the in-service training programmes.
- ❖ Limitation in the teaching materials.

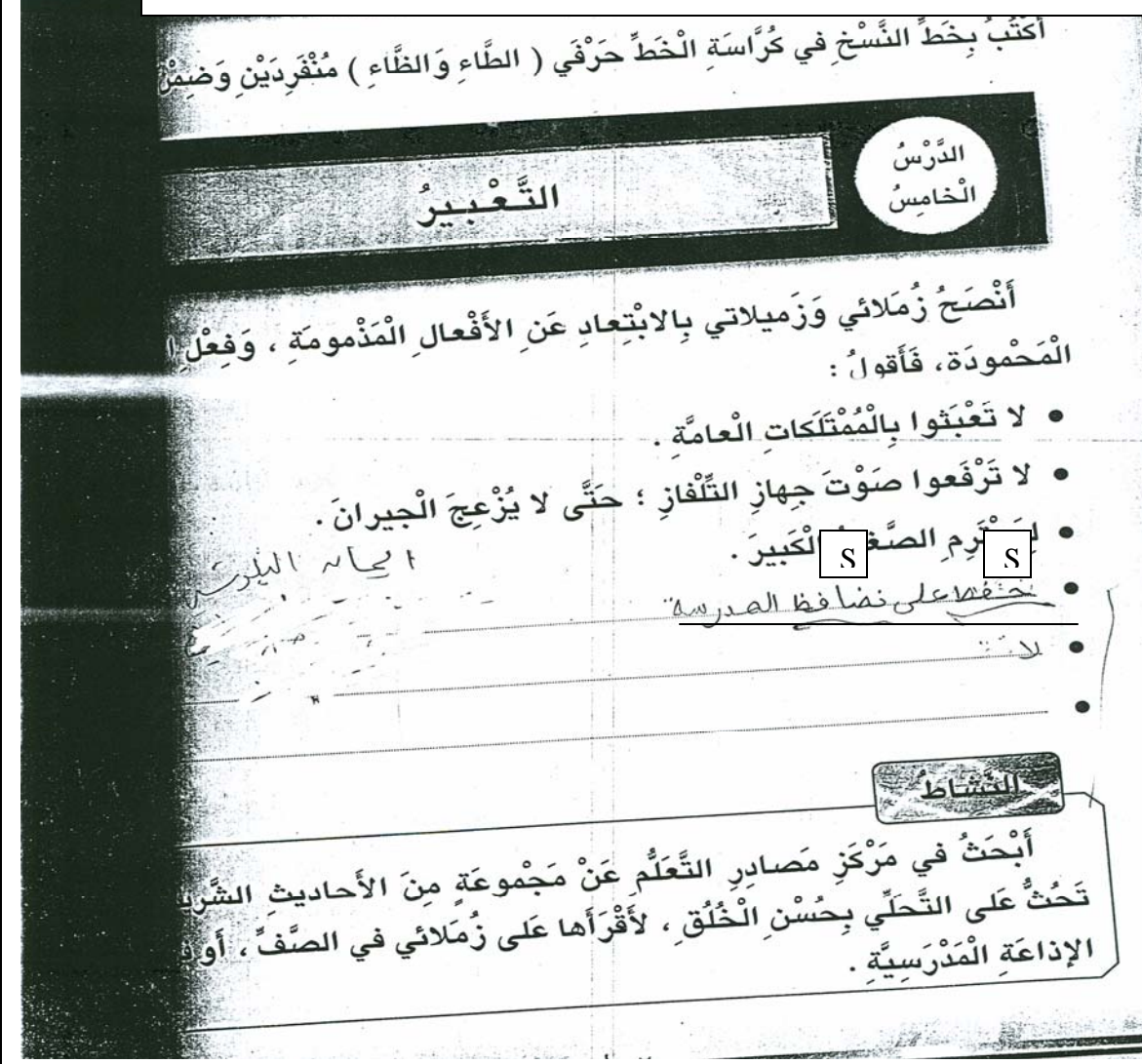
Thank you for cooperation

The researcher,,,,,,

Appendix 5.1 Examples of students' written texts:

P9

This text was written by a low achieving girl (P9). The text was on a prescribed topic about bad behaviour and good behaviours. Although the teacher discussed all sentences that should be written by students in their textbooks, this student could not write the text.



P9

This text is one of free written texts. It was also written by (P9). This text includes some separate sentences that do not relate to a particular topic. It is more about particular events that this student went through. In addition it includes several spelling and grammatical

* I went to park

S
ذَهَبْتُ إِلَى عَدِيْقَةٍ

I went to the school

ذَهَبْتُ إِلَى الْمَدْرَسَةِ

A trip in the park

G

I went with father to stream

رَحَلَةٌ فِي الْمَدِيْقَةِ

Roads in Oman

S G
ذَهَبْتُ مَعَ أَبِي فَلَاحِي

Play with my friend Fatma in the park

G S
الْتِمَاعُ فِي عَفَاةٍ

We ,I love Oman

G S
لَعِبَةُ مَرْمَدِيْقِي عَاطِمَةٌ فِي الْمَدِيْقَةِ

G
نَحْنُ نُحِبُّ عَفَاةً

* I translated these samples of students' written texts as they were written by students, with there spelling, grammatical and punctuation mistakes.

P14

This text was written by a high achieving boy (i.e.P14). The text is one of the structured topics that required writing separate sentences to identify the importance of the cooperation in the society. P14 wrote four sentences; two of them do not relate to the question's request.

Cooperation is the essence of life

Cooperation among members of the society leads to an orderly conduct and cleanness

The Army cooperates to defend the nation.

We cooperate in thick and thin.

اَكْتُبْ فِي كُرَاسَةِ الْخَطِّ جُمْلَةً تَشْتَمِلُ عَلَى حَرْفَيْ (الطَّاءِ وَالظَّاءِ) .

التَّعْبِيرُ

الدَّرْسُ
الْخَامِسُ

اَكْتُبْ اَرْبَعَ جُمَلٍ عَنْ فَوَائِدِ التَّعَاوُنِ لِلْمَجْتَمَعِ عَلَى نَمَطِ الْجُمْلَةِ الْآتِيَةِ :

* التَّعَاوُنُ يَقْوِي اَوَاصِرَ الْمَحَبَّةِ بَيْنَ اَفْرَادِ الْمَجْتَمَعِ .

١. التَّعَاوُنُ يَمُنِّحُ الْمَجْتَمَعِ اَمْنًا وَمَعْنَى الْحَيَاةِ الْمَعْنِيَّةِ .

٢. التَّعَاوُنُ بَيْنَ اَفْرَادِ الْمَجْتَمَعِ يَحْمِلُ النِّزَامَ وَالنِّظَامَ .

٣. الْحُرُوسُ الَّتِي تَتَّوَعَّدُ بِهَا الدُّوَاءُ عَنِ الدَّلَادِ .

٤. نَتَّعَاوُنُ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ .

النَّشَاطُ

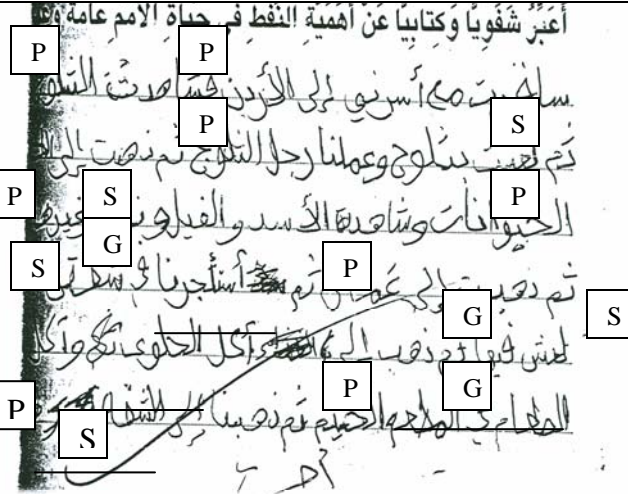
١. اَخْتَارُ مَشْرُوعًا اَتَّعَاوُنُ مَعَ ثَلَاثَةِ مِنْ زُمَلَائِي عَلَى تَنْفِيذِهِ ، وَاتَّحَدَّثُ عَنْهُ اَمَامَ زُمَلَائِي فِي الصَّفِّ .

٢. اَقُومُ مَعَ مَجْمُوعَتِي بِمُلاحَظَةِ الْاَعْمَالِ الَّتِي تُقَدِّمُهَا الْجَمْعِيَّةُ لِلطُّلَابِ لِمُدَّةِ اُسْبُوعٍ ، ثُمَّ اُسْجَلُ مُمَاحَظَاتِي ، وَاعْرِضُهَا عَلَى زُمَلَائِي فِي الصَّفِّ .

P14

This text was also written by (P14). The text is one of the free written texts that were written in the free writing lesson. P14 wrote about his journey to Jordan with his family. The text included several ideas and they were well organized. The text included few spelling mistakes; however it lacked punctuation marks.

I traveled with my family to Jordan there I saw the snow and I played with the snow we made a snow man then we went to the zoo and we saw the lion, the elephant and so on after that I went to Amman and we rented a flat and lived in it then we went to eat sweet and food in the Alkayam restaurant then we went to the flat.



P22

This text was written by a high achiever girl (i.e.P22). The text is one of structured topics that required summarizing the story of the wolf and the shepherd and identifying the lessons that were learnt from the story. P22 wrote four sentences do not relate to the question's request. The spelling of the text was correct, yet the text lacked punctuation marks.



Truth is a commended deed

Lying is a slandered deed
No one believes the liar

even if he said the truth

The people in the village
did not help Said

أَلْحَصُّ الْقِصَّةِ فِي خَمْسِ جُمَلٍ مُفِيدَةٍ ، مُبَيِّنًا فَوَائِدَ الصِّدْقِ وَمَضَارِّ الكَذِبِ :

P الصدق صفة حسنة

P الكذب صفة سيئة

P لا أحد يصدق الكذاب حتى لو صدق

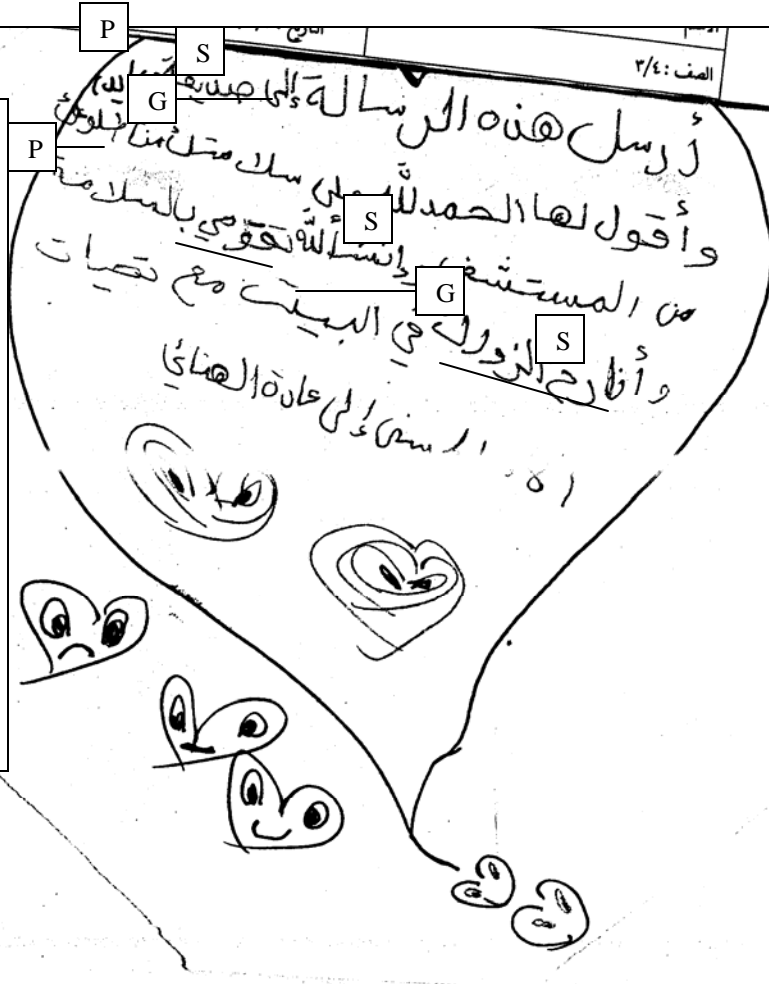
P لم يذهب أهل القرية لمساعدة سعيد

أَسْرِدُ بِلُغَةٍ عَرَبِيَّةٍ سَلِيمَةٍ عَلَى مَسَامِعِ زَمَلَانِي فِي الصَّفِّ طَرْفَةً
قَرَأْتُهَا ، أَوْ سَمِعْتُهَا ، وَأَطْلُبُ إِلَيْهِمْ تَحْدِيدَ الْعِبْرَةِ الْمُسْتَفَادَةِ مِنْهَا .

P22

This text was also written by P22. It is one of free written texts. P22 wrote a letter for her friend who was sick in the hospital. The text is clear and well organized in terms of ideas. However, the text included some spelling mistakes and lacked punctuation marks.

I am sending this letter to my friend Aida to tell her thank god for your safety and I wish that you will be better and I will visit you at home with my regards



P28

This text was written by a low achieving boy (i.e.P28). The text is one of the structured topics that required writing five sentences describing the Oryx and identifying how Oman protected it from the extinction. Although the text was written on the board, this student was unable to copy it correctly; namely the text was inaccurate in terms of spelling, punctuation and handwriting. Therefore it is difficult to read or understand what this student wrote.

أَكْتُبُ خَمْسَ جُمَلٍ عَنِ صِفَاتِ الْمَهَا الْعَرَبِيَّةِ ، وَدَوْرِ السُّلْطَنَةِ فِي الْمُحَافَظَةِ عَلَيْهَا .
لَتَمَيِّزُ الْمَهَا بِالرِّشَاقِ وَجَمَالَ الْمَيْرُورِ وَالرَّوْحِ الْأَنْبِيَّ
لَفِي الْمَدَامِ الصَّحْبِ كَمَا لَفِي الْمَدَامِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ وَكَرَّ الْفَاعِلِ
بِسَبَبِ الْمَهَا بِهَا ذَاكَ السَّمِ بِرَبِّهَا فِي الْجِيِّ ابْنِ سِرْلَعِ
تُسَمَّى الْمَهَا الْعَرَبِيَّةُ بِمَدَّةِ أَسْطَلَا الْوُطَيْبِيِّ النَّاسِ
بِقُدْرَةِ مَلِكِ السُّلْطَانِ مِنْ مَدَامِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ وَكَرَّ الْفَاعِلِ
مَعْبُودِ بَرِّ الْوُطَيْبِيِّ



أَرْجِعُ إِلَى مَرَكِّزِ مَصَادِرِ التَّعْلُمِ أَوْ غَيْرِهِ ، وَأَكْتُبُ عَنِ الْمَهَا الْعَرَبِيَّةِ ،
وَأَمَّا كَيْنِ اسْتِطَانِهَا .

P28

This text was also written by P28. It is one of the free written texts. P28 wrote two incorrect lines that do not include one single correct word.

