Workplace Writing: A Multi-Perspective Study of Engineer Alumni's Preparedness for English L2 Writing in Oman

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Declaration

I, Tayiba Al Hilali, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Tayiba Al Hilali

(word count: 85,165)

Dedication

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(الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَٰذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ)

سورة الأعراف (٣٤)

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"Praise to Allah, who has guided us to this; and we would never have
been guided if Allah had not guided us." Quran [7:43]

I dedicate this thesis to the pure soul of his majesty, Sultan Qaboos,
who devoted his entire life for the development of Oman, to the soul of
my father, the late Suleiman Thani Al Hilali, who had a dream of a child
pursuing studies in London, to the soul of my grandmother who passed
away during my PhD journey, and to the soul of my aunt who brought
me up and had been a mother and a friend to me. May Allah's mercy
and forgiveness be upon their souls. Amen!

Abstract

This explorative, interpretive, qualitative study seeks to understand and problematise college alumni's preparedness for engineering workplace writing in English in Oman. The issue of preparing learners to write for workplace writing has been widely contested by social learning theories and previous research on university-workplace transition of novices. This is due to the situated nature of writing which makes teaching genres outside their local contexts problematic. The study has two primary objectives. First, from Social Constructionism and Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) perspectives, the study makes a theoretical contribution to conceptualising workplace English L2 writing preparedness by adopting a social view of writing to explore the contextual and situated nature of workplace writing. Second, the study makes a contribution to knowledge in the field by tackling the issue of alumni's preparedness for workplace writing gained in college writing classes through directly investigating the views of alumni and line managers to understand the factors contributing to the perceived preparedness. To achieve these objectives, I used a multi-perspective approach. I collected qualitative data over a period of one year through 16 semi-structured interviews as the main method for data collection, with 12 Higher College of Technology (HCT) engineer alumni and four line managers at five different private sector companies in Oman. The participants included both new and experienced alumni in different fields of engineering. To better understand the workplace writing in these specific contexts, the interview data was supported with subsidiary data from textual analysis of 29 alumni's workplace written samples.

The findings revealed two levels of contextual elements at which workplace writing operates in the studied context: rhetorical and socio-contextual. The former includes audience, purpose and valued style, and the latter collaborative writing, physical environment and level of experience. Participants' perceptions were shaped by factors such as genre awareness, deficiencies in technical writing experiences at the

college, such as lack of task authenticity, lack of feedback and graduates' attitudes. The interpretations of the findings suggest that the college role in learners' preparedness for workplace writing is significant and perceived differently by individuals. The findings also provide theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications for research and teaching in the area of ESP/ technical/ professional writing.

Impact statement

The field of technical writing has grown increasingly with the growth of English as the primary language for international business and relations, and its importance for the development of the industrial world has been widely recognised. However, dissatisfactions expressed by employers with the level of preparedness of college graduates to meet the demands of the kind of writing required in the workplace abound. This has necessitated investigation into the preparedness of college alumni for the highly contextualised nature of workplace writing. The study contributes to theory, knowledge and practice inside and outside academia.

The study's theoretical contribution concerns problematising and conceptualising workplace English L2 writing preparedness by taking a social perspective to understand the contextual nature of workplace writing. Particularly, by focusing specifically on the discipline of engineering, with graduates of HCT who typically would have entered college with low English proficiency, the study contributes to the body of knowledge concerning preparing such learners for workplace writing. The findings of the study contribute to the empirical understanding of college graduates' preparedness for workplace writing and the potential role played by the academic context in graduates' preparedness. The findings have highlighted that there is no straightforward answer to how the classroom can prepare learners for workplace writing; instead, this should be problematised due to the complex and situated nature of workplace writing. Therefore, I argue that traditional needs analysis approaches are insufficient for investigating workplace writing. Hence, the study offers a framework to researchers wishing to investigate this issue in their own contexts whether locally or internationally, by theorising the research from two angles: exploring the contextual elements shaping workplace writing and directly investigating how preparedness is perceived by the professional stakeholders. So, researchers with similar quests are encouraged to adopt a similar perspective in investigating workplace

writing in order to understand learners' preparedness for it. Furthermore, the study draws on interdisciplinary fields, thus, it may be of interest to researchers across different disciplines within education: higher education, applied linguistics and workplace communication. In terms of methodology, the procedures, challenges and other practicalities involved in recruiting professionals and getting access to industries might be insightful for other researchers.

As for the impact outside academia, the findings of this study provide contributions to groups of stakeholders, namely ESP/technical writing teachers, course developers, employers and graduates. The writing teachers can utilise the pedagogical implications proposed by this thesis to prepare activities based on the contextual elements identified by the study. Additionally, they can modify their instructions and feedback practices based on the factors shaping the perceived preparedness noted in the findings. Likewise, the findings inform the design and development of ESP courses in the studied context as well as other similar contexts. In fact, I have been contacted by a policy maker who is a course developer, to obtain my research findings to help make important decisions regarding the technical writing courses at HCT. Some of the findings are influential for the employers who expect to recruit graduates with excellent written communication skills. They can gain insights from the findings regarding the role of the workplace in graduates' preparedness. Finally, some implications are useful for novice graduates seeking to join the workplace. They can gain insights from the findings regarding graduates' socialisation into the new writing context.

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I would like to thank several people without whom the completion of this work would not have been possible. They deserve my sincerest gratitude for all the support they have provided to make this happen.

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List of Abbreviations

CoT	Colleges of Technology
CW	Collaborative Writing
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELC	English Language Centre
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FYP	Foundation Year Programme
HCT	Higher College of Technology
PFYP	Post Foundation year Programme
RGS	Rhetorical Genre Studies
SFL	Systemic Functional linguistics
TRA	Telecommunications Regularity Authority

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study and the rationale for conducting it and provides a statement of the problem. As this study is context-specific, the chapter then provides an overview of the broader context of the study to explicate the background for this investigation. This is followed by an explanation of the significance of the study for the Omani context and the wider context, and identification of the gap in the research. Research aims and research questions are then presented. The chapter ends with definitions of key concepts and a brief outline showing the organisation of the thesis.

This explorative, interpretive, qualitative study seeks to understand the English L2 writing preparedness of engineer college alumni in professional contexts in Oman. It does so to problematise alumni college preparation for workplace writing as they negotiate the transition between these two different worlds (Bremner, 2018; Dias et al, 1999; Schneider & Andre, 2005). The study aims to uncover the characteristics of workplace writing through the lenses of social constructionism and Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) approaches which view writing as contextualised social action. It also examines how the professional stakeholders—the college alumni and their line managers—perceive alumni's preparedness for the demands of workplace writing. Thus, tackling the phenomenon from two angles to problematise the issue of preparing learners for workplace writing is intended to provide a holistic picture of the role played or can be played by the college in preparing learners for workplace writing, and to further demystify the issue of preparedness.

The main argument underlying this study is that college has an important role to play in preparing learners for workplace writing, and the known difference between the academic and professional domains should not be seen as an obstacle in preparing the learners. Rather, exploring the intricacies of workplace writing and its relationship with the social context may enable college composition teachers to better equip learners for the realities of the corporate world. Thus, this study

looks beyond the text to explore the contextual and discursive factors surrounding and constraining the workplace writing in the given context of study, and further extends the debate of the possibility of teaching workplace genres in academic context by investigating how the professional stakeholders perceive alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. In this thesis, I contend that teaching the formal and textual features of genres is not sufficient for preparing the learners, instead, they may benefit more from training to adopt a socio-rhetorical approach to consider the contextual constraints influencing workplace writing practices and to sensitise as to how to learn workplace genres and as to the socially-situated nature of workplace writing.

1.1 Rationale and statement of the problem

My own experience as a technical writing teacher at the Higher College of Technology (HCT), one of the seven Colleges of Technology (CoTs) in Oman, sparked my interest and provided the genesis for the current study. The Technical Writing courses I taught are part of a Post-Foundation Year Programme (PFYP) offered to diploma students from various disciplines: applied sciences, engineering, information technology, and business. The PFYP is an extension of the English foundation programme offered at the English Language Centre (ELC), as stated in ELC Programmes and Courses (HCT, 2015). The PFYP was created as part of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) committee's efforts to develop an ESP programme to cater for the needs of various disciplines taught in the college. As per the graduate attributes that the college with its various programmes aspire to achieve (as stated on College Goals and Values), graduates should be able to communicate effectively in written and spoken English (HCT, 2015).

However, the efficacy of this programme, and whether the above-mentioned graduate attribute is considered while designing this programme, is contested as discipline faculty members and workplace employers continuously express their dissatisfaction with students and graduates' English proficiency. Despite all the efforts exerted in these

courses to prepare the students, anecdotal evidence indicates that employers in the private sector companies which recruit college graduates often complain about the English proficiency of the graduates. My acquaintances working at some of these companies often criticize the poor English communication skills of HCT graduates specially written skills. Students' struggle with writing is also witnessed by me when I was teaching Technical Writing 1 and Technical Writing 2 courses at HCT. Empirically, previous local studies have noted that higher education graduates are still not sufficiently proficient in English and lack the communication skills required at the workplace (Al-Issa, 2011; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). This is particularly true about the writing skills as writing has been found to be "a nightmare to many Omani employees" (Al-Busaidi, 1995, p.322). All of these mostly survey-based local studies concluded that there is a gap between the English programme offered at the higher education and the demands of the real world.

1.2 Arriving at the research aim

My personal experience and the identified gap between the demands of workplace and the kind of courses offered in higher education institutes led me to develop the first research proposal for this study to conduct a needs analysis study and incorporate voices from the workplace in an attempt to bridge the gap between workplace and college writing. However, as social research rarely works out according to initial plans (see McKinley & Rose, 2017), after delving into the literature relevant to university-workplace transition and genre theory (covered in chapter 2), I realised that teaching workplace genres in the classroom is a problematic issue and should be investigated thoroughly. Thus, I have decided to problematise and make sense of the issue instead of trying to close the gap between these two contexts. To achieve this aim, in the present study the classroom boundary has been crossed and the workplace context has been explored.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study aims to understand the issue of HCT alumni's preparedness for English workplace writing in Oman. Previous related studies target somewhat different contexts, and are largely survey-based involving the perspectives of students or employees graduated from various higher education institutions with different majors. As a significant contribution to knowledge in the field, the current study seeks to gain in-depth insights of the contextualised nature of workplace writing and engineer alumni's preparedness through interviews and text-analysis as well as by incorporating the employers' perceptions.

Concerning related studies, one exception could be a recent PhD thesis by Al-Hinai (2018) which investigates the factors impeding CoTs graduates from excelling in the technical report writing skills required in the workplace. While this study involves CoTs graduates in general, the current study specifically targets the case of HCT to understand the preparedness of HCT graduates for the workplace writing demands given the non-standardised nature of technical writing courses offered at CoTs. In doing so, the current study intends to provide a detailed example of the phenomenon under investigation, so that the findings might be transferred to similar contexts. The findings of Al Hinai's study may not plausibly reflect the case of HCT, as Technical Writing courses are not standardised among the CoTs. In fact, due to the urgency and significance of the issue investigated in the current study, I have been contacted throughout my study multiple times by one of the policy makers at HCT who is interested in knowing about the findings of the study to inform the revision process of the ESP programme. Also, the current study involves the engineering discipline only, unlike Al Hinai's study which studied Technical Writing courses and workplace requirements from a broader perspective.

My study's contribution to knowledge differs from Al-Hinai's because it takes a social/contextual perspective of writing, or a non-linguistic approach—in Flowerdew's (2002, 2011) words—rather than a

linguistic one (as in Al-Hinai, 2018). Besides, my study adopts a Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) framework to explore the workplace writing practices which may complement Al-Hinai's (2018) study that adopted a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach to focus on the textual analysis of technical reports. Through text-analysis and interviews, Al-Hinai's investigation focused on the extent to which CoTs students are prepared for report writing in the workplace and the similarities and differences in the reports written in the Technical Writing courses in CoTs and those required in the workplace. However, the current study does not focus on one particular genre but contributes to knowledge by going beyond the text to investigate the contextual factors surrounding text construction. Such texts include not only reports (as in Al-Hinai) but also emails. Email has acquired important status in workplace communication, and it serves multiple functions from quick exchange of information to record keeping purposes. Email is considered in this study because it represents the communication practices of contemporary workplaces, and it is regarded as an essential component of ESP courses intending to prepare learners for workplace writing (Evans, 2012; Spence & Liu, 2013). Thus, exploring email and investigating how it is influenced by contextual factors is vital to understand students' preparedness for workplace writing.

Additionally, the multi-perspective (Paltridge, 2020) nature of this study makes it unique among the previous studies addressing graduates' transitioning to the workplace writing. The combination of professional stakeholders' perceptions of alumni's preparedness for the workplace writing and how the situated nature of workplace writing shapes alumni's writing practices provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the issue of preparing learners for the workplace writing demands. The present study is also unique because it amplifies the voices of the alumni having experienced both college and workplace writing as well as their employers. In so doing, I argue that professional stakeholders are best positioned to clarify workplace writing requirements and graduates' preparedness for them

while students or new graduates who have not yet joined the workplace can only anticipate what is required in the workplace (cf. Knoch et al., 2016).

While much of university-workplace transition research has been conducted in English speaking countries mostly with L1 learners, there is a paucity of such research on L2 learners' transitional experience especially in the Gulf countries, including Oman. As suggested by Duff (2008), more research on language socialization is needed in different contexts other than North America and Europe. Furthermore, Hyland (2013) stresses the need for more research on the context of professional writing and contends that greater attention must be given in ESP writing instruction to the realities of workplace writing which often occurs collaboratively. Therefore, the current study will contribute to the body of knowledge relevant to the transition of students to the workplace, and it will also extend the debate regarding the role of the university in supporting learners with this transition and the possibility of teaching workplace genres outside their context.

Investigating such an issue positioning workplace professionals as the main stakeholders may illuminate the realities of workplace writing so as to inform ESP courses in the given context and similar contexts. Furthermore, while this issue has been investigated in engineering, student interns have been the focus of most of such studies, but the current study takes on the broader views of both new and experienced graduates so as to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these two groups negotiate their workplace and college writing practices.

1.4 Context of the study

This section provides socio-historical background which is important to situate this study in the broader context (research setting is discussed in methodology). It presents a brief overview of the Omani context and the historical development of the English language in the labour market in Oman. It then links this with the development of the English language in the institutions of higher education. Particularly, it highlights the nature of technical education in Oman including HCT.

Although the study is not conducted in the academic context, it is highly motivated by the experiences and issues the researcher and the graduates have encountered in this context. Therefore, it is essential to explicate the nature of this context and how this study is significant in this particular context. Moreover, a brief overview of the workplace context that served as the research site for this study is provided (details of research setting are provided in Chapter 3).

1.4.1 An overview of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman[1] is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries established in 1981 as a form of political, economic and social alliance among six Middle Eastern countries including Oman: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates. According to the latest CIA estimate, the population of Oman is 4,613,241 with immigrants making up approximately 45% of its total population. The national religion is Islam and its official language is Arabic, though other languages are also spoken by some ethnic groups and foreign expatriates, such as Baluchi, Swahili, English, Hindi and Urdu. Arabic is the medium of instruction in public schools and English is the only foreign language taught in these schools. Since it has been introduced in the Omani educational system after the start of the 'renaissance' era in 1970, when his majesty Sultan Qaboos came to the throne and started building the modern Omani nation, English language has assumed an essential role in school and higher educational system as it has been deemed as central for the country's ongoing development (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

Economically, like the other Gulf countries, Oman is extensively and predominantly dependent on oil and gas resources, which can produce between 68% and 85% of government revenue. Nevertheless, it has initiated a plan for economic diversification and

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[1] Detailed overviews of the Omani context have been provided in other theses (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Hinai, 2018), therefore, this is just a brief overview

privatisation to deplete the dependence on the oil sectors as the main source of income. This diversification plan involves developing sectors like tourism, telecommunications, logistics and shipping, manufacturing and mining. It has also sought to rely on the Omani citizens to build its economy and provide more job opportunities for the locals by implementing an Omanisation policy, which refers to "the government scheme for gradually replacing the expatriate skilled labour force with Omani citizens"(Al-Jadidi, 2009, p.5). This has certainly required yielding qualified and competent graduates who can meet the demands of the labour market including English language competency.

1.4.2 The dominance of English in the labour market in Oman

The dominance of the English language in the labour market in Oman can be traced back to the discovery of oil in the Gulf countries which necessitated the recruitment of foreign expertise, and to the political and economic changes which had brought radical developmental transformations with them. Although Oman had never been a British colony, its trade relationship with Great Britain can be traced back to the 15th century and developed after granting Britain oil exploration concession in 1965 (Al-Busaidi, 1995). This has opened the doors for foreign workers, especially Indians, who are regarded as proficient speakers of English. In this sense, Indians have been instrumental in the expansion of English in Oman. Along with Indians, different Omani ethnic groups, such as Swahili speaking Omanis, Baluchis (a Persian tribe), and Lawatiyas (with Sindhi origins, known as competent users of English), have played a major role in introducing and spreading English in the labour market (Al-Busaidi, 1995). This expansion and prevalence of the English language has been accelerated in the renaissance era since His majesty, Sultan Qaboos has ruled the country from 1970. The development movements in various sectors, such as education, health and telecommunications, necessitated the demand for hiring foreign experts and establishing connections with different non-English speaking countries, such as Turkey, France and Japan. Thus, English has served as a means of communication with

these external parties and multi-national workforce prevalent in private sector companies in Oman (Al-Hinai, 2018; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

English is also widely used in oil and service industries (Al-Busaidi, 1995). Consequently, the association of the English language with Oman's major economic source, oil, and international trading partners has been conducive to its dominance in the labour market and its association with employees' successful careers. In fact, graduates with an excellent command of written and spoken English are exceptionally favoured and accepted in private sector companies, in particular oil companies where the official language of communication is English (Al-Jadidi, 2009). Furthermore, it has been noted that possessing good English communicative skills is associated with employees' success and promotion in the Omani labour market (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016). On the contrary, as Al-Busaidi (1995) found, low standards of English hinder Omani graduates' chances for employment in industries. Therefore, more training is required to better prepare learners for competently using the language in their professional careers (ibid). As noted, apart from oil and gas firms, the country has sought to diversify its economy to reduce dependency on oil revenues (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Brummer, 2013); attention was turned towards other private industries such as telecommunications, banking and tourism which predominantly use English in their operations. Thus, a mastery of English can play a large role in securing employment (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012).

1.4.2.1 *Local policies and pressure on higher education institutes*

Oman's access in the global economic community of the 21st century and the demand for Omanisation have called for education reform. The pressure on the institutes of higher education to reform the curricula to foster employment opportunities and socio-economic developments was further augmented with the commencement of 'Omanisation' as part of Oman's Third National Development Plan 1980-1985 (Donn & Issan, 2007). This policy could not be

accomplished without the provision of ample training in English communication skills required in private sector companies. Besides, the impositions on tertiary level educational institutes to take into account the requirements of the job market have been heightened since the 'Arab Spring' started in early 2011, when young Omanis protested on the streets, called for increasing employment and higher education opportunities, and fought against corruption in the government. The government reacted quickly to citizens' demands by employing around fifty thousand people within less than a month, reducing enrolment requirements at higher education institutes and expelling key officials from their posts (Al-Hinai, 2018).

Furthermore, having signed the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 2002, Oman made a commitment to participating in the global economy (Donn & Issan, 2007). Hence, foreign investments in the country introduced by the global forces have changed the demands for education (Al-Manthri, 2001). Since then, education policies have taken steps to develop higher education to cope with economic and market changes and take account of the demands of economic globalisation on the development of human resources. These initiatives are part of the 2020 vision plan and general education reform developed in 1995, which both aim to improve the quality of the national education system to equip students with necessary skills and knowledge for a successful career (ibid). One of the fundamental goals of this vision is human resources development as key success in the global economy, and these goals can be achieved through aligning education with economic developments nationally and internationally. Through this reform, English language, recognised as the language of international business and the only official foreign language used in Oman, has received tremendous attention in the higher education curricula to prepare students for written and spoken communication needed in the labour market.

In response to political issues and demands of local developmental policies, it has been essential to review tertiary level education policies

to better equip graduates with the skills required in the labour market (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Possessing English communicative skills is one the most recognised ones for increasing employability. Nevertheless, these skills have often been found inadequate in graduates in the Arab Gulf in general, and in Oman in particular (Al-Issa, 2011; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). As Al-Mahrooqi (2012) maintains, since English communication skills are essential for success in the professional career, it is of vast importance that Arab countries adapt their educational policies to achieve the desired reform.

Generally, ever since the introduction of English language classes in the educational system in 1970, the Omani government has realised the centrality of the English language for fostering the country's global economy. Therefore, it has been profoundly invested in teaching it as a foreign language at all educational levels, starting from grade 1 (after the introduction of the Basic Education programme in 1998) to undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). This investment is represented in the huge budgets allotted for developing ELT in the education system through hiring foreign experts for programme design, introducing advanced technology into ELT classrooms and re-evaluating existing teacher training programmes (Al-Issa, 2011). In addition, it was decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction in higher education institutions (Al-Bakri, 2013) in Oman to enhance learners' mastery of the language and to increase their employment chances in the private sector where English is mainly and officially used. The dominance of English language in the labour market in Oman, and the reliance on college graduates to take part in the country's development, display a strong link between tertiary education and the labour market. The outcome of this connection has been establishing and investing in higher education institutes which produce competent graduates as required by the workplace. One of these endeavours is initiating technical education.

1.4.3 Technical education in Oman: Colleges of Technology

To produce competent graduates who will be able to take part in the country's development, the Omani government has made extensive efforts to diversify higher education (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Therefore, a number of higher education institutions have been opened to meet the country's occupational needs. The top-ranked of these institutions is Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the only public university, established in 1986 with nine scientific and humanities colleges. Furthermore, seven colleges of technology have been opened in different regions offering Diploma and Bachelor's degree in various technical, scientific and business programmes. There are also 16 institutes for health sciences, one campus for the College of Banking and Financial Studies and five Colleges of Applied Sciences. Besides these state-funded institutes, there are also seven private universities and 19 colleges across the country. The current study focuses on the context of technical education represented by the Colleges of Technology (CoT) which are deemed as "instrumental in preparing young Omanis […] to meet the country's occupational needs" (Brummer, 2013, p.4).

Technical education started long before launching the public university, SQU. The creation of the Colleges of Technology was a response to the long concern of the government with technical/vocational education that began with establishing Oman Technical Industrial College in 1984 in the capital Muscat, which was upgraded and renamed as the Higher College of Technology in 2001. Other regional colleges of technology were launched across the country, located in Musanna, Nizwa, Ibra and Salalah, in 1993 followed by two more branches in Shinas and Ibri which were opened in 2005 and 2008 respectively (Higher College of Technology, 2019). These colleges operate under the Ministry of Manpower and aim to produce a workforce with adequate and relevant skills to fulfil jobs in the labour market. The programmes offered in these colleges generally include Engineering, Business Studies and Information Technology (IT), with an exception of HCT which includes

departments for Pharmacy, Applied Sciences, Fashion Design and Photography programmes. The programmes include four levels: A Foundation Year Programme (FYP), Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor of Technology (only offered at HCT in Engineering, Business Studies and IT with specific conditions) degrees.

Students who join these colleges have spent 9-12 years mainly at public schools where Arabic is the medium of instruction and English is taught as a single subject. Having missed out on admission to SQU or other institutes which require high grades in the General Education Certificate Examination and demand linguistic prerequisites, those who enrol into CoT are mostly low school achievers with poor English proficiency (Al-Husseini, 2004).

1.4.3.1 HCT

Given the focus of this study, it involves only HCT alumni and not those of the other colleges mainly because technical writing courses involved in this investigation are specifically the ones taught at HCT and not at the other branches. Another reason is that HCT is the central branch of the other colleges of technology and the largest among them. It is considered the second largest higher education institution after SQU, accommodating more than 12,000 students. The broad vision of HCT is to be an eminent technological institute offering focused education to prepare learners to be competent and skilled future professionals who join the labour market with consummate technological and personal skills. Thus, the college is committed to continuously develop its programmes and the quality of teaching and learning through curriculum review, market analysis and technological adoption. Besides critical thinking and problem-solving as graduate attributes, the college also focuses considerably on preparing graduates who can communicate effectively in spoken and written English since it is valued and officially used in the job market, especially in the private sector. The college therefore includes the English Language Centre (ELC) to support the development of

students' English language proficiency needed for their academic and professional success.

1.4.3.2 ELT at HCT

English language teaching offered in the ELC consists of two main programmes: The Foundation Year Programme (FYP) and the Post Foundation Year Programme (PFYP). The FYP is set to improve students' English proficiency before embarking on the PFYP and their academic disciplinary studies which are conveyed in English, as most of them have received their school education in Arabic. Starting students are usually 18 years old male and female high school graduates from various backgrounds and different capacities in terms English proficiency and general academic achievement (Al-Hinai, 2018).

Once joining HCT, students take a placement test administered by the ELC to determine their English proficiency level. Students who score outstandingly in this test (86% and above) are exempted from the FYP and can directly join PFYP where they can enrol in Technical Writing courses and their disciplinary subjects. Those with moderate or inadequate performance in the test are placed in one of four levels according to their scores (regardless of their disciplines) in FYP where they receive intensive courses of English (in addition to IT and Mathematics modules) in the four skills, with more time allocated for writing, i.e. around eight hours per week, as opposed to six hours per week for reading, listening and speaking. Students learn basic knowledge about writing sentences, paragraphs and essays. More attention is placed on writing due to students' difficulties with it compared to other skills and in order to prepare them better for the technical writing courses and disciplinary courses in PFYP. The general writing course offered in FYP is not the focus of this study.

My study focuses on the technical writing courses existing in the PFYP at ELC, which are part of the ESP programme offered to students from various disciplines intended to develop their English skills needed for the disciplinary studies and future professions. This programme is

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comprised of four modules offered at different levels of study: Technical Writing 1 and 2, Technical Communication and Public Speaking. The courses are delivered at different levels of study (i.e. Technical Writing 1 and Technical Writing 2 are taught in first year Diploma, Technical Communication in second year diploma and Public Speaking in Higher diploma) with four contact hours per week. The Technical Writing courses[2] can be described as adopting a 'common core' ESP approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) for students from various disciplines, and teaching interdisciplinary topics. Although both written and spoken communication skills are accounted for, the principal component which these courses focus on is writing. The Technical Writing 1 module focuses on teaching academic writing skills, such as paraphrasing, summarising, referencing and discussing graphs, needed for carrying out assignments in the disciplinary courses, and writing essays such as compare and contrast and descriptive essays. More advanced and technical writing is done in the Technical Writing 2 module which emphasises report writing skills through engaging students in work-related scenarios with a specific purpose and audience, as well as writing process essays. Similarly, the Technical Communication module focuses on advanced technical writing skills such as writing technical descriptions of electronic devices or tools. Job search skills, such as writing a CV and job application letters, are also practiced in this module as support for students after graduation. In addition, all three modules include units on teaching technical vocabulary the students are more likely to encounter in their academic disciplines or at the workplace.

The above-mentioned description of Technical Writing courses is based on the currently used coursebooks[3] at HCT to deliver the

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[2] In this thesis, Technical Writing courses refer to Technical Writing 1, Technical Writing 2 and Technical Communication courses provided in PFYP at HCT.

[3] These ESP courses, particularly Technical Writing 1 and Technical Writing 2 were developed in 2012 by the HCT PF Academic Coordinator based on a needs analysis with heads and content teaching staff. Prior to 2012, the English for General Academic Purposes course (EGAP) was mainly focused on academic writing skills (Al-Lawati, 2016), and even prior to this, teachers used to rely on

modules. Technical Writing 1 and 2 coursebooks are solely designed by the current Post-Foundation (PF) academic coordinator at HCT, whereas Technical Communication is a collaborative work of the ESP programme development committee including members (PF coordinators and some academic staff members from ELCs) from the seven Colleges of Technology. Hence, it is the only common coursebook among all the CoTs, whereas Technical Writing 1 and 2 modules have different content and coursebooks across the colleges. This non-uniform nature of most Technical Writing courses across CoTs is one of the reasons for focusing only on HCT alumni's writing in this study so as to gain in-depth understanding of this particular group of alumni in relation to technical writing courses offered at HCT. The assessment methods implemented in the current Technical Writing courses at HCT are comprised of quizzes (designed by the course instructor), mid-semester and final exams with tasks on vocabulary and on composition (designed by the PFYP testing committee led by the PF Academic Coordinator), and oral presentations only in Technical Communication.

It is hoped that the findings of the current study would contribute to the efforts made by the ESP course designers at HCT (and hopefully, similar programmes in other parts of the world), as it has reached out to workplace stakeholders whose voices and perceptions have been missing in the currently developed ESP courses.

1.4.4 The workplace context

The study involves participants from five different private sector companies: one telecommunications company and four oil and gas companies (details of these companies are given in Chapter 3). The telecommunications sector in Oman is among the most advanced and competitive sectors in the country and has grown rapidly in recent years. The oil and gas industry is the country's largest industry which

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independently developed materials and handouts taken from the internet and there was no standardised course material.

has been the driving force of the country's economy. Despite the country's efforts to diversify its economy, oil and gas has continued to remain its main source of income for supporting Oman's growing infrastructure, such as health, public education roads and electricity services. All oil- and- gas related activities run in industries are supervised by The Ministry of Oil and Gas (MOG). Although Omani graduates prefer joining the public sector due to various facilities provided there, the majority of CoT graduates in general, and HCT graduates in particular, are employed in the private sector due to the government's emphasis on the Omanisation scheme in the private sector as mentioned above. Generally, telecommunications and oil and gas firms are recognised to be the largest recruiters of HCT graduates. As mentioned earlier, the private sector officially uses English as its primary language of communication, as opposed to the public sector, and seeks to recruit candidates possessing outstanding written and spoken English communication skills.

1.5 Research aims

The study is designed according to the overall aim to understand and problematise HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. It specifically seeks to understand engineering alumni's and their managers' reflections on whether the college has a role to play in preparedness for workplace writing. To achieve this aim, the study is two-fold and investigates the issue from two angles. First, it takes a social perspective of writing to investigate the socially situated nature of genres as experienced by college alumni in the workplace. Specifically, it looks into how social/contextual elements shape the workplace writing practices of the alumni. This aim is underpinned by the argument that the potential role of the college in preparing learners for workplace writing should not be obstructed by the situated nature of workplace writing and the disparity between academic and workplace contexts. Instead, understanding what happens in the workplace is a crucial component of the process of preparing learners for the transition from academia to the workplace (Bremner, 2018), and the idea that the socially-situated nature of writing should be

incorporated in composition classes for better preparation of learners for workplace writing (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Gimenez, 2017). Second, as Landrum, Hettich, and Wilner (2010, p.97) argue, "[u]nderstanding the skills and abilities necessary for success is important for both institutions of higher education and their future graduates", especially since dissatisfaction with graduates' preparedness persists, it is important to investigate how the college preparation for workplace writing is perceived by the alumni and their line managers. This direct investigation of perceptions regarding preparedness is found to be important to understand the role that can be played by the college in preparing learners for workplace writing and to problematise preparedness (Knoch et al., 2016; Moore & Morton, 2017; Schneider & Andre, 2005) (see Chapter 2 section 2.1.6).

1.6   Definitions of key concepts

Having presented the study rationale, context, RQs and aims, this section now defines the key concepts in this study.

Contextualised / Socially-situated nature of writing: This concept is underpinned by the argument that writing and context are mutually constitutive as accounted for through Social Constructionism theory and RGS (see Chapter 2 section 2.2). In other words, writing does not occur in a vacuum, rather, it is shaped by the beliefs and values of the discourse community it occurs in. In the same vein, writing is seen to influence the community in which it is produced (Bazerman, 1988; Bhatia, 1999).

Social/contextual elements: This term refers to the rhetorical elements, such as audience and purpose (Bremner, 2018; Coe, 2002), and socio-contextual elements, such as collaborative writing (Bremner, 2010; Spilka, 1998; Storch, 2005), which shape and constrain workplace writing practices (see Chapter 4 for the distinction between rhetorical and socio-contextual elements).

Preparedness for workplace writing: By this phrase, I particularly refer to the role the college plays or should play in preparing learners for workplace writing. It entails alumni's self-perceptions of their readiness for the highly-situated nature of workplace writing as informed by their college and workplace writing experiences. Such preparedness in this study is not viewed as merely being able to understand the formal conventions of genres, but to be sensitive to the contextual elements shaping the written texts and the processes and practices involved in the construction of the texts, and to possess analytical tools to unpack the context (Angouri & Harwood, 2008).

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters including this introductory chapter which has provided the rationale and significance of the study and an overview of the context of the study. It also presented the research aims and research questions. The next chapter reviews the scholarly literature in the field of workplace and college writing and learners' transition between these contexts. It also explains the theoretical framework underpinning the social view of writing adopted by this study. Chapter 3 provides the ontological and methodological approaches implemented to address the research questions. It provides a detailed account of negotiation of workplace access, data collection and data analysis procedures. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of the study. Chapter 4 deals with the empirical findings pertaining to RQ1 regarding the contextual elements shaping alumni's writing practices, and Chapter 5 presents the findings pertaining to RQ2 with respect to the participants' perceptions of alumni's preparedness for the workplace writing demands. Chapter 6 discusses the key findings identified in the previous chapters in relation to the research questions and the previous studies. Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the key findings of the study and presents the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical contributions of the study. The limitations of the study and directions for future research are also discussed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the relevant literature pertaining to the broader scope of my study, exploring the nature of writing in the workplace. First, an overview of the social/contextual nature of workplace writing is presented. Then, the different contextual elements shaping workplace writing, such as audience, and purpose, and processes, such as collaborative writing, are discussed. After that, the literature pertaining to students' transition and preparedness for the workplace writing is reviewed. Then the chapter turns to present and justify the adoption of Social Constructionism, Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) and ESP approach to genre as theoretical frameworks underpinning this study and the perspective of writing as well as analytical lenses to view the data.

2.1   Relevant literature

2.1.1   The social/contextual nature of workplace writing

Research on writing has extended its focus beyond studying the product and process of writing to include the social nature of writing which shapes both the text and how it is produced. Schneider (2002) maintains that "writing and social context are inextricably interrelated" (p.170). In other words, writing and social context influence and are influenced by each other. Thus, considering the social/contextual nature of writing while researching workplace writing provides valuable insights into its complexities and how it is done. Understanding such contextual nature potentially helps writing teachers and researchers to look for effective strategies to better prepare learners for writing in the corporate world.

Extensive research has shown that workplace writing is context-based and workplace context affects the written discourse of the members belonging to it (Bazerman, 1988; Bhatia, 1999; Bremner 2006; 2012; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Pogner, 2003). Thus, using the discourse of the community is enormously important. A solid argument which accounts for the social nature of workplace genres is in Millers'

seminal work (1984), in which she described genre as "typified rhetorical action" (p.151). According to Miller, genres are responses to recurrent situations occurring in a particular social context. This view of genre indicates how genres are bound to the context and evolve from social needs and exigencies; a view also taken by Bremner (2012) who argues that writing cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place. This was demonstrated in his case study of tracking the socialization of a Chinese intern in a Public Relations company in Hong Kong, whose written discourse changed remarkably over the three months of the internship due to the socialization and immersion in the discourse culture. It is important to communicate as a member of social groups since writing is a social act affected by institutional and cultural contexts. Because transitioning from one context to another is difficult, as Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1991) suggest, writers should be cognizant of the fact that workplace writing reflects and shapes the organisational context and is influenced by the environmental factors surrounding its construction. Likewise, they should be aware of various canons, values and traditions of the workplace (Bhatia, 1999; Ledwell-Brown, 2000). Hyland (2004, p. 132) has emphasised the crucial influence of the social context on writing:

> [T]he more we are able to understand the conventions, goals and assumptions of these communities, the better we can describe what it is writers are doing when they select one form or structure over another, and the better we can assist novices to evaluate and employ these devices effectively.

Thus, to understand the dynamics of writing, it should be examined as a social action that shapes and is shaped by the context surrounding it and its beliefs and values (Bazerman & Prior, 2003). It is essential, therefore, to consider the context while researching writing in the workplace. Context does not merely refer to a physical place, but it refers to "all of the nonlinguistic and nontextual elements that contribute to the situation in which reading and writing are accomplished" (Johns, 1997, p.27). Context has also been characterised to include "social, cultural, political, ideological and

discursive dimensions" (Freedman, 1994, p. 163). Additionally, context has been viewed broadly to be including both rhetorical situation and context of situation (Coe, 1994), "in which the former includes purpose, audience and occasion and latter the sociocultural context" (Samraj, 2002, p. 164). In the light of these multiple and complex layers of context which influence a written text, the current study takes a broader conceptualisation of context which includes both rhetorical and socio-contextual elements influencing writing. I describe rhetorical elements to include those elements which have a direct influence on a text (e.g. audience, purpose), whereas socio-contextual elements refer to broader contextual elements (e.g. collaborative writing) influencing writing practices surrounding the construction of the written text but not necessarily have explicit manifestations in the text.

Given that writing is context-bound (Bizzell, 1982, Hyland, 2003), I decided, hence, that the present study would take a social/contextual perspective to explore alumni's writing in the workplace. It focuses on exploring the contextual elements that shape their workplace writing (i.e. context-text relationship). Such knowledge of rhetorical and discursive practices would remain tacit unless asked about. In the current study, alumni, texts, and line managers (readers) are the different sources incorporated to understanding the contextual nature of workplace writing, unlike some previous studies which only encompassed the readers (Adam, 2000; Kleimann, 1993; Ledwell-Brown, 2000). Incorporating such multiple perspectives provides comprehensive understanding of the situated nature of workplace writing graduates should be equipped with.

However, this is not to imply a one-way relationship between text and context in the workplace. Rather, this relationship is reciprocal, and text does also influence the context it is produced in (Bremner, 2018, Pogner, 2003). Genres "constitute and govern the… community, defining and reflecting the community's epistemology and values" (Devitt, 1991, p. 336-337). Furthermore, Weick (1987) remarks that "Interpersonal communication is the essence of organisation because

it creates structures that then affect what else gets said and done by whom" (p.97), and it is central to the implementations of any organisational change (Lewis, 2011). This idea is also echoed by Orlikowski & Yates (1994) who note that genre and genre repertoire are central to a community's organising process and reflect hierarchical structures and how tasks are organised within the community (also Devitt, 1991). In fact, this relationship can be accounted for through Social Constructionism which views writing as a tool for constructing the community (see Section 2.2.1). To illustrate, Pogner (2003), in his study which looked into how texts evolved through interaction and revision processes in an engineering discourse community, supported this mutually-constitutive relationship elucidating that drafting and revising genres have contributed to reifying and maintaining social norms and roles and professional relationships in the given community.

While acknowledging the mutually constitutive relationship between text and context, the current study foregrounds how texts and writing practices are influenced by the social context as it focuses on the socially-situated nature of writing. Hence, the next section will explain the notion of *discourse community* as a context of investigation.

2.1.2 Discourse community

Discourse community has become a key term in academic and non-academic writing literature (Pogner, 2005; Kwan, 2014). In spite of its prevalence, an agreement regarding its precise definition has not been reached. Bremner (2018, p.13) echoing Kent (1991), states that a discourse community has been sometimes viewed as a specified concrete entity while in other occasions it is depicted as "indeterminate and uncodifiable sedimentation of beliefs and desires" (p.425). To Swales (1990), a discourse community is constituted by a group of people who share a set of common goals, practices and norms. According to Swales, what is central to the membership to a particular discourse community is communicative practices among its members using one or more genres to achieve their joint goals. Thus, the major

criteria used to define a discourse community accentuated by Swales is "shared discursive conventions and norms" (Kwan, 2014, p.446). Swales' definition has been criticised for narrowing the focus on the communication among the members of a particular discourse community without accounting for the communication which takes place with laypeople or members of another discourse community, for instance, the communication between the banking sector and government and business sectors (Smart, 2006). However, Hyland (2007a) contends that regardless of contentious conceptualisations of discourse community, it is highly effective in describing genres and the academic or professional communities they belong to, as Hyland (2015) explicates, "[t]hrough notions of community we can see writing as a means by which organisations actually constitute themselves, and how individuals signal their membership in them" (p. 25). Also, Swales (1990) points out that this term has been appropriated by studies adopting a "social view" of writing. So, what is valuable for the current study is the idea that within a discourse community, context, and texts are mutually constitutive of each other, thus, it helps to understand the writing practices of the given discourse community. Additionally, the notion of discourse community is regarded as an important element of social constructionism theory which provides the basis for the social perspective of workplace writing in this study.

Further, the construct of 'community' has been regarded as an important element in professional writing research as it is a powerful drive which encompasses shared values shaping the discursive practices (Candlin & Hyland, 1999). Thus, the concept of discourse community is not limited to academic writing but has also expanded to non-academic communities including technical writing in engineering professional communities, for example (Pogner, 2003; Winsor, 1996). The context in the current study mainly operates at the level of the discourse community of engineering in professional community. It does also refer to another concept— 'organisational culture'—for discussing contextual elements specific to particular organisations (see Section 2.1.3.5).

In this thesis, the notion of 'community' is also used with regard to the well-established concept of 'community of practice', thus, it is worthwhile to make a distinction between these two concepts. 'Community of practice' is developed and used in the field of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the social aspects of learning. According to Wenger (1998), what defines a community of practice is the practice a group of people are engaged in, and this practice consists of three dimensions: a jointly pursued enterprise, mutual engagement and interaction, and a shared repertoire of language, knowledge, history, artefacts and communication tools. Beyond this theoretical concept that this term holds, Kwan (2014) elucidates that the term is also a "shorthand for the social theory of learning that Lave and Wenger (1991) attempted to develop" (p. 446). That is, it is related to the idea that new members to the community learn through participating in its activities rather than explicit and structured education, and through interacting with more experienced members. They first learn through participating in periphery and attenuated tasks with the support of their seniors which Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as "legitimate peripheral participation", and they gradually move to becoming fully fledged members of the community. It is this latter use of this concept that bears relevance to the current study as it is connected to socialisation into the workplace community (see Section 2.1.3.6).

2.1.3 Social/contextual elements shaping workplace writing

As discussed above, workplace writing is highly situated and constrained by social/contextual elements surrounding the construction of a text (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Bazerman & Prior, 2003; Gimenez, 2017). To deeply cognise the complex nature of workplace writing, and thus understand how students can be better prepared for the situated nature of workplace writing, it is imperative to explore and interrogate about such elements.

Bremner (2018) has also stressed the importance and value of researching practices in different workplaces, on the basis that

understanding these provides a way into their communities. Berkenkotter and Huckin (1993) suggest that there are two routes to gain understanding of communities' ideologies and genre knowledge: by participating in the communicative activities of the discourse community and through learning the conventions of genres. Thus, there has been a growing body of research investigating genres and their conventions in the workplace. However, Bremner (2018) emphasises that while studies of genres have been influential in revealing the norms of a discourse community, they should not be studied independent of the context, but researchers should look beyond the text and explore contextual factors and processes surrounding the construction of a text in a particular community.

Thus, this section will review the literature related to the social/contextual elements, such as audience, purpose, valued style, and processes, such as collaborative writing, which constrain workplace writing. I will also explain the notions of organisational culture and socialisation process and their relevance to the current study. Throughout the discussion, some comparisons between workplace and college writing will be made in light of these elements and the relevant literature.

2.1.3.1 Audience

Previous studies of university-workplace transitions have elucidated that students entering the workplace often fail to adapt their writing to the needs of their audience (Knoch et al., 2016; Kuteeva, 2013; Mabrito, 1999; Northey, 1990; Paretti, 2006; Winsor, 1996). This is largely due to the radical difference in the types of audience in the academic and workplace contexts (Dias et al., 1999; Freedman & Adam, 2000; Freedman et al., 1994, Schreiber, 1993). While the reader of the texts produced in the academic setting is primarily the teacher, the knowledge holder, who reads for the purpose of grading, workplace genres are written for various and multiple audiences, i.e. superior, subordinates, internal, external, who read for action-oriented purposes (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Knoch et al., 2016; Palmeri,

2004). Thus, students move from writing to an expert to writing as an expert (Schreiber, 1993; Gimenez, 2017) to a variety of readers whose backgrounds, preferences and expectations must be considered.

Previous research has shown that audience is a crucial factor which determines how a particular text is shaped, and awareness of audience (i.e. adapting texts to cater for needs of audience) is essential for successful communication in the workplace (Andrea & Schneider, 2004; Knoch et al., 2016; Leydens, 2008; Paretti, 2006). These studies also found that consideration of audience influences the content, organisation, language choices and register (Miller & Charney, 2007; Kuteeva, 2013). Therefore, teaching learners to consider their audience while producing a text is of paramount importance to better prepare them to cope with the demands of workplace writing. However, as Paretti (2006) notes, while communication tasks usually focus on equipping students with the knowledge of format and content, they ignore the importance of fostering how to link the format and content to specific needs of different audiences. Thus, Paretti contends that communication tasks should be designed to teach the students how to cater for various audiences when they write, and this will help prepare them effectively for the workplace writing.

While previous university-workplace transition studies touched upon the audience factor in terms of being crucial and challenging element for new graduates, they did not explore in detail how alumni, either new or experienced professionals, experience the audience factor after moving to the workplace, and how it influences their writing practices in the new context. The current study, therefore, attempts to fill this gap in the literature by delving into the impact of audience as a rhetorical element on alumni's workplace writing. This will illuminate alumni's awareness of their audience and why and how they tailor their writing for various and multiple readerships. Literature indicates that there are some audience-related factors which necessitate writers' tailoring of texts to suit the intended audience: power relations and readers' background and their needs and expectations (Andre &

Schneider, 2004; Bhatia, 1999; Bremner, 2018 & 2006; Northey, 1990).

2.1.3.1.1 Power relations and politeness

It is clear that power disparities are ubiquitous in the workplace, unlike the academic setting where power is for most equal among learners with a single authority figure represented in the teacher. The workplace context consists of a heterogeneous group of employees with different levels of experience and hierarchical levels, and these power imbalances constitute constraints on workplace communication. Handling workplace communications in the context of power relations necessitates understanding writer-reader relationships in terms of status and power hierarchy, and thus, selecting the language and tone appropriate for the intended readerships. At a fundamental level, it is considerably different if the document is written for superiors rather than for subordinates, or if it is written for external rather than internal audiences (Bhatia, 1999). Writing in the context of power relationships often forms a challenge for novice graduates joining the workplace as they are required to adjust their writing according to their power relationships with the intended audience (Bhatia & Bremner, 2014). Two types of status are distinguished by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996): inherent status, which "results from holding a powerful position ... acknowledged by all members of the ... community and beyond" and relative status, which is "enjoyed as a result of the power an individual can exercise in an interpersonal relationship" (p. 637). The novices who embark on the new job do not possess inherent power and are much more restricted when it comes to language choice in written interactions compared to those with inherent power. Failure to consider power relations with the intended audience in written interactions may result in problematic and crucial repercussions at organisational and individual levels.

Previous research on business communication has demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between politeness and power (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris,1996; Bremner, 2006; Holmes & Stubbe,

2003; Schnurr et al., 2007); handling power relationships is thus associated with the exhibition of politeness in workplace communication. Politeness is a much-studied topic in the area of sociolinguistics and language pragmatics and going in detail about it is out of the scope of this study, thus, discussion will be restricted to the literature on politeness in the workplace context. Yet, it is fundamental to touch upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and their notion of 'face'. According to them, in an interaction, individuals have the desire to claim for themselves a certain public self-image and to wish for their face to be satisfied. They propose five politeness strategies that the individuals can deploy in response to any face threatening act (FTA). These include:

- *positive politeness strategy*, which involves establishing solidarity and refers to the desire to be appreciated and accepted (through complimenting and expressing commonality);
- *negative politeness strategy*, which refers to the desire and the right to possess "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61);
- *bald on-record*, a direct politeness strategy when the speaker does nothing to reduce the FTA, common with close relationships or in urgent task-oriented communications when the focus shifts from satisfying the hearer's face to accomplishing a task;
- *off-record politeness strategy*, an indirect strategy which removes the speaker's imposition on the hearer by merely implying the desired act; and
- avoid FTA strategy when the communicator chooses to avoid saying anything.

These politeness strategies demonstrate ways through which language can be used to reduce threats and boost mutual co-operation between communicators. The deployment of these strategies depends on the seriousness of the FTA, which according to Brown and Levinson can be determined by three socio-cultural

dimensions: the relative power relations between the interlocuters, the social distance between them, and the degree of imposition on the hearer. This theory is deployed in the current study for analysing the email samples (see sections 3.5.2 and 4.1.1.2) written by the alumni in the workplace to supplement and corroborate their views on adapting their writing to cater for their audience in the context of power relations. This also allows for in-depth exploration of the complexities of how power relations are managed in the given context of organisations in consideration for the intended audience. So, the politeness strategies and the linguistic choices are considered as textual realisations of the influence of writing for a specified audience on alumni's workplace writing.

Although much of workplace writing entails considering power relationships when producing a text and enacting them in language choice, doing so is even more common and essential in writing involving requests, as making a request is recognised as a key and common speech act in the workplace (Ho, 2011; Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). There is a considerable risk and imposition involved in making requests on both the speaker and hearer, thus, it is imperative to formulate face threatening request acts with extra caution, especially in the power-relations context ubiquitous in the workplace. Previous studies investigated how politeness is displayed linguistically in request emails in workplace organisations. An influential study was conducted by Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1996) to identify the influence of interpersonal variables, i.e. power, status, distance and imposition, on the linguistic variations in business request correspondence. They noted a correlation between these variables and the position of request in the correspondence, and the use of pre and post requests. To illustrate, relational requests (high imposition) tended to be positioned at the end of the correspondence, whereas they would be placed at the beginning in routine correspondence (low imposition). Also, pre and post-requests were noted to be more common in high imposition requests, though they did occasionally

appear in routine low imposition correspondence to emphasise urgency, for instance.

The variation in making requests in terms of structure was also highlighted by Mulholland (1997) who found that a business request made in the Australian context is comprised of four stages: pre-request, core request, post-request and re-request, while Thai business emails comprise the first stages excluding re-request as found by Chakron (2006). Pre-request includes background information and rationale for the request, and it tends to prepare the recipient for the request, core-request carries the main request and post-request reminds the recipient of the core request, clarifies it or expresses anticipation, urgency or thanking (Chakron, 2006, Mulholland,1997). These studies highlighted the variation in request structure depending on the culture of the writers, as more direct and deductive requests are often associated with English native speakers and inductive approaches with non-native speakers (e.g. Kong, 1998; Chakron, 2006). These cross-cultural studies are not directly relevant to the current study but useful in understanding the variation in the structure of request email. What is more relevant is the variation in request structure according to the level of hierarchies of communicators.

Kong (2006) investigated request emails in a company in Hong Kong and found that the position of the request in the emails (deductive or inductive approach) varied depending on the relative power status of the writer. Similarly, in a study of request emails exchanged among education professionals, Ho (2009) noted the degree of directness and rhetorical strategies varied depending on the power relations between the writer and recipient. What all these studies suggest is that the enactment of politeness is a complicated issue and constrained by cultural and context specific factors (Bremner, 2006, 2018; Harris, 2003).

Furthermore, a number of studies investigated the enactment of politeness in the power-asymmetrical context of the academic setting,

such as investigating students' challenges in managing student-professor power relations in email writing (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015; Chen, 2006); however, examining how students enact politeness in consideration of their target audience after moving to the workplace context is scarce. An exception would be Bremner's (2014) study of students' performance on internship, which reported on interns' struggle to achieve appropriate tone/register for their audience. Thus, the present study will touch upon these complicated constructs when discussing the influence of writing for a specified audience on alumni's workplace writing.

2.1.3.1.2 Background knowledge, needs and expectations of target audience

Another audience-related factor which influences the construction of a text in the workplace context is the writer's familiarity with the background of the target audience. It is vital to identify the characteristics of the readers in terms of the shared knowledge and technical or non-technical background for successful communication in the workplace (Bhatia, 1999; Bremner, 2018). This awareness allows the writers to decide how much they need to elaborate and how much brevity they should maintain depending on how much their readers are knowledgeable about a given topic (Freedman & Adam, 2000; Miller & Charney, 2007). Also, the use of register—technical/non-technical—is decided on depending on whether the recipients possess a technical background.

Previous research emphasised the need for workplace writers to consider the background of their audience before producing a text because although much of the writing is done internally within a particular discourse community, i.e. engineering, they are also required to write for a wider audience such as laypeople or professionals belonging to other discourse communities. For instance, the bankers interviewed in Bhatia and Bremners' study (2014) explained that they are not only required to learn the banking terms used in their professional communities, but they should also be able

to 'de-jargonise' all the technical terms and transform them to simple language when communicating with the investors who are not familiar with technical jargon. This is also captured by employers in Moore et al. (2015) who suggested that university graduates should be able to 'de-technicalise' their disciplinary language and express it in an accessible form to laypeople, and by an employer in Knoch et al.'s, (2016) who stressed that engineers must be able to write in a register appropriate to non-engineers.

Furthermore, in her study of mapping the communication practices in the workplace and four related higher education disciplines, namely architecture, mechanical engineering and radiography in Western Cape in South Africa, Winberg (2007) found inter-professional communication (communicating with audiences from various fields) is prevalent in the workplace compared to intra-professional communication found in academic settings, which engenders students to experience confusion in terms of audience in their writing. Hence, it is of paramount importance for workplace writers to adjust their language to cater for an audience who would usually not share the same technical or academic background.

Apart from the background knowledge of the intended audience, attending to their needs, expectations and preferences also influences how a text is shaped. Workplace writers should be cognisant of including the content required by their readers rather than focusing on secondary and unnecessary information. Northey (1990) noted that the correspondences written by accountants in the workplace were writer-centred rather than reader-centred; for instance, they focused on explaining the problems encountered by the auditors and how they were rectified, but they failed to address the needs of their clients when they did not explicitly mention how the changes might benefit the clients. Further, the level of detail required in written documents is determined by audience expectations. For example, in a study of engineers' perspectives on rhetorical awareness in academic and professional contexts (Leydens, 2008), the interviewed participants emphasised the importance of understanding audience expectations

in workplace writing and knowing "whether to condense or expand particular types of information to fit audience needs" (p.253). To illustrate, some readers may request little detail in documents while others might demand detailed explanation.

Also, in a study of understanding intern students' transitional experiences to workplace writing (Andre & Schneider, 2004), some interns reflected on the challenges they encountered in writing from readers' point of view and failed to provide them with information they needed. For example, one of the interns had to write summaries of interviews with clients for social workers. At the onset, she did not understand why her readers would need these summaries, so she wrote lengthy summaries and did not include the needed information. This leads to the purpose, another vital rhetorical element which influences workplace writing.

2.1.3.2 Purpose

The reader-centred approach of workplace writing mentioned above, in addition to audience, also entails understanding readers' purpose of reading a particular text. Thus, this places demands on the writer to comprehend the purpose of writing the text from the readers' point of view. Purpose is recognised as a primary element in the construction of a genre as it influences the content, schematic structure and language choice (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). In fact, according to Swales' definition of genre, the purpose is "a privileged criterion" in identifying genres as well as constituting the "rationale for a genre" which "shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains the choice of content and style" (1990, p.58). The centrality of the purpose in shaping genres has been the basis for the growing research in genre analysis. Extensive research has investigated the commonalities in terms of textual organisation, rhetorical moves and other features among texts with shared communicative purposes (see Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Upton, 2002). However, *purpose* in this study is not discussed as genre determinant or criterion for classifying genres; rather, it is used as one of the

rhetorical factors, besides audience, shaping written texts (see section 2.2.2.4 for how genre is identified).

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that genres in the workplace serve instrumental and action-oriented purposes (Flowerdew & Wan, 2006). Bremner (2018) proposed that workplace genres work at three levels: rhetorical (e.g. informing, persuading, requesting), organisational (e.g. maintaining company's image) and individual (e.g. achieving personal goals). Further, Bhatia (1999) made a distinction between "socially recognised communicative purposes", or what Miller (1984) called the *social motive* of writing, which is "a motive that is socially recognised and allowed for" (Dias et al, 1999, p. 20), and private intentions, which refers to writers' endeavour to manipulate genres to serve personal or organisational goals within the socially accepted purposes. This resembles the individual purposes identified by Bremner (2018).

In addition, the literature also emphasises that one genre can serve single or multiple communicative purposes depending on the context. To illustrate, annual reports of a company may serve not only information-giving purpose, but also promotional and fund-raising purposes (Bhatia 1999). What is essential for successful communication in the workplace is to be able to manipulate genres to serve different purposes which constrain the schematic structure and linguistic features of genres. For the purpose of the current study, Bremners' (2018) classification of the purpose of workplace writing will be employed to report on the kinds of functions workplace genres serve in the given context.

Although extensive research has been done on genre analysis in both academic genres (Swales, 1990) and professional genres (Bhatia, 1993, 2014; Louhiala-Salminen, 1997; Samraj, 2002), genre analysis is still a fertile area of research particularly in workplace contexts given its dynamic and typical nature: dynamic in the sense that genres are flexible, and typical in terms of the typical nature of each workplace context.   Furthermore, previous university-workplace transition

research did not analyse graduates' workplace written texts in terms of purpose and its effect on shaping the texts (c.f. Andre & Schneider, 2004). The current study, therefore, contributes to the research on professional genre analysis in general and to university-workplace transition research in particular by analysing alumni's workplace written texts using the 'move analysis' approach (Swales, 1990) (see section 3.5.2). This will allow me to demonstrate how purpose influences the shaping of workplace texts as experienced by the alumni bearing in mind that in doing so the study does not intend to claim consistency of rhetorical moves in the analysed genres due to their limited number. Rather, genre analysis is used as supplementary data to support the interview data.

Literature on the university-workplace transition demonstrated that there is a radical disparity between workplace and academic writing in the purpose it serves (Bremner, 2010, 2018; Dias et al., 1999; Dovey, 2006; Freedman et al., 1994; Paretti, 2006; Smart et al., 2012; Winberg, 2007). To explain, in the workplace, text is used to communicate knowledge so that audiences can perform actions and make decisions, whereas it is used to perform knowledge (epistemic or learning-oriented) in the classroom setting so that teachers can assess their students (Herrington, 1985; Paretti, 2006). In other words, as Smart et al., remarked, typically in the classroom, students are asked to write for the purpose of demonstrating how much they know about a particular topic. On the contrary, in the workplace, writing is done to convey novel and unfamiliar ideas to readers who need to draw conclusions or solve problems based on what is written in the document. So, the way the purpose is perceived by writers influences the content and organisation of the text. For instance, Herrington (1985) reported that chemical engineering students in her study of writing in the academic setting perceived the purpose for writing a lab report to be to demonstrate knowledge (learner-centred purpose) to the professor "who had already read hundreds of reports just like theirs" (p.350); thus, they included definitions to display knowledge. Despite this, they also perceived an audience-centred purpose of

design reports as there was a knowledge gap and they would not expect their professor to know the exact solutions.

There is a dichotomy in the views of researchers with regard to teaching writing for instrumental purposes in the classroom. In their influential book "Worlds Apart", Dias et al. (1999) maintain that the real and action-oriented purposes of workplace writing are absent in the classroom setting. To illustrate, writing to keep records for legal and financial accountability and writing to perform speech acts, such as requesting or instructing are seen to be invalid in the classroom context. Likewise, there are studies which reported that providing workplace scenarios in the classroom did not help the students to consider real world purposes and they could not look beyond knowledge demonstration purpose of writing and they were still governed by the ideological and institutional constraints of the university (Dias et al, 1999; Freedman et al., 1994, 1996; Nathan, 2013). Other studies noted the value of teaching students about audience, purpose and other contextual aspects within the classroom to raise students' genre awareness (Cheng, 2008; Yayli, 2010; Yasuda, 2011). The current study accepts the latter view and highlights the notion of genre awareness (see Section 2.1.5).

2.1.3.3 Valued style in workplace texts

Style in this study is defined as the "ability to use language and phrasing to assist rather than impede the reader's efforts to understand the information being communicated" (Plung, 1984, p.20). One of the most valued styles in workplace writing is precise and concise style of writing (Conrad, 2017; Leydens, 2008; Moore et al., 2015; Sales, 2006; Steiner, 2011; Zhu, 2004). Admittedly, as Dulek (1992) stated, "precision is the "backbone" of good technical writing" (p.30), and technical writing is typically known for its attentiveness to precision and conciseness (Plung, 1984). In technical writing, precision is always equated with clarity, objectivity and unambiguity (Bjelland, 1990) through which readers are not given the option to interpret the intended meaning, instead, they are given the exact

information. Previous studies on workplace email observed that there has been a preference for minimalism (brevity) in email messages for efficient and quick information exchange (Mulholland, 1994; Murray 1995).

Both preciseness and conciseness help achieve clarity, directness and unambiguity, which are of utmost importance in workplace written communications mainly due to the critical nature of workplace writing which cannot withstand any legal or financial repercussions, and also due to time pressure in workplace context which necessities straightforward and succinct writing. This quality of writing has also been emphasised by workplace managers in previous studies. For instance, employers were found to be annoyed by graduates' lack of conciseness and lack of clarity in accountancy (Northey, 1990), and managers in another study (Moore et al., 2015) advocated concise and brief writing for effective workplace communication. Likewise, students transitioning to the workplace context also noted the value of conciseness and clarity in workplace writing compared with their wordy writing valued in academic contexts (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Paretti, 2006).

This preferred style or feature of writing can be realised in various ways in the written texts. However, there are few empirical studies analysing how precise and concise writing is manifested in workplace texts, particularly in engineering. An exception would be Conrad (2017), where a comparative analysis was conducted between workplace engineer practitioners and students' written texts linguistically at the sentence level employing corpus linguistics quantitative analysis and genre analysis, among the other findings. It was found that practitioners' writing tended to be more concise and precise compared to students' lengthy and ambiguous sentence structures. The practitioners used simpler sentences in which a single idea would be conveyed per sentence, and they linked their use of simple sentences to their need to be clear and to reduce their clients' reading time. They would also use complex sentences, e.g. to express relationships in engineering, but these sentences mostly included one

independent clause and one dependent clause. In contrast, the students had the tendency to write single and complex sentences with multiple ideas to sound professional and knowledgeable. Concerning preciseness, the practitioners valued using accurate words and avoiding vague or problematic words to evade causing any liability for the company. To achieve preciseness, they used relative and accurate terms (e.g. _preferred_ option as opposed to *the _best _option* in students' texts) and naming quantities precisely (e.g. *we drilled _three _boreholes*) compared to vague descriptors (e.g. *At _really low temperature_*) used by the students. So, conciseness was reflected in simple sentence structure and preciseness is realised in accurate and careful word choice (ibid).

These ideas are also echoed by Dulek (1992) who remarked that precision is a crucial aspect of technical and professional writing which mostly values clarity. Although he used clarity as an umbrella term, he kept using precision and clarity interchangeably. According to Dulek, readers and writers' perceptions of clarity are influenced by three factors: precision, document accessibility and corporate language context. One way to achieve precision is the use of specialised technical language with the caveat that this should be done wisely to cater for a technical or non-technical audience. Dulek also referred to the corporate language context which entails the importance of incorporating terminologies recognised and preferred by each company to achieve precision in technical workplace communication. The corporate language context could be at the industrial, disciplinary and departmental levels, and new employees should adopt and incorporate the accepted and recognised terminologies or abbreviations within their particular company.

2.1.3.4 Collaborative writing

Collaborative writing (CW) is regarded as a prominent feature of workplace writing and has been widely investigated in previous studies of workplace writing in general and workplace technical communication in particular (Bhatia, 2014, Bremner, 2010, Bremner et

al., 2014, Burnett, 2001, Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Faigley & Miller, 1982; Gimenez, J. & Thondhlana, 2012; Jones, 2005, 2007). Burnett (2001) noted that 75% to 85% of workplace writing is done collaboratively. This phenomenon of collaboration is seen to be the most observable manifestation of the social nature of writing (Freedman & Medway, 1994) and considered as an integral part of any workplace community. The diverse studies investigating CW in the workplace have yielded different definitions of CW, thus, various forms of CW. Therefore, as Jones (2007) proposed, it is crucial that researchers and teachers have a clear definition of CW when researching or teaching CW.

2.1.3.4.1 Defining collaborative workplace writing

As stated above, research in CW in the workplace is an established area with a plethora of studies exploring the what and how of CW. Despite the abundance of studies on CW, there is not a single precise and agreed upon definition of what this notion is (Gollin, 1999). The definitions of CW in previous workplace studies—mostly conducted in the US—varied in terms of details and specificity. For instance, a simple and narrowed definition of CW is given by Ede and Lunsford as "any writing done in collaboration with one or more persons" (1990, pp. 15–16). Others offer more expanded definitions to include direct and indirect forms CW that occur in the workplace such as Jones' (2005) definition which describes CW as "interaction by an author or authors with people, documents, and organisational rules in the process of creating documents" (p.450). Jones (2007) has cautioned against relying on a narrow definition; rather, CW should be viewed as "as consisting of a rich, varied group of activities" (p. 290). Hence, the current study has adopted Jones' definition as it encapsulates a comprehensive understanding of the various types of CW, i.e. both overt and covert, that take place in the workplace.

2.1.3.4.2 Forms of CW in the workplace

CW in the workplace takes a variety of forms which have been systematically categorised in the most recent taxonomies developed by Lowry et al. (2004) and Jones (2005). These taxonomies are

thorough attempts at illustrating how collaborative writing is enacted in the workplace. The detailed taxonomy proposed by Lowry et al. comprises four elements: strategies, activities, document control modes, and roles. Each element is defined in the table below. Lowry et al. (2004) also discuss "work modes" which refers to a group's decision as to when (synchronicity) and where (proximity) the collaborative writing act occurs.

Table 1. CW taxonomy, adapted from Lowry et al. (2004, p.75)

Element	Definition
CW Strategy	A team's overall approach for coordinating the writing of a collaborative document.
CW activity	A major process that generally occurs in the act of CW.
CW document control modes	Methods used to manage control of the text that a group is developing.
CW role	A formal or informal responsibility in CW that a participant has in a CW group, which is generally known to the group and lasts for an unknown or set amount of time.

The other taxonomy is offered by Jones (2005), called "Comprehensive Collaborative Continuum", which consists of three elements:

- contextual collaboration, which is using the existing documents whether as content or templates when writing a new document;
- group collaboration, which "involves a collection of people who largely plan, draft, and revise together" (2005, p. 454); and
- hierarchical collaboration, defined as "carefully, and often rigidly, structured, driven by highly specific goals, and carried

out by people playing clearly defined and delimited roles" (Ede & Lunsford, 1990, p. 133, as cited in Jones (2005, p.452)).

Hierarchical collaboration includes two forms of CW: sequential collaboration, in which a document is passed from one writer to another, and author-centred collaboration in which writing is conducted by a single author. It also contains four types of interactions: content, which involves interacting with other people to obtain content; mentoring, which refers to mentoring others' writing or being mentored; stakeholder, which includes interacting formally with other stakeholders to seek input in a form of reviewing or document cycling; and strategic interaction, which entails discussing "larger issues than those concerning the immediate text" (Jones, 2005, p. 454), such as discussing how a particular document should be created.

The three elements are placed along a continuum according to the degree of overtness of the collaboration as shown in Figure 1 below. Group collaboration is the most overt form of CW while contextual collaboration is the most covert. In fact, contextual collaboration resembles intertextuality as both terms refer to indirect or covert form of CW which entails drawing on templates or other documents. Jones (2007), using his taxonomy of CW (Jones, 2005), surveyed a large number of technical communicators to investigate how frequently they were engaged in CW activities in their professions. He concluded that the technical communicators engaged in a wide variety of CW activities, but the most frequently used type of CW was found to be contextual collaboration. Due to the importance of intertextuality in workplace written communication and the large body of research exploring it, I will discuss it in detail in the next sub-section.

Figure 1. Comprehensive Collaborative Continuum (adapted from Jones (2007))

Both Lowry et al.'s (2004) and Jones' (2005) taxonomies of CW are comprehensive and covered most of the aspects of CW in the workplace. However, Jones' model best captures the idea of overt and covert forms of collaborative writing in a more comprehensive way which best aligns with the definition of CW adopted in this study. Jones used his taxonomy to design a survey which explored the frequency of CW types practiced by technical communicators in the workplace. Some of the questions did not represent participants' collaborative activities nor did the survey include open-ended questions to allow the participants to mention other collaborative activities not stated in the survey. Taking this into account, the qualitative nature of the current study allows for rich exploration of the CW activities without being tightly constrained by a particular taxonomy. Nevertheless, the taxonomies explained above will guide the analysis pertaining to how CW concerns alumni's writing processes.

2.1.3.4.3 Intertextuality in workplace writing

As noted above, intertextuality is a prevalent form of CW in the workplace. Intertextuality refers to "a number of relationships that the text in question may have with those which in some way have been used, referred to or exploited either directly or indirectly in the construction of the text in question" (Bhatia, 2014, p.146). It is an important phenomenon of workplace writing as it helps elucidate links between texts, and it is a useful instrument to understand how a text

is constructed (Berkenkotter, 2001; Bhatia 2014). Bremner (2008) argues that intertextuality, being an essential aspect of workplace writing, could be one way to expose students to authentic workplace situations if they are provided with intertextually related texts. The concept of intertextuality was first coined by Kristeva (1980) who states that texts operate on two different levels which link the author and reader of a text and connect the text to other texts. What underlies the notion of intertextuality is the fact that texts are not detached objects which show up from nowhere, rather they are interconnected to previous texts and part of an ongoing process of interaction. The discourses a text would draw on in business communication could be both written, e.g. previous emails or reports, and oral, e.g. previous phone calls or discussions (Bremner & Costley, 2018; Evans, 2012; Nickerson, 2000; Warren, 2016).

Intertextuality can be seen in different ways in workplace writing. Devitt (1991) identifies three forms of intertextuality:

- generic intertextuality refers to the writer's drawing on previous texts generated in response to similar situations, such as templates;

- referential intertextuality is when a text makes a direct reference to another text, e.g. "As discussed in the meeting"; and

- functional intertextuality is realised "when a text is shaped by other texts in a system or exchange" (Bremner, 2018, p. 42); and a request email reply can be influenced by the request email it is responding to or by company's guidelines of writing a request email.

Workplace studies have investigated intertextuality and their manifestations in workplace writing. For instance, in their ethnographic study of analysing tax computation letters in an accounting firm in Hong Kong, Flowerdew and Wan (2006) noted that these three types of intertextuality were evident in their analysis of the texts. Furthermore, in their investigation of the communication

practices of the land surveyors' project management in Hong Kong, Cheng and Mok (2008) noted intertextuality among invitations to tenders, proposals, emails and meeting minutes. But the most frequent type noted in Cheng and Mok's study was referential intertextuality, which is "perhaps the most visible form of intertextuality" (Bremner, 2008, p. 308). Therefore, in analysing the workplace genres, it is important to consider intertextuality as a prevailing form of CW as well as a ubiquitous feature of workplace writing—along with the aforementioned elements, such as purpose, audience and valued style—and its effects on shaping a text directly or indirectly. So, as Bremner (2008) stated, intertextuality "not only accounts for the links between texts, but is also an important factor influencing the way in which texts are constructed" (p.306). In the current study, I explore how this feature is played out in the workplace.

2.1.3.4.4 Teaching CW in the classroom

As noted, workplace writing is conducted collaboratively unlike most classroom writing, including ESP writing, which is more likely to be an individual activity (Bhatia, 2014). Even when CW does occur in the classroom, it is most likely to take a different and limited form. Gollin (1999) reported that the CW practices in the workplace differ considerably from the kind of collaborative writing done in the classroom. Previous studies investigated such gaps between these contexts in terms of CW. For example, in his study of analysing business communication textbooks particularly to investigate the value these textbooks attach to workplace collaborative writing, Bremner (2010) found that the textbooks addressed collaboration in a generic manner simply based on the idea of working together. The tasks included in the textbooks provided little or no practice of the workplace CW experiences and did not foster any role differentiations among group members. Likewise, Mabrito (1999) noted that employees play different roles in the CW process depending on their positions and the organisation's goals while students are often assigned similar roles and contribute equally to a written document. Further, collaboration in

the workplace and college takes different forms and students' awareness of this difference should be raised.

CW in the workplace takes various forms, such as group writing, sequential writing and intertextuality. In contrast, classroom collaboration is often structured and adopts a limited formal structure of group work. Given the centrality of CW to workplace writing, the body of research in workplace CW has advocated the need for familiarising students with the kind of CW practiced in the workplace (Bremner, 2010, 2014; Dovey, 2006; Gollin, 1999; Nelson, 2003). Essentially, the previous studies also concluded that CW tasks in the classroom did not take into account the complexities of CW found in the workplace (Bremner, 2008, 2010; Kwan, 2014). Through exploring the nature of CW and how it is enacted by the alumni in the workplace context, the current study contributes to the body of research pertaining to preparing learners for workplace CW.

2.1.3.5 Organisational culture

It is apparent that every organisation has its own culture and its own way of doing things (Bremner, 2018). The new graduates who join a company have to understand the specific ways of doing things in that company; that is, they have to decipher the company's culture including its values, rituals and traditions (Ledwell-Brown, 2000). When exploring the contextual factors shaping workplace writing, the influence of organisational culture is certainly inevitable as organisations' culture is a reflection of organisations' values and beliefs which can be seen in the artefacts, practices and behaviours (Schein, 2010) in the organisation.

The notion of organisational culture is useful in understanding what is going on beyond the influences of the discourse community which focuses on the level of text and the processes surrounding its construction. For instance, the aspects of a particular company's artefacts, values or norms influence the writing practices of the alumni when variation in practices is noted. Such aspects could be the physical environment, managers' mentoring, and feedback practices.

This is not to suggest that an organisational culture does not influence the collaborative writing norms, the tone used in correspondence, preferred jargons or the way of opening or closing emails. However, the link between these elements and the organisational culture is not the focus of the current study. In the current study, I mainly explored the contextual elements from discourse community perspective by focusing on the text and the surrounding process, as self-reported by the alumni and their line managers and supported by the written samples, without specifically delving into the culture of a particular organisation.

To reiterate, organisational culture and sub-cultures can be valuable notions to understand the factors relevant to the values and norms of particular organisations involved which appear to influence the writing practices of the alumni. The notion is also relevant to the preparedness of new graduates who are expected to read the organisation's culture they wish to join for a better assimilation into its communication practices. Although organisational culture has been vastly researched in organisational and workplace studies, it is rarely studied in relation to writing practices. An exception is Ledwell-Brown's (2000) study which sought to understand how an organisation's values, beliefs and goals impacted on the writing practices of writers in a large pharmaceutical company, and how they are reflected in managers' expectations for written communication as they reviewed employees' texts. The study employed multiple data collection methods: interviews, observations and documents and included two divisions (sub-cultures) within the company: management information systems and marketing. The findings suggested that the expectations of writers were shaped by sub-division and the company's overall values and attitudes. By discussing some of the findings from an organisational culture perspective, the present study contributes to the influential yet rarely investigated area of the influence organisational culture on workplace writing.

2.1.3.6 Socialisation processes

The notion of socialisation is directly linked to organisational culture discussed above. Any new member entering an organisation needs to decipher its culture. One way to achieve this is through a socialisation process which can be defined as the process where "new members of a workplace community become fully fledged members by acquiring the discourse and the writing practices of the new community" (Machili, 2014, p.21). Besides acquiring the discourse and writing practices, I would also add understanding the ways of learning such practices in the new communities as Freedman et al. (1996, p.395) contend "when students move from the university to the workplace, they not only need to learn new genres but they also need to learn new ways to learn these genres." Understanding such ways of learning involves comprehending the socialisation processes specific to each organisation. For example, some organisations follow a formal apprenticeship approach whereby a new employee is guided by a senior employee (Freedman et al., 1996, Knoch et al., 2016), while others' approaches might be incidental through engaging with the new employees in participating actively in the writing practices and learning through experience or trial and error. While the former approach resembles Rogoff's (1991) *guided participation*, in which novice employees are assisted by more experienced employees to achieve their tasks, and the latter reflects Lave and Wengers' (1991) *legitimate peripheral participation*, in which upon joining a new community, novices first get engaged in simple tasks and gradually move complicated ones. So, in this case, learning occurs through interacting and participating in the activities of the 'community of practice'; thus, it is seen as situated and as a social process (Kwan, 2014).

Further, *guided participation* entails intentional and explicit teaching through providing feedback and comments from supervisors on documents written by novices. The feedback practices may also take different forms depending on the policies of the organisation as well as the supervisors' preferred review process (Knoch et al., 2016;

Mabrito, 1999). In their study of tracing the transition of students from university to workplace in various fields, Le Maistre & Paré (2004) found that new graduates experienced varying degrees of support from their supervisors depending on the culture of the profession. For instance, while physiotherapists received extensive induction in their first years of work, teachers experienced little or no support as teaching is assumed to encourage autonomy and non-intervention. Yet, the differences in the socialisation process do not only depend on the culture of the profession but also on the culture of each organisation.

There are extensive studies tackling and tracing the socialisation processes of novice graduates joining the workplace community (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Artemeva, 2009; Beaufort, 1999; Bremner, 2012;; Dias et al., 1999; Galtens, 2000; Le Maistre & Paré, 2004; Smart & Brown, 2006; Winsor, 1996). Some of these studies (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Artemeva, 2009; Bremner, 2012; Galtens, 2000; Le Maistre & Paré, 2004) concluded that both workplace and academic settings play a role in enhancing graduates' socialisation process. But, as most of these studies suggested, there is no doubt that that workplace is powerful milieu for learning workplace writing. So, what is of utmost importance is that learners should be aware of the role played, or should be played, by the workplace in their socialising and acquiring writing practices, and to be attentive to learning opportunities in the workplace (Freedman et al., 1996). Most of the previous studies noted the difficulties novice graduates or interns encountered in socialising into a new culture, such as feeling disoriented, hesitating to ask questions, and learning about the audience, context and style of the organisation (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Galtens, 2000). The current study does not focus on the socialisation processes of the learners in the workplace context as it is widely investigated in the previous studies mentioned above. However, it utilises this influential notion of the socialisation process to understand how different socialisation techniques and approaches used in the workplace communities, and enacted by the alumni,

influence their writing practices. The study also incorporates the link between the socialisation process and cultural organisation—which is a rare link in workplace writing research—to explain the variation in the socialisation practices, including mentoring, feedback, and the amount of writing assigned, experienced by the alumni.

Having reviewed the literature relevant to the social nature of workplace writing, now the chapter turns to discuss the workplace writing research, which is pedagogically influenced, that is related to the role of the academic context in preparing learners for workplace writing.

2.1.4 Perceived role of college in preparing learners for workplace writing: Issue of transferability

The contextually-bound workplace writing discussed above has implications for where and how workplace discourse and genres can be acquired. Many of the previous studies of university-workplace transitions have questioned the transferability of genre knowledge and skills gained in the academic context to the professional context and contended that the academic context does not play a role in preparing learners for the demands of workplace writing. This contention is largely based on the disparity between the academic and professional contexts in terms of the audience, purpose and other contextual elements which impact the content, format, style and other aspect of a text. However, merely based on the disparity between these two contexts, it would be excessively pessimistic to diminish the role academia can play in preparing learners. Certainly, some researchers recognise that both contexts play a role in learners' preparedness for workplace writing.

Freedman et al. (1994) used workplace simulation with their business students to approximate the case studies practiced in workplace settings. Despite their attempt to bring the workplace and classroom closer together through simulation, they noted that students' writing was constrained by the institutional context. They found disparity between college and workplace writing in terms of audience, reading

practices, social purpose, and collaborative composition processes. Although Freedman et al. did acknowledge that this kind of pedagogical intervention may be useful in equipping the students with the intellectual stances, ideologies and professional values needed for entering a workplace, they mostly emphasised that the students have to learn new genres after being immersed in a workplace context in which readers, purposes and processes are immensely different from the college context.

Similarly, Dias et al. (1999) in their large-scale empirical study on the relationship between university and workplace writing, traced participants from business, architecture and law and concluded that these two contexts constitute different activity systems which are worlds apart from each other. According to them, "one activity, writing in school, is not necessarily preparation for successfully undertaking the other activity, writing at work" (p. 223). Similar to Freedman et al. (1994), the disparity was noted in terms of audience, social motive and the reader's role. In considering this view, however, Dias et al. were not claiming that college writing is less effective than that of workplace writing, as they stated "We can argue that both activities can function effectively in their respective systems without necessarily bridging their two worlds" (p. 223). Yet they strongly maintained that there are minimum opportunities for preparing learners in one context for the other.

These two studies and other similar studies (e.g. Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Dias & Paré, 2000; Freedman & Adam, 2000) held a pessimistic view of the role of the college in preparing learners for workplace writing, or as Brent (2011) described it, they see 'the glass as half empty'. However, other researchers (e.g. Artemeva, 2009; Brent, 2011, 2012; Smart & Brown, 2002) could see 'the glass as half full' and argue for the possibility of teaching workplace communication outside its local context.

For example, Artemeva (2009), in her study of following the trajectories in learning genres of four engineering students who took a

professional communication course tied to their engineering disciplinary courses at a Canadian university, concluded that it is possible to teach domain-specific communication strategies apart from its local context under certain circumstances, i.e. if communication courses are tightly linked to learners' discipline and if such courses are carefully designed and grounded in theory. In her course, the students were engaged in producing genres connected to their engineering projects they did concurrently with the communication course. Hence, the writing activities they were involved in were situated in the discourse community of their discipline. Through analysing her four case studies using a combination of activity theory, situated learning theory and Rhetorical genre studies (RGS), Artemeva acknowledged the role of the formal academic education in equipping learners with the written communication skills practiced in the workplace. She considered the college writing experience as one of the *'genre knowledge ingredients'* that enable novices to become successful genre users in their professions, among other ingredients, such as workplace experience or training. As noted earlier, this idea is also echoed by others such as Le Maistre & Paré (2004) and Galtens (2000) who recognised the role of both college and workplace in preparing learners for workplace writing.

Another study which supports the valuable role played by college writing experiences in facilitating students' transition to workplace writing is the one conducted by Brent (2012). In his study, Brent interviewed business and arts students on co-op internships once per month for four months of the internship programme to investigate if they drew on their university courses when performing writing tasks in the workplace. Unlike Artemeva (2009), he did not focus on a particular communication course specifically designed for teaching technical and professional writing. Instead, he examined the effect of the overall writing experience gained from other courses. Brent found that the students were able to effectively transform some rhetorical strategies into the workplace writing context drawing on a large repertoire of rhetorical knowledge acquired generally in a variety of

university courses though not explicitly being able to credit one particular course. In fact, Brent ended up adopting Smart and Brown's (2002) term of 'transform' rather than 'transfer', as it suggests recreating new skills by adapting and building on the foundation laid by the academic context.

This debate on the potential role of college in preparing learners for workplace writing constituted the basis for shaping the current study. Given the situated nature of workplace writing, previous studies overly emphasised the disparity between the academic and workplace contexts and diminished the role of the college, whereas the current study does not view this disparity as an obstacle for preparing learners. Rather, it was decided to explore the contextualised nature of workplace writing and the contextual factors influencing the writing practices of college alumni to gain a better understanding of what role the academic context can play in preparing learners for the contextualised nature of workplace writing. Furthermore, the present study also investigated college alumni's sense of preparedness as perceived by them and the line managers to identify what factors have contributed to shaping their perceptions to understand the role played by the college in enhancing or impeding alumni's preparedness for workplace writing.

2.1.5 Genre awareness vs. Genre acquisition

The debate on the perceived role of the college in equipping learners with the required genre knowledge for a successful transition to the workplace is predominantly associated with the issue of transferability of genre knowledge to a new context. This debated issue has resulted in various genre-based pedagogies. As discussed above, there are those who argue that genre knowledge is not transferable to other contexts, and thus, contend that genres are situated and cannot be taught outside their local context. On the other hand, there are other scholars who argue for genre transferability under certain conditions, and hence, advocate teaching genre in the classroom context for application in another context, i.e. workplace or disciplinary courses.

Two approaches to genre-based pedagogies have been identified: genre acquisition and genre awareness (Devitt, 2004, 2009; Johns, 2008, 2015; Russell & Fisher, 2009).

Russell and Fisher (2009) first distinguished between these two approaches or goals of genre-based teaching. Genre acquisition entails "students' ability to reproduce preconceived text types that are organised, or "staged," in a predictable way" (Johns, 2015, p.116). So, the focus of the instruction will be on teaching explicit formal structures and linguistic features a text, such as five paragraph essays, to be reproduced by students in the fixed manner without much attention to the rhetorical situation of the given writing task. The central focus of the genre acquisition approach is on mastering a limited number of texts with little or no consideration of context. In contrast, the genre awareness approach aims "to assist students in developing the rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting their previously held socio-cognitive genre knowledge ("schemas") to ever-evolving contexts" (Johns, 2015, p.116). This approach promotes rhetorical adaptability and encourages students to use their generic background knowledge as a platform for producing new texts. Hence, students are encouraged to acknowledge variation in genres they are likely to encounter in their professional context, instead of learning limited, fixed and de-contextualised texts types.

While acknowledging the strengths of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) pedagogies and the accessibility of its curriculum to both teachers and novice learners, Johns (2008) contended that the genre acquisition approach advocated by SFL pedagogies, which focuses on acquiring key genres, may not entail raising students' awareness of revising their genre schemas to meet the demands of a specific writing situation. Nevertheless, the explicit teaching of formal conventions and textual features of genres—as advocated by SFL and the genre acquisition approach—cannot be undermined and, in Johns' (2008, p.245) words, the "key genres are certainly a beginning, stepping stones for preparedness". This idea is also supported by Andre and Schneider (2004) who found evidence for the value of explicit teaching

of workplace genres in the classroom in their study of students' transition from college to the workplace. They purport that this explicit instruction can provide students with a foundation or schema which students can build upon further. However, they also caution that this explicit teaching should be done with awareness raising with regard to the socially-situated nature of genres, as they described:

> When instructors teach writing, they must take care to do so within a framework that emphasises the socially situated nature of written genres. Explicit teaching of the formal features of textual genres must also be informed by an understanding and acknowledgement of the variation in form exhibited by genres within different contexts. (Andre & Schneider, 2004, p.54)

Hence, acknowledging and utilising previously gained knowledge and treating each writing text as a new situation with its own rhetorical and contextual elements, or rhetorical adaptability, is the approach which should constitute the basis of any curriculum aiming to prepare learners for workplace writing. A number of studies (e.g. Cheng, 2007; Pang, 2002; Yasuda, 2011; Yayli, 2011) examined the effect of genre-based instruction on students' writing performance and on developing their genre acquisition and genre awareness. Such studies did not only entail teaching formal conventions of genres, but also include raising students' rhetorical awareness.

For instance, Cheng (2007) analysed a Chinese electrical engineering student's (Fengshen) three samples of article introduction accompanied with annotations and interviews, and noted that the student was able to transfer some previously gained rhetorical features (purpose and audience awareness) into his writing. Cheng concluded that the influence of genre-based teaching should be fully captured through examining learners' ability to 'recontextualise' their genre knowledge in response to new rhetorical situations. By 'recontextualise', she meant "learners' abilities not only to use a certain generic feature in a new writing task, but to use it with a keen

awareness of the rhetorical context that facilitates its appropriate use" (Cheng, 2007, p.303). This is relevant to Bernstein's (1990) concept of 'recontextualisation' which elucidates that knowledge created in one context gets recontextualised in a new context. So, recontextualising occurs if students are trained to see the relationship between the generic features and the rhetorical/contextual elements shaping them. This finding is also evident in Yasuda' (2011) study of Japanese EFL students who after having rhetorically analysed and practiced email writing, not only showed linguistic and structural sophistication, but also acknowledged that they gained more consciousness of how audience and purpose influence their linguistic choices; thus, they extended this rhetorical awareness to composing emails in both English and Japanese.

While these two studies are located within the classroom boundaries, genre awareness is signalled in university-workplace transition studies examining genre transfer (see section 2.4 above) (Brent, 2012; Smart & Brown, 2002). For example, the group of interns studied by Smart and Brown (2002) were able to 'transform' genre expertise learned in a college writing programme to the workplace relatively easily. This is because they had already gained sufficient expertise in professional writing in their college experience which they were able to *reinvent* and *resituate* in the new rhetorical environment. This reinvention or transformation was noticed in reader-centred writing, research strategies, use of digital technologies, and collaboration.

Regardless of what it is named: *genre awareness*, *transformation* or *recontextualisation,* the current study considers genre awareness to be important in order to fully capture the role played/should be played by the college in preparing learners for workplace writing. The current study is not a 'closing-the-gap'[4] study and does not claim that there is certain generic knowledge or skills which should be taught in the

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[4] This phrase is used by Brent (2011) to describe the studies which assume that writing skills and knowledge can be taught in the classroom as long as there is a clear idea of what kinds of skills are required in the workplace.

classroom and can be transferred wholesale and reproduced in the workplace. Rather, it argues that the schematic knowledge students gain from their college writing experiences is useful and would add to their preparedness repertoire, or 'genre ingredients' (Artemeva, 2009), and we as teachers and researchers should look for ways of enhancing students' genre awareness and schematic knowledge to better prepare them for workplace writing demands. If we aim to enhance students' genre awareness, enable them to develop rhetorical adaptability and to raise their awareness regarding variation in workplace genres, it is essential to help them see the text-context relationship which is how workplace writing is characterised. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of the current study would add to the body of knowledge regarding the role of the college in preparing learners for workplace writing through exploring the contextualised nature of workplace writing and through investigating how college writing experiences impact alumni's perceived preparedness. The study will also extend the debate on genre transferability and genre awareness which have dominated the ESP and technical communication field.

2.1.6 Studies on perceived preparedness for workplace writing

In addition to the research into transition experiences of novice writers, a number of studies also concerned with identifying the differences between classroom and workplace writing investigated the contextual constraints influencing writing in both academic and workplace contexts (e.g. Dias et al., 1999; Freedman et al., 1994). All of these studies (raised in section 2.1.3.6) have echoed how the university has prepared or failed to prepare the learners for workplace writing, but few studies have directly explored stakeholders' (e.g. students, teachers, graduates, employers) perceptions of the university preparation for workplace writing.

One of the exceptions is a small-scale study conducted by Vest et al. (1995) in which six engineers recently hired by an electronics manufacturing firm were interviewed regarding their perceptions of

their college preparation for the requirements of workplace communication. Their responses ranged from "it doesn't prepare you for the reality of working" to "adequate" (p.14). The participants were mainly satisfied with the teamwork skills they gained from their engineering courses, and they did not see the need for having a separate communication course. The study concluded with a set of recommendations which the participants perceived as important to be implemented in college engineering courses, e.g. face-to-face communication skills and email writing. The focus of Vest et al. (1995) was on both oral and written communication skills, unlike the current study which mainly investigates the preparedness for writing.

In the same vein, other studies investigated the perceptions of employers of college graduates' preparedness for workplace writing. Many of these studies were conducted quantitatively to investigate the satisfaction levels of employers with college graduates' preparedness (e.g. Pinelli et al., 1995; Reave, 2004) and revealed that the there is a gap between the writing instruction in the classroom and graduates' preparedness for workplace writing. Such studies concluded with recommendations as to what professional/ technical writing programmes should include based on employers' requirements. While these studies along with Vest et al.'s (1995) are valuable in gaining insights as to what is required in the workplace, they fail to capture the complexities of the situated nature of workplace writing, and have often been criticised by genre and situated learning theorists. Hence, after the proliferation of genre-theory and transition studies, the transferability of genre knowledge and skills and the possibility of teaching workplace genres outside their local contexts have been contested (Schneider & Andre, 2005). This has resulted in studies that went beyond gap-closing investigations to understand the role a college can play in learners' preparedness for workplace writing in light of genre and social learning theories, but still such studies with direct focus on stakeholders' perceptions of preparedness are few.

One of the earliest examples is Schneider and Andre's (2005) qualitative case study which explored the perceptions of nine students

in three disciplines in a Canadian university regarding their university preparation for workplace writing. These students had just completed their work placement that required them to write on the job. The findings revealed the perceptions of the students varied depending on their disciplines, ranging from highly positive for Management, to positive for Political Science, to negative for Communication Studies. The study also found that their perceptions were shaped by several factors: their analytical skills, the instruction they received in specific genres, their experience in collaborative writing, and the feedback they received on their writing. Based on these factors, Schneider and Andre raised some pedagogical implications. They argued that the classroom does play a role in preparing the students for workplace writing by providing them with "a grasp of the basic conventions of common workplace genres" but accompanied with "an appreciation for the complex nature of genres and genre acquisition" (p. 196). So, unlike the closing-the-gap studies, they did acknowledge the complexities of the situated nature of workplace writing and emphasised raising students' awareness regarding it. The authors also maintained that although students' perceptions are only one way to explore how well they are prepared for workplace writing, they do provide valuable insights especially when their perceptions are informed by both academic and workplace experiences. Based on this argument, in the current study, rich insights are gained by exploring the perceptions of the alumni who are already in the workplace at various positions and levels of experience. So, their perceptions are informed by both workplace and college writing experiences.

A recent study conducted by Knoch et al. (2016), a team of researchers from the University of Melbourne supported by IELTS partners, investigated the perceptions of different Australian stakeholders of the writing demands in the university and the workplace in the fields of engineering and accounting, and relating these demands to the writing section of the IELTS test. Through interviews with final year students, lecturers, employers and employees in their first few years of employment, and employers'

review of the final year writing assignments, the study revealed that most stakeholders agreed that the students were not sufficiently prepared for the writing demands in the professional setting. These perspectives were explained in light of the discrepancies between the university writing tasks and the required workplace writing. Such discrepancies were in terms of genres practiced, adapting the written text to cater for different audiences, writing processes; individual or collaborative, and text editing process.

A notable point in the study of Knoch et al. (2016) is that student participants provided insufficient and uncertain accounts of their expectations of the workplace writing and graduates' preparedness to fulfil the workplace writing demands. In fact, the most valuable data in this study was obtained from the professionals: employees (graduates) and the employers. While including various stakeholders adds to the breadth of the study, selecting and focusing on the stakeholders who are more likely to provide the data needed to thoroughly address the research questions enhances the depth of the study. It was decided, therefore, not to include academics or students as stakeholders in the current study and to closely focus on the professional stakeholders.

A more recent study by Moore and Morton (2017) investigated the perceptions of immediate supervisors and managers who closely work with college graduates in the professional setting regarding graduates' abilities and experiences in the area of written communication, the challenges they face upon their transition to the workplace and what can be done to better make them ready for the workplace writing. Semi-structured interviews with twenty participants in a range of professions and firms in Australia revealed that graduates' written communication ability may not be as "overwhelmingly deficient" as generally reported in government and corporate surveys. What shaped the employers' perceptions is their acknowledgement of the differences between workplace and academic settings in writing practices, the difficulty to identify specific writing requirements due to the uniqueness of specific organisations, and the role of the

organisations in training and inducting the novice employees into the workplace. Unlike the previous gap-closing studies, Moore and Morton (2017) did not end up with a set of workplace requirements and needs pertaining to writing skills to be developed in the academic context. Instead, the employers' expectations from the college is to raise students' awareness of the specific circumstances and constraints which shape any writing situation (e.g. purpose, audience, etc.) and to be able to adapt their writing according to such constraints. While this study examined employers' perspectives, the current study involves college alumni's perspective along with their line managers' to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from two different stakeholders' views. Nevertheless, Moore & Morton's (2017) study and its findings have been influential and resonate with the central argument which has shaped the current study.

The shift in this kind of research from gap-closing investigations to problematising research informed by genre and social theories of learning has certainly called for more theorised research for understanding this phenomenon in the globalised and ever-evolving workplace context.

2.1.7 Literature Gap

The review of the relevant literature has indicated that the on-going debate on the university's role in preparing learners for workplace writing demands has resulted in various kinds of studies with different stances. Brent (2011) categorised these studies into three types according to their positions: closing the gap, glass half empty and glass half full. As noted earlier, the closing-the-gap studies sought to provide the writing skills needed in the workplace and assumed that such skills when taught in the classroom can be transferred to the workplace. On the other extreme are the 'glass half empty' studies with a gloomy view of preparing learners for writing in another context, and contend that context-dependent nature of genres can be best learned when learners are immersed in the context. This concern about whether the classroom has a value at all has led to studies that

hold a middle ground stance and see the 'glass as half full'. These studies, while they agree and acknowledge that genre knowledge cannot be transferred wholly from one context to another, they contend that genre knowledge can be at least transformed, resituated or reapplied in another context under certain circumstances. So, this kind of research looks for "ways in which we can nurture in our classrooms rhetorical ability that students can use in other contexts" (Brent, 2011, p. 403). Therefore, the key role of the classroom is awareness-raising regarding genre awareness and rhetorical adaptability.

The current study has taken on the third stance and argues that the college does have a role to play in learners' preparedness for workplace writing. Hence, to address the gap in the literature, the following research questions guide the current study:

- **RQ1:** How does the socially situated nature of writing, i.e. social/contextual elements, shape alumni's workplace writing practices?
- **RQ2:** How is alumni preparedness for workplace writing perceived by the alumni and their line managers?

By asking RQ1, the study does not take a needs analysis, or closing-the-gap approach like previous studies (cf. Vest et al, 1995) to understand how to prepare learners for workplace writing. Rather, it maintains that to prepare learners for workplace writing, it is insufficient to teach the formal conventions of a genre; instead, it is vital to practice and raise students' awareness of the many aspects that surround the construction of a text in a particular discourse community due to the situated and complex nature of workplace writing (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Bremner, 2018; Moore & Morton, 2017). Thus, the way of understanding and investigating learners' preparedness adopted by the current study is distinctive. It seeks to explore how context shapes the writing practices of college alumni as self-reported by the alumni themselves, triangulated with their line managers' perceptions, who are professional members of the

workplace and with textual analysis of alumni's workplace written samples.

Also, as discussed in the previous section, there are not many studies which directly investigate stakeholders' perceptions of students' preparedness for workplace writing. Thus, RQ2 addresses this gap as the study has chosen to recruit professional stakeholders to investigate the phenomenon of preparedness, unlike previous studies which recruited students or student interns who were not fully immersed into the workplace community (cf. Knoch et al., 2016; Schneider & Andre, 2005). It is hoped that rich insights would be gained by conducting this study with workplace participants as the alumni's perceptions are informed by both college and workplace experiences, besides, the alumni and their line managers are best positioned to clarify the contextual elements shaping workplace writing.

Thus, the current study has uniquely combined and foregrounded the contextual elements shaping alumni's writing in the workplace and the perceptions of their preparedness complemented with insights from genre theory and research in workplace writing to understand and problematise the phenomenon of preparedness. Such multi-dimensional investigation will allow me to fully capture the phenomenon of the role of the college in alumni's preparedness for workplace writing, and it perhaps contributes to theorising these kinds of studies. Furthermore, the current study combines Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), ESP approach (within genre theory), and social constructionism which is a novel combination in workplace and university writing research (as discussed in Section 2.2 below).

2.2 Theoretical frameworks

This part aims to explain the theoretical frameworks underpinned this study and illuminated the data. It is advocated to use a combined theoretical basis in a study on workplace writing and the transition from university to the workplace (Dias et al., 1999; Artemeva, 2008; Bremner, 2012). For example, Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) have

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been successfully complemented by other social theories such as situated learning and activity theory (e.g., Artemeva, 2008; Artemeva & Freedman, 2001; Freedman & Adam, 2000). This study will integrate RGS and ESP approaches of genre theory with social constructionism to gain a new understanding of the social nature of workplace writing and the perceived preparedness for it.

2.2.1 Social constructionism

Workplace writing is contextually-bound and regarded as a social action that shapes and is shaped by the context surrounding it and its beliefs and values (Bazerman & Prior, 2003; Miller, 1984). This perspective is espoused by social constructionism which—rejecting the empiricist view of social phenomena— views language as a social action and a medium through which knowledge is shaped and shared among people. The fundamental precept underpinning social constructionism is that writing is both contextually-constrained and context creating (Candlin & Hyland, 1999). In other words, both the context and written discourse maintain a reciprocal relationship as they affect the construction of each other. In this light, social constructionism helps us to understand the interactive relationship between the written discourse and the workplace context. From a constructionist perspective, like any other artefacts, written texts are not-context free, rather, they are created in cultural, historical and ideological contexts (Kong, 2014). Further, social constructionism has proved to provide an ideal theoretical basis for the study of writing as a social activity (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999). Therefore, in this sense, social constructionism is appropriate for the current study which views workplace writing as a social act, and it helps in understanding how contextual elements shape the way the alumni write in the workplace.

Rafoth and Rubin (1988, p.1) contend that "written text is a form of social constructionism", and propose four dimensions of social constructive processes:

1) Writers construct mental representation of the social contexts such as audience and power difference during the writing act.

2) Writing as a social process can articulate or constitute social contexts.

3) A text may be a collaborative effort of a group of people.

4) Writers assign consensual values to writing, thereby constructing a particular dimension of social meaning.

All of these elements illustrate the mutually constitutive relationship of a discourse community and written discourse. Particularly, these dimensions are relevant for the current study as they can help account for the data pertaining to how context shapes the writing practices of the alumni as they include some contextual elements discussed in this study such as audience and audience-related factors, such as the power disparity between writers and readers, the collaborative nature of writing in the workplace, and the values socially and consensually assigned to a particular written medium or to a preferred style of writing. So, in this study, from the premises of social constructionism, writing and the processes surrounding it are viewed as inherently linked to the context in which it takes place.

It is essential to clarify that using social constructionism as a theory for investigating workplace writing has implications for teaching writing outside its local context since it views genre and context as inseparable. This view makes the role of the classroom teacher in preparing learners for workplace writing problematic. However, as I noted earlier, coinciding with Bremner (2018), the current study maintains that this view should not downplay the value of the academic context in preparing the learners to write in the workplace context. Instead, social constructionism can be influential in illuminating the contextualised nature of workplace writing, which can be helpful in understanding and problematising the role the classroom teacher can play if workplace writing is situated. Additionally, in light of these insights from social constructionism regarding teaching workplace genres in the classroom, this study explores how the alumni and line

managers' perceptions of preparedness for workplace writing coincide with such insights.

Social constructionism as a theory is complemented by Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), as both view writing as a social action. Further, RGS approach of genre studies is integrated with the ESP approach as both underpin the view of genre teaching incorporated in this study. Thus, it is worth explaining genre theory and its three recognised schools.

2.2.2 Genre theory

Genre has been influential in understanding workplace writing, described as "typified rhetorical actions based on recurrent situations" (Miller, 1984, p. 159) (see Section 2.1.1). This perspective of genre situates it in an interlinked relationship with the discourse community. It shapes and is shaped by the community it occurs in. Thus, understanding genre potentially provides a kind of 'entry pass' to the community it belongs to. It is then vital to explicate the nature of genre and its various approaches that have led to different understandings of genre.

In basic terms, genre is "a type of spoken or written text" (Hyon, 2017). Genres are recognised as types due to their shared communicative purpose and similar conventions. However, this does not mean that there are no differences between texts within the same genres. That is, as there is textual typicality in the texts belonging to the same genre, variation also inherently characterises such texts depending on contextual constraints such as purpose, audience, and the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs (Paltridge, 2012).

Apart from this basic understanding of genre, extensive research on genre and genre analysis in different contexts with varying target groups of learners and differing focuses of researchers has resulted in three 'traditions' or 'camps' or 'approaches' to genre analysis as classified by Hyon (1996): Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Rhetorical Genre Studies

(RGS). Although these approaches differ from each other in their theoretical frameworks, educational contexts and their degree of emphasis on text and context, there is a certain amount of overlap among them (Hyland, 2004; Paltridge, 2001). Boundaries between these approaches have blurred as practitioners and researchers amalgamate elements from the three approaches. A brief overview of these three approaches is presented below along with its relevance to researching workplace writing.

2.2.2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

The SFL approach to genre (sometimes referred to as the Sydney School), based on the work of Michael Halliday (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1989), views genre as a social process which involves achieving specific social purposes through the use of certain rhetorical structures. For instance, the social purpose of the recount genre is to retell past incidents in the correct sequence. Genre in SFL is defined by Martin (1993) as "staged, goal-oriented social processes". So, for SFL practitioners, the schematic structure and language of texts are linked to the social purposes and contexts in which the texts emerge. Although textual features vary from one context to another, SFL practitioners also maintain that "within that variation, [there are] relatively stable underlying patterns or 'shapes' that organise texts so that they are culturally and socially functional" (Feez, 2002, p.53). This stability is seen as helpful in educating and socialising students who wish to gain access to the academic community. Therefore, SFL research and curriculum have been considerably dedicated to providing students in schools and adult migrants with access to the recognised genres of the dominant culture to facilitate their participation in that culture (Johns, 2011).

Bremner (2018) states that while SFL has rarely been used in research which explores workplace writing, it does not mean that it is not an appropriate framework for studying workplace writing. Flowerdew (2002) categorises SFL as a linguistic approach applying theories of functional grammar focusing on in-depth linguistic analysis and lexico-

grammatical realisations of the communicative purposes of genres. While SFL can be appropriate for studies which approach workplace genres from a linguistic perspective seeking to provide detailed linguistic analysis, it does not seem to serve the contextual concern of the current study which has primarily adopted a contextual perspective of workplace writing.

2.2.2.2 ESP approach (within genre theory)

As its name implies, the ESP approach was established by researchers in the field of English for Specific Purposes, pioneered by the work of eminent scholars Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). The ESP approach views genre as "a tool for understanding and teaching the kinds of writing required of non-native English speakers in academic and professional contexts" (Hyland, 2004, p. 43). So, genre in ESP is associated with this central aim which is preparing learners for their target contexts, that is, the situations where they wish to study or work (Hyon, 2017; Johns, 2011). ESP researchers are, thus, interested in analysing genres to explicate the textual features of various disciplinary texts to inform ESP course design. Swales (1990) defined genre as "a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes" (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013, p.347). The major focus of this approach is on the communicative purposes that are achieved through genres and recognised by members of the discourse community they belong to. In other words, particular conventions are employed by a specific discourse community for various communicative purposes (Swales, 2004). Swales (1990) contended that communicative purpose is a key factor in determining whether a text belongs to a particular genre. However, he then adjusted this view and accepted that genres may serve multiple purposes and these may differ for each participant involved (Askehave & Swales 2001). The ESP approach also emphasises the communicative needs of a particular group, that is, what members of a group use writing for. Similar to SFL, ESP is also classified as a linguistic approach as it is interested in rhetorical structures and their lexico-grammatical realisations (Flowerdew, 2002).

This approach is mainly based on Swales' (1990) moves analysis, which recognises some typical moves (schematic structures) in a particular genre and each move serves a specific communicative purpose and has specific linguistic realisations. However, Swales (1993) also advocates going beyond the text to consider the contextual aspects of genres to gain better understanding of the social and cultural features that surround the genres. For the purpose of the current study, move analysis is used to analyse some of the workplace written samples submitted by the alumni to illuminate the impact of purpose—one of the studied contextual elements influencing alumni's writing—on the schematic structure of the written texts.

2.2.2.3 Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS)

RGS approach (also known as the New Rhetoric), based on the work of North American Rhetoricians (e.g. Artemeva, 2008; Freedman, 1999; Miller, 1984) views genre as a situated action. While SFL and ESP stress the importance of describing lexico-grammatical elements and rhetorical regularities, the RGS approach goes beyond describing the textual features to emphasizing the significance of investigating the social and cultural aspects that shape genres. RGS views genres as being dynamic and flexible and the structural regularities of genres are influenced by the discourse community and its members, thus allowing more creativity in writing. Hence, from the perspective of RGS, genre evolves as social actions change since the major purpose of genre in RGS is to accomplish certain social actions (Miller, 1984). Research and teaching in this approach have predominantly focused on L1 teaching of professional writing and composition studies. This concern has resulted from extensive focus on teaching genres as products and forms rather than focusing on contextual factors such as purpose and audience, or socially constructed activity view of writing. Thus, research studies using this approach tend to focus on the contextual features surrounding the genres and how different contexts contribute to the formation of genres.

RGS has been adopted in the present study to view the data pertaining to the contextual factors shaping alumni's workplace writing. RGS is underpinned by a social constructionist perspective of genre. Unlike SFL and ESP, RGS is characterised as a contextual and non-linguistic approach, and its methodology is ethnographic rather than linguistic (Flowerdew, 2002, Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). That is, it is less concerned with rhetorical structures and grammatical features and more with situational and social contexts of a discourse community including purpose, audience, values, norms and discursive practices such as collaborative writing, surrounding the construction of a text. These precepts of RGS provide a valuable theoretical basis to account for the contextual elements shaping alumni's writing practices in the workplace, as a dimension investigated in this study to understand the college alumni's preparedness for workplace writing.

New Rhetoric theorists (e.g. Freedman et al., 1994, Dias et al., 1999) maintain that genres cannot be taught in a writing classroom, as they will be removed from their original context and will become objects for teaching rather than tools for communication (Hyland, 2004; Hyon, 2017; Johns, 2002). However, like ESP practitioners, there are other RGS scholars who embrace the idea of teaching workplace genres in the classroom and recognise its value for raising learners' awareness as to the contextual elements shaping genres (e.g. Artemeva, 2009; Devitt et al., 2004). Aligning with this view, the current study contends that while it is true that genres are dynamic and flexible in nature and confined to a particular context, teachers can expose their students to key features of a particular genre and raise their consciousness regarding the ability to manipulate genres depending on the social context they are used in, so exploring and teaching contextual factors can help to equip students with necessary analytical tools to be used in the new context of writing. The overlapping aspects of ESP and RGS regarding teaching genres in the classroom shape this underlying argument of the current study and are influential in accounting for the participants' perspectives of alumni's preparedness.

2.2.2.4 Workplace genres identified

Discussing genre theory is also important for identifying what constitutes workplace genres particularly in the analysis of the workplace written texts and the various purposes they serve. From an RGS and social constructionism theory, workplace genres in this study are identified based on the action it is used to accomplish (Miller, 1984), and they evolve based on community's response to a social exigence.   Although genres are 'relatively stable' with conventionalised linguistic forms (Swales, 1990), their fluid and dynamic nature subject them to change (Bhatia, 1993).

This discussion is relevant to this study as a number of workplace written texts are analysed; among which is email. The issue of the classification of email has been an area of much discussions. The contention of whether considering email as a distinct genre or channel of communication has been grounded in various communicative purposes email can serve. Zhu and White (2009) identified email as a genre based on its instrumental purpose of getting work done. Within this broad purpose are specific purposes such as recording, reminding, asking for information and requesting. Some identified email as a single genre (Mulholand, 1999) while others as sub-genres (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2005). According to Askehave and Nielsen (2005), media and genre are sometimes inseparable and have dual characteristics. They talk of 'media genres' where media and genres are inseparable because "the media is not only a distribution channel but also a carrier of meaning, determining aspect of social practice (how a text is used, by whom it is used, and for what purpose)" (p.138).

In light of the discussion above, communicative purpose could not be an appropriate criterion to identify genre. Instead, in this context, genre is seen as volatile triggered by changes in the rhetorical situations and identifiable within in a particular workplace community. Bazerman (1994) also emphasises the recognition of genre by their users. Admittedly, although 'communicative purpose' continues to be

influential in genre identification, Swales has revisited it, and has proposed the notion of 'repurposing' (Askehave & Swales, 2001) to tackle the unstable and dynamic nature of genres. Thus, email in this study is envisaged as a distinct genre insofar it is recognised by the members of a particular workplace community as serving its needs.

2.3 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to the nature of workplace writing and the role of the academic context in preparing learners for it. It has discussed the literature on the social and contextual nature of workplace writing, and how this has formed the basis for investigating learners' preparedness for workplace writing from this perspective. The chapter has also provided an extensive account of the debate on the role of the college in preparing learners for workplace writing and issues of genre knowledge transferability. In addition, previous studies investigating learners' preparedness have been critically reviewed and a literature gap has been identified.

Regarding the frameworks underpinning the current investigation, the precepts of social constructionism and Rhetorical Genre Studies regarding the mutually constitutive nature of workplace writing have provided a theoretical lens to view the data relevant to the contextual elements constraining alumni's workplace writing. In addition, the move analysis element of the ESP approach of genre has been adopted to analyse workplace written samples for illuminating how communicative purposes shape the written texts. Further, the integration of the views of ESP and RGS of teaching workplace genres in the classroom has shaped the main argument of this study: The academic context does have a role to play in preparing learners for workplace writing, by not only teaching the formal structures and conventions of genres, but also by using awareness-raising pedagogy and framing genre teaching within the socially-situated nature of workplace writing.

Having discussed the theoretical aspects of the study, the next chapter presents the methodology employed to conduct this investigation.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this chapter, I explain an overview of the methodology of the current study, including the rationale for adopting a qualitative inquiry to investigate the writing practices of college alumni in the workplace and participants' perceptions of alumni's preparedness for the writing demands of the workplace. The sections of this chapter focus on (3.1) my epistemology and ontology ; (3.2) the choice of qualitative approach; (3.3) sampling and negotiating access to the workplace setting; (3.4) methods and procedures of data collection; (3.5) data analysis procedures; (3.6) trustworthiness of the study; (3.7) researchers' reflexivity; and (3.8) ethical considerations.

3.1 My epistemology and ontology

This study is broadly informed and guided by the research paradigm of constructivism (or interpretivism) (McKinley, 2020). This philosophical position about the world—or worldview as termed by Creswell (2014)—is my epistemology that I as a researcher bring with me to serve as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p.17). Thus, the constructivist view of the world forms my perceptions of reality, my understanding of the field of inquiry, research questions, data collection methods and procedures and data analysis and interpretation. In other words, it has shaped the way I went about this research.

My research takes a constructivist position underpinned by a relativist ontology in which reality is viewed as multiple— as opposed to positivism which argues that there is single objective knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Cohen et al., 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This multiple reality is subjective and shaped by social and cultural norms. Hence, working within a constructivist paradigm allows me as a researcher to explore the intricacy of participants' views of preparedness for workplace writing rather than limiting meanings into narrow categories (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, constructivists purport that knowledge is actively constructed by exploring people's

views and understandings of the social world (ibid), including the written communication (McKinley, 2015). Aligning with this, in the current study, I seek to understand the subjective reality regarding alumni's preparedness for workplace writing by exploring the contextualised nature of workplace writing as self-reported by the participants and evident in HCT alumni's workplace written texts, as well as investigating the alumni and their line managers' perceptions of college preparation for workplace writing. Hence, meanings are constructed by the participants as they make sense of their experiences (Crotty, 1998).

Also, within the interpretivist paradigm, researcher's interpretations are considered valuable in constructing meaning. I, as a constructivist researcher, intend to interpret and make sense of participants' perceptions of alumni's preparedness for the workplace writing demands. I interact with the participants through semi-structured interviews to generate the meaning. This reflects the subjective epistemologies underpinning constructivism which claims that knowledge is co-constructed through the interaction between individuals. Thus, both the researcher and participants actively engage in building the knowledge through interactions with each other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). My own engagement in analysing and interpreting data has allowed me to take an active role in constructing meaning with the participants to gain knowledge that represents the reality. Hence, I recognise how my own background as a technical writing teacher at HCT shapes my interpretation of the data pertaining to alumni's preparedness and the factors influencing it. Furthermore, constructivists also believe that perceptions do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are shaped by the cultural and historical factors and formulated by social context and experiences that impact on individuals' lives (Creswell, 2014; Guba & Lincoln,1990). In the present study, the participants' views are shaped by their experiences both in the college and workplace, and my goal as a researcher is to interpret their views acknowledging how their personal and cultural experiences might influence their interpretations.

Finally, the qualitative paradigm which seeks to understand the problem from the participants' own perspectives of situations (referred to as 'situated qualitative research' by Atkinson, 2005) adopted by this study aligns with the epistemological and ontological views underpinning the study.

3.2 The choice of a fully qualitative research approach

Informed by my epistemological and ontological perspectives, this study adopts a fully qualitative research approach, particularly a 'situated qualitative' approach, to respond to the research questions. A qualitative approach is needed in an explorative study which intends to explore certain realities of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2014). This study is *qualitative* in the sense that it is exploratory in its nature and seeks to understand how college alumni enact the situated nature of workplace writing, and how they and their line managers perceive alumni's preparedness for workplace writing demands. Qualitative research provides an in-depth, complex and detailed understanding of the meanings (Cohen et al., 2017) the workplace participants ascribe to writing practices in the workplace. I have employed this approach because I am particularly interested in how my participants make sense of and construct their realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Flick, 2007). Thus, this 'situated qualitative' approach is undertaken to 'give voice' to the professional stakeholders, namely alumni and their line managers, to gain detailed descriptions of their perceptions of preparedness for workplace writing and to explore the situated writing practices in the workplace and the contextual elements shaping such practices (Braun & Clarkes, 2013, Cohen et al., 2017). Such detailed and intricate perceptions (as shared by the participants) cannot be realised unless the participants can talk openly in their own natural settings to explore how they make sense of their own realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Lichtman, 2014). Hence, relying on naturalistic enquiry offers a deeper understanding of the tacit nature of writing practices and alumni's reflections on their past and present writing experiences. Similarly, one of the main characteristics of the situated qualitative approach is its concern with

insider meaning (Dornyei, 2007) or emic description of a situation (Flowerdew, 2005). In other words, it explores a social phenomenon from individuals' perspectives, taking into account the meaning they bring to the phenomenon being studied. Hence, the participants themselves can ideally disclose the interpretations of their actions and experiences. In this study, the perceptions of workplace alumni and their managers can best unfold the meanings and realities of the social phenomenon, which is alumni's preparedness for workplace writing.

Furthermore, my approach is *situated* in the sense that I have visited different workplaces where I conducted most of the interviews and collected authentic written samples. In this sense the study is to a certain degree grounded in participants' everyday social worlds (Atkinson, 2005) as this approach has allowed me to gain an understanding of participants' social environments.

Another reason for adopting a fully qualitative approach, particularly a situated qualitative approach, is because it is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3) and context is deemed to be a key tenet in the premises of a qualitative approach (Braun & Clarkes, 2013). This qualitative enquiry/ situated qualitative research approach is of particular significance when the researcher is not familiar with the context of investigation and seeks to gain more knowledge about it (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This study aims at understanding and uncovering college alumni's preparedness for workplace writing by exploring the writing of, and reflections on writing from, the alumni in their own contexts to which I am a stranger. Such access to their own context has allowed me to gain a thorough understanding of the nature of workplace writing.

However, the 'situated qualitative' approach can be challenged as how researchers can understand a cultural scene (in this case, the workplace) that is not their own. My response to this is that while seeking to understand realities from participants' own perspectives, I do not intend to 'get into their heads'. Instead, the aim is to situate myself in the position of a knowledge seeker who wishes to learn from

the participants about the situated nature of workplace writing to expand my, and other ESP teachers', understanding of preparing learners for workplace writing.

In addition, there has been increasing acceptance of qualitative methods in applied linguistics since the mid-1990s (Dornyei, 2007). This is because of the understanding that language acquisition is influenced by context. Hence, qualitative research is ideal in providing insights into the social and cultural context shaping the language. This is applicable to the learning of writing as it is associated to the context and considered as a 'social act.' So, qualitative methods, namely interviews and text analysis, provide an opportunity to delve into the contextual dimensions which shape the writing act.

To sum up, a situated qualitative research approach has allowed me to understand how the world is viewed and experienced from others' perspectives, and it provides me with a position from which to explore rich and thick description of meaning. It also, very importantly, takes context into account. All these characteristics of a fully qualitative approach are in harmony with the aim of this study. Having explained the research paradigm and philosophical stance, the next sections will shift attention to the practical aspects of methodology, which are the selection of participants and settings (accessing the workplace) and data collection methods, and data analysis.

3.3 Participants and setting

This section presents the sampling strategy used in the selection of the sixteen male and female participants, negotiation of workplace access, profiles of the five selected companies, and profiles of the participants, including twelve alumni and four line managers.

3.3.1 Sampling strategy

For this study, two types of non-probability sampling appropriate for qualitative enquiry, were employed: purposive and snowball. Purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2011) in which the selection of

setting or participants is criterion-based, was the main strategy utilised. The sample units have certain characteristics which allow in-depth exploration and understanding of the research questions. The selected participants are 'information rich cases' (Patton, 2002, p.230) as they provide valuable insights to serve the purpose of the study because they are "concerned and experienced with the issue under study" (Flick, 2007). Therefore, the participants in the present study were purposefully selected based on the following predetermined criteria which serve the aim of the study:

- the main participants had to be engineer alumni who graduated from HCT and have been working in private corporations in Oman; and
- these alumni had to have written a certain amount; and
- the kind of writing they are required to do in their workplaces had to be varied.

Therefore, a prior meeting was held with the human resources managers (the gatekeepers) in each company to identify the participants who meet these criteria.

It is important to clarify that while the sample seems to be homogeneous, diversity in the samples was considered to achieve a full coverage of the issues influencing the phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2014). The sample is diverse in terms of the years of experience and specific engineering disciplines. The study sought a comprehensive understanding of engineering workplace writing in relation to the college preparation of the alumni rather than targeting a specific engineering discipline, bearing in mind that all the engineers are taught the same Technical Writing courses in the college. Hence, the selected alumni could have majored in any of the specific specializations offered in the college under the three broad sections, namely Civil & Architectural Engineering, Electrical & Electronics Engineering and Mechanical & Industrial Engineering.

The secondary participants are the line managers. Those managers were selected based on the immediate interaction with the alumni in terms of employee appraisal and checking or editing the reports produced by the alumni.

Along with purposive sampling, snowball sampling was also employed based on participants' recommendations to recruit other potential participants (Cohen et al., 2011; Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015).

3.3.2 Negotiating access to the workplace

Field access is not a simple process, but rather "a social process of initiating, negotiating and maintaining field relations, either directly with participants, or indirectly through a gatekeeper" (Bengry, 2018, p.7). Getting access to an industry or business setting is known to be particularly difficult. Therefore, I started searching for access before commencing the field work (in June 2016). The initial support I sought was from the Higher College of Technology (HCT). I approached the Head of the On the Job Training (OJT) Department responsible for the placement program of the college students, and consulted him regarding the companies which have a large population of college engineering graduates. However, the Head stated that there are no such statistics which provide accurate numbers of the graduates recruited in the companies. Nevertheless, based on his experience, he was able to provide a rough estimation as to which companies are more likely to recruit most college graduates. Accordingly, the Head of OJT emailed gatekeepers at a number of companies (N=10) requesting them to take part in the study. Unfortunately, none of these companies responded. With the aid of personal contacts, I could get access to two companies: a telecommunications company and a petroleum company, and approval was granted to conduct interviews. After ethical approval was secured through my home university (see section 3.8), the consent form and participant information sheet were sent to the identified gatekeepers at these companies.

With access approval from these companies, further negotiations of access and recruitment took place in the second phase, which

happened after commencing my fieldwork (in February 2017). The interviews were conducted in a telecommunications company, where I first met the gatekeeper who is responsible for organizing training sessions for trainees, and at the same time he is a team leader at the NOC department in the company. This first meeting was to introduce the gatekeeper to my research topic, objectives, methods, and the criteria I set for my potential participants. The meeting took longer than anticipated as the team leader showed immense interest in the topic and its value for their company. He then asked for some time to look for the participants which fit into my criteria. After two days or so, we arranged for another meeting as he already identified a group of participants whom I could interview. However, unfortunately, after more discussions, I discovered that only one participant met my criteria as others were neither engineers nor HCT graduates (but I noted this as potential site for a future study).

The same day, I met my first alumnus participant, briefed her on my study topic, and asked her to complete the life grid form (see Appendix 1) and return it to me through email. I also asked her to go through the participant information sheet and to sign the consent form. We arranged time for the interview which was the next day in the company itself. Similarly, at the petroleum company, the gatekeepers arranged a meeting with me to understand more about the purpose of my study and how it would be beneficial for them. After identifying the potential participants who would meet my criteria, they emailed me the interview schedule with the timings and names of the five selected participants. After talking to the participants, I excluded three of them as they did not meet the criteria of my sampling. That is, two of them dealt with technical work and did not do significant writing at the workplace, and the other one graduated a very long time ago and did not remember anything about college writing. So, I interviewed two alumnus participants at this company and one line manager on a different day.

Initially, I followed purposive sampling to recruit my potential participants. Because I struggled to find enough participants who met the recruiting criteria at the companies I was granted access to, I had

to employ snowball sampling. Therefore, after conducting the interview with the first participant, I asked her if she could suggest some other participants from her acquaintances at the same or a different company. This participant convinced her colleague who met my criteria to take part in the interview. I met this alumnus right after I conducted the first interview; I briefed her on my topic, and we arranged a time for the interview. I kept using snowballing strategy even with the team leaders and managers as they had good contacts with other companies. With the help of these managers, I could get access to another petroleum company and did five more interviews there. Furthermore, I could get some contact numbers of college alumni from my colleagues and administrators at HCT. Due to the difficulty of accessing some of the companies, I had to conduct some of the interviews with the alumni at HCT by liaising with the administrators there. In fact, one of the managers from a petroleum company granted me permission to contact the alumni who work at the company but to conduct the interviews somewhere else as the physical access to the company was not easy. Another company allowed me to conduct the interviews in a separate building which belongs to it, but it did not require any gate access permission.

One consideration about my success in getting access to my participants was my position in relation to the research site. As an Omani government-funded doctoral student, I was concerned that participants might think I was conducting the study to evaluate them or their work. To counter any such concerns, I took a position 'below' the participants, in what Kubota describes as "studying up" (Kubota, 2017), which set participants at ease. From this position, I came as an outsider who did not know the research context and would therefore learn from the participants (more easily gaining their trust), rather than evaluate them.

In short, a study involving accessing the workplace setting and recruiting professionals requires establishing a good rapport with the participants and gatekeepers (Lunsford Mears, 2009) to recruit more participants. Also, an outsider researcher should make the best use

of a personal network and gatekeepers who "open the doors to the field and the right persons" (Flick, 2007, p. 44). The gatekeepers at the companies involved in this study facilitated the recruitment of participants and provided a social and physical bridge between the researcher and the field (Clark, 2011). The rapport I established with my participants not only facilitated more recruitments, but it also allowed me to stay in touch with some of the participants throughout my PhD study for follow up questions.

3.3.3 Company profiles

As noted, the study involves participants from five different private sector companies: one telecommunications company and four oil and gas companies. Although Omani graduates prefer joining the public sector due to various facilities provided there, most CoTs graduates in general and HCT graduates in particular are employed in the private sector due to the government's emphasis on the Omanisation scheme in the private sector (see section 1.1.). Generally, telecommunications and oil and gas firms are recognised to be the largest recruiters of HCT graduates. As mentioned earlier (in Chapter 1), the private sector officially uses English language as a medium of communication, as opposed to the public sector, and seeks to recruit candidates possessing outstanding written and spoken English communication skills.

3.3.3.1 Telecommunications sector

The telecommunications sector in Oman is among the most advanced and competitive sectors in the country and has grown rapidly in recent years. Currently, there are two main telecom operators/service providers in the country and a third operator is yet to be announced in 2019 (Muscat Daily, 2018). These operators are supervised by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA). The telecom company involved in this study is one of the leading operators which reported achieving 89.3% Omanisation. Similar to other private sector companies in Oman, this telecom company uses English as an official language for internal and external communications. Thus, they pay

considerable attention to recruiting graduates with excellent English communication skills, and they conduct their job interviews in English. Although great emphasis is placed on written communication skills (i.e. email and report writing), the writing component is taken for granted in recruiting procedures. Furthermore, though general English courses are offered to employees as part of a professional development scheme, the company does not provide specific training courses/workshops on written communication skills.

3.3.3.2 Oil and Gas sector

The oil and gas industry is the country's largest industry which has been the driving force of the country's economy. Despite the country's efforts to diversify its economy, oil and gas has continued to remain its main source of income for supporting Oman's growing infrastructure, such as health, public education roads and electricity services. All oil and gas related activities run in industries supervised by the Ministry of Oil and Gas (MOG). The current study involves participants from four different oil and gas companies. One of these companies is a renowned crude oil exploration and production and natural gas supply company in Oman. This large industry includes a diverse workforce from various nationalities, but still maintains a high percentage of Omanisation: 77% in 2016, and it is aiming to achieve 90% by 2020. This company, and all the oil companies, requires proficient English ability, and only those competent in English are able to secure employment in such a large firm (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). This company places strong emphasis on, and provides a sizeable budget for, human resources professional development through scholarships and in house as well as external trainings and workshops including general English language courses.

Apart from this company, the study also recruited participants from three other oil and gas companies. One of them is also a leading oil producing company in Oman. The company achieved 88% Omanisation and offers training opportunities for new graduates. Due to the growing number of Omani employees in this company, in-house

and external training opportunities are provided to enhance employees' professional and interpersonal skills. The other company is a leading refinery and petrochemical production company in Oman and the Middle East. This company is also committed to the Omanisation policy with 79% of its employees being Omani nationals. It started Graduate Recruitment Program in 2012—since then it has started recruiting more than 100 new graduates every year and providing them with an 18-month on-job training. The fourth recruited company is a distinguished one in the field of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) system installation, fire protection systems and firefighting equipment. This company also welcomes new engineer graduates, with Omanisation at 45%, and it relies fully on the English language in all its communications.

3.3.4 Participants profile

The total number of the participants in this study is 16. Out of which 12 are HCT engineer alumni (main participants) and 4 are the line managers (secondary participants to support and validate the data from the main participants). As Table 2 shows, the engineer alumni participants cover a range of educational degrees and specific engineering specializations. They also belong to various sectors and have different years of experience. 'New alumni' are those with 1-3 years of experience, and 'experienced alumni' are those with 6-9 years of experience. The title 'line manager' is used to refer to those managers who have been interacting with HCT engineer alumni whether they are their team leaders, supervisors or managers. As Table 3 shows, these 4 line managers equally belong to oil and gas (N=2) and telecommunications (N=2) sectors.

Table 2. Profile of HCT engineer alumni participants

Number of alumni participants	12 (9 male & 3 female)	
Education	8 Bachelor's degree	4 higher diploma
Specific engineering specialisation	2 telecommunications engineers	5 mechanical engineers
	2 oil & gas engineers	2 civil engineers
		1 computer engineer
Years of experience	7 New alumni	5 experienced alumni

Table 3. Profile of line managers

Number of managers	4	
Post level	1 manager	2 team leaders
		1 supervisor
Sector	2 telecommunications	2 oil & gas

3.4   Data collection methods and procedures

The study has adopted a multi-perspective approach (Paltridge, 2020) including different workplace stakeholders as well as textual analysis, which has enriched the understandings and interpretations of the studied phenomenon, by providing concrete examples of the participants' written language in the workplace. In the table below, the type of data gathered to address the research questions and their corresponding aims is outlined.

This section explains data collection methods employed in this study and the specific procedures taken in the deployment of each method. First the interview, the primary data collection method, is presented, followed by text analysis, the secondary method of data collection.

Table 4. Data collection methods

Overall aims	Research objectives	Research questions	Type (s) of data
To understand and problematise alumni's preparedness for workplace writing **To understand whether the college has a role to play in preparing learners for the situated nature of workplace writing.**	To explore the socially-situated nature of workplace writing as experienced by the alumni.	1. How does the contextualised nature of writing, i.e. social/contextual elements, shape alumni's workplace writing practices?	Semi-structured interviews with HCT engineer alumni and line managers Analysis of workplace written samples written by the alumni
	To investigate the factors contributed to the perceived preparedness/ lack of preparedness.	2. How is alumni preparedness for workplace writing perceived by the alumni and their line managers?	Semi-structured interviews with alumni and line managers

3.4.1 Interviews

This study mainly relied on interviews with the alumni and managers regarding the preparedness for workplace writing and alumni's perceptions regarding the contextual elements that shape their workplace writing. A research interview is a kind of conversation where knowledge is created in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Cohen et al., 2011; Kvale, 2007), hence, aligning with the constructivist view of co-construction of knowledge underpinning this study. The exploratory nature of this study has formed the basis

for the decision of employing interviews as the primary data collection instrument. It serves as the principal means of gathering information and directly related to the objectives of the research (Cohen et al., 2011). Through probing interviewees' views and thoughts, "we can also elicit their version or their account of situations which they may have lived" (Wellington, 2015, p.137). It allows the participants to discuss the issue of preparedness for workplace writing from their own perspective, which is in line with the situated qualitative approach adopted in this study. In addition, it adds value to the depth of the data by accessing participants' shared thoughts to get insights into their knowledge, preferences, beliefs and attitudes regarding college preparation for workplace writing. A qualitative interview is also "a key venue for exploring the ways in which subjects experience and understand their world. It provides a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions" (Kvale, 2007, p. 9). Hence, it is a powerful and ideal instrument for providing a rich account of complex issues of workplace writing and how the alumni perceive their preparedness for it.

Despite being a valuable method for collecting deep insights, the interview is often criticised for being subject to researcher bias as interviewers are tempted to influence interviewees' responses (Rose et al., 2020). However, as a researcher within the interpretivist's paradigm, I acknowledge that there are biases in all researchers (McKinley, 2017) as their approaches are inevitably influenced by their backgrounds and experiences. Being reflective since the beginning of data collection process has made me realise and control the impact of my own biases and maintain openness to interviewees' responses (Rose et al., 2020).

Interviews involve power dynamics that must be recognised by researchers prior to the interview as the interviewer and interviewees' positions and identities influence what is said (Rolland et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2020). This is because interviewees may think that they are being assessed by the interviewer. In my situation, none of the

alumni I have recruited were my previous students, thus, they were more comfortable sharing their thoughts—both related to college and workplace experiences— with me as a stranger and an outsider who has taken a "studying up" (Kubota, 2017) position during the interviews (see section 3.3.2).

The type of interviews used in this study is semi-structured interviews. This form of interview is employed because it is flexible and allows participants more freedom and opportunity to express their views and discuss important and unexpected issues (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Also, it entails a certain level of *reflexivity* which allows for exploring ideas in varying depth and order with each interviewee (Rose et al., 2020). This form of interviews is more balanced—compared to the other forms (i.e. structured and unstructured interviews)—as while it allows for developing new ideas and topics raised by the interviewees necessary for generating rich data, researchers can still refer to their pre-set interview questions (interview guide) to maintain a focus on eliciting responses relevant to the research questions (Rolland et al., 2020).

3.4.2 The interview procedure

Two sets of interviews were prepared: one set for the alumni and the other for the managers (see Appendix 1). The interview questions used for the alumni were largely adopted from Schneider and Andre (2005) which resembles the line of investigation of the current study— college preparation for workplace writing. Some of the demographic questions from Schneider and Andre were included in the life grid form (e.g. age, major of study, degree, position, time spent writing). I have also used the questions related to college preparation for workplace writing with slight modifications. For example, questions 5-13 (see Appendix 1, Alumni's interview questions) were adapted with reference to HCT technical writing courses. To illustrate, the question *(What writing courses did you take in university?)* was changed to question 9 *(Could you describe your learning experience in technical writing and technical communication courses at HCT?)*. Furthermore, question 13 *[What do you suggest should be changed or included? (Is*

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there anything you wish you had known before entering the workplace?)] combined two separate questions from Schneider and Andres' as they elicit similar points. Since I was interested in knowing more about alumni's workplace writing practices in detail especially with regard to contextual elements, the question *[Tell us about (or show us) a document you wrote on your work term]* from Schneider and Andre was modified and broken down to questions 1-4 (see Appendix 1).

The interviews started in February 2017 and ended in June 2017. The interviews took place either on company premises or at the Language Centre at HCT, depending on participants' convenience and availability. The alumni were sent a life grid form (see Appendix 1) through email prior to the interviews. Some of the alumni participants filled out the form on the day of the interview, while others sent me a soft copy or printed out a hard copy and brought it to the interview session. The purpose for creating the life grid form was to collect some demographic information about the alumni, such as their personal, academic and professional details. The questions in the life grid were initially part of the interview questions. However, as workplace participants are expected to be rather busy, these questions were reduced and included in the form instead. I started each interview with a quick overview of the life grid form and by asking the participants to clarify any unclear responses or to elaborate on some of the points, such as their position and job description.

The first two interviews with an alumnus and a line manager at a telecommunications company served as pilot in February 2017. These two participants were asked to comment on the clarity of the questions and to provide any other comments. After the pilot interviews, in response to the participants' comments, the interview questions were refined, reworded, combined and sequenced. Furthermore, I jotted down some unexpected prompts that I came up with during these two interviews to be used in future interviews, if necessary. Using semi-structured interviews has allowed me to ask questions based on the participants' answers. For example, one of

the alumni who has recently joined the workplace surprised me by stating that he does not do a lot of writing as he is still new at the company. Thus, I had to restructure some of my questions to suit his experience with workplace writing and to focus on his expectations about the kind of writing he will be required to do at the workplace.

The typical protocol followed in each interview was to start by introducing myself and briefing the participant on my research topic and objectives. Then the participant was given some time to read the participant information sheet and ask questions, if any. Next, the participant was asked to read and sign the consent form. If a participant had not completed the previously sent life grid form, they would be given some time to fill it in. The participant was asked to choose the language preference for conducting the interview. Most participants chose to converse in English. A few of them code-switched between Arabic and English. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded using a recording device (Sony ICD-PX440). The average duration of the whole interview was around 45 minutes (the longest ones exceeded an hour). Because the study probed alumni's writing experiences in technical writing courses at HCT, I carried with me Technical Writing textbooks obtained from the HOD of the Post-Foundation Program in the college to trigger their memories. Fortunately, even the experienced alumni were able to remember and reflect on their college writing experiences, and when I showed the textbooks to two new alumni, they immediately recalled the Technical Writing course having looked at the textbooks.

3.4.3 Text analysis

Text analysis is used as a secondary source of data to address RQ1. Workplace written samples of the alumni were collected to provide textual evidence for understanding the shaping by social/contextual elements of the alumni's workplace writing practices, particularly for supporting the themes emerging from the interview data. For instance, interview responses illustrating alumni tailoring their writing to cater for

various readerships is complemented with analysis of reports written for internal and external audiences. This serves as a triangulation technique which enhances the credibility of the data.

The use of text analysis aligns with the social constructivist stance, adopted for this study, which maintains that discourse constructs reality by viewing "texts as communicative units which are embedded in social and cultural practices" (Paltridge, 2012, p.7). In other words, what people say or write shapes and is shaped by the context in which it is used. From this perspective, the social/contextual elements valued in the workplace discourse community (that participants claimed to be crucial in shaping alumni's writing practices) are deemed to be realised in their written texts. Furthermore, social realities or any social phenomenon cannot be understood without referring to the discourses that ascribe meaning to them (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). In this study, to understand the writing practices of the alumni and the overall phenomenon studied (i.e. preparing learners for workplace writing), it is crucial to explore the authentic written texts from the workplace.

After each interview, the alumnus participants were requested to share some of their workplace written texts. They were advised not to share highly confidential texts and were assured that the texts would be solely used for the study. Some samples were collected later as I progressed in analysis upon contacting one of the participants via email. The total number of the samples submitted by the alumni was 29 (see Table 5). Any confidential data including names of people or organisations were blacked out. Then the samples were sent to the respective participants to black out or discard any confidential data. All the contacted participants confirmed that the samples did not contain any confidential information. The analysed texts are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Types and number of analysed texts

Text type	Number
Email	10 (5 of them were part of chains)
Incident reports	4
Lab report	1
Daily report	7
Monthly report	2
Drilling programme	1
Forms	3
Process document	1

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Analysing interview data

To analyse the data, thematic analysis is used to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset in relation to the RQs (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Since the study was already guided by established concepts in the literature pertaining to contextual elements shaping workplace writing, such as audience, purpose, and collaborative writing, and intended to explore other contextual elements specific to the context of the study, both 'theory-driven' and 'data-driven' thematic analysis was used throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identified concepts not only informed the interview guide, but also guided the initial coding process. This combination of both bottom-up and top-down approaches allows for more flexibility to incorporate and focus on desired themes and at the same time does not obstruct participants' voices and allows for the data to speak for itself.

As Table 6 below shows, the analysis consists of two main cycles with specific stages: descriptive and interpretive. First, I began with the descriptive cycle. I started transcribing the interview data early during the data collection phase. This allowed me to improve the interview questions and to consider some important points raised by the

participants in future interviews. It was also helpful for enhancing my interviewing techniques. The verbatim transcription of interview data was done in the language used for conducting the interviews, which is mostly English. The few instances of Arabic code-switching were transcribed in Arabic so as to not lose the intended meaning. The Arabic extracts used as evidence when reporting the findings were later translated to English. After transcribing all the interview data, I uploaded the dataset on Nvivo in two separate folders: one for alumni's transcripts and the other for managers' transcripts. The data were also cleaned by categorizing the chunks of data under headings derived from the interview questions. This step was necessary to run auto-coding on Nvivo to organize the whole data according to the topics of the interview questions. This has allowed me to view all the responses under a particular interview question.   Further, the information from the life grid forms was fed into Excel sheet and uploaded on Nvivo. Nvivo is used to help organise the analysis (Baralt, 2012; Gibbs, 2013) and thematic analysis is served best by software use (ibid). Collation of coded data is more efficient in Nvivo. It increased the organisation of data and coding through dragging data under the developed code. It was also helpful in creating thematic maps.

Table 6. Stages of thematic analysis of interview data

	Stage 1: Transcribing
	Stage 2: Generation of codes: - Familiarizing - Initial coding (using Nvivo) - Annotating
First cycle analysis: **descriptive approach**	**Stage 3**: Searching for themes - Going back and forth - Grouping and categorizing codes - Generating initial themes
	Stage 4: Visualizing: - Creating mind maps to visualize categories and sub-categories - Moving and grouping some codes - Creating Venn diagrams to compare and contrast codes from alumni and managers' interview data
Second cycle analysis: **Interpretive/ Analytical** **approach**	**Stage 5**: Reviewing themes: - Checking and sorting themes - Coming up with a provisional thematic map
	Stage 6: Generating final themes: - Refining, naming and defining themes - Coming up with the final thematic map

The actual analysis started flexibly following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis and incorporating them within the two cycles of analysis conducted (see Table 6 above). This is not to imply that my analysis took a linear process, rather it was recursive with a number of iterations and movement back and forth between the data set, coded extracts and emergent themes (ibid). Each step was carried out first for analysing alumni's data and then managers' responses.

First, the familiarisation process started from transcribing as I became familiar with data and I noted some initial potential themes by the time I finished transcribing (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I started reading and rereading the transcripts to further familiarize myself with the data and gain a deeper understanding of it. I started to notice things relevant to my RQs. While doing so, I made some annotations (in Nvivo) of my initial thoughts and the general impression of the data.

Next, I created two separate folders for the codes: one for codes generated from alumni's responses and the other for managers' codes. Similar folders with different names were created for different coding cycles (e.g. Alumni 1, Alumni 2). After starting coding, I realized that I needed to organize them under some universal organizing categories. So, I had come up with two organizing categories derived from my research questions, which are: perceptions of preparedness and contextual elements. This was helpful to relate the codes to the RQs. Although I started with some initial codes, such as 'audience' and 'collaborative writing', I coded everything to be open to unexpected findings that might have turned out to be of most interest. While coding may be viewed by some researchers as technical and preparatory work for deeper interpretive analysis, in this study it is considered as "deep reflection […] and deep analysis and interpretation of data's meaning" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). In fact, some initial codes were so large and rich that they were 'promoted' to a theme (e.g. audience and purpose themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

A 'complete coding' approach was used, hence, *anything* and *everything* of relevance to research aim was coded (ibid), and later I became more selective. Sometimes the coding was done line by line and in other instances the whole paragraph was coded. Furthermore, some extracts were initially coded more than once, and later on after deep analysis I decided where they fit more meaningfully. There were some codes which did not seem to directly fit under any of the organizing categories, so they were initially coded as miscellaneous. Moreover, creating initial mind maps as I progressed in analysis and

discussing the categories and sub-categories with my supervisory team were helpful to decide on the categorization of the codes so as to enhance the trustworthiness. As I was coding, I kept making annotations about any thoughts provoked by the data (See Figure 2). I would also sometimes define and describe the codes to remember their meanings and why I created them.

Figure 2. An example of annotations

P: So, that time what I learned whenever I want to write a paragraph, first I will write it in Arabic then I translate it to in English. What happen for my mind this is from my understanding philosophy, what I understand my mind first it's get it in Arabic then translate it to English and this totally wrong because there is different words in English which cannot be translated in Arabic, and even if you translate it, it will be leading to mismeaning, so that time this difficulty is to carry with me since when I was in school till I finish the college and you know even the teachers does not know that I have this difficulty. They found that my English … the sentence is not matching to each other or the word is not, but then when I come to the work, I understand this was the main issue I handle it with me, then what I within work life… when I start speaking English and forgetting translating Arabic, I found it's more easier and easier and to

I: To write more accurate as well

P: Exactly

I: That's really interesting! So, you depended on tra[nslation in your] work right?

P: Yeah

Q.3. Audience

Created: 23 Jan 2018   By: T

workplace context makes the participant realize not only the importance of the basic knowledge of writing she gained at college, but also how to apply this knowledge properly. she also realized that translation was the major reason for her…

Delete   ◀ ▶

Table 7. Example of initial coding

Data extracts	Initial codes
P: … so when you send an email to customer need to be careful you need to be like very kind and even sometimes if they are wrong or something, you need to write it in different way. Don't tell you are wrong	1. Awareness of audience 2. diplomatic
P: It's different because I think we had given something which is not related to my work at all like sometimes scientific reports, I am not science anymore I'm not going to that department	Not relevant/not specific

Table 7 shows the codes initially assigned to the given extracts. Two codes were applied to the first extract as it broadly implies the alumnus' awareness of the intended audience, and more specifically illustrates maintaining diplomacy as an element which necessitates the alumnus' consideration for his audience when producing a written text. As the analysis developed, the code 'awareness of audience' became a sub-theme which includes audience-related factors such as power relations consisting of elements like politeness and diplomacy. This illustrates moving from more surface analysis (i.e. 'semantic'), to deeper underlying interpretations (i.e. 'latent' thematic analysis) (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to encapsulate participants' underlying assumptions and conceptualisations. In the same vein, the second extract illustrates another alumnus' dissatisfaction with the kind of writing he practiced in Technical Writing courses at college due to the irrelevance between the tasks and genres practiced in these courses to his engineering discipline and to workplace writing requirements. The underlying assumption in this response is a lack of specificity of Technical Writing courses to cater for learners' disciplinary needs,

hence, in this sense the writing tasks practiced in them are regarded as irrelevant. Later in the analysis, I renamed 'irrelevance' as 'lack of authenticity' which entailed the discussion of lack of specificity, among others, as a factor shaping alumni's views of preparedness.

After completing the initial coding, I started reducing and combining similar codes (See Figure 3) as an initial step for searching for themes and sub-themes. A thematic map of initial themes was created (see Appendix 2). Furthermore, I noticed a lot of overlapping in the codes generated from the data of the alumni and their line managers; hence, I created Venn diagrams to visualize how they differ and intersect (See Appendix 3). Tables were also created to compare various themes generated initially (See Appendix 3).

Figure 3. An example of aggregating similar codes

Then I moved to the second cycle of analysis which consists of two stages as explained below.

Stage 1: This stage involved reviewing the candidate themes for refinements. During this stage, some themes were aggregated together to form a new theme which captures the initial themes comprehensively. For example, 'disparities' and 'deficiencies' were merged together to form a new theme which is 'deficiencies in college writing experiences'. Also, a theme like 'feedback' was attached to the 'level of experience' element, as it tackled a similar issue. This was decided after multiple readings and re-coding of some extracts. Furthermore, I ended up abandoning some themes which did not have

enough data to support them (e.g. 'low self-confidence'). In addition, some themes collapsed together to form an overarching theme, which 'organises and structures' the analysis and captures 'an idea encapsulated in a number of themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 231). For example, the themes 'audience', 'purpose' and 'valued style' were collapsed to form the overarching theme 'rhetorical elements', capturing the common idea among these three contextual elements. In the same vein, themes like 'collaborative writing', 'physical environment' and 'level of experience' fell under another overarching theme 'socio-contextual elements'. Then, I generated a provisional thematic map (see Appendix 2). Finally, the reviewing of themes was also done in relation to the entire dataset to check whether the generated themes precisely represented the meanings in the whole dataset (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Stage 2: The final stage of the analysis involved further refinements of the themes to generate the final satisfactory themes which better address the RQs. This was done through a final revising of the themes and relating them to the RQs. I also renamed some themes and provided a definition (see Chapters 4 & 5) of each to identify the "essence of what each theme is about […] and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.22). Finally, I came up with the thematic map (see Appendix 2).

3.5.2 Analysing the written samples

A top-down thematic analysis approach is used to analyse the written texts. Initially, I experienced a dilemma regarding what to label my approach of analysing the written samples. The confusion was between whether to call it 'thematic' or 'qualitative content analysis'. Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis distinction is often muddled in the literature (Rose et al., 2020). Sometimes thematic analysis is viewed as an "an early, underdeveloped, variant of contemporary qualitative content analysis" (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p. 4). After extensive readings about both approaches, I could develop a clear distinction between them and decide that my approach is top-

down, or 'theoretical' thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fact, this form of thematic analysis is usually confused with qualitative content analysis since both involve applying priori codes. This deductive thematic approach "would tend to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12). The codes I applied to the data were driven by my own predetermined ideas developed while analysing the interviews. Additionally, this form of thematic analysis tends to focus on analysing some aspects of the data rather than scrutinising the whole data (ibid).

The process of text analysis followed in this study is recursive and involved skimming, reading and interpreting (Bowen, 2009) (see Figure 4). The steps that preceded the actual analysis of the samples included familiarising myself with the data, and sorting them into different folders according to their types. All the samples were analysed either in word documents or PDFs using comments and notes and mark-up features. Email samples were copied to a Word document for analysis purposes. A multi-staged process of coding the data was used (Kuckartz, 2014). In the first stage of the analysis, I skimmed the samples, I jotted down some comments of my initial thoughts of what seemed interesting or striking (such as brevity). In other words, I did some initial coding based on my preconceptions of contextual elements shaping workplace writing. In the next stage, codes were further developed based on the initial themes generated from the analysis of the interview data (Stage 3, see Table 6). This stage involved thorough reading of the texts and applying predefined codes from the interview data to the texts to integrate textual data with the data gathered through the interviews (Bowen, 2009). For example, as I went through the collected texts, I would code data relevant to precise and concise writing, such as factual information and abbreviations (see Tables 15 & 16). This was done for all the datasets. Similarly, different codes relevant to the themes of 'audience' and 'purpose', such as 'power relations' and 'to inform' were applied to the texts. In the final stage, following a recursive approach (Baralt, 2012),

as interview themes were refined, I would go back to the samples and refine them simultaneously. For example, the themes, 'level of experience' and 'workplace physical environment' were applied to text analysis after I progressed in the interview data analysis.

Text analysis was mainly used to support the rhetorical elements shaping alumni's writing practices, namely audience, purpose and valued style, as this level of context appeared to directly shape the written text and has obvious manifestations. For example, consideration for audience represented in the structure, choice of word and tone, was supported with concrete evidence from emails and reports using thematic analysis along with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness theory (see sections 2.1.3.1.1. and 4.1.1.2). Similarly, the influence of purpose on the written samples (e.g. emails and reports) is analysed using Swales' (1990) moves analysis (see sections 2.2.2 and 4.1.4). Some participants were contacted during text analysis for further follow-up questions, for instance, asking about the audience and purpose of the analysed texts. Examples of coding an email and an incident report are shown below in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 4. Text analysis process

Initial codes based on preconceptions

Familiarising:
-Skimming
-Initial coding

Based on interview codes (stages 5 & 6)

Refining codes:
- Reviewing
-Adding codes

Interpreting:
-Thorough reading
-Applying codes

Based on interview codes (stage 3)

Figure 5. Example of email coding

Dear H,

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Politeness, formality because the audience is high in hierarchy

As per our discussion, here is my commitment that I will cover all element of core competencies in my GDP with the help of Mr. X and Mr. Y they will supporting me to get exposure in technical side as well as me self.

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Linking to previous discussion. This alumnus also mentioned this in the interviews when he said that after oral communication is done, he should sit and write "if we talk to someone, we have to write"
> Oral intertextuality

These are the things I'm planning to cover:

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> PURPOSE: TO INFORM about the goals, to document

Figure 6. Example of report coding

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> The incident is described briefly and concisely in customers' version of incident report.

Details of Incident:

On 5th Feb-2017 @ 6:45 PM, ▮▮ ▮ observed indication of power failure in camp and many services of ILL & telephone services (3G+LTE) got affected. ▮▮ ▮ reported this issue to the concerned team to attend this malfunction and the issue has been escalated to top management. Due to area role, the team not allowed to enter the site at night time, so the issue has been postponed to next day.

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Purpose: Informing the customer about the action taken by the company to solve the problem

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> maintaining transparency with the customer.

On 6th Feb-2017 early morning, power team moved the site and they mobilized at 6:30 AM. They started investigation the issue and they observed the generator was faulty and need to be changed. They requested for new one, hence they replaced the faulty generator with the healthy one. All traffics restored at 8:20 AM.

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Preciseness, maintaining transparency with the customer.

RFO:

This issue occurred because of generator faulty in ▮▮ and it has been replaced with new one.

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Without giving any details of the nature of investigation, and this is because the customer is not interested in such technical things, they just need to know what was the reason for outage and how was it resolved (as stated in the interview)

▮▮ regrets for any inconvenience this incident may have caused and remain at the customer disposal. For any clarification you may have, please do not hesitate to contact our ▮ directly

> Tayiba Al Hilali
> Showing politeness

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3.6 Trustworthiness of research

Many researchers suggest validity and reliability measures of assessment to qualitative research are irrelevant and have come up with alternative frameworks and terms to evaluate the quality of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2015; Dorneyi, 2007; Flick, 2007; Gibbs, 2012; Guba and Lincoln,1985; Seale, 1999). The subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative research in which 'truth' is relative has led qualitative researchers to argue that qualitative research needs its own criteria and procedures to achieve quality (Dorneyi, 2007). In the same vein, as Braun and Clarke (2013) contend, the criterion of reliability is not appropriate for evaluating the quality of qualitative research since it generates different results depending on the context of study. Similarly, the themes and categories produced in the analysis depend on researchers' points of view and experiences. Thus, alternatively, trustworthiness is a fundamental criterion to assess qualitative research. The trustworthiness in the present study was achieved by adopting Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criterion in which they use alternative terms for evaluating qualitative research. They use distinctive terms, such as:

a) *credibility* (i.e. refers to authenticity and confidence on how well data represent the focus of the study),

b) *transferability* (i.e. is the extent to which the findings are applicable to other contexts),

c) *dependability* (i.e. deals with the consistency of interpretation throughout the study) and

d) *confirmability* (i.e. concerns the neutrality or the degree to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias).

Credibility holds "the idea that the reader can have confidence in the data and their interpretation" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 75). Therefore, the researcher employs certain procedures to check the accuracy of the findings. One key technique to ensure credibility is through the means of triangulation (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Cohen et al., 2011). Triangulation is defined as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 195). It is 'a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.5). Using multiple methods provides more rigorous and richer data, and it is a good fit for a multi-perspective approach for exploring the complexity of human behaviour. In other words, through triangulation, researchers can examine an issue from various angles. Furthermore, triangulation is required because qualitative research deals with ambiguous human behaviours which cannot be thoroughly investigated with a single method.

Hence, to enhance credibility of the present research, method and source triangulation is employed. Two data collection instruments are used: semi-structured interviews, and text analysis. Although the study is mainly interview-based, the data obtained from the text analysis is triangulated with the interview data to increase the rigour of analysis. In addition, a secondary source of information (i.e. line managers) is triangulated with the primary source (i.e. alumni) to obtain multiple perspectives of the writing practices in the workplace and the preparedness of college alumni for workplace writing. Site triangulation (Shenton, 2004) was also established by employing participants from various organisations in two different sectors (i.e. telecommunications and petroleum). Although workplaces are diverse and each organisation usually has its own way of doing things, commonalities in the perceived writing practices across different organisations employed in this study appear to increase credibility of findings. In addition, all the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for ensuring accuracy of what was said (Riessman, cited in Silverman, 2011). Furthermore, the use of a researcher reflective diary (for critical self-awareness, see section 3.7) and supervisory meeting notes, for recording any decisions made along the way, enhanced the plausibility of data interpretation (ibid). Member check (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Gibbs, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2103) was also utilised to enhance credibility of data gathered. All the

participants were invited to verify the interview transcripts. Those who were interested in this process confirmed the accuracy of their accounts. What is more, peer-debriefing (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), or a 'critical friend', a colleague who shares the same field as mine, was frequently consulted to interrogate the coding categories. This was not a one-off practice, rather, it continued regularly throughout the data analysis phase (Barbour, 2013). Also, collaborative discussions with my colleagues from different disciplines widened my vision as this worked as another insight into my data which has a different perspective. I was also able to detect flaws in my analysis when my assumptions were challenged by my peers; hence, I constantly questioned, revisited and developed my interpretations of the data.

Transferability suggests that "findings may be applicable in similar situations" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 75). To attain transferability in this study, rich description is provided for the reader (Creswell, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that qualitative findings can be transferred to other contexts by providing detailed description of the specific contexts, participants and the circumstances of the study. Then it is the reader's responsibility to judge the possibility of applying the results to other contexts and subjects (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 75). This is akin to what Snape and Spencer (2003) propose regarding the depth and extensiveness of data as a tool to achieve reliability. Thus, the study provides a detailed account of the context, the participants, field experience including negotiating access to the workplace, and detailed account of data analysis and leave the judgement of results' applicability to other contexts on the reader to decide. This vivid account enables readers to make decisions as to the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Dependability refers to the consistency of findings over time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Auditing approach has been advocated to ensure dependability of research findings (ibid). This involves documenting all the phases of research including all research activities, such as data

collection and analysis procedures, and all decisions taken throughout the research (Creswell and Millar, 2000). The current study provides a detailed description of the research design and its implementation, including data collection and analysis procedures and all the theoretical, methodological and analytical decisions taken throughout the study; all of which is documented in supervisory meeting summaries. Furthermore, to achieve dependability, consistency of data interpretations was maintained through triangulation of methods and sources.

Confirmability refers to "the idea that the researcher has remained neutral in data analysis and interpretation" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2010, p. 76). To ensure confirmability, it is important to create 'an image of researcher integrity' (Dornyei, 2007). This image can be built through contextualization and thick description, and through recognizing researcher's own biases. Hence, as a qualitative researcher, I was well aware of my positionality and reflective of my own biases and was attentive to their effects on data. To enhance this, I would get engaged in regular discussions with my supervisory team and peers throughout data analysis phase. Furthermore, my initial findings and interpretations were presented in international events. Discussing my findings with different audiences, including pioneers in the field, verified the impact and richness of research findings. Also, triangulation has helped in reducing the effect of my own biases (Shenton, 2004). Another means to enhance confirmability is to explicitly state my self-awareness of biases and their effects on shaping interpretations. This is demonstrated in the next section.

3.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to "the process of critically reflecting on the knowledge we produce and our role in producing that knowledge" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.37). It is the process of researchers' reporting on their personal biases, beliefs and values they may bring to the inquiry (Creswell & miller, 2000, p.27) which inevitably shape

the process and product of knowledge production (Gibbs, 2012; May & Perry, 2013). Hence, as researcher, it is crucial to engage in a self-reflection about my preconceptions, my positionality in the research field and my interaction with the participants (Gibbs, 2013).

In this study, I maintained a reflective diary throughout the research process. In the diary, I have kept notes of my field work experience and reflected on my analytical ideas and the decisions I have made throughout data analysis process. These reflections were in the form of notes, memos or mind maps. This on-going self-reflection throughout the research process has made me realise my positionality and acknowledge my biases and their influence on the interpretation of data. In this study, I define myself as one of the ESP teachers who teach Technical Writing courses at the Language Centre at the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Oman. My experience has formed the impetus for conducting this study on exploring the writing of the corporate world with HCT alumni. Therefore, I have recognised the impact of my own background, biases and identity on my research process.

Highly restricted physical access to workplace organisations has positioned me as an outsider who is not allowed to enter the premises of the organisations without the availability of gatekeepers. While conducting the interviews in the premises of the organisations, my position was of an 'intrusive outsider' (Folkes, 2018) who would disturb professionals' busy life and exploit their precious time. To recall an incident, while I was waiting for my first interviewee for a particular session of interviews early morning, the participant entered the room and abruptly said 'you have only twenty minutes'! This has happened because I was late for my appointment due to unexpected disruptions while accessing company's main building. The participant's behaviour is utterly understandable as time is substantively valued at the workplace. This incident has made me realise my position as an outsider who is conducting research in the world of business known for its hectic atmosphere. However, this single incident does not imply that my outsider position has obstructed the research process. In fact,

I was always welcomed warmly by the gatekeepers and participants who seemed to be interested in sharing their stories and struggles with writing and providing me with the information that I lacked, i.e. workplace writing practices, being an outsider. Being cognisant of my positioning as an 'intrusive outsider' throughout the interview process, I would ensure that I behaved courteously all the time, and I kept appreciating their interest in participating.

However, this intrusive positioning has changed with those participants I interviewed outside their work time and work premises. Due to difficulties in accessing one of the companies, the gatekeeper asked me to conduct the interviews somewhere else, hence, a few participants were interviewed at the Language Centre at HCT after liaising with an administrator at the college. With those participants, I did not feel intrusive and the alumni were happy to get back to the college as professionals who were not threatened by my position as a teacher at the same college they graduated from. In fact, during all the interviews, I took a position 'below' the participants as a researcher willing to learn from them rather than judge them (Kubota, 2017). Teacher-student power relations did not exist in my relationship with the alumni who viewed me as a professional and a researcher. Hence, there was not any hesitance on the part of the alumni in sharing their honest experiences of college writing. At the same time, being an outsider to their professional world with no power or threat has allowed the alumni to disclose their honest views regarding their workplace writing practices. Besides, their comfort in expressing their views openly was also due to the rapport and trust I established with them. Furthermore, the interviews took a conversational form in which the alumni acted as active agents in coproducing knowledge rather than me taking the role of an interrogator controlling the process of the interviews. This was reflected in the freedom they were given regarding the amount of time they took and types of topics they wished to talk about. They were also given the choice to converse in Arabic or English and were reminded of this throughout the interviews. The

alumni fully controlled the use of either language or code mixing/switching according to their convenience.

Similar to the alumni's interest in the topic of the study and their recognition of its impact and importance to them, the line managers were also profoundly interested in the topic and facilitated the research process. They devoted time from their busy schedule to help me gain access, as three of them were the gatekeepers as well, identify potential participants and arrange interview schedules. In fact, they used their networks to help me gain access to other companies. They were also eager to express their views of HCT graduates' writing performance in the workplace and tremendously acknowledged the need for preparing learners for workplace writing. Some of them have also expressed their willingness to enter a future collaboration with me to devise technical writing courses to improve technical writing skills of their employees. Besides, they showed interest in knowing about my research findings.

I was also aware of the influence my professional and theoretical background may have on the interpretation of the data. Though I am not an insider to the organisations serving as my research context, being a teacher who taught technical writing courses I am in a way connected with the alumni who studied such courses. Thus, I am aware of the influence of my experiences in the ESP program at the college on the interpretation of data. Being aware of my biases has served as a tool to control the potential biased views. For instance, I ensured to present honest accounts of the participants regarding their views of college preparation for workplace writing as extreme negative and positive views were reported. My experience with teaching technical writing courses enabled me to understand some of the alumni's accounts especially regarding the types of genres taught and teaching practices. For example, knowing about the developments of these courses throughout the years allowed me to account for why some alumni said they learned email writing and why some did not. Hence, in this sense my experience has enhanced the interpretation of data instead of contaminating it.

On the contrary, "the self is the research tool, and thus intimately connected to the methods we deploy" (Cousin, 2010, p. 10). Furthermore, since my knowledge of the existing literature has informed my research questions and shaped the focus of the study, I was aware of the influence of my preconceptions of workplace writing practices and the contextual elements shaping them. Although I incorporated some priori themes, namely audience, purpose and collaborative writing, I was also open to other unexpected possibilities, such as workplace physical environment theme. Besides, the codes under the priori themes were strongly grounded in the data and did not necessarily match the literature. Also, I discussed workplace features like 'intertextuality' as part of 'collaborative writing' and not as a separate element. This idea is influenced by my own perceptions and my own influence by the literature. Therefore, when it was interrogated in the interviews, the purpose was to consider it as part of collaborative writing. Thus, being aware of my theoretical values that I brought to the research has allowed me to maintain caution in my analysis.

3.8 Ethics

Ethics have been considered in all stages and aspects of the research. The current study required informed consent since it involves human participants (Neuman, 2003). A prerequisite for conducting this study was to complete and sign an ethical-issues form and to obtain ethical approval (approved through the University of Bath on December 17th, 2016). Adhering to the ethical considerations for conducting this research, permission was sought from the workplace organisations for interviewing the alumni and the managers, and for collecting some written samples. This was done by arranging a meeting with gatekeepers at the companies when they were briefed on the objectives of the study and its benefits for their companies, and they were ensured confidentiality and anonymity of the names of the companies. I also obtained individual participants' permission for being interviewed. Therefore, before the start of each interview, I would first introduce myself as an initial step to establish trust and

rapport (Gibbs, 2012). Then the participants were briefed thoroughly on the objectives of the study, issues related to confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2011), right to withdraw and storage of data orally and in writing through providing participant information sheets (See Appendix 4) which the participants were given some time to read and ask for clarifications. It was clearly explained to the participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study during or after it has taken place, and those who wish to be debriefed on the results would be provided a brief summary of the findings. Furthermore, the protection of their identity was guaranteed. Then, participants' informed consent (See Appendix 4) was obtained.

To avoid any disruption of work, interview meetings were held at a time and place convenient to each participant. Their permission was sought for recording the interviews and full confidentiality was assured.

As far as the texts are concerned, at the initial meeting with the gatekeepers, permission was sought regarding access to the documents written by the engineer alumni. Later, the participants' permission to collect samples of their writing was sought. They were assured of the right to select the samples themselves and to delete any confidential parts they may not wish to reveal which may put them of the company at risk. They were also assured that the written samples would be solely used for the purpose of the study.

As college alumni are one of the participants recruited in this study, I sought HCT Dean's permission to mention college's name in my study. To do so, I first arranged a meeting with the Head of the Language Centre at HCT and briefed him on the topic and aim of the study. I was asked to write an official letter to the Dean seeking his permission regarding this matter. I received an official letter (See Appendix 5) from the Deanship granting me approval for using college's name in my study.

These ethical issues were also considered during data analysis in several ways. All the audio-recorded interviews and transcripts were saved in password protected files. The transcripts were anonymised

not only for the purpose of reporting findings but also when conducting peer debriefing sessions (Flick, 2007). Furthermore, when employing member checking of the transcripts, the participants were given full right to withdraw what they said (Gibbs, 2012). Also, confidentiality of the written samples was ensured by blacking out all the names and any information which may reveal the identity of the participants or the organisations.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the philosophical and methodological underpinnings which guided this study to obtain understanding of the workplace writing practices enacted by college alumni and their preparedness for the demand of workplace writing as conceived by the alumni and their line managers. The social constructivist nature of this study and qualitative inquiry design have led to gaining deeper accounts of participants' views on the researched topic. Detailed explanations and justifications for adopting the qualitative design were presented. Also, the selection of participants and workplace setting was thoroughly explicated. A substantial part of the chapter was also devoted to explaining the negotiation of access to the workplace and specific steps followed in doing so. The role of personal networks and gatekeepers in gaining access was highlighted. Also, establishing good rapport with participants was conducive to recruiting more potential participants.

After that, the methods of data collection, semi-structured interviews and text analysis, were described and justified in relation to the research aims. Rich description of the exact procedures followed to collect data was presented. Further, the use of thematic analysis to analyse the data was explained thoroughly and systematically providing specific examples and mind maps to demonstrate the decisions taken throughout the data analysis phase. This was followed by discussion of the quality of qualitative research in the light of trustworthiness and the measures taken to achieve it. The chapter

ended with reflexivity and research ethics considered throughout the study.

Next, the following two chapters present the findings of the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings related to the contextual elements shaping alumni's workplace writing (RQ1), and Chapter 5 provides the findings pertaining to alumni and line managers' perceptions of HCT graduates' preparedness for workplace writing demands.

Chapter Four: The Contextual Nature of Engineering Workplace Writing

This is one of the two findings chapters. It presents the analysis of the findings addressing RQ1: <u>How does the socially situated nature of writing, i.e. social/contextual elements, shape alumni's workplace writing practices?</u> In this chapter, I focus on exploring the nature of engineering workplace writing through highlighting the contextual elements shaping the alumni's workplace writing practices. As I combined both deductive and inductive approaches in analysing the findings pertaining to this research question, I began my analysis with contextual elements established in the literature as my initial themes, such as audience, purpose, and collaborative writing. Admittedly, these elements were extensively probed in the conducted interviews. As I progressed in my analysis, the data also revealed other prominent elements, namely valued style, level of experience and workplace physical environment, which I did not take into consideration prior to data collection and analysis but found them as important as the other contributing factors to shaping the workplace writing practices of the alumni. Having ended up with these distinct but interrelating contextual elements led me to viewing context into two levels: micro and macro. Therefore, I have taken a broader conceptualisation of context and viewed it as including both *rhetorical situation* and *context of situation* (Rabbi & Canagarajah, 2017; Coe, 2002; Samraj, 2002). The former embraces the contextual elements directly shaping a written text such as audience, purpose, and valued style, thus, operating at a micro level, whereas the latter refers to the macro broader contextual and social processes and practices surrounding the production of a text and shaping the writing practices of the alumni, e.g. collaborative writing. The former has a visible manifestation in the written texts collected from the alumni, whereas the latter influence the overall practices and are not necessarily exhibited through the textual analysis.

This study is interview-based and the findings are mainly based on the interview data. Text analysis is used as a supplementary source of data. From the interview data obtained, I identified six salient emergent themes based on thematic analysis of the interview data pertaining to the contextual elements shaping alumni's workplace writing practices. In addition, textual evidence from the written texts obtained from the alumni will be integrated to support the themes identified from the interview data. Both alumni and line managers' perspectives will be integrated to illustrate these elements.

Influenced by the literature on text-context relationship (Coe, 2002; Johns, 1997; Pang, 2002) and views of Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) (Artemeva, 2008 & 2005; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Miller, 1984), and in line with the view of context I have taken, I organised the themes under two overarching themes (As in Table 8): Rhetorical elements (micro) including the following themes: 1) audience, 2) purpose, and 3) valued style, and Socio-contextual elements (macro) including: 4) collaborative/individual writing, 5), workplace physical environment and 6) level of experience. The former elements directly shape the written texts as perceived by the participants and noted in the text analysis, whereas the latter shape the overall workplace writing practices of the alumni, and this influence is not necessarily directly manifested in the written texts, therefore, most of the analysis will be based on the interview data with occasional support from the texts. The findings are presented according to the classification shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Overarching themes and themes identified

Overarching themes	Themes	Description of themes
Rhetorical elements: This refers to elements having immediate influence on the text, thus, supported by textual evidence.	Audience	This theme describes the kinds of readerships the alumni deal with in their workplace writing and how they manipulate genres to cater for various and multiple readers. Audience-related factors, such as audience background, power relations and audience's needs and expectations were noted to influence alumni's written texts.
	Purpose	The alumni and line managers identified a multitude of instrumental and real purposes for writing at the workplace. These purposes are classified in three categories: rhetorical, organisational and individual. Writing purposes appeared to influence alumni's writing in terms of content, overall organisation, rhetorical structure and register.
	Valued style: Preciseness & conciseness	This theme highlights how the valued feature of workplace writing which is preciseness and conciseness impacts on alumni's writing. This is manifested in the use of abbreviations, factual facts, and other forms of brevity and preciseness evident in the written samples.

Socio-contextual elements: This refers to broader contextual and social practices surrounding the production of a text which shape not only the text but also the process of alumni's workplace writing, as well as the amount and type of writing tasks they are involved in. **(mainly based on interview date with occasional textual evidence)**	Collaborative/ individual writing	Collaborative and individual writing appeared to influence the writing practices of the alumni. Although they mostly write individually, various forms of collaborative writing seem to shape their writing practices in various ways.
	Workplace physical environment	Whether alumni work in the field or office has an impact on their writing practices in terms of the amount of writing, process and types of texts required.
	Level of experience	This theme illuminates the influence of alumni's level of workplace experience on their writing practices in terms of amount of writing, process, types of texts required from newcomers and experienced alumni, and the feedback practices they experienced.

4.1 Rhetorical elements shaping alumni's writing

This section will present the findings related to rhetorical elements representing the immediate factors which shape the workplace written texts as perceived by the engineer alumni and their line managers. These factors are audience, purpose and valued style. Each factor will be discussed in detail in the following sub-sections.

4.1.1 Audience

This section focuses on one of the rhetorical elements shaping alumni's writing which is 'audience' in response to RQ1 regarding how social/contextual elements shape alumni's workplace writing. It highlights the types of audiences the alumni write for as identified in the interviews, and how they adapt their writing depending on the audience.

4.1.1.1 Who do the alumni write for and what regulates this?

It is commonly recognised that workplace writing involves dealing with a wide range of audiences internally and externally (Moore et al., 2015). In this study, there is consensus among the participants that they write for various audiences at the workplace. Such audiences could be internal, such as line managers, colleagues and other departments within a company. Besides, audiences could be external such as contractors, customers, ministries, and vendors both locals and internationals. However, there are some restrictions on communicating with external audiences. For instance, not all departments and employees can communicate with customers as there are specific departments allocated for this, as stated by one of the telecommunications line managers:

> *But, not all of the staff in the company will deal directly with the customers, so we have different sections different departments who directly have the access to reply customer emails or sending some reports on their services or explaining incidents, so some roles are played by our staff (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).*

Such external correspondences would seem to be limited to specific employees and departments for the purpose of confidentiality as pointed out by M3, one of the line managers, *"They [the alumni] are not supposed to do because a lot of things are confidential…"* (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017). Thus, the alumni under M3's supervision only write emails for internal audiences as there is an independent department that communicates with external parties such as ministries for confidentiality purposes. Such restrictions in communicating with external audiences was not necessarily attributed to the level of alumni's experience. For instance, although the majority of new alumni stated that they mainly write for internal audiences (A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12), some of them do need to write emails or monthly reports for external parties if they are involved in projects with contractors or clients (A7, A12).

Such projects involve teamwork, and this collaborative nature of the workplace leads to having multiple audiences for a single text including various parties involved as delineated by one of the alumni: *"Asset team, managers, planning and design engineers, drilling supervisors, site well engineer, the contractors, engineers, contract holders, everyone who is involved in drilling"* (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017). These multiple audiences could be primary or secondary audiences. Some alumni mentioned that they know who their main audiences are and who should be copied and why, as one of them clarified: *"… the To for the guy who has an action or direct guy he must to do it, the CC is just for his information or just to sharing what's happen"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).

In short, the audiences the alumni write for in the given context whether in the field of petroleum or telecommunications could be classified in three categories: Internal audiences (at the level of superiors, subordinates and colleagues with the same status), external audiences including locals and internationals (with different power relation), and multiple audiences (main or secondary with different power relation). Such identified categories of audience reflect power relationships and the need for workplace writers to handle such relationships to achieve their communicative goals (Bremner, 2018).

The findings extend Bremner's discussion on workplace writers' need for *register appropriateness* when communicating with subordinates or superiors through further delving into the contextual and organisational elements which influence this appropriateness, such as diplomacy, confidentiality and level of formality in relationships, and providing textual evidence for such realisations. This will be highlighted in the next section. The data have also highlighted that socio-contextual elements such as teamwork and organisational constraints in communicating with external audiences, based on the organisational department, seem to determine the types of audiences the alumni write for, hence, shaping alumni's workplace writing practices.

Having identified the kind of audiences the alumni write for and what regulates it, the next section will illuminate the findings related to how the alumni adapt their writing to cater for various audiences.

4.1.1.2 Adapting writing according to audience

The previous section showed that the alumni write for various audiences with different power relations at the workplace. It is not sufficient for workplace writers to know who their audiences are, but being aware of how to adapt writing to cater for various audiences is of paramount for effective workplace writing (Andrea & Schneider, 2004; Knoch et al., 2016; Paretti, 2006). Through providing explicit and various examples, both from interview and textual data, of the conceptualisation of audience, findings of this study elaborate on Andrea and Schneider's (2004) discussion on how graduates' awareness of their potential readers influence their workplace writing. Furthermore, Paretti (2006) emphasises the need for practicing audience awareness in composition classroom and specifically focused on adapting texts to meet the information needs of audiences. In the same vein, the findings of this study add to audience-related factors which students need to be made aware of in composition classes. There is a general consensus among the participants that awareness of audience is a pivotal element in workplace writing as audience shapes the written text. Three audience-related factors

seem to influence alumni's written texts in terms of word choice, tone/register and organisation: the background of their audience, power relations, as well as their audiences' expectations and needs.

The known background of the target audience, i.e. their familiarity with technical content, has an impact on the register used in the written texts. For example, as reported by one of the telecommunications engineer alumni, technical register cannot be used to address audiences with non-technical background:

> *If you send anything technical to non-technical people, it is impossible for them to understand it, and they will [face]a great difficulty… because you are talking about something technical related to engineering and that person could be from a business background (A1, 16 / 02 /2017).*

This quote implies that the background of the potential reader determines the kind of register that should be used. For instance, readers' belonging to business department may struggle to understand the engineering technical vocabulary used in any document. Likewise, A4 stressed that she is careful in using technical terms in user guides and reports as her readers are different in terms of their knowledge and their level of understanding. In contrast, A8 mostly writes for audiences with technical background, thus, he does not need to elaborate on everything, as he clarified: *"I just write the number of the equipment, and they understand what I mean themselves … as they are aware of the functions of every equipment"* (A8, 08 / 05/ 2017). The emails and reports submitted by some of the alumni further prove this point. Technical terms and abbreviations are extensively used in daily reports, a lab report and emails written for managers and colleagues from the same department or field. Furthermore, a table of abbreviations with their definitions is used in the opening of a manual which documents the process of Oracle user management in consideration of the reader who might not be familiar with the abbreviations used as illustrated in the snapshot below:

Figure 7. A table of abbreviations with their definitions in a manual

4 Definitions

Sl. No	Process Name	Brief Description
1.	UM	User Management
2.	HD	Help Desk
3.	SR	Service Request
4.	ES	Enterprise System

Apart from the background of audience, power relationships seem to necessitate alumni's adaptation of their texts according to their audience. By power relationships I meant how the alumni "frame their writing in the context of the power relationships they have with their intended readers" (Bremner, 2018, p. 71). The alumni in this study seemed to be aware of their power relationships with the readers. Most of the alumni are new graduates who do not have any status or power, and this leaves them with little freedom in terms of language choice especially when communicating with those up in the hierarchy. For instance, the power relationship with superiors or subordinates seems to affect the selection of appropriate tone and words in a written text, as commented by a drilling engineer:

> *… when you are talking to the managers, it's different from when you are talking to other engineers different when you are talking to the contractor, you know, if I want to talk to the contractor and I need something and direct following sometimes, I need to be aggressive. When you need; when you are requesting something from your manager, you choose your words (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017).*

As the quote implies, more polite tone is used when communicating with superiors whereas more leeway is practiced when communicating downward. Similarly, another petroleum engineer commented that formal register is maintained when writing for seniors or international audiences, and this influences their word choice, as he explained:

> *… for the senior people, for example, or international emails you need to be careful and very formal in this you need to pick some words, maybe this words it can be key this is what I think I'm doing (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

Hence, as these quotes show, maintaining more politeness and formality is determined by the status of the target audience. This is evident in politeness markers used in the emails collected from some alumni. For example, the way of starting the email tends to be formal sometimes using *'Dear'* and titles to address senior recipients. In contrast, emails sent to peers and subordinates have a less formal tone, for instance, starting directly with the name of the recipient without using *'Dear'* or titles. The use of titles, expressions which structure and conventionalise a text, i.e. fixed opening and closing structures are used to maintain social distance and formality, and this is also considered a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Harris, 2003). Three email samples (see below) are used to illustrate how the power relations (audience factor) influence the written texts of the alumni and the demands placed on the them as they made requests of their superiors and subordinates. This influence is evident in the structure of the request and the language used (see Table 9). This is explained through the employment of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

Table 9. The influence of power relations on the request emails of the alumni

	Email 1	Email 2	Email 3
Power	**Downward**	**Upward**	**Upward**
Politeness strategy	**Bald on record politeness**	**Bald on record politeness**	**Negative politeness**
Linguistic strategies	- Direct request: Using the politeness marker *please* as a form of deference with an imperative verb 'Please clarify' -form of address: recipient's first name	- Direct requests: Using a declarative 'I need …' Using the politeness marker *please* as a form of deference with an imperative verb 'please provide' 'Please make haste' - Form of address: recipient's first name	Indirect request Using passive voice 'Your action is highly appreciated' - Form of address: Dear+ recipient's first name
Request structure	Pre-request X Core request ✓ Post- request X	Pre-request ✓ Core request ✓ Post- request ✓	Pre-request ✓ Core request ✓ Post- request X

✓= including the given request structure

X= Not including the given request structure

As shown in Table 9 above, Email 1 (see Figure 8 below) involves a request to seek clarifications made by an alumnus who supervises construction project at a petroleum site from a subordinate (site team member) regarding whether the mentioned items are required at the sites. This email is part of the ongoing emails this alumnus had to send to the site team to follow up with the condition of work related to the project. Hence, it is part of the routine work, and the social aspect of the request entails rights and obligations to do routine tasks (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1996; Paramasivam & Subramaniam, 2018; Skovholt, 2015). Therefore, the politeness used here is bald on-record strategy which is mainly used in such task-oriented communications when the face threat and imposition are low and attention is shifted to the completion of the task efficiently rather than satisfying the receiver's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The operational and routine nature of this communication is also evident in the use of the first name of the recipient as a form of addressing. However, this does not mean that receiver's face is utterly neglected by the alumnus (the sender) as a politeness marker 'please' is used to mitigate the direct imperative request. As for the structure of the request, this email only includes the core-request as indicated in line (2) without any mitigations efforts that would be achieved by pre-request (e.g. giving rationale for the core request) or post-request (e.g. reminding or thanking[5]).

Email 2, as shown in Figure 9 below, is sent by a drilling supervisor (subordinate) at the site to a design and planning engineer at the Head office (superior) to request the provision of certain materials. Similar to Email 1, bald on-record strategy is used to make this request as the sender being a subordinate seems to focus on the accomplishment of the task rather than satisfying the face. Another explanation could be that the amount of communications and discussions between the drilling supervisor and the design and planning engineer may have

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[5] The thanking shown in the email (line 3 Email 1) is part of the fixed closing this alumnus has used in all his emails, thus, cannot be considered as post-request structure.

alleviated the assumed distance of hierarchy. The sender started with a pre-request in order to justify the reason for the core-request and lead the recipient to it. The writer addressed the recipient using his first name and used a direct declarative statement as in 'I need…) in the pre-request (first sentence in line 2). This is mitigated in the core request (second sentence in line 2) where the direct form of imperative request is softened by the deference marker 'please'. The email also has a post-request statement which emphasises the urgency of the request as in 'please make haste', which is also mitigated by providing a reason for the urgency 'as my driver is on the way to …'. This implies the consideration on the part of the sender of the recipient's face although it is a task-oriented request with low imposition.

The third email (see Figure 10 below) is sent by a field alumnus to his team leader to request him to take an action regarding the stated problem occurred at the oil refinery. A formal and polite form of addressing is used, i.e. Dear + the first name of the addressee. The email is comprised of two request structures: pre-request (as in lines 2&3), which give background to justify the request and core-request (as in line 4), which comprises the actual request to perform an action. The core-request is expressed indirectly deploying a negative politeness strategy by using a passive voice and thanking the recipient in advance to eliminate imposition and to avoid threatening his addressee's negative face.

It is important to admit that here I do not claim generalisability as the analysed sample is small and not seen as part of an email thread. It was not possible to look at the whole email exchange in this data set because some participants did not provide me with the whole thread and only sent me the messages written by them. Besides, some threads were too short. Analysing the whole exchange would have provided a clearer depiction of the politeness strategies used and the influence of power relations. For example, the form of address might be more formal (Dear + first/last name) in the first message (i.e. chain initiator) and get less formal (i.e. using the first name only) in subsequent emails, resembling an instant text messaging.

Figure 8. An email sample written for a subordinate

Email 1

| 1 | ████████, |

| 2 | Please clarify whether the following items are needed for this project or not from site side. |

    1) **Fire alarm**

    2) Door Access

    3) Emergency door

    4) Interlocking/Kerbstone outside the building

    5) Water heater.

| 3 | Thanks & Regards, |
| 4 | ████████ Civil Project Engineer |

Figure 9. An email sample written for a superior

Email 2

From: █████████
Sent: Monday, December 31, 2012 9:39 AM
To: ████████
Subject: RE: Plan forward

| 1 | ████████, |

| 2 | I need 4x ████████ and 4x ████████ for the ████████ Please provide ███ |

| 3 | Please make haste, as my driver is on the way to the ███. |

| 4 | Sincerely, |

| 5 | ████████ Supervisor |

Figure 10. An email sample written for a superior

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Email 3                                                  │
│                                                          │
│   From: ████████████████████                             │
│   Date: August 12, 2018 at 3:49:50 PM GMT+4              │
│   To: ████████████████████                               │
│   Cc: ██████████████████████████████████████             │
│   ████████████████████                                   │
│   Subject: ████████████████████████                      │
│                                                          │
│  [1] Dear █████                                          │
│                                                          │
│  [2] It was observed that ██████ indicating more than    │
│      ██████████ densimeter                               │
│      Although, there is no presence of hydrocarbon at    │
│      atmosphere  [3]                                     │
│  [5] Your action is highly appreciated  [4]             │
│      Regards                                             │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Power relations are also exhibited in the need to be "diplomatic" with external audiences, such as customers or clients who are apparently high in the power hierarchy. Handling such audiences diplomatically impacts the choice of words, as commented by A2 when asked whether she considers her audience when she writes:

> *Yes, you should consider that this is a customer and should be addressed in a way which gives him priority. You need to convince your customers because they will never admit that it's their mistake and always blame you…So, you have to be diplomatic with them and use certain words to explain them that this and that had happened (A2, 21 /02 /2017).*

This response indicates that the need to be diplomatic with customers is essential because the customers tend to blame the company for any fault occurred. In order to evade any responsibility for delaying the investigation and the same time to avoid placing the blame on the customer, A1 stated this using impersonal and passive language, as represented in this sentence in her incident report, "*Due to area rules, the team not allowed to enter the site at night time, so the issue has been postponed to next day.*"

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Apart from diplomacy, the participants from telecommunications company (A1, A2 & M1) mentioned confidentiality as an element shaping the written texts in terms of the organisation and amount of content of incident report. M1 stressed that it is crucial to be aware of the information which should not be shared with some audiences. A1 and A2 stated that various versions of the incident report are produced depending on who their recipients are because sometimes they cannot share confidential information with them, as A2 explicated, *"Sometimes, we need to produce different versions because there are things which are not supposed to be shared with the customers like technical things such as the IP, the name or the version of the device"* (A2, 21 /02 /2017). Hence, three versions of the report are generated for various readers. These versions are different in terms of the overall organisation and amount of details, as depicted by A1:

> *This is for customer because we don't want to share… I mean we can't tell them what the exact problem is just in general… we don't give them the details, so it's just a one-page brief version of the incident report… However, the incident report for our internal purpose is rather detailed (A1, 16 / 02 /2017).*

This point is attested to in customer's version (Reason for Outage RFO) of the incident report. This version is brief compared to the detailed incident report written for internal audiences. RFO excludes specific details which are not meant to be revealed to customers. For example, the details of what caused the fault and the specific procedures taken to resolve the fault are not supposed to be written in the customer version. Instead, a general description of the incident and how it has been resolved is provided. To illustrate, Figure 11 shows the section of a report which describes the incident in customer's version, and it includes a brief description of the incident stating the fault, its reason and how it was resolved. This indicates that these alumni were able to realise the rhetorical strategy associated with RFO which would allow them to deploy Grice's maxim of quantity (1975 as cited in Bhatia, 1999) by not telling the whole truth and the maxim of quality by not lying, as stated by M1, *"there should be transparency, there should be diplomacy in revealing facts; if you*

don't want to reveal do not tell him at all, but never cheat or tell lie to the customer" (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).

Figure 11. Incident description in customer's version of incident report

Details of Incident:

On 5th Feb-2017 @ 6:45 PM, ▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮ observed indication of power failure in ▮ camp and many services of ILL & telephone services (3G+LTE) got affected. ▮▮▮▮ ▮ reported this issue to the concerned team to attend this malfunction and the issue has been escalated to top management. Due to area role, the team not allowed to enter the site at night time, so the issue has been postponed to next day.

On 6th Feb-2017 early morning, power team moved the site and they mobilized at 6:30 AM. They started investigation the issue and they observed the generator was faulty and need to be changed. They requested for new one, hence they replaced the faulty generator with the healthy one. All traffics restored at 8:20 AM.

Another audience-related factor which appear to influence alumni's writing is their readers expectations and needs. For example, A4 mentioned that when she writes, she needs to understand what her readers want to gain from the text. So, readers' needs and requirements are assumed before producing a text. Furthermore, the telecommunications participants, A1, A2 and M2, agreed that the incident report produced by the company cannot be sent to the Telecommunications Regularity Authority (TRA) unless it is converted to another version using the template provided by TRA itself. A1 justified this by saying that this particular audience prefers simple and brief report.

However, A1's view regarding audience needs and expectations is inconsistent with her line manager's view who stated that TRA expects more elaborated reports with technical words. A1 and M2 have different understandings of their audiences' expectations and needs. The former perceived that her audience, TRA, is more concerned with knowing about the percentage of fault in a particular area, accordingly, she would use simple words with less elaboration. In contrast, the latter viewed TRA's needs from a manager's perspective who is concerned with avoiding fines and penalties from TRA. Thus, he expects a more detailed report to be sent to TRA to explain the fault

and provide resolutions. This also could be due to the difference in the purpose of writing this report to TRA. A1 would write it to inform, whereas M2 would seem to hold a pragmatic and practical purpose for writing it. This leads to the purpose which is another rhetorical element influencing alumni's workplace writing that will be discussed in the next section. This inconsistency in accounting for audiences' needs also implies a mismatch between manager's expectations from the alumnus and the alumnus' own conceptualisation of her writing practice, thus, raising questions regarding the readiness of alumni to perform workplace writing as expected by employers.

In summary, audience is an essential rhetorical element which influence alumni's workplace writing. The participants, both alumni and their line managers, mentioned various external and internal audiences whom the alumni write for depending on the nature of their job and level of experience. Also, it was stressed that being aware of the audience is vital in workplace writing as it shapes the written text in terms of word choice, tone/register, and overall organisation. Readers' background, power relations and readers' needs and expectations appeared to influence alumni's adaptation of their writing to cater for various audiences. Here, I do not intend to claim that the alumni, whether new or experienced, do not encounter difficulties in catering for various audiences in their workplace writing (this will be discussed in Chapter 5). Rather, the purpose here is to explore how the alumni and line managers account for this rhetorical element in this particular context of study and to examine the socially-situated nature of written genres (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Bazerman & Prior, 2003) that writing classroom should emphasise. This consequently draws attention to the on-going debate on the possibility of teaching workplace-like writing in composition classroom (Artemeva, 2009; Brent, 2011; Dias et al., 1999; Dias & Paré, 2000; Paretti, 2006) (This is discussed in Chapter 6).

Having explored audience and how it shapes alumni's workplace writing, the following section will discuss the findings pertaining

another rhetorical element briefly touched upon above which is the purpose of writing.

4.1.2 Writing purpose

This section will illustrate another significant rhetorical element shaping alumni's writing which is the purpose of writing. Various purposes were identified by the participants (alumni and their line managers) in the interviews. The following sub-sections will present the findings relevant to these purposes and largely based on textual analysis an illustration of how purpose impacts writing will be provided.

4.1.3 Types of writing purposes

A range of writing purposes have been mentioned by the alumni and their line managers in their interviews. These purposes are fundamentally instrumental and action-oriented, and they can be classified into three overlapping categories: rhetorical, organisational and individual (see Table 10 below) as briefly mentioned by Bremner (2018) in his book *'Workplace writing: Beyond the text'*. Although these kinds of purposes may be discussed in the literature, to the best of my knowledge, I have not come across this particular classification in an explicit manner except in this book. Hence, the findings of this study illustrate and elaborate on these types of purposes so as to extend Bremner's classification.

Rhetorical

The majority of purposes of writing reported by the participants appeared to fall under rhetorical level, *inter alia,* informing, persuading, and requesting. Each kind of purpose has underlying pragmatic and instrumental goal. Echoing the findings of Evans (2012), the mostly mentioned purpose in this category is informing. For example, this purpose is discussed with relevance to communicating through email with vendors providing a particular service for well planning in one of petroleum companies, as described by A3:

… to inform to communicate and update basically … So, each well requires … unit and I have only one unit; we need to plan it that's why they need a report. For example, if someone asks me 'ok I have this well it has a problem and under your unit', I need to plan for him, so I tell him I am attending this well after 3 days I will finish then I will move there. So that's the only purpose for this updating and communicating and this writing (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).

This response reflects the instrumental purpose underlying the purpose of informing and updating. Similarly, A1, from the telecommunication firm, stated that she would write an incident report for TRA to inform them about the percentage of network fault in a particular area. Along with informing, investigating, summarizing, and recommending are also recognised by the participants as purposes for writing reports, for instance, investigating an incident, writing a short report to summarize a project for the manager, and providing recommendations to avoid any network outage in the future. This indicates that a genre can serve a single or multiple purpose in a particular communicative event (Bhatia, 1999).

Another commonly mentioned rhetorical purpose is requesting. This seemed to pertain mainly to situations when the alumni needed someone within the company to perform actions to support their work, such as repairing equipment (A10, A11) or resolving any issues they might have faced in their work, as commented by A7, *"if I'm finding anything difficult in the project, then I have to ask the site team request to do …site visit and ask him to do this and this…"* (A7, 26 /04/ 2017). Along with requesting a service or action, A10 and A12 alumni pointed to requesting goods to get their work done. However, A12 explained that along with requesting goods, he would have to persuade the purchase department within his company to provide the requested item for him, *"… for example, … in our company, we raise specifications for some materials for purchases, so this is persuasive how you persuade your purchasing department to bring that material to you…"* (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017), and he would do this for economic considerations that impact on his work, as he elaborated, *"Yeah request mail with specification because you know it is expensive*

materials so if you request it like … this and it's not matching what we need so it will be a problem it will be cost of money and cost of time" (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017). This implies the complex and multi-faceted social context workplace writers must deal with (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Dias et al., 1999). Besides considering the immediate purposes of writing, writers at the workplace have to account for the multi-layered context surrounding them, such as economic or legal considerations. It also suggests that such requests are made for real and instrumental purposes in response to recurrent exigencies (Miller, 1984) as opposed to more epistemic and learning-oriented purposes of writing in the classroom setting (Dias et al., 1999; Paretti, 2006; Smart et al., 2012).

Apart from common purposes for writing, such as informing and requesting, there are other purposes which were occasionally noted by the participant, for instance, the function of reminding is mentioned only by two alumni from the petroleum firm (A3, A9) who would write reminder emails especially to the engineers in the desert field to remind them to report back *(I need always remind them ok please where is the report where is the investigation report)* in case of any hazards (e.g. accidents, injuries), thus serving a real and action-oriented purpose, as described by A9:

> *We write every day because we encounter problems; I mean there are complications sometimes in the field, yeah, there are engineers who make mistakes in some sensitive things, so we always send reminders (A9, 08 / 05/ 2017).*

Another rarely noted purpose is instructing which is identified as one of the purposes of email writing among other purposes (A4), but more importantly it is emphasised by an experienced computer engineer who writes user guides to instruct employees, *"To instruct and build a right awareness for the users to work independently without future need for Its…"* (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017). Similarly, two alumnus participants mentioned the function of appreciating among the myriad functions of email writing as commented, *"…appreciation because maybe they do a good job"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017). In the same vein, at least one

participant mentioned apologising as one of the purposes of writing emails, as he commented *"doing some apologies to the customers"* (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017). All these rhetorical purposes, whether commonly or occasionally mentioned, are underpinned with real and action-oriented purposes of workplace writing which occurs in response to recurrent social events.

Organisational

Apart from rhetorical purposes for alumni's workplace writing, other vital purposes can be recognised as organisational (Bremner, 2018), namely documenting, managing information and work delivery and maximising organisation's welfare. As mentioned earlier, these categories of purpose can be characterised as overlapping, thus, the purpose of this classification is not to assume their distinctiveness, rather, to present the various levels of purpose workplace writing can operate at in an organised manner.

One of the core organisational functions of workplace writing recognised by a number of participants is documenting everything that occurs in the workplace. Participants emphasised that keeping evidences of their tasks and achievements is immensely crucial, and this reflects the overarching instrumental purpose of writing in the workplace, as depicted by one of the new alumni:

> *…it will be evidence also we did this work if there is any mistake, for example, I joined in 2016, but some of our problems still from 2015 so that will be evidence for me I was not there at that time someone of engineer… was there and just taking an acting hand over from him"* (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017).

Besides writing an incident report for informing and recommending, it is also written for organisation's internal documenting purpose (A1). In the same vein, the line manager, M4, also stated that *"another purpose [for workplace writing] is just for record keeping,"* (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017) and this could serve as a source of learning for employees, as

he elaborated, "*… keeping it as learning so that someone can pull out a report and learn from others' mistakes.*" Documentation is also mentioned by two new alumni, A7 and A10, in relation to the value of email writing as a means of documenting incidents and keeping evidences compared to verbal communication, *"…they [the company] have like email for them as evidence so everything even if you talk verbally with someone, he asks you to write email for him."* (A7, 26 /04/ 2017).

Apart from documenting, managing information and work delivery seems to serve the organisational purposes well. For example, the computer engineer, A4, who writes user-guides to instruct (as mentioned earlier) employees, would also write such user-guides to serve as feasible means to spread information, thus, serving an organisational and instrumental purpose as she depicted:

> *… whenever there is a new employee joining a company, it's very difficult to go and explain separately, so better to whenever we have any model or we have any system, we have such user guide which guides the user … (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017).*

Additionally, A4 created two forms, namely a privileged access request form and a role delegation request form, to increase the efficiency of work, as stated at the onset of the latter form, *"The purpose of this form is to have a formal process to delegate user responsibilities to authorized IT personal to process urgent requests in his/her absence."*

Likewise, the analysed daily reports written to report on completed activities (rhetorical purpose) can also serve as a practical means to hand over work during shifts and leaves (A8 & A12), as explained by A8 who would write logbooks to report on the completed work for the colleague taking over his work, *"The logbook is the activities that I do so that the next person taking the shift can check the activities I have done and carry on with them"* (A8, 08 / 05/ 2017).

Another organisational function reported by some participants is increasing company's benefits. This is mainly mentioned with relevance to saving company's money, as mentioned previously in the

case of A12 who said that he would not request to provide any materials without writing material specifications to avoid purchasing unnecessary materials which may cause loss of money. Similarly, telecommunications alumni, A1 and A2, explained that they would write recommendations in their incident report to avoid any fines might be applied by Telecommunications Regularity Authority (TRA), as depicted by A2:

> *Of course, the TRA takes actions on the incident report sent to them, for example, if any fault has occurred repeatedly this month to the extent that charges have been applied, they will check the recommendations proposed previously. For example, I recommended that this circuit should be replaced with another new one, so they would check whether I did this, or the fault continued to exist (A2, 21 /02 /2017).*

Likewise, A12 revealed that sometimes he would keep written reports as evidence in order to claim payment from a client, as he depicted:

> *… we need it sometimes these reports we need it for payment, so if you bring that inspection reports QC (Quality Control) reports with your reports and with pressure testing report, … so it means you have the right to ask for payment, so we collect these all and we will ask for payment from the client (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017).*

In addition, this organisational purpose is also mentioned by one line manager with relevance to the overarching purpose of writing which is to promote company's image and reputation in the market, as he commented:

> *Through my writing I am achieving the company's goals, and this affects its performance… and this means the company is increasing brand's image and value in the market. And this will definitely attract customers… (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).*

Overall, all of these organisational purposes are characterised as instrumental serving real purposes in the workplace.

Individual

In addition to rhetorical and organisational purposes the alumni write for, a few alumni pointed out to using genres for their individual

purposes. Although limitedly noted, it seems to be rather important in the discussion of writer's intent in workplace writing. Such individual purposes are exhibited in alumni's utilisation of writing to achieve their personal goals.

A12 revealed that he had a private purpose he would look forward to achieving through his report writing. He would write to show to the higher management that he had been following the safety instructions and fulfilled company's target, thus, aiming to obtain recognition. As he commented:

> *…to tell them [the management] we are following the instruction of the client, and we are following the target of our company … because, for example, if you did your work without any accident, so it means you are perfect, so you will get awards from the HSE department you are saving the environment... (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017).*

This personal purpose for writing a monthly report seems to resemble what Bhatia (1995 & 2004) referred to as 'private intentions' which professional writers express within socially recognised communicative purposes (e.g. the socially recognised purpose of this monthly report is to inform the management about all the conducted activities) informing through manipulating generic resources. How this embedment of purposes is realised linguistically in the text (monthly report) could not be illustrated here because I was not provided by this particular document by the participants.

Similarly, when asked whether he writes to persuade others, A7 commented that he did write a persuasive email, but for a personal motive, (rather than for the welfare of the organisation like A12):

> *Sometime yeah, but I did it for myself for movement when I was dealing with movement, so I have to persuade my CFDH which is … civil engineering discipline Head… I did it one two time... (A7, 26 /04/ 2017).*

In summary, the data revealed that the alumni write for various purposes in the workplace and such purposes can operate at three levels: Rhetorical, organisational and individual (see Table 10 below).

These levels are interrelated in nature as workplace writing is regarded as 'multifunctional' (Bhatia, 1999), and a particular genre can serve a single or multiple purpose. A common feature characterising these purposes is their instrumental and action-oriented nature in harmony with RGS' view of genre, thus, raises questions regarding the differences between academy and workplace writing and the extent to which workplace writing can be taught in the classroom (Bremner, 2010 & 2018; Dias et al., 1999; Nathan, 2013). In other words, genres in the workplace are utilised to achieve social purposes and fulfil actions responding to exigencies of the given context, which is the core emphasis of Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS) (Miller, 1984). Hence, in contrast to Moore et al.'s (2015) findings, the findings here suggest that it is the demands of a particular job or task constrain the types of writing purposes accomplished by the alumni rather than the level of their experience.

Table 10. Categories of writing purposes identified by the participants

Rhetorical purposes	Organizational purposes	Individual purposes
Informing	Documenting	
Requesting	Managing information and work delivery	
Persuading		
Instructing		
Summarizing		
Investigating		
Recommending	Maximising organisational welfare	Achieving personal ends e.g. Getting reward
Reminding		
Clarifying/ asking for clarifications		
Appreciating		
Apologizing		

Having discussed the various purposes for alumni's workplace writing, the next section will highlight how purpose shapes alumni's writing.

4.1.4 How does purpose shape alumni's writing?

This section will illustrate the influence of writing purposes on alumni's written texts, in terms of the overall organisation, rhetorical structure, content, and tone based mainly on the textual analysis of emails, reports and other documents submitted by some alumnus participants. Because purpose is in the heart of a genre (Swales, 1990), the discussion of how purpose shapes written texts is extensively covered in the literature. For example, Samraj (2002) touched upon how the purpose stated in a writing task was manifested in the overall organisation of her students' literature review on wildlife behaviour. Likewise, in her study of analysing business fax, Louhiala-Salminen (1997) analysed communicative purpose of the faxes and the linguistic realisations of each rhetorical move. However, this is expansively covered in the academic genres more than the professional ones. Thus, the findings of this study will add to the body of research on analysing how purpose shapes professional genres. To analyse the impact of purpose on alumni's written texts, five types of texts are

analysed using Swales' move analysis (1990), and thematic analysis of both textual and interview data. These texts are: incident reports, daily reports, a drilling process programme and follow-up emails, a lab report and emails.

4.1.4.1 Incidents reports

As discussed earlier, three versions of the incident report are created in the telecommunications company not only to cater for various audiences, but also to achieve different communicative purposes. As it is hard to separate these two elements, and I was not able to collect a document which is written for the same audience but with two versions tackling two different purposes, the same sample of reports will be used but this time to foreground the purpose variable through analysing the rhetorical moves. The version written for the customer, named (RFO), is brief whereas the one written for the internal management is detailed due to varying purposes for writing them. While the purpose of writing the former is to inform the customer about, as A2 clarified, *"why it [the fault] took 4 hours or why it took 2 hours, what's things you did, if they [customers] have to pay for the router or for the device such kind of things,"* (A2, 21 /02 /2017), the latter is written for internal management to keep a record of measures taken to solve the fault to avoid similar faults in the future. Therefore, it is relatively longer and includes an elaborated description of the incident along with recommendations. This suggests how alumni's consideration of the writing purpose shape the content of the incident reports. Consequently, this seems to influence the overall macro organisation of the reports and their rhetorical moves, as illustrated below:

Table 11. Comparing the rhetorical moves in two versions of incident report (Customer vs. Management versions)

Rhetorical moves in management's version	Rhetorical moves in customer's version (RFO)
1. **Incident time:** Move 1: Start date/time Move 2: End date/time Move 3: Duration	1. **Brief general information about the incident in a form of points:** Move1: Customer's name Move 2: Ticket starting time Move 3: The service affected Move 4: Type of fault Move 5: Ticket closing time
2. Incident description Move 1: Describing the incident: Noticing a fault (who, when, what type) Move 2: Explaining initial investigation: specific immediate actions taken after noticing the fault Move 3: Explaining subsequent investigation (date, time, specific actions taken to detect the reason for fault, specific actions taken to resolve the issue, time of resolving)	**2. Details of incident** Move 1: Describing the incident: time, type Move 2: Stating initial investigation: main immediate actions taken Move 3: Stating subsequent investigation (date, time, stating the reason for fault, final main actions taken to resolve the fault, time of resolving)
3. Reason for Outage Move 1: Restating the reason for fault	**3. RFO** *(Reason for Outage)* Move 1: Restating the reason for fault Move 2: Reiterating how the fault was resolved
4. Chronology events Move 1: Giving detailed breakdown of date, time and related actions achieved.	**4. Concluding paragraph** Move 1: Apologizing/showing concern Move 2: Offering contacts details for any clarifications Move 3: signing off
5. Recommendations Move 1: Providing suggestions to avoid the same problem in the future	
6. Appendix Move 1: Tables of affected services and/ or systems	

As the table above illustrates, different purposes have led the alumni in telecommunications firm to produce two relatively different versions of the incident report. RFO (customer version) consists of only one page with four brief sections while the management version can be five to seven-page document with six detailed sections, a cover page and table of contents. Since the purpose of writing the management version is to document the whole incident to avoid similar future faults, the incident is described in detail with specific actions taken to investigate and solve the fault, as stated by A1, *"That [managements' version] is detailed and includes everything: the alarm's time, the escalation time… and how the team has dealt with the issue"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017). To illustrate, all the communications and steps carried out from the beginning of the fault until resolving it is documented with exact timings as illustrated in the time breakdown at the end of the report, as the screen capture (Figure 11) shows below. In contrast, the incident in RFO is described briefly without specifying the exact steps followed by the company to investigate and resolve the issue. For example, as shown in the sample above, a general sentence is used to describe the measures taken, *"They started investigating the issue"* immediately followed by the reason detected, *"and they observed the generator was faulty and need to be changed."* Another influence of purpose on structuring the management version of incident report is manifested in recommendations since one of the purposes of writing this report is to propose actions to avoid similar problem in the future. On the contrary, no recommendations are given in customer's version of the report since this would not serve the purpose of this report. Unlike in the management version, the RFO section in customer's version has two moves to restate not only the reason for outage but also to emphasise how the issue has been resolved because its purpose is to inform the customer about the reason of the fault and most importantly what has been done to restore it. Hence, this variation in these reports in terms of the macro and rhetorical moves structure is constrained by the purpose they serve.

Figure 12. Chronology of events section in incident report written for the management

Chronology of Events:

Date	Action
29/2/2016 16:05 PM	Access team notice (mains <u>Failure &</u> rectifier 1 /2 faulty in ▇▇ Telecom
29/2/2016 16:25 PM	For 20 minutes Access team keep calling ▇▇ standby but o no response then <u>escalate</u> the issue to Manger of (power team) ▇
29/2/2016 16:30 PM	Mr ▇ informed ▇ rom ▇ to attend the site & check the issue.
29/2/2016 16:38 PM	Access team notice (AC Fail alarm and rectifier 1 / 2 <u>faulty)</u> in ▇▇ 2 , Access team keep calling ▇ to get the update
29/2/2016 17:00 PM	Mr ▇ attended the site & checked the issue and updated NOC team and corporate with ▇ power team
<u>1/3/2016 12:33</u>AM	TC NOC observed COMM break in ▇▇
1/3/2016 12:35 AM	▇ team call ▇ on call engineer and he informed them that the ▇ shelter outside the CAM. Access team keep <u>calling</u> ▇ power team but no response then called manger Mr ▇. MG ▇ made conference call with Power ▇ Mr ▇
1/3/2016 3:30 AM	▇ power team reached the site and found the rectifier was failed due to high voltage from main power and the control panel of generator was faulty due to that the power didn't switch automatically to work through the generator once the commercial power went <u>down .</u>
1/3/2016 3:40 AM	Power ▇ moved to ▇ to search for spare of rectifier.
1/3/2016 4:00 AM	▇ power team found the spare part and back to the fault location and working to replace the faulty part of rectifier and fix the main trip and control panel of generated.
1/3/2016 6:21:00 AM	All alarms clear and traffic restored

As for the third version of this report written for TRA, as explained earlier, the conflicting perceptions of the purpose of writing this version have led to two different realizations regarding how this report is shaped. The alumnus (A1) perceived that this report is written to inform TRA about the percentage of fault in a particular area as this is the most important piece of information TRA is interested in. Therefore, A1 stated that this report is brief and includes simple words.

In contrast, the line manager, M2, seemed to have a more pragmatic purpose (to avoid fines) of writing to TRA, thus, he would expect detailed explanation of the fault using technical terms along with providing recommendations. Although these are conflicting views of the purpose, they still provide insights into how purpose shapes workplace writing in the context of the study.

4.1.4.2 Daily reports

A number of alumni mentioned that they are required to write daily reports which noted to be common in the workplace. The purpose of such reports is mainly to update and inform the internal management about the daily activities or operations taking place. One of the alumni from the petroleum sector stated that he would write a daily report to inform the Head office of the activities occurred at a particular well, as he explained:

> *…the report is including all the activity what's happen in that specific well, for example, … this well x well ok I'm going to write when we start the timing, with breakdown time, for example, I start like 11 am and then will start each activity I do after one hour what's happen after another hour what's happen every single breakdown with details because they need to understand what's going on, they need an update (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

This response implies the purpose of this particular report is manifested in its content and organisation, as explained by A3. For instance, it includes the exact timing of the commencement and end of the whole operation with specific time breakdown to elaborate on each task took place. Additionally, the purpose is also realised in the technical register that should be used to justify any action taken place during the operation, as explicated by A3:

> *then I will report what's happen, for example, we go inside the well then something is happen like we couldn't reach then I have to report it a well why and… I need to justify or I need to use technical writing I have to tell him because, for example, this is the profile is small this is big because this tool is not fit for this like this (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

Likewise, A12, who is a mechanical engineer working as a site engineer for liquified petroleum project, stated that every morning he would visit the site, check the activities accomplished in the preceding day, and write a report. The purpose of this report is to inform the administration about all the completed activities taken place at the site and the number of manpower involved in the work. This purpose is evidently realised in the content and the overall organisation of the daily report samples submitted by A12. To illustrate, as shown in the figure below, the daily report is written in a form of a table including four columns (sections): date, day, site work details and number of workers. The third section (site work details) consists of two moves: mechanical work and electrical work so as to distinguish between the mechanical and electrical tasks completed.

Figure 13. Sample of a daily report

Date	Day	Site work Details	NO. of Workers
19/2/2017	Sunday	Mechanical work: • Made threading for 1-1/4" CS pipe to move the by–pass inside the European Finishing Restaurant. • Made threading for 3/4" CS pipe inside the Beach Club Restaurant. • Inspected the installation and welding in pour 10 in the basement by the consultant which pass the Bowling area and raise it to Beach Club Restaurant. Electrical work: • Continuously completing the installation of 25mm GI conduit pipe in the basement.	1 fitter 1 helper 1welder 2 electricians 1 supervisor

4.1.4.3 Drilling process programme and follow-up emails

Drilling programme is written to explain the process of drilling a particular well so that the drilling supervisor and his team follow the explained steps of drilling, as described by A5, an operation engineer at a petroleum company, when asked about the purpose of writing the drilling programme, *"…this is the programme I submit it to the drilling supervisor this is how we are going to drill this well you need to follow A, B, C, D this is what if you have any deviation, we need to talk".* In the analysed drilling programme submitted by one of the alumni, this purpose is manifested in the clear, chronological and thorough explanation of each step the drilling team is expected to follow, besides, potential problems that may occur in any step is also stated along with measures to resolve them.   Furthermore, instructional language is used in this document, such as imperatives, modal verbs and transition phrases, such as 'then' 'before', 'after', 'during' and 'later'.

During any operation, whether it is well drilling or construction plan, a lot of back and forth email communication takes place between the employees, supervisors, team and contractors, as stated by the participants. Such emails include updates or further procedures which should be followed by the performing team.   Two of the analysed emails are written for the purpose of further explaining a particular process. This purpose is reflected in the rhetorical structure of the emails and the linguistic realisations. To illustrate, in one of the well drilling follow-up emails written for providing further procedures to be followed by the well drilling team (see Figure 14), the purpose is realised in the structure of the email particularly in in Move 1 where the plan/process is indicated in the subject, and Move 3 which thoroughly explains the steps to be performed by the team and provides all the possible measures to be taken. The purpose is also reflected in the imperative language used to instruct the team, such as 'Make sure', and 'Rotate and circulate', as shown in the example below.

Figure 14. A sample of drilling programme follow-up email

From: ▮▮▮▮▮
Sent: ▮▮▮▮▮
To: ▮▮▮▮▮
Cc: ▮▮▮▮▮
1 **Subject:** Plan Forward for completion

Team, **2**

3 The plan forward for ▮▮▮ Operation:

1) We are going to go for a check trip ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
2) ▮▮▮ to the held up depth. Rotate and circulate with the highest flow rate.
3) Make sure to clear the hole path and wipe the sting many times to make sure about the path clearance. (please check the shakers for cutting if you have return)
4) If you have any doubt about the path cleaning, then please close ▮▮▮▮▮▮
▮▮▮▮▮▮
5) ▮▮▮▮▮▮
6) ▮▮▮ the completion as per the agreed tally. (back up completion items already called off to be in location before dark)
7) If you got any resistant try to work on ▮▮▮▮▮
8) If not success then try to close ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
9) If In case the completion cannot go father and we are not making any progress. Then we will set the completion at this depth as following:

- ▮▮▮▮▮▮

- make up the completion as following:
- ▮▮▮▮▮▮
- ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
- ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
- ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

4 Regards,

5 ▮▮▮

4.1.4.4 Lab report

A lab report is submitted by one of the alumni in the petroleum sector which is written to inform/ communicate the results of an oil-acid compatibility test. This purpose is reflected in the macrostructure of the report which includes three sections: introduction, highlights and conclusion, and in the micro rhetorical moves of each section as shown in Table 12 below. The introduction consists of two moves: the first move states the overall social aim of the report which is to inform the management of the results of the experiment, and this is signalled by the phrase "you will find the outcome' as in example a. On the other hand, the second move states the experimental aim, as signalled in 'brought to X for a compatibility analysis' in example b. It also provides

background information of the experiment (e.g. the date of receiving the sample). The second section named 'highlight' is the longest section comprising of three moves, and it is of the most interest, as it combines both the method and results sections, which are usually two separate sections in academic laboratory reports. The first move lists the methods followed in the experiment, and as shown in examples c and d, generally past tense and passive voice are used (with the exception of two instances 'we have bottle' and 'let the mixture'). Move 2 of this section states the results of the experiment in a form of picture illustrations, as signalled in the phrase 'The below pictures show the result', to effectively communicate the results. In other words, the emulsion problem resulted from the experiment can be best demonstrated through pictures. Move 3 proposes a solution for the emulsion problem and demonstrates the new result, as signalled in the following phrase 'here is the picture after adding Non-emulsifier agent'. The last section concludes the report by reiterating the results and providing recommendations as signalled in the phrase 'its recommended'.

While the literature identified a conventional structure of lab reports consisting of Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion (IMRD) (Dudley-Evans, 1985; Martin & Rose, 2008), there is still scope for variation in genres across disciplines and workplaces as they represent the ever-evolving contexts they are used in (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). Despite few variations, the moves in the given lab report are still inconsistent with IMRD structure. For instance, all the moves in this lab report align with Parkinson's (2017) rhetorical moves of academic lab reports, but the macro sections differ. This lab report consists of 3 sections—Introduction, Highlights and Conclusion. The methods, results and discussion are combined within Highlights. Also, Parkinson's analysis includes other extended moves unlike this brief lab report.   This could be due to brevity which is valued in the workplace unlike lengthy lab reports in academic contexts.

Table 12. Move analysis of a lab report

Introduction
Move 1: Stating the overall aim of the report
a. Enclosed you will find the outcome of the analysis performed on the sample.
Move 2: Providing background information & stating the experimental aim
b. The sample was delivered on the 10th January 2017 and brought to X laboratory for a compatibility analysis
Highlights
Move 1: Listing the methods (step by step procedures followed in the experiment)
c. We have bottle of Acid sample 15% HCL mixed with below recipe (referring to a table)
d. The test was performed by pouring 100 ml of oil into test beaker then injecting 100 ml of 15% HCL to see the reacting with agitation, after that let the mixture to settle down to equilibrium phase in order to see the interface between the oil & water base fluids separation
Move 2: Stating the results
e. The below pictures show the result of the compatibility between the Acid & oil (referring two images with captions)
Move 3: Proposing a solution
f. Solution is we need to add Non emulsifier agent into our system recipe in order to avoid the emulsion problem, here is the picture after adding Non-emulsifier agent to disperse the emulsion (referring to an image)
Conclusion
Move1: Reiterating the results
g. The test result shows the current Acid recipe is incompatible with oil,
Move 2: Providing recommendation
h. therefore, its recommended to review the acid recipe and adding Non-emulsifier for the system.

4.1.4.5 Emails

Some of the analysed emails are written for the sake of informing, and it is realised in the moves and their linguistic realisations. In example 1 (see Table 13 below), the overall purpose of this email is to inform the management about the target developmental goals the alumnus is committed to accomplish during the year. As shown in Table 6 below, the subject reflects the purpose of informing as signalled in the phrase 'Note to CFDH'. The body of the email largely reflects the overall purpose of the email in Move 3 and Move 4, with the former giving a general statement of the topic to be informed, and the latter which states the topic in detail. The informative language is signalled in phrases such as 'here is my commitment' and 'there are the things I'm planning to cover' as illustrated in Moves 3 and 4 respectively.

In the same vein, example 2 (see Table 14 below) shows another informative email written to inform the manager about the launching of a particular tool. It is interesting to note that both Move 2 and Move 3 resembles Move 3 and Move 4 in example 1, although the alumni who produced these emails belong to two different companies. So, Move 2 generally states the topic and signalled by the phrase 'Kindly be informed', while Move 3 provides specific information about the informed topic, as indicated in 'launching time', 'line pressure' and 'flow rates'. AlAfnan (2015) also found similar moves in his moves analysis of informing emails, with high frequency of occurrences of framing moves (identifying a topic, salutation, closing and signature), which indicates high level of formality in informing emails.

Table 13. Move analysis of an email (example 1)

Move 1: Identifying subject	**From:** ▮▮▮▮▮ **Sent:** Wednesday, September 8, 2016 2:40 PM **To:** ▮▮▮ **Cc:** ▮▮▮▮ **1** **Subject:** Note to CFDH
Move 2: Opening	**2** Dear ▮▮▮,
Move 3: Stating the topic to be informed broadly	**3** As per our discussion, here is my commitment that I will cover all element of core competencies in my GDP with the help of Mr. ▮▮▮ and Mr. ▮▮▮ they will supporting me to get exposure in technical side as well as me self.
Move 4: Providing details of the topic to be informed	**4** These are the things I'm planning to cover: • Review Company Standards to get knowledge from them as much as possible. • Conduct 2 to 4 site visit per month to cover the required key elements. • Conducting meeting with contractors and design consultancies to follow up on ongoing engineering and construction civil activity. • Coordinate with other department or project to get required knowledge in certain area to close out gaps in my GDP.
Move 5: closing	**5** Thanks & Regards,
Move 6: signature	▮▮▮▮▮ **6** Civil engineer

Table 14. Move analysis of an email (example 2)

Move 1: Opening	
Move 2: Stating the topic to be informed broadly	On Jul 25, 2018, at 20:18, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ > wrote:
	1 Dear ▮▮▮,
	2 Kindly Be informed that ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮has been launched from ▮launcher successfully. Pl. find below details.
Move 3: Providing details of the topic to be informed	3 Launching time @▮▮▮▮ Line pressure :▮▮▮▮ Flow rates :▮▮▮▮
Move 4: Closing	4 Regards,

To sum up, the findings suggest that purpose of writing is a vital rhetorical element which shapes alumni's workplace writing. The alumni and their line managers revealed a range of rhetorical, organisational and individual purposes for workplace writing, and these purposes are highly pragmatic in their nature. Thus, writing is viewed to serve as a tool to accomplish certain social actions. This resonates with social constructionists and RGS' view of writing as a social action entailing a social motive (Kong, 2014, Miller, 1984). The textual data, along with the interview data, imply that purpose influences written texts in terms of the content, rhetorical structure and register. It also indicates how the alumni manipulate genres to suit particular purposes, and knowing how to manipulate genres is vital for professional success (Artemeva et al., 1999).

4.1.5 Valued Style: Preciseness and conciseness

Precise and concise style of writing was noted by many participants to be valued in the workplace due to the critical nature of workplace context. Although they did not necessarily use these exact words when discussing preciseness and conciseness, they often referred to them using different expressions, such as, *key words, terminologies, abbreviations, shortcuts, simple language, words we use should exactly describe things, precise words, choose the right words and clarity.* By preciseness, the participants meant the exact use of words and factual statements to convey correct information. This style of writing is perceived to be crucial for several contextual reasons, thus, it seems to notably influence alumni's workplace writing.

In the interviews, the participants stressed the importance of writing precisely and concisely due to the critical nature of workplace environment. There is zero tolerance against mistakes in this environment to avoid critical consequences which may result from lack of clarity of correspondences or reports. For instance, hazardous consequences may result from lack of preciseness which will severely affect the company, as commented by one of the alumni who emphasised on being precise in writing his daily logbook written for a colleague taking over the shift, *"…for instance, there is an empty tank which I had started to fill in and reached 30% and 70% is left. If I don't write this thing, he wouldn't know about filling it, thus, it could cause explosion as it contains carbonic substances"* (A8, 08 / 05/ 2017). Also, lack of precision may cause financial losses, for example, in case there are mistakes in a contract or if materials are not described precisely before placing an order, as depicted by these two viewpoints:

> *If the contractors make any mistake even an error in a single code in the highly sensitive documents, this will cost the company thousands and millions amounts of money… (A9, 08 / 05/ 2017).*

> *…we have to study the specification for our pipe what we need, for example, we need which diameter … we have to write … and which model actually and the type of that joint if it is rubber or if it is spring if it is hydraulic we have*

> *to mention all these things in our report and we'll send it to purchase department… because you know it is expensive materials, so if you request it like … this and it's not matching what we need so it will be a problem it will be loss of money and loss of time (A12, 11th / 06/ 2017).*

These responses stress the importance of writing precisely to avoid critical repercussions at the organisational level. Also, some participants pointed to the careful choice of words whether in writing reports or emails, especially to customers, or posting comments on the social media as this does not merely affect the company, but also the employees themselves who are legally liable for whatever they write. It can also cause termination in case of any improper communication, as reported by a line manager:

> *This is very sensitive when you talk to someone without carefully choosing your words, it can fire you. It happened once to one of the employees who said over the phone 'you don't have the right to do this' to one of the service companies which reported him to the CEO (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017).*

Although this comment is about spoken communication, it could be inferred how severe the consequences would be for the written communication as it is documented. At least one alumnus mentioned that he would revise his writing for preciseness, *"… so sometimes you write a report, but when you come to read it, you think it is not that much deeply in what you're going to say, so it's not matching so you have to rewrite another one"* (A12, 11th / 06/ 2017). This implies that extreme carefulness should be undertaken in the choice of words to precisely describe the intended meaning.

Along with preciseness, it is noticeable that brevity is valued in workplace writing and this is mainly due to the technical and busy nature of engineer's work. Brevity is pointed to by the alumni [*"Actual writing not essays not long paragraphs; we should make it as short as possible"* (A10, 13/08/2018)]   and their line managers in several instances, for example, when describing one liner emails, writing short sentences instead of long emails, and using abbreviations. Understanding the abbreviations used in a particular organisation is

essential in order to fulfil the desired communicative purpose. Use of abbreviations is noted in some emails of the alumni, for example, using FYI (For Your Information) for the purpose of informing and FYA (For Your Action) when seeking actions in emails submitted by A10. This alumnus also recalled an incident when he sent an email to his colleague at another department requesting him to join him at the site, and as A10 commented, *"he did not join me and when I asked him 'why didn't you come?', he said, 'you wrote FYI not FYA in the email'"* (A10, 13/08/2018). The written texts I gathered from the alumni show evidences of preciseness and conciseness.

4.1.5.1 *Evidences of preciseness and brevity in alumni's written texts*

The most conspicuous feature which captured my attention while analysing alumni's technical documents is their succinct and precise style, unlike the lengthy essays the students are taught in the college. Precise language is evident in the reports and emails analysed, for instance, this is manifested in exact dates and timings and accurate facts, as shown in the table below:

Table 15. Examples of precise language from different written samples

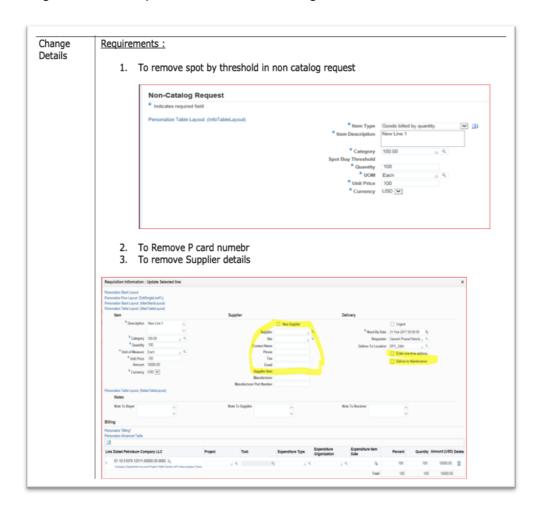| Type of document	Examples of precise language
Email	-we stopped @1100 hr due to increasing of temperature for more than 49.2 C -but make sure not to exceed 4000 Kpa surface pressure. - It was observed that 29-XI-53 indicating more than 5% LEL at MAF densimeter A-2904 - When we close the annular for injecting go with 1 m3/min, but make sure not to exceed 4000 Kpa surface pressure. This is to make sure to clean all junks and not to exceed the MAASP.
Reports	- On 7^h Jan-2017 @ 4:30 PM, XX NOC observed indication of power failure in Y camp - All traffics restored at 9:45 AM - On 29/2/2016 16:05:59, Access team noticed (main failure and rectifier 1 /2 faulty) alarms -During the test traffic got affected for a short duration of time (2 minutes from 03:04 PM To 03:06 PM) - Modified 1-1/4"CS pipe which running through the screed inside the European Finishing Restaurant and we put it in level of 110mm. - The test was performed by pouring 100 ml of oil into test beaker then inject 100 ml of 15% HCL to see the reacting with agitation
Drilling programme	-Marked for 110mm HDPE pipe line to dig 400mm depth to modify the pipe inside the chamber and fix the isolation valve. -During top-hole drilling operations access to a water supply of 120m^3/hr should be available in the event of total losses

In the same vein, brevity is exhibited in these documents in the form of symbols, abbreviations, bullet points (instead of paragraphs), and one or two liner emails, as illustrated below:

Table 16. Examples of Brevity from email and report samples

Forms of brevity in alumni's texts	Examples from reports and emails
Symbols	Arriving time @ 1031H Retrieving time @ 1620H He attended the fault and update the NOC team that there is no Commercial power failure in the area but no power in the exchange & he found two rectifiers are down & only one rectifier was working On 7^h Jan-2017 @ 4:30 PM, XX NOC observed indication of power failure It was observed that the sand used to backfill the pipeline at XX site @ CH 5.8 is mixed with stones The WEG will be @ 1582m Inc = < 50 Deg
Abbreviations	FYI, ILL, DG, AMF & DC, GDP, HCL PTW office OSO team inclinations below 1 deg

Bullet points	Please clarify whether the following items are needed for this project or not from site side.
	   1) Fire alarm
	  2) Door Access
	  3) Emergency door
	  4) Interlocking/Kerbstone outside the building
	  5) Water heater.

One or two liner emails	FYI We planning to launch the X tool tomorrow July 25th, @ 8:30 am from XX. Kindly provide support to my team as usual. Congratulations. Well done X.

The use of symbols and bullet points seem to be facilitated by technology-mediated writing which makes it efficient way of communicating under the pressure of workplace environment. Likewise, quick and brief emails with one or two words are common due to the on-going chains of email between senders and recipients. These interactions resemble instant messaging and do not necessarily include salutation and/or closing phrase in every chain. In fact, in one of the email chains with nine messages, the first message *(chain initiator)* tends to be longer than the subsequent ones aligning with Evans' (2012) finding. Technology also allows the use of images and visuals, as evident in some analysed emails, a software changes form, and a lab report, which further facilitate brevity and preciseness. For instance, in the lab report, the experiment results are demonstrated through the use of images instead of writing as experimental results can best demonstrated through images. Similarly, in the software changes form, the proposed changes are illustrated via screenshots along with short phrases, as shown in the Figure 15 below. Supporting Iedema's (2003) argument regarding how modern corporates have shifted to adopt multimodal approaches to communicate to the world, this finding suggests that apart from language, workplace writing also requires the use of other semiotic tools, e.g. images, to present the intended meaning through multimodal communication.

Figure 15. Example of multimodal writing

Brevity is also valued in the workplace because the major concern of workplace environment is to ensure that work is done, and due to time pressure the recipients may not read the full document (Moore et al., 2015), as explained by one of the alumni, *"… even I'm not sure if everyone reads it, basically some people they just [care about] what happens; they see the well number they don't care some people don't care what's happen inside they care about when they finish that's it"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017). While it is true that every organisation has its own way of doing things, it is interesting to notice that symbols, especially @, abbreviations, and bullet points are common features across different organisations involved in this study. This corroborates the value of these features in workplace writing in the given context.

In short, technical writing in the workplace is featured by precision and brevity. The critical and busy nature of workplace environment evokes

and necessitate these features, as witnessed in alumni's writing and interview data. Also, technology-mediated means of communication seems to promote brevity and preciseness in alumni's writing.

Having discussed the rhetorical elements which shape alumni's workplace writing, the following part of the chapter will present the findings pertaining to socio-contextual elements influencing their writing practices.

4.2 Socio-contextual elements

Socio-contextual elements refer to broader contextual and social practices surrounding the production of a text which seem to shape not only the text but also the process of alumni's workplace writing and their overall writing practices. The findings in this section reflect Bazerman and Prior's (2003) contention regarding the need to explore the practices that writers engage in while producing texts and the values attached to writing practices in specific contexts to understand the nature of writing. This overarching theme includes three main themes: collaborative/ individual writing, workplace physical environment: field vs. office work, and level of experience: new vs. experienced. Each theme will be discussed in the following sections.

4.2.1 Collaborative/ individual writing

Along with audience and purpose, collaborative writing was also probed in the interviews as it is considered a prominent feature of workplace writing (Bhatia, 2014, Bremner, 2010, Bremner et al., 2014, Burnett, 2001, Gimenez & Thondhlana, 2012). However, in the current study, most participants reported that writing is mostly and mainly done individually in the workplace. The reason given for individual writing by some participants is that writing in the workplace is perceived as part of other engineering duties which are performed individually. Yet, a number of participants also admitted that there are some occasional moments when writing is done collaboratively, as commented by A4, *"Usually individually, but sometimes we write collaboratively"* (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017). Such occasions are very rare *"...required once a year maybe"* (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017). Contextual

exigencies seem to call for these occasional collaborative writing tasks, for instance, working on projects or urgent problem solving tasks, as commented by a line manager from telecommunications, "*…there are some cases where the team is working to solve something, then when it comes to the report, they will collect all the information from everyone, and they'll form a letter or email*" (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017). This is consistent with what A2 mentioned that in serious cases of dealing with network faults, her team leader would ask her and her colleagues to produce a piece of writing collaboratively, as she commented:

> *I remember once we had a critical fault and X (name of the organisation) sent to the CEO, and from the CEO it came to us. I remember my team leader asked me to sit with a group of colleagues (names are removed) …and we wrote in group (A2, 21 /02 /2017).*

This implies that sometimes contextual exigencies necessitate collaborative writing which involves a lot of discussions, negotiations and interactions to decide on the content and structure of a written piece of writing, as described by M2:

> *… based on his task he will collect the information when it comes to forming this information together as a teamwork, they will of course discuss where to put this paragraph where to put this explanation… (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).*

Thus, this kind of occasionally done collaborative writing influence alumni's process of producing a text. As the above-mentioned quote suggests, this kind of collaborative activity entails negotiation and communication among group members to decide on the structure and content during the creation of a document.

Among all the written texts collected from the alumni, only one text displays an evidence of direct collaborative writing which is a software change request form as it concluded with the names of all the contributors to the texts. This direct contribution and interaction to produce a written text does exist in this particular context but regarded

as uncommon form of collaborative writing, hence, other forms of this kind of writing seem to be more prevalent.

4.2.1.1 Other forms of collaborative writing shaping writing practices

The above-mentioned occasional collaborative writing takes the form of group work in which group members physically and directly interact with each other to produce a final product of writing. It is apparent that the majority of the participants viewed collaborative writing as a joint activity in which two or more writers sit together and create a text. For example, physical distance during drafting a document is not viewed as collaborative writing, as commented by one of the alumni, "*Drilling programmes, for example, there is a lot of people who is working on it. A lot of people, but we are not working on the same table*" (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017). A5 further added that interactions would take place among various parties when drafting a drilling programme. When I attempted to argue that it is collaborative in this sense, A5 maintained that "*We write it individually, but everyone is putting his input; it was reviewed*" (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017). This implies that though various parts of the document were drafted and reviewed by different parties, this alumnus did not view this activity as collaborative since it was not done 'on the same table.'

However, collaborative writing in the given workplace context mostly takes an indirect form where input is provided from various sources, whether people, departments or other documents. Most of the participants, except one alumnus and two managers, tended to disregard this form as collaborative writing, hence, immediately denied writing collaboratively and emphasised that writing is done individually in the workplace. This is due to their narrow conceptualisation of 'collaborative writing.' The rest of analysis will be based on what I conceptualise as collaborative writing, which is a broader view entailing all the activities and written or spoken communication surrounding the creation of a text (Bremner et al., 2014). This largely involves communicating with various people and departments and referring to other documents as a source of input.

This kind of collaborative writing influences the process the alumni go about in constructing a text. Some alumni mentioned that they would sometimes need to communicate with other people within or outside the organisation to obtain the necessary content of their document. In fact, the type of the document determines whether input from other sources is needed or not. Reports and business cases may require input from other sources, as commented by A4 when asked whether she gets the information for her writing from different sources, *"it depends on the document, for example, if I am writing "Business Case", I am getting information from venders, websites and people opinions; If I am writing e-mail usually it is my feedback"* (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017). This is consistent with M3's opinion when he stated that *"he [engineer employee] can't write anything on his own except for email maybe."* However, sometimes even the content of email might be obtained from others, for instance, A3 would ask his manager for the content and purpose of writing email on his behalf, hence, the manager would be indirectly contributing to the formation of the email.

Further, sometimes information should be provided by other departments as the issue is related to them, as A1 stated, *"…from different department, for example ... because I am working in transmission section if it is related to our problem, I have the information, but sometimes it is related to another department …"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017). This implies that sometimes it is not necessary to get information from others simply because the information is available and taken "from the site itself". In this case, the content needed is available and does not involve other parties, thus, there is no need for relying on other sources of information to produce a particular text.

Another form of collaborative writing shaping alumni's writing practices and manifested in alumni's emails is intertextuality, which refers to texts' direct or indirect relationships with other texts (Bhatia, 2014). These other texts serve as source information, thus, shape the way a text is written. Texts may be drawn on implicitly to write a text, for instance, one A12 remarked that he would need quality control report and inspection report in order to write his daily report. Likewise, one

of the line managers mentioned that previous emails also serve as source of information for writing a report, "*The report contains facts so first, for example, he [the engineer writer] should take that facts from emails records; from his understanding…so there are many sources*" (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017). While this seems to refer to indirect relationship with other texts, texts can also be referred to directly and explicitly, for instance, A1 said that she would explicitly refer to the recommendations in previous incident reports to notify recipients of similar repetitive incidents. This *referential* intertextuality is also evident in alumni's emails, but referring to oral communications, such as, *'As we discussed earlier,' 'As per our discussion…,' and 'As discussed in the phone.'* Hence, written as well as spoken discourse influence the construction of new texts (Cheng & Mok, 2008), as depicted by a line manager:

> *Discussions with administration about a particular topic can serve as input for him [engineer writer] to write about, hence, there are many sources of information for writing, and they could be written documents and oral discussions besides his own ideas… (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).*

In addition, *generic intertextuality*, which refers to drawing on previous texts which have been produced in response to similar situations, also seems to shape some alumni's writing practices. This is evident in templates which some alumni draw on, for instance, callout emails mentioned by A6, which is a standard form in which he would need to change the date and job description every recurrent situation. This is also pointed to by a line manager:

> *For example, if there is a fault in a technical system, they should always be recorded and documented. So, he [the alumnus] can look at the faults and the actions taken to overcome it… and write about it in his own language (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).*

Intertextuality is also manifested in the chains of correspondences analysed as the alumni were engaged in dialogues with various parties regarding a particular issue, such as planning for a well drilling and solving a problem. This is related to *functional intertextuality*, which refers to a text influenced by other texts in the system, as the alumni's

writing is shaped by the interconnected interaction as they respond to various issues, and another example could be, as mentioned by A6, relying on company's online system which provides guidelines and procedures of writing various emails.

Another example of *functional intertextuality* can also be inferred from A4's response about the series of documents surrounding the construction of project planning document, as she depicted:

> *…we have whenever, for example, we want to introduce new system as well before the projects planning, we have to write one document called request for quotation (RFQ) or request for proposal (RFP) this document used to ask vendor what is the service or goods we are looking to have from the market … and then this document will be given to the purchasing department where they will…invite those suppliers and they see after that we will have another writing called technical evaluation documents to evaluate those quotation or proposal has been submitted by those supplier… (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017)*

As this quote shows, there is another document which precedes the project planning which is Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Quotation (RFQ), which states the specifications of the project. What follows this document is technical evaluation to evaluate suppliers' proposals. This denotes that project planning is part of a chain of documents produced in this particular workplace context: RFQ/RFP- technical evaluation- project planning. What can be inferred is that the project planning, which explains the plan and implementation of a project, is influenced by the RFP and technical evaluation and cannot be written without referring to these preceding documents as they are all part of the ongoing dialogue and a response to similar situations (Bremner, 2008). The impact of these texts could be on the generic, rhetorical or linguistic choices the writer would make as Bremner (2008) stated that the influence could be at varying levels of impact.
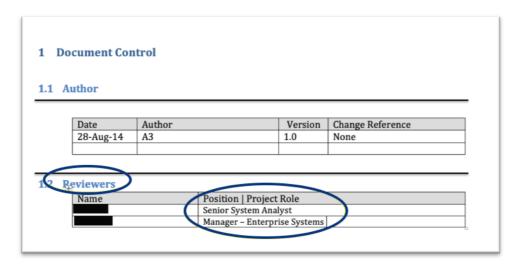
Apart from obtaining input from other people and intertextuality, another form of collaborative writing impacting alumni's writing practices is shift handovers and rotations. For instance, A2 reported that after her shift is over, the next person in the shift should continue

writing updates about the fault. Likewise, when asked to clarify how writing is done collaboratively in the workplace, M4 stated:

> *Ah for example, … we work in… rotation so there is one person who starts the report and then … his back to back continues the report, and then they send it to someone else in town who reads the report do the proof checking if there is anything (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017).*

This resembles the sequential model of collaborative writing in which each team member upon completing his task passes the document to the next member to contribute to the document with his part of writing (Gimenez & Thondhlana, 2012). This quote also signifies that not only rotations, but also reviewing is another form of collaborative mentioned by a few participants when asked about collaborative writing taking place in the workplace (A1, A5, A7, A9, M1), for instance, reviewing done by colleagues or more senior colleagues, as A1 reported, *"I have to write it share it with team leader (Name removed) to review it … and then…if it is ok we have to send it to the customer and for the management and for different departments"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017). Reviewing is also corroborated by one of the analysed texts which is a user manual written by A4 and reviewed by two of her senior colleagues, as illustrated in Figure 16:
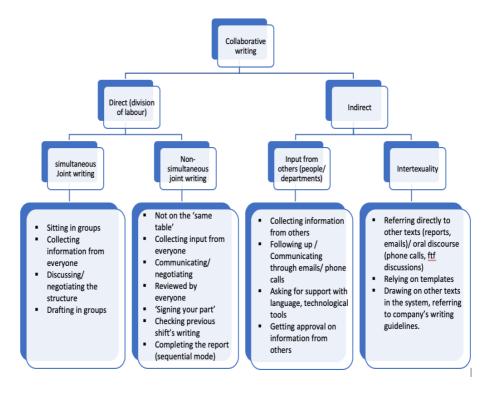
Figure 16. Evidence of reviewing in a user manual

In brief, while most of the writing is seen to be done individually in this particular context of study, it would seem that collaborative writing

does exist and take various forms at the workplace, hence, influencing alumni's writing practices differently (see Figure 16 below). It could occasionally take the form of group writing where everyone directly and overtly takes part in the production of a text. Moreover, it could also be indirect and covert collaboration where other sources, such as other departments, people, and documents (intertextuality) contribute to the production of a piece of writing. Such contribution can also be through shift handovers and revisions. This process of writing — collaborative and individual— certainly influences the writing practices of the engineer alumni in terms of the process of planning and drafting a document which involves communicating in spoken or written modes with other parties or referring to other documents in order to obtain input in the form of content or review. This prevalent form of collaborative writing in the given workplace context resonates with what Jones (2005) called 'contextual collaboration' which goes beyond the conventional understanding of collaborative writing of people simply interacting and writing together, to include the organisational practices and other documents within the organisation. The illustration below summarizes how various forms of collaborative writing shaped the writing practices of the alumni.

Figure 17. Various forms of collaborative writing shaping alumni's writing practices

4.2.2 The workplace environment: Field vs. office writing practices

The theme does not need to be present in every item or most items as long as it is meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although this theme does not appear very frequently in the data, it captures a meaningful element with regard to the research questions. Thus, this theme is decided to be included based on its saliency (Buetow, 2010).

Generally, all the participants concurred that writing is done on a daily basis by engineers, though at different amounts. Some would write *"40-50 emails per day,"* while others would spend 8 to 9 hours or 3 to 4 hours a day writing. However, some alumni participants stated that they would not do a lot of writing, for instance, just for 15 minutes or 10% of the daytime. This could be because of the nature and the environment in which the engineers work. In other words, engineers working in the field are given less writing duties than those based in office. This could be due to the technically-oriented nature of field work, as explained by A6:

> *… because see we are well engineer in the field and we have well engineer in Muscat; there in field more technical by visibility by checking and only write little reports, but here in Muscat your work in papers and documents (A6, 26 /04/ 2017).*

This suggests that more technical work is required in the field than paperwork. Also, not much writing skills are expected from those engineers working in the field as more technical skills are required, as commented by at least one line manager:

> *… not necessarily all engineers will be good at writing reports because some of the engineers are working in the field they're doing physical work…When it comes to the reports, maybe he will use the communications or writing skills in emails… but even though that communication is not necessary also to be like high level writing skills... It will be like some simple very simple emails … (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).*

This is also mentioned by some field engineers who would write simple emails and brief reports and communicate verbally most of the time. This could be due to the urgency of accomplishing physical work or due to the nature of the field environment which is usually in remote areas, e.g. desert or refineries, which do not necessarily conform to the conventions and protocols of office work, as described an alumnus who experienced both field and office environments:

> *… and I need you to understand the field culture. Field culture is a way different than head office culture. The field culture they have like job to be execute and then go to sleep, here no you [maintain] formality you have to justify (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

So, the nature of environment itself influences the writing practices of the engineers and their line managers' expectations. Furthermore, even the process of writing is affected by the nature of work environment. To illustrate, due to technical nature of the field work, A12 stated that he would do note- taking and rough writing at the site and the actual writing and typing would take place in the office. Moreover, the nature of field work requires limited amount of writing, as commented by A6, *"…only two sentences… just very short: the time with the specific job… for example, SS I want you to come there in rig*

site tomorrow at 3 or 4 pm." (A6, 26 /04/ 2017). This is also reflected on the daily site reports submitted by A12, which includes a pre-set form filled in with brief notes of site operations. In contrast, some office-based alumni (A1, A2, A3, A4) were noted to produce elaborated documents and to do substantial amount of writing and, as A1 emphasised that she would do a lot of writing *"compared to the technical [job]"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017).

The monthly report written by one of the alumni—who deals with field operations—to record well drilling operation activities in the oil field is written in a form of Gantt chart (see Figure 18 below), which requires minimal writing pertaining to job type, well number, well type and remarks. Furthermore, a well operation daily report and a daily network performance report submitted by a petroleum engineer and telecommunications engineer are found to include numerical and technical data with charts and graphs and formulae, but require a limited amount of writing.

Figure 18. Monthly report Gantt chart

In short, the nature of workplace environment seems to influence the kind of writing experiences the alumni would have. Those working in

the field do a limited amount of writing and produce brief texts compared to those based in office as the field work is more concerned with accomplishing the technical work without paying more attention to paperwork formalities dominating the office work environment. This theme will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

4.2.3 Work experience: New vs. experienced alumni

Writing practices of the engineer alumni are not only influenced by the nature of the workplace environment, but also by their level of experience. The writing practices of newcomers or new graduates are different from those with more work experience. Nevertheless, who is regarded as a newcomer differs depending on the particular workplace context. For example, at one of the petroleum companies that participated in this study, those who have been working for up to three years are still regarded as newcomers, thus, given limited writing responsibilities, and only "*after 4 to 5 years*" they are regarded as experienced. On the other hand, at the telecommunication company, newcomers start sending emails from their second week. This could be because more communication may be required at telecommunication companies. The data revealed that the level of work experience has impacted on alumni's writing practices in terms of the amount and complexity of writing tasks assigned by their managers, and the feedback and guidance they received from seniors.

Generally, the data revealed that a fewer writing responsibilities are given to new graduates, such as writing brief emails and short reports. A6, who is a new alumnus, reported that he would mainly send callouts, one-line reports, but more sophisticated emails are sent by his supervisors, as he described:

> *…he sends it because he is above me and he sends it because you know I'm petroleum engineer and I have only now 2 years in XX (company's name is removed), so I just send the callouts and if there is anything happens related to me (A6, 26 /04/ 2017).*

This kind of brief reporting is also mentioned by other new alumni (A10, A12) who mainly follow a standardised format which requires adding

brief information. To illustrate, the daily report submitted by A10 is a

CHECKINGS RESULTS				
1. STATION STATUS				
BVS	CODE (A. B & C)	DESCRIPTION		CLOSE DATE
11	B	vegetation in the Station need to be remove.		
12	B	,	, , , , , , , , .	
2. EQUIPMENT STATUS				
BVS	CODE (D. E. F, G & H)	DESCRIPTION		CLOSE DATE
11	H F F	Low pressure of N₂ in the HPU. Battery caps Broken. Temp Indicator need calibration.		
12	E H F H	Some lighting System not working. US, DS pit cover missing (TRU pit). Battery caps Broken, And there is leakage of acid. earthing cable missing.		

pre-set form which he would fill in manually with notes regarding the

condition of the Block Valve Station (BVS) he is in charge of, as shown

in Figure 19 below.

Figure 19. An example of a pre-set template a newcomer would use

Similarly, A8, who is still a trainee, would not write a lot of emails

unless he needed anything, as he reported, *"now as an operator I don't*

write a lot because they don't give me any specific task…" (A8, 08 /

05/ 2017). Furthermore, writing demands get more complicated as the

years of employment increase, starting from simple one line reporting

moving to writing standards and full long technical reports writing, as

commented by a line manager:

> *They write what they did in the last 24 hours what*
> *operations took place, but it's mainly abbreviations it's a*
> *one line report it's not a full report like the technical report*
> *that we know. For that stage but at later stage there is a*
> *lot of report writing we have lots of standards updates*
> *and people get involved in that but that is after 8 years*
> *of working in XX (company's name is removed) … (M4,*
> *05 / 04/ 2017).*

Apart from one- line reports and daily reports, new alumni may use templates or pre-set format of email or report previously written by others to which they just make a few amendments. For instance, when writing callouts, A6 would use the same given format with a few amendments, as commented, "*Yes, when we send a callout, it's as a standard form we just change the date and job description*" (A6, 26 /04/ 2017). Likewise, as mentioned above, A10 mentioned that there are official sheets or forms provided by his manager which would only require him to do limited writing. Hence, there is a consensus among the participants that not much writing is required from the engineers in their first a few years. However, this does not denote that the new graduates are not aware of what is expected from them in later stages. This is corroborated by some new alumni's responses (A10, A8) which explicate the kinds of written genres required at their organisations although not assigned to them at their initial stage, as admitted by A10,"*Yeah letters, but actually I am not writing it, but some of my friends in my office doing this, but I think one day I will come to that*" (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017). This implies that they have been exposed to such advanced types of writing at earlier stages of their employment. Additionally, the managers expect from the new graduates to get accommodated to the new environment first, understand the contextual elements and learn workplace terminologies. This learning and adapting to the new culture happen progressively, as explained by one of the managers:

> *Firstly, we teach him [new graduate] the required terminologies, tell him about the internal and external audiences, and teach him the way of oral and written communication. We don't let him write emails at the beginning, and we ask him to see how his colleagues follow up with emails, how it works, what language is used… we have to guide and follow him email by email and provide comments regarding mistakes…then only he is able to independently handle emails (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).*

This implies that dealing with writing at the workplace is a gradual process where new graduates are first guided and scaffolded by their seniors, besides, their participation is considered peripheral and

attenuated focusing on writing limited types of genres with simple writing tasks. After they are able to establish themselves at the workplace, more writing tasks are given to them, and they will be considered as fully-fledged participants. Moreover, after becoming legitimate participants of community of practice, not only more complicated genres and writing tasks are expected from the engineers, but they may also be asked to create new templates from scratch (as in the case of A1, A2, A3), as reported by A2:

> *…we used to write and send to my team leader who would assist us until we understood how to write [reports], and we created our own template of the current incident report which wasn't there before… (A2, 21 /02 /2017)*

The two previous responses denote that guidance and feedback on new graduates' writing does occur in the workplace as a few alumni stated that they would receive feedback when they were newcomers, *"at the beginning they [supervisors] gave us feedback"* (A2, 21 /02 /2017). Likewise, the four line managers also stated that they provide feedback and guidance to the newcomers through various approaches, such as in friendly and informal way or formally through suggesting English courses. This is mainly done to induct the new graduates into the required professional writing until they become independent writers. Some managers would provide feedback on writing to save the public face of the company, as commented by A4, *"Yes, first 3 months because you know she is responsible about me; if I'm sending any email would be shame if it has mistakes or something"* (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017). This statement is confirmed by line managers' concern with company's image which necessitates checking employees' emails and reports especially if they are for external audience. Managers' concern with producing accurate texts to save company's public face is also found by Forey and Nunan (2002) in accountancy firm.

Also, there are some highly motivated managers who willingly provide feedback. For instance, A3 recalled the way his previous manager would comment on his writing in a friendly manner:

> *… My manager he is so picky in even in a small mistake in a letter or in a grammar … I remember I send an email and this email mentioned to sign something and … I wrote it wrong instead of sign I wrote it sing, and what he did he went to google and picked a picture of a singer and sent it to me… he … sends it back to me but without copying anyone … I realize that oh I made a mistake and always he does this (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

A3 has had an opposite experience regarding feedback in his current workplace where people are more concerned with getting the work done, thus, they might not read the full report and would not be concerned with the accuracy of the language as long as the content is understandable.   A3's experience with feedback denotes that the same person has had two different experiences regarding feedback on writing in two different workplaces. In his previous job, his manager was a native English speaker who would willingly, spontaneously and amiably, tend to correct his language mistakes, whereas in his current job, he would receive no feedback at all as people are more concerned with the pragmatic side of the reports he would submit.

However, this is not the case for many of the new alumni who denied receiving any feedback from their supervisors on their writing. When feedback is probed in the interviews, various range of responses were noted which denotes that practices of feedback experienced by the alumni vary. When asked whether they received feedback when they first joined the workplace, most of the alumni said that they received no feedback from their seniors on their writing with few who occasionally did receive feedback when they instigated it themselves. What is surprising is that those of who denied receiving any feedback are mainly newcomers, as commented by A7, *"No, they are not checking the writing"* (A7, 26 /04/ 2017). This could be due to the limited amount of writing required from the newcomers. It could also be due to the busy nature of the higher management, as stated by A10 when asked whether he gets feedback on his writing from his supervisor, *"… no no they do not clarify this because they are not free for this; they are so busy"* (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017). Therefore, in the absence of feedback and guidance, newcomers would either initiate it or depend on themselves in accomplishing any writing task.   To

illustrate, some alumni said that they initiate feedback from their colleagues and seniors, for instance, although no direct feedback is instigated by his manager, A7 commented that he would sometimes seek his boss's help when writing, *"No, but sometimes I ask for help can you check, is it correct or not, but I get it as other side of opinion not as you check my writing."* This suggests that some managers may be too busy or reluctant to provide any comments or directions on writing unless they are indirectly asked by the employees themselves to do so. Thus, some alumni would be hesitant to ask for help and complete the task on their own, as stated by A7, *"… they don't know even that I don't know how to write I don't show I try my best to do it my own"* (A7, 26 /04/ 2017). So, A7 would not show his manager that he was struggling with writing and needed his guidance, instead, he would try to depend on himself. This is consistent with A1's preference to rely on herself rather being corrected by others all the time, as she said, *"I had to depend on myself… because I personally don't like to be corrected a lot by people which I means I have to learn on my own"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017). However, there is a deviant case (A12) who would not feel the need and the significance of receiving feedback on his writing from his managers and seniors because, as he mentioned, *"HCT has given us enough of all of that"* (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017). This suggests that A12 perceived that HCT has prepared him so well in writing that the provision or absence of feedback would not affect his performance.

Thus, with the exception of a few fortunate alumni who received coaching from their supervisors regarding writing, most new alumni did not experience any proper guidance or feedback on their writing, hence, they either instigated it themselves from their colleagues or supervisors or they relied on themselves in tackling any writing tasks assigned to them.

Supervisors' feedback would seem to vary in terms of focusing on language, format and content. The major concern regarding feedback emphasised by the line managers is spelling errors, structure, and lack of preciseness. Similarly, the alumni mentioned similar types of

corrections along with content, format and tone, as illustrated in the table below. This concern with linguistic aspects is also raised by the alumni with regard to the challenges they faced when writing in the workplace (see Section 5.3.2.2.). The feedback practices constitute the discursive practices which surround the construction of a written text and though indirectly does shape the text.

Table 17. Managers' feedback on alumni's writing

Types of comments	Examples from interviews
format and content	*It [feedback] varies from one supervisor to another; for example, my previous supervisor used to be more concerned with the format, such as the font size, but the current one would focus more on the content* (A2, 21 /02 /2017).
vocabulary and spelling	*… she [the manager] was correcting some words… because … one of my difficulties is that I was repeating same words, so she asked to use synonyms…then even for correcting the spellings she asked me to review it, read it carefully, then send it…* (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017).
structure and expressions	*They focus on structure like you have to write dear, Mr., this this, and what's the problem and what you have to end sincerely like this and date and your name also you should write it* (A11, 21/ 05/ 2017).
Tone	*… sometimes I do some mistakes talking aggressively with the managers sometimes some of my friends say or the manager himself call me 'A5, this is not the way how you write* (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017).

To conclude, being a new graduate or experienced appears to shape the kind of practices the alumni would have with workplace writing. Newcomers are given limited number of writing tasks and required to do simple and short types of writing in the workplace. Besides, the line managers and a few alumni stated that new graduates are trained by their seniors through guidance and feedback until they gradually become full members of the community and are trusted not only to

write independently and accurately, but also to participate in the creation of new genres. However, feedback and guidance from seniors is not always provided due to the busy nature of the workplace, thus, leading the alumni to be self-reliant writers and take the initiative in seeking guidance.

4.3 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter presented the findings related to RQ1, and responded to it using two broad categories which seem to influence the writing practices of the engineer alumni. First, rhetorical elements, including audience, purpose and valued style, were discussed based on interview and text analysis data. These elements are found to directly influence the texts produced in the workplace in terms of content, overall organisation, rhetorical moves and tone/register. Second, socio-contextual elements, consisting of collaborative/individual writing, workplace physical environment and workplace experience, were explored and found to shape the overall writing practices of the alumni. Although this influence is not directly manifested in the texts but certainly influence alumni's writing practices both in terms of product and process. This exploration of context-text relationship has given valuable insights into the nature of workplace writing which is regarded situated and social act. It also depicts different levels of context that workplace writing operates at; from being rhetorical and situational to broader socio-contextual considerations of the context. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter Five: Views on Alumni's Preparedness for Workplace Writing

Having discussed the findings pertaining to the nature of workplace writing and how contextual elements shape alumni's writing practices, this second findings chapter will explore the studied phenomenon, i.e. preparedness for workplace writing, from another angle which sheds light on alumni and their line managers' views on alumni's preparedness for the demands of workplace. Thus, the chapter will present the findings related to RQ2: How is alumni preparedness for workplace writing perceived by the alumni and their line managers?

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview data, four emergent themes have been identified: 1) Expectations from the college, 2) Personal factors, 3) Acknowledgment of the basic knowledge (Genre awareness), and 4) Deficiencies in college writing experiences. All these themes are tied to a central concept around which the themes cohere, which is 'middle-of-the-road views.'   The four themes represent the factors shaping the views regarding college preparation for the workplace writing. The findings will be organised according to the given themes and categorised into three main sections: 1) Middle-of-the-road views (central concept), 2) Factors shaping line managers' views of alumni's preparedness, and 3) Factors shaping alumni's views of preparedness. Each section includes the identified themes and subthemes (as shown in Table 18 below).

Table 18. Description of themes and organisation of findings

Central concept: Middle-of-the-road views		
Overarching theme	**Theme**	**Description of theme**
Factors shaping managers' views	Expectations from the college	This theme captures one of the factors shaping line managers' middle-of-the-road views of HCT preparation for workplace writing. They partly felt that the college does have a role to play in preparing graduates for workplace writing, and this view is shaped by managers' expectations from the college. These expectations include equipping the graduates with the basic written communication skills, strengthening writing curricula, and interacting with the labour market. purposes.
	Personal factors	Not solely blaming the college, the line managers also attributed graduates' lack of preparedness to personal factors, such as motivation, capacities and family background.
Factors shaping alumni's views	Acknowledgment of the basic knowledge (Genre awareness)	This theme highlights one of the factors shaping the middle-of-the-road views the alumni of their college preparation for workplace writing. They partly believed that the college did play a role in their preparation through equipping them with the basic knowledge of writing which they were able to utilise in the new rhetorical context.
	Deficiencies in college writing experiences	This theme describes another factor which shaped alumni's views of preparedness for workplace writing. Though acknowledging the importance of the basic knowledge they gained at the college, the alumni still held that they are insufficiently prepared to meet the writing requirements of the workplace, and this view is grounded in the deficiencies in their Technical Writing experiences at college. The deficiencies include lack of authenticity, lack of feedback and graduates' attitudes.

5.1 Middle-of-the-road views

In the semi-structured interviews, all the alumni were directly asked whether their college writing experience prepared them for the kind of writing required in the workplace. Likewise, line managers' perceptions regarding HCT alumni preparedness for workplace writing were directly probed. The line managers stated that HCT graduates are not adequately prepared for the workplace writing demands. Similarly, the alumni mostly and generally felt dissatisfied with their preparedness for performing the writing tasks in the workplace. However, regarding the college preparation for the workplace writing (which is the focus of this study), both alumni and the line managers shared middle-of-the-road views. To illustrate, the line managers perceived that the college does have a role to play, but it cannot be blamed alone for graduates' inadequate preparedness as there are other personal factors into play. Likewise, although there are a few extreme cases, the majority of the alumni acknowledged that their college writing experiences did to a certain extent prepare them for the workplace writing by equipping them with the basic knowledge of writing, but it is not sufficient as they perceived some deficiencies in their experiences of Technical Writing courses they took at the college. These views and the factors shaping them are elaborated and elucidated in the following sections.

5.2 Factors shaping line managers' views of alumni's preparedness

All the line managers in a way or another expressed their dissatisfaction with the writing abilities of HCT engineer graduates. However, they held middle-of-the-road views regarding college's preparation for workplace writing. While they asserted that the college does have a role to play in preparing learners for the workplace writing, they stated that it cannot be solely blamed for graduates' lack of preparedness as there are other personal factors into play. These middle-of-the-road views are shaped by their expectations from college regarding preparing graduates for workplace writing and partly

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shaped by managers' reflections on HCT graduates' personal attributes, such as capacities, motivation and family background.

5.2.1 Managers' expectations from HCT

The line managers expressed several expectations from HCT in order to yield well-prepared graduates for the demands of workplace writing. First of all, they expect that the writing courses at the college should equip learners with the necessary basic knowledge of writing which is reflected in basic written communication skills. Since all the communications within the given private sector organisations are done in English (M2, M3), the line managers believed that more efforts should be exerted by the college to equip graduates with necessary communication skills, such as writing emails/letters, as commented by one of the line managers, *"you need to make sure to focus on how to write a simple email or you can say a simple letter with the right words with the right spellings"* (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017). Besides, they also expect more emphasis on writing for various audiences and purposes as stated by M2, *"He [HCT graduate] needs to know about how to write an official letter to any organisation or to any it can be bank can be company".* M1 regarded written communication skills as the basic thing one should learn at college since *"85% of the graduates will be using email in their work"* (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017). As it is not feasible to devise specific courses tackling hundreds of jobs available in the market, M1 suggested that written communication skills, specifically email writing, should be included within technical writing/ communication courses. Hence, the value of the basic knowledge of writing learned at the college is acknowledged by the line managers, as commented by one of the line managers in a telecommunications company:

> *It is hard for me to teach the employees who are already in-service how to write an email, but if they have learned it at college, this information will be valuable and stay with them; they will employ it in the future workplace context (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017).*

Therefore, this implies that the managers hold that the college certainly does play a role in graduates' preparation for the workplace writing.

Another expectation the managers (M1, M4) have from the college is to interact with the labour market and gain insights as to what is required in the workplace before developing writing courses. M4 stated that he was not aware of the HCT writing curriculum as he had never had the chance to interact with the college in any form. Furthermore, M1 suggested that the college should conduct discussion sessions with the labour market and *"involve [it] in drafting new topics"* (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017). He also asserted that the managers' role is only to supervise and guide the new graduates, however, the "burden" falls on the college to prepare the learners.

Some line managers also expect that the writing curriculum at HCT should be strengthened to better enhance the writing abilities of the graduates, as proposed by M4:

> *…the enforcement of the curriculum needs to be there why am I saying that because we have examples of people who have very high GPAs but they are not really not in the theory part not in the practical part not in the writing part not in the verbal part (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017).*

This expectation stems from the disconnect the line managers noticed between HCT graduates' GPA (Grade Point Average) and their writing abilities. The line managers expect that graduates' GPA should truly reflect their writing abilities, as M4 explained, *"I think it [writing skills] should reflect very clearly on their grades so someone who graduates with the 3.5 GPA we expect him to be able to write to have report writing skills"* (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017). Thus, the only way to judge graduates' written communication skills is through their overall GPA, and this is the usual practice employed by the recruiting companies in the given context as there are no specific assessment for the writing skills as part of the recruiting procedures. This view is also echoed by M3 who recalled rejecting many HCT candidates with high GPA due to their poor communication skills during hiring interviews. This

raises questions as to the extent to which Technical Writing courses and other courses at HCT accomplish graduates' attributes pertaining to having effective written and spoken communication skills required by the college.

5.2.2 Graduates' personal factors

Although managers' expectations from the college indicate that they perceived that the college should play a role in preparing learners for the workplace writing, the managers maintained that the college cannot be solely blamed for graduates' lack of preparedness as other personal factors may equally be responsible. This view is grounded in managers' reflective thoughts about alumni's motivation as language learners, low capabilities of HCT graduates in general and their educational and family background.

The line managers referred to graduates' motivation and their capabilities when asked about their views of HCT graduates' preparedness for workplace writing. For instance, one of the managers stated that "*HCT graduates are not up to the expected standards*" (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017)*,* and when asked about the reason for their lack of preparedness, he mentioned graduates' self-interest as a contributing factor, as he explained:

> *I think it's self-interest that is one because I can see the same example in just HCT students in others as well... college takes certain number of graduates with a certain number of grades from their high schools, so not the cream of the cream goes to HCT students, and I think that is the main reason, but there are people within these 5 years who developed themselves out of self-interest, and they excel and we see that in the workplace … (M4, 05 / 04/ 2017).*

This response implies that low capabilities of HCT graduates who are mostly average and low high school achievers may lead to their under-preparedness for the demands of workplace writing, though there are highly motivated learners who may have developed their writing skills during their college education. Likewise, M2 maintained that all graduates are at the same level of English proficiency unless they

possess the motivation and skills to improve and practice English, as he clarified:

> *but the majority to answer this question, for me, they are all in same level unless the person himself he has some skills and talents that he is we can say advanced in English, but this is not because of the college again it's because the person himself. I mean his knowledge his perceptions of English (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).*

The line manager here did not blame the college for graduates' lack of preparation, instead, he pointed out that what makes a difference is graduates' individual motivation to improve the writing skills and the extent of practice the graduates do in their real life. Similarly, M3 also referred to the majority HCT graduates' low capacities and abilities as a reason for their inadequate preparedness excluding those with high abilities and talents. In fact, M3 proposed that HCT graduates need to be taught extensive courses due to their low competency level compared to SQU (Sultan Qaboos University) graduates, as he commented:

> *…I observe, honestly, there is still a gap between the two graduates. Let us say if I compare the… HCT and the SQU, for me is very clear…it could be starting from competency, ability capacities technical capacities are different honestly... I do believe that whatever the other guys getting from SQU, you need to double that. So, if they are getting one course, you need to give two courses because the other guys' [HCT graduates] the capacity is different (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017).*

SQU and abroad graduates are seen by two managers (M3, M4) to be better prepared than HCT graduates in terms of linguistic and communication skills. This view is also shared by two alumni (A6, A7) who felt less confident and perceived themselves as inferior compared to presumably highly competent SQU and abroad graduates who are seen "*… better in writing and speaking…in language skills they have more*" (A6, 26/04/ 2017)*.* M3 stated that although he does consider the low capabilities of HCT graduates while recruiting them and would be lenient with HCT graduates compared to SQU's, but at the same time, as he commented, *"I cannot take someone who is not really ready to do the job"* (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017). Hence, this implies that HCT

graduates should be well-equipped to compete with graduates from other institutes for a better career prospect.

Apart from graduates' capacities and motivation for improving their writing skills, graduates' family background is perceived by two line managers (M1, M2) to be one of the contributing factors which add to their preparedness repertoire, as commented by M1, a team leader at a telecommunications company, "*The atmosphere he lives in, for example, there is a person … who actually lives in a home where everyone speaks English there, so the English language becomes easy for him…*" (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017). Moreover, M2 argued that the accumulation of academic and personal experiences which graduates carry with them determines their preparedness for workplace writing.

To conclude, the line managers' views of HCT graduates' preparedness for the workplace writing are shaped by both their acknowledgement of the role the college should play and their reflections on HCT graduates' personal characteristics. The overall perception of the line managers is that graduates' preparedness is determined by the accumulation of academic and personal experiences. This resonates with the different ingredients of genre knowledge mentioned by Artemeva (2009) in her study of engineers' stories of becoming successful writers after moving to the workplace. Although the current study focuses on one of these ingredients which is college writing experiences (academic factors), the contributing personal factors emerged as an unexpected and interesting finding which could be added to Artemeva's ingredients of genre knowledge.

The next section illustrates alumni's views of their college preparation for workplace writing and what shaped their views. Although the main source of information in the next section will be the alumni, line managers' views will be embedded (for triangulation) when applicable.

5.3 Factors shaping alumni's views of preparedness

Unlike the line managers, the alumni did not refer to personal factors with regard to their preparedness for workplace writing. Rather, their

perceptions were more oriented towards academic factors. The alumni participants reflected on their writing experiences at the college in general and in Technical Writing courses in particular in relation to their workplace writing preparedness. Although there are extreme cases, the majority of the alumni held middle-of-the-road views of their college preparation for the workplace writing. As Figure 20 illustrates below, on one end of the spectrum, there are those who thought that their college writing experience positively supported their preparedness, and on the other end of the spectrum are the views of those who felt that their college writing did not prepare them for the workplace writing at all. Those participants answered directly with either 'Yes' or 'No' to the question of their college preparedness for the workplace writing. However, the majority of the participants did not provide such extreme answers, instead, their responses were on-the-middle-of-the-road kind of responses, such as *"If I say yes, it's not fair, if I say no, it's not fair"*(A5, 05 / 04/ 2017), *"Yes, in certain way"* (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017) and *"Let's say yes, I cannot say no … because in the end of the day I have started learning about the writing there in the college …"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017). These responses, along with other similar responses, illustrate that most participants acknowledged that, though not sufficiently, to a certain extent HCT, particularly Technical Writing courses did prepare them for workplace writing. Thus, in the middle of the spectrum lie the majority of alumni's views which acknowledged that their college experience did somewhat and *somehow* play a role in their preparedness through equipping them with basic knowledge which is useful though not sufficient. All of these views are partly shaped by alumni's acknowledgement of the basic knowledge they gained at the college and their ability to utilise it in the new context (genre awareness) and partly influenced by deficiencies and disparities in alumni's experiences of the Technical Writing courses.

Figure 20. An example of a pre-set template a newcomer would use

Middle-of-the-road views

5.3.1 Acknowledgement of basic knowledge: Genre awareness

Alumni's views are substantively shaped by the conceptualisation of basic knowledge they gained from the college writing classes and their ability to adapt it to the new context of writing. The majority of the participants did recognise that they have gained the basic or background knowledge of writing at HCT. For example, one of them admitted that though she did not become proficient in writing, she did get the basic knowledge of writing from HCT: *"…there are different different types of writing actually, and if it does not make me expert at least it makes me knowledgeable, it gives me knowledge…"* (A4, 27/ 02/ 2017). There are various forms of basic knowledge recognised by the alumni to be useful for the workplace writing. For instance, the types of writing learned in Technical Writing courses were perceived to be helpful, such as writing CVs, letters, process essay, part-by part description and descriptive essays, discussing charts and using linking words and punctuations. While some recognised the value of the basic knowledge of essay writing at HCT, as elucidated by an alumnus who thought that such kinds of writing are useful in describing tools at the workplace: *"… for example, this phone I want to describe it like business essay, it's good because it allows you to show the main specification of the tool of the picture of the sample in front of you"* (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017), A1 did not acknowledge the importance of learning essays at HCT as she kept grumbling that she only learned essays in the writing courses, and this was not helpful in preparing her for the workplace writing, as she commented, *"it is in general; keeping only writing essay…"* (A1, 16 / 02 /2017).

These contrasting views imply that the way the basic knowledge is conceptualised and utilised to fit into the new context seems to

influence how most of the alumni view their college preparation for the workplace writing. For example, for one of them, this basic knowledge has been abstract until she joined the professional field:

> *At the beginning it was only knowledge, or I know that there are informal emails and formal. When I started working … and I start writing my email, or before working I was trainee in different companies, so I started email I found little bit difficulties, ok now I have knowledge how I use can this knowledge to apply it in my job in my training. Of course, I get assistant from Mr. Google. He is always there for us; he helps a lot… (A4, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

Similarly, when asked whether he has learned email writing at HCT, a new alumnus admitted that he did learn it but quite irrelevant to how it is done at the workplace:

> *…I don't deny learning it [email], but not as needed at the workplace, therefore, I look at previous emails and modify them, or I use google translation if I have to (A6, 26 /04/ 2017).*

These two responses indicate that the alumni recognised that they have gained the basic knowledge of writing at HCT, but each of them viewed this knowledge differently. While one of them (A4) perceived this knowledge as abstract without realizing its importance until she practiced it, the other one (A6) viewed it as irrelevant to what is actually required at the workplace. However, both of them utilised technology and relied on previous emails to build on this basic knowledge. Thus, regardless of how abstract or irrelevant it was, it did provide the basis for learning which could be built on using other sources of learning at the workplace, as mentioned by a new alumnus: *"we have little bit background of this, so we move on this background; we gain another information from net and from trainers there…"* (A11, 21 / 05/ 2017)*.* Furthermore, as one of the line managers commented, the basic knowledge gained from college remains within the graduates. It just needs to be triggered by opportunities in the new context to reapply it properly. This coincides with another view of the basic knowledge that it is relevant, but the context of workplace is different, hence, this knowledge needs to be *recontextualised* in order to fit into the workplace context, as depicted by an alumnus:

> *… the writing is writing words is words the sentence is sentence, but you know what is the difference, the style the requirement of that nature of work…so, sometimes we have to write the comparison of materials we use … so, will compare that in comparison style and will submit it to them. So, we learned this in our HCT, and some informative reports informative essays we learn them at HCT, and we are applying it in our work (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017).*

Thus, the argument here is that the evolving nature of professional genres necessitates that learners should be able to conceive the writing encountered at the workplace as new tasks having their own rhetorical context of purpose and audience. This indicates that the generic knowledge gained from college needs to be *recontextualised* in order to be appropriate for the new context. Recontextualisation is defined by Cheng (2007) as *"Learners' abilities not only to use a certain generic feature in a new writing task, but to use it with a keen awareness of the rhetorical context that facilitates its appropriate use"* (p. 303). This notion is also echoed by Smart and Brown (2002) who preferred to use 'transform' rather than 'transfer' as the former suggests relearning and adapting old knowledge and skills in order to fit into a new environment. Similarly, Devitt (2004) and Johns (2015) emphasise the need for developing learners' 'genre awareness', i.e. adapting previous genre knowledge to new rhetorical situations, rather than 'genre acquisition', i.e. mastering the generic features of a limited set of texts types. The findings are in line with this view. For instance, one of the alumni was aware of the rhetorical requirements of the workplace context, thus, he stated that he was able to utilise his basic knowledge gained from technical writing courses—e.g. compare and contrast essays— appropriately, as depicted:

> *… in our company, we raise specifications for some materials for purchases. So, this is persuasive how you are persuading your purchasing department to bring that material to you, so this is a technique we use it here actually we learned it in technical communication (A12, 11 / 06/ 2017)*

This *recontextualising* of genre knowledge previously gained is regarded as "a more sophisticated level of achievement" and a

representation of writing performance (Bernstein, 1990; Cheng, 2007, p.303). In the previously mentioned examples, some alumni did not perceive the value of their schematic knowledge of essays or emails (e.g. *not as needed at the workplace*) learned at college when they encountered new writing situations in the workplace. In contrast, others seemed to utilise their previous genre knowledge and adapt it to new context of situation. However, such recontextualising has not been an easy task as the alumni would seem to lack genre awareness, thus, some efforts were made by them to adapt their writing to the new context, such as relying on technology, learning from others' writing, receiving training or simply practicing and self-learning.

While the alumnus participants viewed the basic knowledge of writing gained at HCT to be useful, but not sufficient, one of the line managers argued that owning basic skills and knowledge of English is sufficient for the college graduates to get a job as the company will take care of developing their technical writing skills if they are given reporting duties, as he commented:

> *… I can say only that the main part played when it comes to the students, they need to know the basics and the company maybe when they focus on reporting, they will choose the right who is having the maximum advance level of English then he can develop them … (M2, 22/ 02/ 2017)*
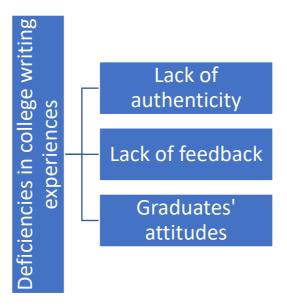
This particular response shows that this line manager's view regarding the preparedness of HCT graduates for the workplace writing is influenced by the idea that the company plays a role in developing their writing skills through training and coaching as long as the graduates have the basic knowledge and skills of English. However, this does not coincide with the fact that not all workplaces provide such learning and developing opportunities as confirmed by most of the participants. Furthermore, the challenges faced by the alumni at the workplace do not concur with the idea that basic knowledge is sufficient.

In short, the way the participants conceptualised the basic knowledge of writing gained at HCT and the degree of genre awareness they possessed seemed to influence the way they perceived the

preparedness of the graduates for the workplace writing. Those who recognised the usefulness of this basic knowledge and were able to utilise it in the new context seemed to acknowledge its impact on their preparedness.

5.3.2 Deficiencies in college writing experiences

This section sheds light on another factor which has shaped alumni's middle-of-the-road views of their college preparation for the workplace writing. The alumni reflected on their writing experiences at the college in general and in Technical Writing courses, in particular in relation to their workplace writing preparedness. They also reflected on the differences between college and workplace writing. As discussed in the previous section, most of the alumni acknowledged the role of their college writing experiences in equipping them with the basic knowledge of writing, however, they still thought they are insufficiently prepared to meet the demands of workplace writing. This view is grounded in the deficiencies and disparities in their experiences of technical writing courses which seem to have resulted in the perceived insufficient preparedness for the workplace writing. Three emergent sub-themes (as illustrated in Figure 21) have been identified as deficiencies in alumni's college writing experiences 1) lack of authenticity, 2) lack of feedback on college writing and 3) graduates' attitudes towards Technical Writing courses, each of which will be illustrated below.

Figure 21. Deficiencies in college writing experiences

Deficiencies in college writing experiences

- Lack of authenticity
- Lack of feedback
- Graduates' attitudes

5.3.2.1 Lack of authenticity

One of the major factors inferred from alumni's responses of their writing experiences in Technical Writing courses at HCT which have led to their lack of preparedness for workplace writing is inadequate authenticity and irrelevance of the tasks practiced in Technical Writing courses to the kinds of the tasks required at the workplace. The word 'Authenticity' is used in various ways in the areas of EFL learning, curriculum design and language testing (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Gilmore, 2007; Lewkowicz, 2000; Mishan, 2005; Widdowson, 1978). No matter how it is used, in a way or another it refers to facets of reality. In the current study, this term is used to refer to the degree to which the tasks performed by learners are meaningful, valid and relevant to the tasks required in the workplace (Freedman & Adam, 1996; Stein et al., 2004). It is related to learners' specific disciplinary needs and professional demands (Bhatia, 1993; Clarke, 1989; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Thus, a task is considered authentic when it entails real-world relevance (Bachman, 2000; Cronin, 1993). In this study, lack of authenticity is reflected in the generic, non-technical and non-communicative nature of the writing tasks in Technical Writing courses, especially lack of focus on email, and the disparity between the contextual elements which shape writing in both academic and professional contexts.

5.3.2.1.1 The general and non-technical nature of Technical Writing courses

The generic and non-technical nature of the Technical Writing courses are noted to be irrelevant to the kind of writing required at the workplace. For example, it was stated in a wide range by the alumnus participants that the generic nature of these courses and their inadequate specificity would not seem to meet the requirements of the workplace, as one of the new alumni commented: "*…I think we were given something which was not related to my work at all, like sometimes scientific reports, I am not science anymore; I'm not going to that department*" (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017). Most of the alumni seemed to be dissatisfied with the irrelevance of what they studied in these courses to what they actually need at the workplace, and; therefore, did not find them useful, as commented by a new alumnus: "*They [technical writing courses] were not very useful because the things I got here are too much different from what is required at the workplace…*" (A8, 08 / 05/ 2017). The disparity was noticed in the "*vocabulary, topics, and other a lot of things*" (A8, 08/ 05/ 2017). At the workplace, the alumni are required to write technical writing, but the majority of them stressed that Technical Writing courses did not include anything technical. When talking about *technical* writing, some participants referred to the topic of writing itself. For them if the topic is related to describing something technical related to engineering, e.g. reporting a problem or incident that happened during well drilling, then it is technical. However, according to them, writing about daily life, picnics or hobbies is not regarded as technical. Similarly, others defined *technical* writing as writing specific kinds of genres, such as incident reports and business cases instead of writing essays. Also, *technical* writing for some participants means writing emails and official letters for various purposes and audiences. To illustrate, some alumni noted that in writing courses, they wrote about general topics '*about life',* such as summer holiday or hobbies. Even though they wrote various kinds of essays and genres in these courses, the topics were rather general, as commented by an experienced alumnus:

> *… in college we learn everything we write stories, we write paragraphs, we write process, but what I remember in college we mainly focus on the hobbies like stories writing stories writing paragraphs about you know different things which are general. But, when we come for life, even when we were writing email or letter, it all about general not given like business case (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017).*

A similar remark was also made by some new alumni who had taken the revised Technical Writing courses. For instance, one of them pointed to the generality of the writing topics in the sense that they are not technical, as he said *"… it's different when you write technical or write anything just about your life"* (A6, 26/04/ 2017). He further commented that "*when the teacher asks you to come up with any topic of your choice and write about it, as a novice student, you are definitely not going to choose a technical topic but you will rather write about any other topics*" (A6, 26/04/ 2017)*.* Likewise, an experienced alumnus maintained that Technical Writing courses were repetitive of the foundation English courses, and she studied writing in them, but they were devoid of any technical content, as she commented, "*there were Technical Writing courses but as a name only not as content*" *(A1,16/ 02 /2017).*

The generic and non-technical nature of Technical Writing courses was also noticed in the types of genres introduced in them. The kind of writing practiced mostly in Technical Writing courses was essays and short paragraphs as stated by most alumni. This is typical of English for academic Purposes (EAP) classroom where the focus is on teaching general academic types of writing such as essays and letters. When asked about what he learned in these courses, one of the new alumni commented that *"not too much because you write only small paragraph and you can get it from anywhere"* (A6, 26/04/ 2017). This response implies that there was not sufficient and/or actual practice of writing in such courses. Other participants said that they would write essays, CVs, job application letters, emails and letters. More recent graduates wrote business and scientific reports. The participants varied in their experiences due to the difference in their cohorts and the kind of technical writing courses they had taken. For

instance, experienced graduates did not take the newly developed Technical Writing courses which included scientific and business reports. Conversely, more recent graduates complained that these courses did not focus on writing official emails and letters. However, there is an overall consensus among all the alumni involved in this study regarding essays being as the major and sometimes the only kind of writing practiced in Technical Writing courses*.* This lack of exposure to various workplace genres, such as email and reports seems to lead to alumni's lack of preparedness to produce required genres in their workplaces. Some experienced alumni, who did not learn report writing in college, expressed that once they joined the workplace, they had to write reports and other documents from scratch as there were not any templates they could rely on. Hence, they found it challenging to create documents being newcomers with little experience of workplace writing, as commented by one of them, *"Yeah, the challenge is only I don't have a sample, and I have to search by myself from google of course see how to write and not that much for writing the content"* (A1,16/ 02 /2017).

Apart from the challenge of creating documents from scratch, writing documents which are not only related to engineering, but also to other fields such as business and finance is identified to be a difficulty. An example of this is an experienced alumnus who had to deal with contract planning and producing documents which were not in his expertise, and he stated that the part which is still difficult for him is *"very technical which is like planning, budget and stuff you know financial"* (A3, 27th / 02/ 2017). This raises questions as to the level of specificity technical writing courses should adopt (Hyland, 2016). As some of the responses above illustrated, some alumni (A1, A2, A8, A10, A11) were in favour of having specific engineering ESP classes instead of having heterogeneous classes with business, IT and science students, and they strongly stressed the need for streaming Technical Writing courses according to various specialisations at HCT. On the other hand, a few alumni (A3, A4, A12) argued that common core courses should be taught at HCT, as commented: *"I*

think no need to separate them, just give situation in the same class give them different situations regarding to their specialisations" (A12, 11/ 06/ 2017). Such argument stemmed from these alumni's practices in the workplace where they were required to produce genres related to business and finance, as in A3's case above. However, A4 contended that both specific and common core are equally important, and students should have a solid grounding in their own discipline to better be able to produce interdisciplinary writing (Flowerdew & Costley, 2017) as she depicted:

> *How he [an engineer] writes in his specialist, for example, in his specialist, there is technical reports and those things. Let's assume I'm an engineer and I want to buy a machine, I need to write an email or RFP (Request for Proposal) which is learned in business department, how I can as an engineer, show my experience or show my requirement through those business terminology (A4, 27 / 02/ 2017).*

This denotes that engineers sometimes have to write across disciplines, business genres, for example. Thus, they ought to be aware of the generic features of genres belonging to other disciplines. This resonates with 'common core' ESP approach proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987) in which students from various disciplines are exposed to genres from different subjects. The issue of specific vs. common core courses is widely debated in the literature (Hyland, 2002, 2016, 2017; Basturkmen, 2003), and this particular finding extends this debate and reflects that diversity in alumni's experiences and their own specific workplaces seem to shape how they perceive specificity (this will be discussed in Chapter 6).

To sum up, alumni stated that the general and non-technical nature of Technical Writing courses do not meet the requirements of the rather communicative and technical nature of the workplace writing. The highly emphasised genre noted to be lacking in college writing is email. Therefore, it will be discussed in detail in the next sub-section.

Lack of focus on email

All the alumnus participants, either new or experienced, in the field or office, asserted that the most prominent kind of writing they do in the workplace is the email aligning with Moore et al.'s (2015) findings. In fact, sometimes email is the only type of writing done especially in the case of newcomers working in the field. Generally, emails were found to be means for planning, conducting, negotiating internal and external organisational activities, for instance, negotiating with contractors regarding well planning. The value attached to email could be attributed to the official nature of email compared to verbal communication, which is being less relied on nowadays in workplaces, as suggested in the following comment:

> *Yeah because today I am 100% sure that every company is only dealing by email by the way officially, there is no other way calling is not accepted because if you call someone, he can delay he can deny but if official email from his email at work, he cannot deny it (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017).*

In addition, the predominance of email could be due to the shift from traditional paper-based letters to technology mediated means in business communications, as explained, *"…I mean using the technology of course email is now one of the technologies I mean less paper work and more on technologies"* (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).

Thus, the importance of preparing students for email communication in the workplace is profoundly highlighted by the participants. Undoubtedly, email should be an essential component of Business English/ ESP courses which seek to minimise the gap between workplace and the classroom (Evans, 2012; Spence & Liu, 2013). In this study, however, most of the alumni believed that Technical Writing courses do not focus on developing written communication skills, and their line managers also commented that HCT alumni lack such skills. By developing written communication skills, the participants, both alumni and line managers, share a common understanding which is developing email writing skills including writing different kinds of emails for various purposes and audiences, using an appropriate tone in

emails and expressing concisely and precisely using appropriate technical terms.

Thus, the most significant workplace genre which most alumni noted to be missing or not sufficiently taught in their college writing courses is email writing. It was reported that Technical Writing courses did not focus on teaching email writing though some exposure to general letter writing was provided at school, as stated by one of the new alumni, *"So, the problem that I'm facing actually when I cannot remember if I take a course here talking about emails, I was just taking that at secondary school I think or before that also"* (A10, 21 / 05/ 2017)*.* This lack of exposure to email writing has formed a hurdle for most alumni writing at the workplace, as expressed by an experienced alumnus, *"Yeah, it was emails my big difficulties because that time I remember we mainly focus on letter we are not focus on email"* (A4, 27/ 02/ 2017). This suggests that lessons on letters, which have become very rare in business world (Leena Louhiala-Salminen, 1996), appeared to be irrelevant to the workplace which mainly uses email as a form of correspondence.

One new alumnus mentioned that not only at the workplace did he find email writing difficult, but even before joining the workplace when he would send his CV for applying for a job, as one new alumnus recalled:

> *While searching for a job, sometimes I was asked to send my CV. But, I had to write a subject and something else in the email, and I would spend half an hour daily thinking what to write until I asked someone, and he told me what to write, and then I started to copy it every time I wanted to send such email… so, it would be good if the college focuses on teaching emails as it is important after graduation (A8, 08/ 05/ 2017)*

The alumni's difficulties with email writing was also noted by their line managers who emphasised the importance of introducing students to email writing, as commented by one of the line managers, *"we can observe that because when you tell them to write email, they spend more time to send these emails…"* (M3, 07/ 03/ 2017). Therefore, the managers expressed the need to focus on preparing graduates for

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writing various kinds of emails at the level of college, as suggested by one of the line managers at a telecommunications company:

> *In college if there is a session at the level of graduation … to develop them to make them ready to … join any of organisation they will have basic skills of writing and what is the importance of communication through emails, how short I need to write, … sometimes I need to elaborate more in some emails sometimes no I need to do some short emails short response, so different kind of communication you can say (M2, 22/ 02/ 2017).*

Furthermore, being able to use the appropriate register in emails was reported to be lacking in alumni's writing. For example, some participants observed that writing official emails is required at the workplace and not taught in the writing courses at the college, "*but as I told you no official emails no official writing*" (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017). By official emails, participants refer to formal emails written for higher management or external audiences. It was noted that such official emails have a certain structure which the alumni are often not able to follow, as commented by one of the new alumni, *"sometimes the official email has a structure we are not following that at all"* (A10, 21/ 05/ 2017). In fact, this resonates with Bremner's (2014) study in which employers found register to be the most difficult challenge encountered by the interns in the workplace. In the same vein, a line manager in telecommunication sector complained that the alumni do not use appropriate formal register while writing for managers, instead, they follow the *'Omani way'* of writing for higher management. They tend to directly translate polite expressions, such as *'seeking your kind support',* from Arabic which may sound odd and unacceptable in English, as he delineated:

> *I mean you know our Omani way in writing to the management it is still in their mind the style, for example, you want to request a service from Wali [a governor] you are following a formal way … it is not a practical way as if you are requesting a service from top management even I don't like that way… (M1, 20/ 02/ 2017).*

In short, almost all the alumni felt that they are not sufficiently prepared by their college writing courses to produce emails at the workplace,

and this appears to impact on their preparedness for the workplace writing. Lack of authenticity is not only exhibited in the writing tasks and genres practiced in Technical Writing courses but also in the contextual elements which shape workplace writing as will be illustrated below.

5.3.2.1.2 Disparity and lack of awareness of contextual elements

Workplace writing is recognised to be shaped by contextual elements surrounding it, such as audience and purpose, as identified in the previous chapter. The disparity between workplace and college writing in terms of these contextual elements has an impact on alumni's preparedness for adapting to the new context of writing. While I agree that workplace context cannot be replicated in the classroom, I contend that exposure to the contextual elements and clarifying the differences between both contexts in terms of such elements might be useful for students' preparedness. Technical writing courses are not perceived by the alumni to consider exposing and raising students' awareness regarding such contextual elements.

Writing for various audiences is an essential characteristic of workplace writing which seems to lack emphasis at the college, as commented by one of the experienced alumni when asked about the differences between her college and workplace writing:

> *We used to write all this in the past, but here, of course, we don't write in the same way. Here, we communicate; I don't only write an email to a customer, but also to a colleague, to other departments. The way of communicating with various audiences is not emphasised at the college (A2, 21/02 /2017).*

Most of the alumnus participants admitted that they have learned to write for various audiences at the workplace as this was not practiced at college where they mainly wrote for their teachers, as one of the alumni emphasised, *"[the audience was] mainly the teacher yeah because he never asks to present. I mean you write; it's not presenting. You just write, and then he will assess."* (A3, 27/ 02/ 201). This response denotes that the students did not share their writing with

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their classmates, rather, it was only the lecturer who would read and assess.

Some alumnus participants faced difficulty when it came to writing for various audiences, as commented by an experienced alumnus, *"At the beginning of course it [writing for various audiences] was not easy at all"* (A4, 27/ 02/ 201). These alumni faced this challenge due to the difference in the writing style which is influenced by the variation in the audience. Power relation with the intended audience makes a difference in the way alumni write, as elucidated by a new alumnus who found catering for various audiences 'a big deal':

> *Yeah, it's different when you write to someone, and just send email to someone in same level with you different than you write email to someone in higher management, just there send the small sentence and small description and there we have to write accurate each word you have to choose it (A6, 26/04/ 2017).*

This implies the difficulty of adapting writing to cater for various audiences as, for example, brevity is maintained when communicating with employees or colleagues from the same level, while accuracy and precision is more of a concern when writing for employees in higher positions. Another audience related element stressed by the participants is maintaining polite and diplomatic tone especially with customers. At least two of the alumni recalled incidents when they were alerted by their managers of the repercussions of sounding rude in their emails, as mentioned by an alumnus:

> *… sometimes, I do mistakes talking aggressively with managers…the manager himself calls me 'A5 (name is removed), this is not the way how you write. This comes in the beginning until you get familiar how to talk to people that's how it works here, and to say it's nothing learned from college (A5, 05/ 04/ 2017).*

The line managers have a consensus that the alumni face difficulty in addressing various audiences in their writing. For instance, when asked whether HCT alumni consider the variation in audience when they write at the workplace, one of the line managers commented that the alumni would spend a long time when writing emails to their senior

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managers as they try to cater for their audience. Furthermore, another petroleum line manager stated the alumni in his team still struggle to cater for audiences with non-technical background, for instance, as he elaborated, in "*the use of abbreviations; if I write a report to you I know that you don't have an engineering background, I should not use engineering abbreviations, so I know that mistake is happening over and over again*" (M4, 05/ 04/ 2017). This aligns with Steiner's (2011) study which found that engineers' one of the serious challenges is to cater their writing for non-technical audience. Hence, catering for various audiences while writing is certainly a challenge faced by the alumni at the workplace, thus, technical writing courses at HCT should place ample emphasis on it.

Another contextual element which sets workplace and academic contexts apart is the purpose for writing. While writing is done at the workplace for real and social purposes, the purpose of writing at college is mainly to perform knowledge and to be assessed (Dias et al., 1999). When asked whether the purpose of writing at the college was clear or not, one of the alumni responded that *"Yes, it's clear because, as I mentioned before, the instructor basically they give you the task because he has already taught you what to do, and they need to assess you if you can do it"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017). This was also echoed by one of the line managers who believed that the workplace should also play a role in enhancing graduates' communication skills due to the disparity in the purpose of writing in both college and workplace contexts, as he commented:

> *…we'd also like to make sure that this student is well prepared for the working place in terms of speaking in terms of writing because the communications here communication role is not about study a subject and doing exams. Exams or study at the college means we are scoring somehow and memorizing words memorizing books (M2, 22 / 02/ 2017).*

This suggests that the purpose of writing at the college is to pass exams, unlike the purpose of workplace writing which is to accomplish certain social actions. A number of alumni denied learning about the purpose of writing at their college writing courses. Some of them

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understood the purpose at the workplace by practice while a new alumnus admitted that writing for various purposes is not clear *'until now'.* Although some participants acknowledged that they learned to write for various purposes at the college, such as to persuade, describe, compare and contrast, not all of them would seem to be able to *transform* this knowledge to their workplace writing which is done for achieving real purposes, such as to solve a problem or to avoid fines. This is undoubtedly due to the irresistible disparity between both contexts in terms of the purpose of writing. Hence, it was repeatedly proposed by the participants to create imaginary scenarios in the classroom which allow students to practice writing for real purposes, as illustrated by an alumnus:

> *For example, …a company or someone gets a problem then send email to fix the problem or a letter after he fix the problem, you need to send appreciation like this type of different purposes (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017).*

Apart from audience and purpose, some alumni also stated the challenges they encountered with another workplace writing feature which is writing concisely and precisely, preferred style of writing in the given workplaces. In order to successfully produce concise and precise writing, workplaces make use of numerous abbreviations and technical terms which are unique to the typical workplace, *"… it's different in XX (name of company removed) here I think someone count them, we have more than 500 to 600 shortcuts…"* (A5, 05/ 04/ 2017), as mentioned by one of the alumni. Using one term or abbreviation helps achieving conciseness and preciseness as depicted by an experienced alumnus who found it difficult to learn the workplace terminologies when he first joined the company:

> *If I don't have that key word, I need to explain this one … for example, the inflow test it's a one page procedure. If I want to explain to someone who don't know this terminology, so I need to [explain] you need to do this one and this one and open this open and close this one… see what's going you need to count how many drops, but if say he know what inflow test means, he will say ok I'm going to do it… (A5, 05 / 04/ 2017).*

The use of terminologies and abbreviations is also stressed by the line managers and one of them when asked about the writing abilities of the alumni complained that *"… we have reporting system that uses abbreviations even in that there are a lot of issues"* (M4, 05/ 04/ 2017)*.* Also, some alumni found such terminologies and 'shortcuts' difficult as they did not learn many of them at the college, as noted by one of the new alumni when asked about the challenges he faced with his workplace writing:

> *…in engineering they should add one course more about vocabularies and about the process, for example, the first time we went there, we didn't know anything about the refinery anything about like how the process is going on and the vocabularies also what is it's name what's evaporation what is condensation (A11, 21/ 05/ 2017).*

As discussed in Chapter 4, preciseness is valued in the workplace because there is no tolerance for mistakes. By preciseness, the participants meant the exact use of words and factual statements in order to convey correct information. This style of writing seems to be missing in alumni's college writing experiences. One of the alumni stated that his college writing is totally different from his workplace writing because *"most of our writing at the company is technical. I mean the words we use should exactly describe things…"* (A6, 26/04/ 2017), as he commented. Similarly, another alumnus mentioned that one of the challenges he faced at the workplace is expressing himself precisely in reports. Alumni's weakness with expressing themselves precisely is also noted by their line managers, as depicted:

> *To write an incident report, he [HCT alumni] needs to go through many steps and drafts to express the incident and select the precise words to describe it, for example, saying 'he hit his head' is completely different from saying 'something touched his head' (M3, 7th / 03/ 2017).*

Thus, lack of exposure to specific technical terminologies and abbreviations would seem to result in alumni's difficulties with adapting to the precise and concise style of writing preferred at the workplace. While it is true such terminologies and abbreviations can be unique to a particular workplace and highly situated, some alumni recalled

frequently used terminologies which they wished they had learned in their technical writing courses. Therefore, students' consciousness regarding such context-specific elements must be raised.

As identified in the previous chapter, while audience, purpose and style are regarded as rhetorical elements which shape the written communication, the findings also revealed socio-contextual elements which are observed to influence the workplace writing, such as collaborative writing and workplace physical environment.

Workplace writing is affected by various forms of collaborative writing (Bremner, 2010) occurring at the workplace context (As discussed in Chapter 4). However, some alumnus participants stated that all their college writing was done individually without collaborating with their classmates, as commented by one of the experienced alumni, "*Yeah, I never worked with group in writing basically especially in classes technical writing 1 and 2*" (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017). This implies that the feature of collaborative writing which influences the way writing is done in the workplace is not considered in college writing classes. Although this study found that writing is largely done individually in the given workplace context, various forms of collaborative writing in the workplace were identified by the participants (see Chapter 4) which should be discussed and practiced in Technical Writing courses.

Another essential socio-contextual element which alumni seem to struggle with is their ability to understand the workplace culture. Context-specific practices are recognised to shape the workplace writing practices; thus, it is mandatory to identify them. Such practices are distinctive and vary from one workplace environment to another because every organisation has its own way of doing things, as depicted by a line manager in a telecommunications company:

> *…every company has its own way of communicating, its own vocabulary and style. The communication at X (an petroleum company) is different from XY (another petroleum company), different from XX (a telecommunications company), electricity companies or ministries, so environment is an essential determinant of way of communication (M1, 20th / 02/ 2017).*

At petroleum companies, for example, the nature of work in the field is predominantly physical and technically-oriented whereas office work is mostly formal and administrative. Field culture does not require elaborated writing, while office culture entails detailed and abundant writing (As discussed in Chapter 4). When asked about the challenges he faced at the workplace, one of the experienced alumni at petroleum company expressed his difficulty with understanding the nature of work environment after moving from field to office work:

> *Well, when I joined after the fresh graduate, I was in the field… and I need you to understand the field culture. Field culture is a way different than head office culture. The field culture they have like job to be execute and then go to sleep, here no you formality you have to justify (A3, 27th / 02/ 2017).*

Therefore, students need to be aware that each workplace environment has a distinct way of communicating, so they need to be able to adapt to various environments and *"… to understand the culture of the workplace…"*, as a line manager suggested (M1, 20th / 02/ 2017). In his book, *Workplace writing: Beyond the text*, Bremner (2018, p.32) suggested that *"the genre producer would need to develop an awareness of the ways in which things are done in particular professions or organisations."* This resonates with Beauforts' (2000) discourse community knowledge which is one of the five areas of context-specific knowledge expert workplace writers should obtain.

To sum up, lack of authenticity in the writing tasks practiced in Technical Writing courses is noted to be a crucial factor shaping alumni's perceived lack of preparedness for workplace writing. The kinds of genres taught in these courses are perceived to be inadequate and irrelevant to the technical and communicative demands of workplace writing. Furthermore, inadequate authenticity is also reflected in the disparity and lack of attention given to contextual elements which shape workplace writing. While replicating the authenticity of workplace context is not possible, raising learners' consciousness regarding the kind of writing required in the workplace

and fostering their adaptability to cater for various contexts is achievable if the aim is to facilitate learners' transition to write in a new context.

5.3.2.2 Lack of effective feedback

Another crucial factor that seems to affect the perceived preparedness of the graduates for the workplace writing is lack of effective and sufficient feedback in Technical Writing courses. By feedback here I refer to form-focused feedback/error correction (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 4, all the line managers and few alumni stated that employers would attend to the formal accuracy of alumni's writing which may indicate that workplace demands accurate and clear writing (Hu & Hoare, 2017). In fact, many participants identified challenges in workplace writing related to the linguistic elements of writing, such as grammar, spelling and vocabulary, as mentioned, *"I feel little bit difficulties because when you write in English, you need to take care about your words, spelling, grammar…"* (A4, 27/ 02/ 2017). The language related difficulties were also mentioned by the line managers:

> *… there're lots of spelling mistakes basic spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes and that applies on their reports as well… there are people who do the spelling check and proof check before they send the report but based on my experience interacting with HCT students the majority of them they are struggling with that. (M4, 05/ 04/ 2017)*

Spelling would seem to be a major problem for many of the alumnus participants. A new alumnus found it difficult to spell the new words he encountered for the first time. Moreover, an experienced alumnus stated that *"yes, most people, and I'm one of them still I have this level of experience, but still I have a lot of mistakes in spelling…"* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017), and another new alumnus mentioned that his spelling is terrible although his pronunciation is good, *"only spelling because I know how to say the word…"* (A7, 26/04/ 2017). Although the alumnus participants stated that they deal with this problem by relying on auto-

check, they admitted that when they write manually, they would end up with spelling errors.

Apart from spelling, grammar is identified as one of the linguistic barriers the alumni have encountered. The knowledge of grammar is recognised as the basic minimum skills and abilities graduates should own, as stated by one of the line managers:

> *I totally agree that the college is not only HCT maybe all of them need to consider that the graduates can have the minimum capabilities of writing skills or at least he can have the good grammar…. (M2, 22/ 02/ 2017).*

Yet, HCT graduates are seen to be facing a major difficulty in grammar when writing at workplace, as commented by a new alumnus:

> *Until now, I have had this difficulty with grammar, and I know I am gonna face this challenge more at the work in the coming days when I have more writing duties. I always get confused with grammar, and it's not only me but more than 80% of us have this problem (A8, 08/ 05/ 2017).*

Such importance placed on accuracy and alumni's difficulties with achieving it in workplace writing could have contributed to alumni's views on form-focused feedback and their demands for it in Technical Writing courses.   Some alumnus participants were dissatisfied with the feedback they received from their writing teachers. For example, one of them stated that he did not get enough quality feedback on his writing, and he disappointedly commented that *"so, I don't know where I went wrong and what's my mistake in grammar, I don't know anything I don't have any feedback from him"* (A6, 26/04/ 2017). Furthermore, although some teachers did provide written corrective feedback, it was kept to the minimum and superficial level indicating a few and simple errors, as an experienced alumnus commented, *"he did check for us but not many mistakes; just simple mistakes… though there were actually a lot of mistakes, he wouldn't go deeper"* (A1, 16/ 02 /2017).

The alumnus participants seem to perceive feedback as direct or indirect (Ferris, 2006) written corrective feedback indicating clearly their grammatical errors, which is mainly form-focused or editorial

matters, such as grammar, spelling and word choice. They expected from their teachers to point out all the grammatical mistakes they made, and they did not seem to be satisfied with correcting a few errors and leaving the rest without correction. The alumnus participants would not seem to understand their teachers' expectations from them to be actively involved in the feedback procedure by identifying and correcting the rest of the errors themselves. This finding echoes that from a study by McMartin (2014), who concluded that students did not always understand why their teachers mark errors the way they do and miscomprehended their own role in the error treatment process. Furthermore, the teachers would not seem to explicitly explain to the students their feedback approach and would simply write the final grade without discussing or indicating students' strengths and weaknesses in writing [*"we feel we do well in exams, but later when it comes to results, we don't know on what basis we are given an A, B or C."* (A1, 16/ 02 /2017)]. This implies that HCT should place a great emphasis on devising standardized, clear-cut and consistent feedback procedures to be followed by all the writing teachers, and students' awareness regarding feedback should be raised. Here, I do not intend to argue for or against form-focused feedback or to claim its long run effects on learners' writing (c.f. Ferris, 2004; Truscott, 1996). However, this kind of feedback can be vital in training learners to be attentive to accuracy when they write in the workplace where there is mostly no tolerance against errors especially when communicating with external audience (Ho & Hoare, 2017).

In short, some alumni felt that their teachers did not sufficiently attend to editorial matters, i.e. spelling and grammar issues, in their written corrective feedback whereas such formal accuracy is valued in the workplace as noted in managers' responses regarding problems in alumni's writing, and as most of the alumni stated that language aspects, such as spelling and grammar, are one the major challenges they have to deal with in their workplace writing. This finding is in consistence with Schneider and Andre's (2005) study which found

feedback as one of the key factors influenced how students perceived their university preparation for workplace writing.

5.3.2.3 Graduates' attitudes

Another factor arose from alumni's discussion of their college writing experiences is their attitudes towards college writing courses, in general, and Technical Writing courses in particular. Some alumni recalled developing negative attitudes towards Technical Writing courses when they were students. Learners' motivation to learn a language is found to be associated with the clarity of purpose for learning it; they are more likely to be motivated to learn a target language when they realise practical purposes for learning it (Dorneyi, 1990; Ghaith, 2003; Oxford; 1996). Some alumni admitted that they did not feel motivated to take these courses seriously at the college, and they have not realized the importance of writing until they joined the workplace (A1, A4, A6). They partly blamed the writing teachers for this as well as they admitted their negligence and lack of interest in the technical writing courses. Learners are more likely to exert efforts if they feel that a particular course is beneficial for their future careers (González Ardeo, 2016). For instance, one of the alumni pointed that students do not take the Foundation Programme seriously and the college administration is not firmed about it, as he commented:

> *Let me speak frankly, we weren't that committed in the Foundation Programme nor the college was firm enough with us; I mean it should be firm. We considered the Foundation Programme as merely registering and attending … and now when we joined the company, we have started to feel that we have lost too much. So, I hope that the college and its administration to be strict with the students and make them feel that this foundation determines their futures, and if they don't care about it now, they will struggle a lot in the future (A6, 26/ 04/ 2017).*

This response denotes that A6 did not understand the importance of writing until he joined the workplace and realised that he did not "*put any effort nor showed any interest when education was available.*" Thus, it is not only the college to be blamed for graduates' lack of

preparedness for the workplace writing, but the learners themselves are equally responsible for this. Unlike these alumni who were not aware of the importance of ESP courses for their future career, the students in a study by Marzá (2012) were aware of the importance of ESP courses for their future career but reluctant to make efforts for ESP learning, thus, ended up with negative attitudes towards it. It was also admitted by two alumni (A1, A6) that some students would take Technical Writing courses "*for the sake of collecting grades and passing.*" Also, the leniency of some teachers did not encourage students to take the writing courses seriously. Instead, the students were more concerned with collecting high grades in such courses, as commented by one of the alumni:

> *…there are some lenient teachers [technical writing teachers] to the extent that student do not get any benefit [from their classes,] but many of them still take such classes with those teachers why? It's just for the sake of passing the course without knowing what they will face later in the workplace (A1, 16/ 02 /2017).*

Furthermore, A1 and A2 reported that they were more concerned with disciplinary courses than Technical Writing courses which they considered 'extra burden', as depicted:

> *When we were actually studying at college, we used to always wonder a lot why we take such courses [technical writing courses], and we used to think that these courses are extra ones…extra burden on us especially when you are doing specialisation which means you focus on engineering courses which have both theoretical and practical parts, and students used to grumble about the common courses (A1, 16/ 02 /2017).*

This response implies lack of interest in Technical Writing courses could be due to lack of awareness of their objectives and their importance for preparing them for workplace writing. This finding echoes that from a study by Bahous et al. (2011) who found that unclear links between English courses and future majors or careers left EFL students unmotivated to learn English. Similarly, another alumnus stated that she did not realize the benefits of what she learned in Technical Writing courses until she joined the workplace, as

she mentioned, *"For me to be honest that time it was little bit boring courses, but when I attend the work that time I understand what the benefit of that courses was…"* (A4, 27/ 02/ 2017).   This raises questions as to the extent to which learners are encouraged to understand the connection between the writing tasks in Technical Writing courses and their relevance to the real world. It also implies that students struggle to understand college's requirements and to unpack the writing demands of the writing courses (Candlin & Plum, 1999; Lea & Street, 1999). This lack of awareness of the relevance of their college writing tasks has certainly made the alumni felt underprepared for embarking on the new writing experiences.

To sum up, alumni's attitudes towards Technical Writing courses reflected in alumni's lack of interest in them could be as a result of learners' own lack of sense of responsibility for their own learning as well as college's lack of firmness in making them realise the value of writing courses for their future career.   Such attitudes in a way appeared to influence alumni's perceived preparedness for workplace writing.

5.4   Conclusion

This chapter has presented an analysis of the findings regarding RQ2 related to the views of alumni and their line managers regarding HCT alumni's preparedness for the workplace writing. The first section of the chapter presented the line managers' views and the factors shaping their views while the second section discussed alumni's views and the contributing factors influenced their views based on their college writing experiences and the challenges they encountered as a consequence of lack of college preparation to meet the demands of workplace writing.

The data revealed that generally there is dissatisfaction regarding HCT alumni's preparedness for the workplace writing as perceived by the participants. However, both alumni and their line managers had middle-of-the-road   views   regarding   college's   preparation   for workplace writing. While the managers felt that the college does play

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a role in graduates' preparation as reflected in their expectations from the college, they equally believed that the academic factors are not solely responsible for graduates' preparedness, but personal factors, such as motivation, capacities, family background and previous educational experiences, also determine their preparation. While all these factors are as important as the college writing experiences, the focus of the current study is to highlight the influence of college writing experiences on alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. Therefore, the other factors, or *ingredients of genre knowledge*, as termed by Artemeva (2009) can be further explored in future studies.

As for the alumni, most of them did acknowledge colleges' role in equipping them with the basic knowledge of writing which some of them were able to utilise in the workplace context; however, they also felt the deficiencies and disparities in their experiences of Technical Writing courses at the college have left them inadequately prepared to meet the demands of the workplace. Such deficiencies were reflected in three factors: 1) lack of authenticity, 2) lack of effective feedback, and 3) graduates' attitudes.

Lack of authenticity of the writing tasks taught in Technical Writing courses were largely discussed in the sense that such courses offered generic and non-technical writing tasks in terms of the genres and topics. Most of them also suggested elevating the specificity of Technical Writing courses to meet the demands of various disciplines offered at HCT. The alumni also suggested focusing on email writing in these courses as they perceived email as the most relevant and required genre in the workplace which they faced difficulty with in the workplace. The lack of authenticity is also inferred from alumni's views regarding the disparity between college and workplace writing in terms of the contextual elements shaping writing, such as audience, purpose and other sociocultural elements. Thus, a number of participants, both alumni and line managers, proposed raising students' awareness regarding these elements, for example, by creating authentic situations in the classroom or by exposing students to workplace writing through placements or tasks. Lack of written corrective

feedback is also regarded as a contributing factor to alumni's lack of preparedness to produce accurate and error free texts in the workplace. In addition, some alumni admitted that their careless attitude towards Technical Writing courses may have led to their lack of preparedness for which they blamed their teachers and the college in general for not being firm and for not making them aware of the importance of such courses for their future career.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The study is motivated by the overall aim to understand and problematise HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. In an attempt to achieve this aim, the study is two-fold. First, it takes a social perspective of writing to investigate the socially situated nature of genres as experienced by college alumni in the workplace. Specifically, it looks into how social/contextual elements shape the workplace writing practices of the alumni. This aim is underpinned by the argument that to understand the dynamics of writing, it should be examined as a social action that shapes and is shaped by the context surrounding it and its beliefs and values (Bazerman & Prior, 2003). This socially situated nature of writing should be incorporated in composition classes for better preparation of learners for workplace writing (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Gimenez, 2017). Second, the alumni's preparedness for workplace writing as perceived by the alumni and their line managers is examined to understand the role of the college in learners' preparedness. As a reminder, the research questions, first presented in the introduction, that guided this endeavour are:
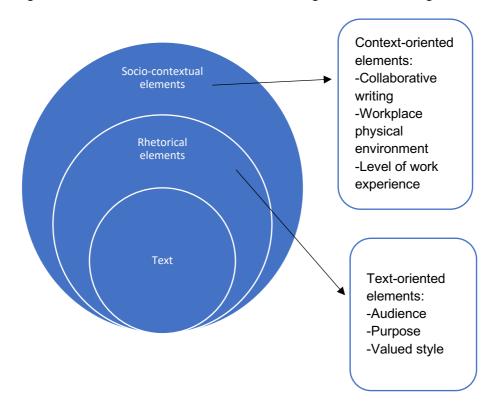
- **RQ1:** How does the socially situated nature of writing, i.e. social/contextual elements, shape alumni's workplace writing practices?
- **RQ2:** How is alumni preparedness for workplace writing perceived by the alumni and their line managers?

This chapter discusses the key findings of this study in relation to these questions and relates the themes identified in the previous chapters to the existing literature on workplace written communication and writing in composition/ESP/ technical writing classes in higher education context. This chapter first discusses the themes pertaining to RQ1 followed by the discussion of those relating to RQ2.

6.1 Contextual factors shaping alumni's workplace writing practices

The purpose of this section is to highlight the main findings related to RQ1, i.e. how the contextual elements influence alumni's workplace writing. This concern was based on the argument that in order to better equip learners for workplace writing, the situated and contextualised nature of written genres should be considered (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Moore & Morton, 2017). Simply teaching the formal conventions of genres is not effective due to the radical difference between academic and professional writing and due to the variations in written genres and writing practices in the workplace. In other words, every organisation has its own way of doing things, thus, learners should be trained to read the workplace context and understand how it constitutes written genres. Therefore, this study sought to explore how context shapes the writing practices of college alumni as self-reported by the alumni themselves, triangulated with their line managers' perceptions, who are professional members of the workplace which places them at the position of providing insights into how workplace writing is done and what are the organisational beliefs shaping their writing practices (Adam, 2000). The study revealed two levels of context at which writing operates in the studied organisations: rhetorical and socio-contextual, as shown in Figure 22 below. Both levels influence the text, however, the rhetorical elements have an immediate influence on the text, whereas the socio-contextual elements refer to broader contextual elements which influence the processes and practices surrounding the construction of a text, and which may not have a direct influence in shaping the text. The following sections will discuss the elements under each of these levels in relation to RQ1 and the existing literature.

Figure 22. Two levels of context influencing alumni's writing

Socio-contextual elements

Rhetorical elements

Text

Context-oriented elements:
-Collaborative writing
-Workplace physical environment
-Level of work experience

Text-oriented elements:
-Audience
-Purpose
-Valued style

6.1.1 Rhetorical elements

The analysis of the data from interviews and written texts has shown that the alumni accounted for rhetorical elements which have shaped their writing practices in the workplace. These elements have directly influenced alumni's written texts in terms of overall organisation, rhetorical structure, lexical choice and tone/register. Three prominent elements were identified in this study: audience, purpose and valued style.

It was stated by the participants (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.1.) that the alumni write for various internal, external and multiple audiences at the workplace. However, communicating with external audiences could be restricted to particular departments within organisations, such as the departments dealing with vendors, suppliers or customers. In harmony with Moore et al.'s (2015) study which found that most of the written communication performed by new graduates would be directed to audience within the organisation, in the current study, almost all the novice alumni said that they would mainly write for internal audiences. However, unlike Moore et al.'s findings, the participants in this study

did not attribute the restrictions to communicate with external parties to employees' level of experience, instead, even the new graduates would be allowed to deal with clients or venders if the nature of their work required it, i.e. involved in a project. In fact, as clarified by some line managers (M2, M3), external communications would be limited to certain staff whose work involves dealing with recipients outside the organisation regardless of their experience level or to certain positions with authorised access to confidential matters involving external recipients.   Writing for various and multiple audiences is a conventional practice at the workplace which, according to the alumni, has not been practiced in the technical writing courses in which they would mainly write for a single readership who is the teacher (e.g. *"[the audience was] mainly the teacher yeah … You just write, and then he will assess."* (A3, 27/ 02/ 201)). This suggests that technical writing courses at HCT should consider devising writing tasks which tackle multiple and/or various audiences.

As widely discussed in the literature, writing for multiple and diverse audiences entails careful considerations on the part of the writer, and this is pivotal for successful workplace communication (Andrea & Schneider, 2004; Knoch et al., 2016; Leydens, 2008; Paretti, 2006). Knowledge of audience characteristics helps the writer to use effective communicative strategies to influence the reader (Bhatia, 1999) and to produce reader-centred rather than writer-centred texts (Northey, 1990). The literature also suggests that writers' considerations and assumptions about their audience influence the content and form of their text (Miller & Charney, 2007). In resonance with these views, the findings of this study indicated that the adaptation of writing to tailor for various readers would seem to shape alumni's writing practices (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.1.2.). It makes a crucial difference if the document is written for superiors rather than for subordinates, or if it is written for external rather than internal audiences (Bhatia, 1999).

As shown in Chapter 4, the alumni stated that they would think about their potential audience when producing a written document in terms of three audience-related factors: familiarity with the background of the

target audience, interpersonal relationships, including hierarchical power relationships, and readers' needs and expectations. These factors are found to impact on the overall organisation, rhetorical structure, word choice and/or the tone/register of alumni's written texts. For example, some alumni commented (e.g. A1, A4) that they would not use technical terms when communicating with readers who were not familiar with technical content or certain abbreviations (unless defined). Moore et al. (2015) referred to this as the ability to *de-technicalise* one's language of disciplinary knowledge to be understood by wider audiences.

While Moore et al. highlighted the need for *de-technicalisation* as the written communication in the context of their study involved audience who would typically not share the same disciplinary background, the current study has found that technical register, or *technicalisation,* would also be considered when dealing with audience who would share the same technical background, hence, this would allow for more brevity and exclusion of details. In resonance with Miller and Charney (2007), writers decide how much they need to elaborate on their ideas depending on what they believe their readers know (*"I just write the number of the equipment, and they understand what I mean themselves … as they are aware of the functions of every equipment"* (A8, 08 / 05/ 2017). Hence, writers omit details, i.e. shared knowledge, if they think that their readers are knowledgeable and familiar with the given topic (Freedman & Adam, 2000). So, the familiarity with intended readers' background and level of knowledge (Bhatia, 1999) was noted to influence alumni's written texts in terms of technical register and degree of brevity or elaboration (as shown in Chapter 4).

Interpersonal relationship is another audience-related factor which appeared to necessitate alumni's adaptation of their writing, hence, shaping the text. Such relationships include hierarchical power relations and social distance. It was noticeable that a power imbalance has played a more important role in the choice of language for audience consideration rather than social distance, which was very rarely mentioned by the participants (*"…if the person is very close to*

us, no need to communicate with him officially so we can give him these notes, this is the common type of writing we are doing" (A10, 13/08/2018)), as opposed to AlAfnan's (2014) findings. According to the interview data analysis (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.1.2.), the alumni were aware of the difference between writing for someone high, equal or low in the power hierarchy and accordingly would adapt their writing in terms of tone as a key element of managing politeness and relationships mostly has to do with the selection of an appropriate register for communication (Bremner, 2018). Thus, more formal register would be enacted with those high in status such as managers and clients.

Politeness markers and politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) were evident in the analysed emails and reports (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.1). Both the alumni and line managers talked about adapting writing to consider for audiences with power relationships through employing different politeness strategies as reflected in the analysed written samples. However, the use of politeness strategies is not always determined by hierarchy level, rather sometimes other factors may influence the choice of strategy. For example, sometimes in task-oriented communications where the attention is shifted from satisfying the face of the recipient to getting the task done, more direct and less mitigated communicative acts were found regardless of the level of hierarchy. This means that Technical Writing courses should capture this complex view of politeness as well as the other audience-related factors. This finding aligns with previous workplace research investigated the influence of addressing readers in different power hierarchies on writing (Alafnan, 2014; Bremner, 2006; Paramasivam & Subramaniam, 2018; Harries, 2003). Also, as shown in Chapter 4, maintaining diplomacy, transparency and confidentiality was also valued in the given context, and the alumni were expected to consider it when dealing with clients who are apparently high in power hierarchy. This was noted to affect the analysed incident reports generated for the clients in terms of language, structure and amount of content and elaboration. Thus, the alumni were required to strike a

balance between transparency and diplomacy in revealing facts and information to customers, and this was reflected in their rhetorical strategies they would take through the deployment of Grice's maxims (1975) of quantity and quality (as cited in Bhatia, 1999).

Readers' needs and expectations are another audience-related factor noted to influence alumni's writing as one of the alumni (A4) stated that she would anticipate her readers' requirements before producing a text. Also, in the telecommunications company, a new version of incident report is generated using a template provided and required by an external audience. While consideration of audience and its effects on writing was mostly studied from students' perspective, either in the classroom or in internship (e.g. Herrington, 1985; Winsor, 1996), how such consideration is enacted by graduates upon fully moving to the professional context is rarely examined (Leydens, 2008, Moore et al., 2015). The key findings under the theme of 'audience' demonstrate how audience shape alumni's written texts and practices in the workplace and how they enacted it in the socially situated nature of workplace writing.

The findings also bear implications for technical writing/ESP courses or composition classroom to consider raising students' awareness regarding adaptation of writing to tailor for various audiences other than the teacher. In her study of examining writing assignments in business courses, Zhu (2004) concluded that writing for business audiences represented one of the ways of initiating students into real-world writing tasks, hence, students need to have a solid sense of audience. Similarly, Paretti stressed the need for practicing audience awareness in composition classroom and specifically focused on tailoring texts to meet the information needs of audiences. Nevertheless, audience awareness is not paid attention to in Technical Writing courses as the alumni (see Chapter 5) in this study stated that lack of awareness of potential readerships was one of the contributing factors to their perceived lack of preparedness for workplace writing demands (as will be discussed in section 6.2.2).

Likewise, given the link between power relationships and politeness, the need for teaching pragmatic competence in EFL classrooms in general (Saadatmandi et al., 2018), and ESP in particular (Shooshtari et al. 2017) is highly called upon in studies in the EFL context. In fact, in their study of politeness markers in ESP textbooks, Shooshtari et al. (2017) concluded that ESP courses should highly consider raising students' awareness of politeness strategies to develop their cross-cultural communication, i.e. to avoid misconception and communication breakdown. Locally, Al-Mahrooqi (2012) found that pragmatic competence is neglected in the Omani school and college curricula while it is considered vital communicative skill which should be emphasised in English classroom given the challenges Omani graduates have faced in communicating with multicultural audiences (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

Another rhetorical element which was found to shape alumni's writing practices is the purpose for writing (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.2.). The centrality of purpose in shaping a genre is well attested in the literature of genre analysis (see Bhatia, 2014 & 1993; Swales, 1990) as it is considered an influential factor in creating and shaping genres. With regard to the purpose, the current study yielded a host of overlapping rhetorical, organisational and individual purposes for alumni's writing in the workplace (section 4.1.2.1.). Such findings indicate the multifunctionality of workplace genres as they serve a single or multiple purpose (Bhatia, 1999). The multi-purposes are reflected in the combination of more immediate purposes with the overarching ones (ibid). The findings also reveal that the alumni would manipulate genres in order to serve different purposes. For instance, As illustrated in Chapter 4 (section 4.1.2.2.), the alumni in telecommunications companies would create different versions of an incident report to inform the customer about the reason for network fault and to keep a record of the incident as a reference for future similar incidents. This variation in the purpose has affected the schematic structure of these reports as well as the content (e.g. amount of details). The influence of purpose was also demonstrated

through the analysis of emails, drilling process document, daily reports and a lab report (section 4.1.2.2.). The analysis revealed that the purpose of the given documents has shaped the overall organisation, rhetorical structure of these documents and the linguistic choices made to serve the purpose.

Two fundamental implications can be sought from these findings. First, learners' awareness regarding instrumental purposes for writing in the workplace must be raised in technical writing classes where the purpose of writing is mainly for knowledge demonstration and for getting assessed by their teachers as stated by some alumni. Second, explicit instructions regarding how purpose is realised in the structure and linguistic choices of genres should be emphasised because when asked whether they learned about the purpose of writing in Technical Writing courses, most of the alumni were uncertain and a number of them denied it. This could be explained by absence/lack of explicitness in the pedagogies followed in these courses. Thus, more explicit approach in teaching writing must be employed, for instance, through genre-based pedagogy which entails an overt approach of teaching writing allowing for a conscious manipulation of structure, grammatical and lexical choices in response to contextual recurrent situations (Hyland, 2003). The effectiveness of genre-based pedagogy in ESP context in enhancing learners' awareness of rhetorical parameters such as audience and purpose (Badger & White, 2000) and their influence on a text has also been proven in previous studies (Cheng, 2008; Yasuda, 2011) as it is regarded as "a means of presenting students with explicit and systematic explanations of the ways writing works to communicate" (Hyland, 2007b, p. 150).

The valued style of writing, i.e. preciseness and conciseness, was also noted by the participants to be crucial and manifested in alumni's written texts in various forms (see Chapter 4 section 4.1.3.). Generally, workplace writing is characterised by preciseness and conciseness which allow for accurate, quick and efficient communication (Zhu, 2004). In resonance with previous studies which found that accurate and precise writing is valued in the workplace

(Sales, 2006; Steiner, 2011), the participants in this study reported that preciseness feature is crucially valued in the given context of the workplace writing as there no tolerance against mistakes which may result in hazardous repercussions for the organisation ("if the contractors make any mistake even an error in a single code in the highly sensitive documents, this will cost the company thousands and millions amounts of money…" (A9, 08 / 05/ 2017)). Besides, employees are accountable for whatever they write officially. Thus, as the participants emphasised, carefulness must be maintained in lexical choices which exactly express the intended meaning. The findings implied that this accountability and criticality is not only confined to senior employees' writing, but novices are also expected to be accountable for what they write even in their simple routine tasks of producing brief and simple reports or emails as any workplace writing can have "immediate economic as well as personal consequences" (Odell & Goswami, 1982, p. 202).

One way this preferred feature is manifested in alumni's written samples is through the use of factual information, for instance, exact timings, percentages, and technical terminologies as observed in the analysed emails and reports (section 4.1.3.1.) and reported by the alumni and the line managers (section 4.1.3.). In fact, the participants reported that each organisation uses its own terminologies and abbreviations which many of the alumni have struggled to acquaint themselves with when they first joined the workplace. While some of these terms are specific to particular organisations and can be learned with practice after commencing the job, some alumni argued that technical writing courses should pay considerable attention to teaching at least frequently used technical words relevant to engineering. Although Technical Writing courses do include units on technical vocabulary (two units in each course), these were not perceived as adequate and specific enough to the engineering discipline as these courses are 'common core' which caters for different disciplines (this will be discussed further in section 6.2).

Abbreviations and technical terms are also used to achieve brevity in the given workplace context. For instance, as one of the alumni (A5) depicted, one term can be sufficient to describe a process which otherwise requires unnecessary blocks of writing. Likewise, aligning with Moore et al.'s (2015) finding, in this study, the line managers (M2, M4) advocated the use of abbreviations and short sentences due to the busy nature of the workplace which values quick and efficient information exchange, and where readers do not have time to read lengthy documents. Brevity is reflected in the report and email samples in the form of symbols, abbreviations, bullet points (instead of paragraphs), and one or two liner emails (section 4.1.3.1.). In fact, such features are eased by computer-mediated communication. For instance, email chains facilitate the exchange of quick and brief messages without the need for repeating information or opening/closing phrases. The influence of technology on business communication is another area of research which is beyond the scope of this study and can be further investigated in future studies. In resonance with Mulholland (1999), there seems to be preference for brevity in language use in email messages in the given context of study as all the analysed emails are short and concise. This valued style of writing in the workplace was contrasted with the lengthy and extended essays or paragraphs the alumni would write in college [*"Actual writing not essays not long paragraphs; we should make it as short as possible"* (A10, 13/08/2018)]. The findings suggest that students should be trained to write concisely, and they must be sensitised regarding adopting styles of writing preferred by the potential workplaces.

6.1.2 Socio-contextual elements

Apart from the textual-oriented elements discussed above, the analysis also revealed that alumni's workplace writing practices are also shaped by socio-contextual elements particular to the studied workplace context. The findings relevant to these elements are based on the self-reported data from the alumni and line managers albeit there were occasional instances when such data were corroborated

by textual evidences. The socio-contextual elements include the discursive practices surrounding the construction of a written text but may not be directly reflected in the text, and they appear to broadly influence the overall writing practices of the alumni. The study has identified three of such elements: collaborative writing, the physical environment and level of work experience.

Collaborative writing (CW) is extensively investigated in previous studies of workplace writing, and it is considered a prominent feature of workplace writing (Bhatia, 2014, Bremner, 2010, Bremner et al., 2014, Burnett, 2001, Faigley & Miller, 1982; Gimenez & Thondhlana, 2012). Burnett (2001) noted that 75% to 85% of workplace writing is done collaboratively. Similarly, Knoch et al. (2016), reported that CW, or team writing as they named it, is common in engineering and accountancy report writing. Nevertheless, in the current study, when CW is probed, the blunt response of most of the participants was rejecting it and asserting the prevalence of individual writing in their organisations (see 4.2.1). However, this is largely because of the narrow understanding the participants held of the nature and form of CW as they perceived it as a conventional form of direct joint writing which involves a group of people sitting and drafting collaboratively. Alumni's such tight understanding of CW could be influenced by their limited experiences, if any at all, with CW in their college writing courses. This is also reported by Freedman and Adam (1996) who contemplated that one of their participants carried with him from the university to the workplace the notion of CW as merely dividing up a task. Although previous studies (Bremner, 2010; Freedman et al., 1994) observed the disparities and gaps between the nature of CW in both academic and professional context, how much this is true about the context of this study has not been tackled in limited scope of the current study. Future studies could explore this phenomenon in a particularised manner.

Nevertheless, here I do not intend to undermine or disregard this direct and joint conceptualisation of CW which is also echoed by Ede and Lunsford who defined CW simply as "any writing done in collaboration

with one or more persons" (1990, p.15-16). In fact, some participants (A2, A3, A4, M2, M3) reported the occasional occurrence of this form of CW when working in projects when a wide range of expertise and skills are required to work in teams, or when required by managers due to contextual exigencies. Jones (2005 & 2007) referred to this form as group writing and found it to be the least frequent form of CW in workplace technical writing. In addition, this direct form of CW can also be non-simultaneous, as reported by A5. This includes collaborative drafting but 'not on the same table', for instance, each member drafts his part separately, combine it into one document and revise it before signing it off. This practice is also reported by the engineers in Knoch et al.'s (2016) study.

After further clarifications, the data revealed that other forms of CW do exist in the studied contexts (section 4.2.1.1). This takes an indirect and covert form of CW comprising of culling input from other people or departments and different types of intertextuality, which generally entails drawing on other texts. Here, I adopt a broader definition of CW to include "interaction by an author or authors with people, documents, and organisational rules in the process of creating documents" (Jones, 2005, p.450). This definition emphasises oral and written interactions as forms of CW including intertextuality and single authorship and does not confide it to direct joint composition.

Different types of CW have impacted alumni's writing practices in terms of the processes and discursive practices they would be involved in while constructing a text. To illustrate, the occasional direct simultaneous joint writing involves face-to-face discussions on the content and structure of the target text along with joint and group drafting. On the other hand, in non-simultaneous joint writing, which is reported in this study and previous studies (e.g. Gimenez & Thondhlana, 2012; Lowry et al, 2004) to be more frequent than drafting synchronously, writing is still done by different members, but it is not done in the conventional group physical setting, rather the contribution of the members would be at a distant and in parallel or unparallel manner. So, substantial communications and negotiations would take

place among the involved individuals through phone calls or email. When each member completes his part, the produced text is reviewed and signed by all the group members. This non-simultaneous direct CW does also consist of drafting a text, such as a report, in a sequential manner. This happens when taking over a shift, checking previous shift's writing and completing it (see section 4.2.1.1.). Hence, the synchronicity (the time a group writes) and proximity (the physical distance of a group) are CW work modes, as coined by Lowry et al. (2004), which seem to influence the writing practices of the alumni in different ways.

While these two types are regarded as direct CW, indirect forms of CW were noted to be substantively ubiquitous in the studied workplace context. These forms shape the practices the alumni get involved in while constructing a text. To explain, though the actual writing would be done individually, the alumni and their line managers reported that the input for a text is usually obtained from different sources which could be other employees or departments (see section 4.2.1.1.). This process involves following up and communicating with others through email or phone calls. The acquired input could be in a form of information, opinion, assistance with language or technological tools, or seeking higher managements' approval of technical content. Similar kinds of collaboration have also been observed in previous studies. For instance, Jones (2007) found that technical communicators involved in his study frequently engaged in this form of collaboration when they interact with other people to provide/obtain content or monitor/get monitored. This form is termed author- centred collaboration which "involves a single writer who does most of the work and is responsible for the project" (Jones, 2005, p. 453).

Similarly, intertextuality which is the other form of this indirect CW entails obtaining input from other sources, yet such sources are mainly written texts. Jones (2007) found contextual collaboration, i.e. intertextuality, to be the most frequent form of collaboration taken place in technical communicators' writing practices. Intertextuality, or 'intertextual borrowing' as termed by Freedman et al., (1996), is

recognised to be a pervasive feature of workplace writing (Bremner & Costley, 2018). It not only explains the links between texts but is also a key factor influencing the way in which texts are created (Bremner, 2008). In the current study, three kinds of intertextuality seem to be manifested in the writing practices as reported by the alumni and the line managers (see section 4.2.1.1.). For example, *referential intertextuality* is reflected in alumni's directly referring to other written discourse, such as emails or reports, spoken discourse, such as phone calls or face-to-face discussions. Bremner and Costley (2018) cautioned that intertextuality is not limited to the interweave among written texts, but spoken discourse also helps shape the texts constructed in the workplace. For instance, Nickerson (2000), Evans (2012) and Warren (2015) noted that intertextuality is evident in workplace emails as they draw on previous written texts, e.g. report or other emails in the chain, as well as spoken discourses such as meetings or phone conversations.

Additionally, *generic intertextuality* is manifested in alumni's drawing on templates or other texts written in response to a similar situation when constructing a new text. *Functional intertextuality* influences alumni's writing practices when they get engaged in interconnected interactions in the form of chains of emails to respond to a particular issue, or when they refer to company's writing guidelines for constructing a text, thus, their texts are influenced by other texts in the system. Among these three types of intertextuality only *referential intertextuality* is directly reflected in the written texts in phrases such as *'as discussed earlier' or 'as discussed on the phone'* as this is "perhaps the most visible form of intertextuality" (Bremner, 2008, p. 308). These forms of intertextuality are also found by Cheng and Mok (2008) to be evident in Request for Information (RFI) written by civil engineering land surveyors in Hong Kong. Similarly, three of them are also evident in tax computation letters analysed by Flowerdew and Wan (2006).

Despite its centrality in the workplace context, CW seems to be absent from alumni's writing experiences in Technical Writing courses at

college, as reflected by some alumni (A1, A2, A3). The importance of practicing CW in the writing classroom is emphasised in the literature (Nelson, 2003) and has been associated with learners' readiness for the workplace (Chen et al., 2004). Bremner (2010) stressed that it is imperative to make learners in ESP courses aware of the differences in CW practiced in the classroom and workplace contexts. Admittedly, all forms of CW occurring in the workplace reflect the social process of workplace writing and emphasise the idea that writing is context-bound. For instance, teaching learners about intertextuality in composition classroom help them understand that writing does not occur in vacuum, rather it is a part of ongoing dialogic process and a response to current or previous situations (Bremner, 2008), and this dialogue has an impact on the ways in which a text is constructed (Bremner & Costley, 2018). Intertextuality also makes the learners understand that a text cannot be produced without referring to previous texts, community expectations and preferred styles (Bremner, 2008). Jones (2007) advocated the teaching of various forms of CW, among them is contextual collaboration, which resembles generic intertextuality, as it was the most frequent type of CW practiced by technical communicators in his study. The findings of how CW influences the writing practices of the alumni in the current study provide valuable implications for ESP practitioners in general, and Technical Writing courses developers at HCT in particular, to take on board the complexities and realities of the nature of CW enacted in the workplace when developing writing tasks.

Apart from CW, another socio-contextual element which appeared to shape alumni's workplace writing practices is the workplace physical environment. Although a few participants mentioned this factor in relation to the writing practices, such responses yielded interesting findings which add to the socio-contextual elements shaping alumni's writing practices (see section 4.2.2.). The findings illustrated that a fewer writing responsibilities are given to the alumni working in field, i.e. oil fields/refineries/sites, compared to those engineers working in the office. Support from the literature is scarce as this issue has not

been specifically tackled. However, the practices of various technical sectors in general have been addressed. Previous studies reported conflicting views regarding the writing practices of technical fields. While some studies reported the perceived importance and high frequency of writing in technical firms such as engineering (e.g. Faigley & Miller, 1982) and accounting (Northey, 1990), others (e.g. Penrose, 1976) noted that writing in technical firms to be of less importance compared to the technical skills.

While variation in writing practices within the boundaries of one organisation or sector is reported in previous studies (Machili, 2014), this has been addressed in relation to level of post (Anderson, 1985; Gunnarsson, 1997) or year of experience (Beaufort, 2000), while the findings of the current study involves variation triggered by spatial exigencies. So, within the same organisation, the variation was noted in the writing practices of the alumni. The writing duties of those in the field are confined to short emails or brief reporting notes, rather than detailed reports written in the office. This distinction could be attributed to the nature of these two environments as noted by some participants. To explain, the field work necessitates more technical and physical work rather than ascribing importance to written communication skills, unlike the office work which is characterised as bureaucratic where administrative and paperwork are valued more. There seems to be more flexibility and looseness in the writing expected from field engineers which does not require high level of writing skills, rather 'simple emails' and one or two-liner emails are usually practiced as the major concern is to get the job done quickly. In fact, it was noted by one of the participants that most communications in the field are done orally for quick execution of work (A6). In contrast, office engineers are expected to conform to the formal and official conventions of writing prescribed by the organisation as well as they are expected to document every activity.

The field culture would seem to resemble organic, innovative organisations which is characterised by informality and casualness in terms of duties and conduct, as one participant described it "*The field*

culture they have like job to be execute and then go to sleep" (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017), whereas the office culture can be equated with bureaucratic and mechanistic organisations which are mostly typified by formality and tightness of conduct (Morand, 1995) [*here [office] no you [maintain] formality you have to justify* (A3, 27/ 02/ 2017)]. Furthermore, it was also noted that field alumni would write their daily reports/reviews manually and one alumnus stated that he would type his notes on computer after returning to his office.

So, such writing practices are influenced by the environmental constraints which can be accounted for through social constructionism lens which stresses the reciprocal relationship between writing and the organisational context. This can also be explained through the notion of organisational culture (Schein, 2010) which novices entering a new organisation are expected to read (see Chapter 2 section 2.1.3.5). Organisation's physical environment represents an artefact in the organisational culture, and the field and office environments can be seen as sub-cultures with different values and norms within the same organisational culture. Although this artefact does not directly shape the written text, it impacts on the processes and discursive practices surrounding the construction of the text. This implies that being able to decipher the culture of a specific organisation is essential for learners joining the workplace. Thus, it is imperative that writing courses in the college raise learners' awareness regarding the notion of organisational culture, and how this shapes the written genres.

Physical environment element seems to overlap with another socio-contextual element which is level of experience (see section 4.2.3.). This overlap is evident as most novice alumni in this study are field engineers. Therefore, some of their writing practices may be shaped by the interplay of both of these elements. For instance, brief emails and one-liner or quick notes reporting practiced by A6, A10, A11, A12 can also be attributed to their being newcomers, besides being field/site engineers. Nevertheless, what is more interesting and exclusive in this element is the gradual process of writing followed in the given organisations to induct the newcomers. So, brief and limited

writing done at the beginning of employment will gradually turn into more complicated writing tasks such as devising standard updates or creating new genres from scratch. This can be accounted for through the analytical perspective developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) with respect to situated learning: "legitimate peripheral participation", in which novices are engaged in simple tasks gradually moving to more complex tasks to become fully-fledged members of the community.

The allocation of writing task according to the level of experience is also reported in previous studies (Anderson, 1985; Beaufort, 2000). However, what this study is concerned about is that the level of experience contributes to the writing practices and to understand why the alumni write the way they do. For instance, the pre-set template with notes reporting daily operations provided by A10 takes this form not only because field engineers are expected to do brief reporting but also due to the alumnus being a novice. This was also confirmed by asking A10 follow up questions after analysing his written sample. In addition, all the novices reported that they do limited writing with extensive use of templates, while the experienced alumni when asked about the kinds of documents they produce in the workplace, they stated that they get involved in writing complicated and detailed various kinds of genres.

Another element which seems to influence novices' writing is feedback practices they have got involved in after joining the workplace community. The responses regarding this element varied (see section 4.2.3.). A few alumni stated that they received feedback when they were novices, but surprisingly the majority of the newcomer alumni in this study reported that they do not receive any feedback on their writing from managers or seniors unless they initiate it themselves ("*No, but sometimes I ask for help can you check, is it correct or not, but I get it as other side of opinion not as you check my writing*" (A7, 26 /04/ 2017)). So, they either ask for help from their colleagues or seniors, or they rely on previous documents or internet search. This aspect of seeking assistance/revision was also briefly touched upon above when discussing CW practices, but most of the aspect of

feedback was probed and discussed in the relation to novices' writing practices and was rarely mentioned by the participants in the context of CW where revision/editing was reported as part of the CW writing process and rarely to provide/seek language input which was solely stated by the novices when asked about CW.

The feedback practices the alumni would get engaged in when they joined the workplace as novices constitute the discursive practices surrounding the construction of a text which may not be directly manifested in the text but does certainly play a role in shaping it. For instance, a few alumni mentioned receiving feedback regarding different writing aspects, such as content, format, spelling, vocabulary, structure and tone, so this input will eventually shape the final product (see section 4.2.3.). Pogner (2003) investigated the interactive process of producing a text written by Danish consultant engineers through analysing the writers' comments and revisions of the text. Although Pogner's concern was more on highlighting writers' reactions to their readers' revisions and comments, his findings elucidated the influence of these discursive practices in shaping the final version of the text. Nevertheless, demonstrating how a text evolves through this discursive revision practice is beyond the scope of this study and would be interesting to investigate in future research.

It is also worth explicating that the novice alumni were more inclined to deny receiving any feedback on their writing compared to the experienced alumni, and this could be due to the limited writing tasks they are assigned being novices and some of them site engineers, too. However, this is not entirely true as the findings also suggested that variation in feedback practices also depends on the organisation, the novices' readiness to receive comments and the managers' willingness to provide feedback.

The findings pertaining to feedback have fundamental implications for the alumni, writing teachers and the line managers. Certainly, novice employees have to acquire context specific knowledge (Beaufort, 2000) through socialisation processes in which they are being

inducted by more senior employees to become fully-fledged members of a discourse community (Machili, 2014). Also, knowing how to work constructively with others is essential for learning and understanding the workplace wiring practices (Angouri & Harwood, 2008). However, given that feedback could be a way of inducting the novices (Ledwell-Brown, 2000), there seems to be lack awareness on the part of the alumni and some line managers regarding this method of inducting, and this could account for alumni's perceived lack of preparedness and struggle with understanding the rhetorical demands of workplace writing. This lack of awareness is reflected in some of the alumni's responses when feedback was probed. Some alumni (e.g. A1, A7, A10) expressed their hesitance with regard to seeking help from their managers and would not like to show their lack of knowledge or would not prefer to be corrected. Also, one of the line managers' (M4) feedback approach is to recommend a language course to those with poor language skills. These responses imply that there is lack of clarity about the role of the workplace community in training the novices to perform the writing demands of the workplace. The managers may not see providing feedback on newcomers' writing as their responsibility (Freedman & Adam, 2000; Ledwell-Brown, 2000), and the novice alumni might not approach feedback as a way of inducting them in the values and expectations of the new discourse community (Ledwell-Brown, 2000).

Learners should be taught how they should go about acquiring the workplace specific knowledge after moving to the professional context, e.g. establishing a comfortable relationship with their mentors (Freedman & Adam, 2000), seeking out templates or soliciting comments on their writing from supervisors and colleagues (Schneider & Andre, 2005) and not simply overlook learning opportunities in the new context, as Freedman and Adam (1996) maintained that students joining the workplace "not only need to learn new genres of discourse but they also need to learn new ways to learn such genres" (1996, p. 424). For instance, students should be trained to take an active role in their socialisation and taught socialisation techniques, such as

questioning—as Sammi, Bremner's case, did use when she joined the workplace as a skill, she recalled learning in her communication course (Bremner, 2012). Similarly, Dias et al. (1999) proposed providing students with learning opportunities similar to those likely to be encountered in the workplace, i.e. moving from facilitated performance (guided learning) to attenuated authentic participation (simple tasks as newcomers), to legitimate peripheral participation (complicated tasks as full participation). Most importantly, learners should be made aware that learning to write is an ongoing process which starts in the university but continues after joining the workplace (Ledwell-Brown, 2000). Additionally, the findings also imply that the line managers should play an active role in inducting the newcomers in order to facilitate their socialisation into the new discourse community.

6.1.3 Summary and implications

The focus of this study is largely pedagogic and motivated with the concern of preparing learners for the workplace writing. Hence, in the discussion of the main findings above, pedagogic implications associated with each contextual element is provided. The findings discussed above can be considered as snapshots of the contextual elements found to influence alumni's writing practices in this particular context of study bearing that these elements are not inclusive but representative of the nature of workplace writing as experienced by the involved participants in the given particular workplace communities. Thus, given the context-bound nature of workplace writing and that every community has its own way of doing things, similar or different contextual elements may be negotiated differently in studies conducted in other contexts. Here, I should also acknowledge that I do not perceive text-context relationship as a one-way impact, rather it is reciprocal. Although the focus of this study is on the influence of context on text, the text does also shape the organisational communities where it is produced in various ways as it is used as an artefact to achieve organisational goals, and this seems to be implied by the findings of the study though it is not foregrounded.

Bremner (2018) called for going beyond the text level in order unveil the complexities involved in workplace writing. He maintained that "writing in workplace contexts is surrounded and shaped by the wide variety of factors that are found there" (ibid, p. 136). Among these, he highlighted collaborative writing, intertextuality, channels of communication and covert or overt context-specific practices. The current study explores and adds to these existent elements. The elements identified in this study and how they impact on workplace writing can inform ESP or technical writing courses intended to prepare learners for workplace writing. Teachers can devise materials which enable learners to communicate with various and multiple readerships with various techniques involving the audience-related factors identified in the findings. Furthermore, the study also revealed a number of writing functions in the workplace along with their

realisations in the written samples which can be utilised to explicitly explain the communicative purpose of a particular genre. These rhetorical elements can be taught through providing imaginary scenarios or involving students with real projects when they have to deal with real audiences and write for instrumental purposes rather than merely for grading (see Bremner et al., 2014; Hafner, 2013). Another context-specific factor found in this study is writing precisely and concisely as a valued style of writing in the studied workplaces to avoid economic or personal hazards. One way to achieve this is to learn the technical terms and abbreviations specific to each organisation after moving to the workplace. Such terms may not be fully covered in the classroom, but discipline-specific frequently used words can be introduced to students. Furthermore, activities on precise and concise writing, along with explicit consciousness raising, can be designed by teachers to prepare the learners for this workplace valued feature. The findings revealed different manifestations of precise and concise writing in the analysed written sample which can be utilised for developing such exercises.

I regard these three elements, namely audience, purpose and valued style, as rhetorical and text-related elements with explicit manifestation in the text. However, the study also revealed another level of context at which writing in the workplace operates, which I called socio-contextual elements shaping the writing practices and processes surrounding the construction of a text including collaborative writing (CW), physical environment and level of experience. A number of forms of CW have been revealed by the study which can be practiced in the classroom, for instance, direct and indirect, e.g. intertextuality, forms of CW which involve a lot of negotiations with others as well as drawing on written or spoken discourses. Though it has not been illuminated in this study due to its holistic nature, but teachers can also delve into the various roles which can be performed by writers in a CW activity and the conflicts that they are more likely to encounter (see Bremner 2010, Dias et al, 1999). Additionally, the physical environment which the engineer graduates are more likely to join has

an impact on what and how they write, for instance, site engineers have a fewer and limited writing duties compared to the office engineers and expected to produce brief and quick texts, either emails or daily reports. In writing courses, teachers should raise learners' awareness regarding writing in various workplace environments, and how this impacts on their writing. As mentioned earlier, learners can be trained to write under various spatial or temporal constraints. Similarly, level of experience determines the types of genres and amount of writing assigned to employees as well as includes the feedback practices affecting their writing process being novice writers. Thus, learners should be sensitised regarding what is expected from them as newcomers and that they should take an active role in learning and unpacking workplace genres as discussed in previous section.

Hence, these elements can be utilised in technical writing classroom as tools to train learners to unpack the workplace context either through exercises or awareness-raising, however, this should be done with two caveats. First, these elements can be used as a starting point for developing ESP/ Technical Writing courses as they are not inclusive and there are a wide range contextual factors in the workplace which the learners should analyse after they enter the workplace. Second, every organisation has its own way of doing things, so the learners should be made aware of exploring and reading workplace context as they move from one workplace context to another. So, instead of only teaching genres with fixed structures, learners should also be taught to adapt and manipulate their writing according to various rhetorical and contextual situations (see below section 6.2.1), besides, they should be equipped with analytical tools to be able to observe and analyse the local context (Angouri & Harwood, 2008).

6.2 Factors shaping stakeholders' perceptions of HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing

The second part of the thesis investigates the alumni and the line managers' perceptions regarding HCT alumni's preparedness for meeting the demands of workplace writing. The key finding is that both stakeholders held middle-of-the-road views regarding HCT's role in alumni's readiness for workplace writing. To explain, while the line managers acknowledged that HCT does have a role to play in preparing its graduates for workplace writing, they also believed that there are other personal factors that may influence their preparedness. In the same vein, the alumni acknowledged that HCT does play a role in their preparedness to a certain degree but still felt inadequately prepared by their college writing courses to meet the demands of workplace writing. The following sections will discuss the findings related to the key factors shaping these perceptions to address RQ 2.

6.2.1 Genre awareness

One of the key findings is that genre awareness appeared to shape the participants' views of HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. According to Johns (2015), genre awareness is an approach "designed to assist students in developing the rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting their previously held socio-cognitive genre knowledge ("schemas") to ever-evolving contexts" (p.116). This approach is reflected in alumni's views of their college writing experience in preparing them for workplace writing as most of them acknowledged the value of the basic genre knowledge they gained in the college (see section 5.3.1.). For instance, technical description essay, process essay, charts, letters and CV were regarded useful schematic knowledge which had helped some alumni after graduating and joining the workplace. However, there were few deviant cases which did not share this view and regarded what they learned at college as not useful or irrelevant, e.g. essays. They seemed to lack genre awareness and could not utilise their schematic knowledge in a

new context, thus, felt not prepared well by Technical Writing courses for workplace writing.

These findings are in congruence with previous studies in which graduates and interns' perceptions of the preparation for workplace writing were shaped by their acknowledgement of the foundation laid by their college writing courses (Knock et al, 2016; Schneider &Andre, 2005). However, while Knoch et al.'s findings did not reveal the nature of this foundation or schematic knowledge that shaped their participants' perceptions, the basic knowledge recognised to be useful for workplace writing preparation by Schneider and Andre's participants was in a form of analytical and research skills, collaborative writing and formal knowledge of a number of workplace genres. In the current study, however, the basic knowledge has been identified only in a form of a host of workplace genres and their conventions. Academic writing skills like summarising and paraphrasing taught in the revised Technical Writing courses were not mentioned by the alumni in the list of the basic knowledge as they might not have seen them as useful or relevant to the workplace writing in engineering field (though one manager did mention the need for teaching such skills for writing long documents such as company's standards/procedures) unlike Schneider and Andre's participants belonging to social sciences disciplines. Also, collaborative writing was not stated by the alumni as an important skill learned in Technical Writing courses, and this indicates the absence of this skill in these courses— as confirmed by a number of alumni— or it may be due to alumni's lack of awareness of the forms of CW as discussed above (in 6.1.2).

Furthermore, Sammi, a case in Bremner's (2012) academy-workplace transition study, did refer to concepts she studied in *Organisational Culture and Communication* course at university. What she referred to was related to reading the workplace culture, which the alumni in the current study did not mention at all. This is not surprising as how to read the workplace culture is not emphasised in Technical Writing courses at the college. Nevertheless, what these findings suggest is

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that the academy does play a role in preparing learners for workplace writing no matter how different these two worlds are (Artemeva, 2009; Bremner, 2012, 2018; Galtens, 2000; Le Maistre & Paré, 2004; Schneider & Andre, 2005).

The findings also reported that some of those who recognised the importance of the basic knowledge of writing regarded adapting it to the new rhetorical context, i.e. genre awareness, challenging and tried different strategies such as relying on the internet, learning from others or merely depending on trial and error to utilise it appropriately. This resonates with what Smart and Brown (2002) alluded to as cultural artefacts which can work as mediating tools to enable novice graduates to reinvent or resituate their genre knowledge previously gained in academic setting. Delving into these strategies is beyond the scope of this study, but it would be interesting to explore such strategies or contextual cues which can trigger schematic knowledge and enhance genre awareness in future studies. This is relevant to the need to raise learners' consciousness of socialising techniques to learn, build on or adapt their genre knowledge to the new context as previously discussed (see Section 6.1.2). The line managers also expected from the Technical Writing courses to equip graduates with the basic knowledge such as email and rhetorical elements, i.e. audience and purpose, which they can apply and build on after moving to the professional context. Thus, what these findings imply is that Technical Writing courses should adopt a genre awareness approach as opposed to genre acquisition (Johns, 2015) (see Chapter 5). In other words, more attention should be given to raising learners' awareness regarding adapting their genre knowledge to the new rhetorical context (Moore & Morton, 2017).

It would seem that Technical Writing courses focus on teaching genres with predetermined or 'staged' structures, i.e. genre acquisition, e.g. four-five paragraphs essays or limited and fixed types of reports, rather than focusing on rhetorical and contextual adaptability. From my own experience as Technical Writing courses instructor, I can recall making minimum reference to audience, but the central focus has always been

on the text and its structural and linguistic features. Previous studies also advocated the use of genre awareness in technical writing classroom. For instance, Johns (2015) applied genre awareness approach with her students who were required to produce a personal statement essay when transitioning from secondary school to university. This approach has allowed her students to examine both text and context along with their previous schematic genre knowledge to assess their new writing task. It has also helped to be analysts of the given genre and its context of situation before producing the text. In the same vein, Devitt (2004 & 2009) advocated the use of critical genre awareness pedagogy through which students are encouraged to use their rhetorical antecedents when acquiring new genres instead of focusing on formulaic types of texts, besides, being critical of genres they may encounter in new contexts and modifying them as required by a particular rhetorical situation. A step further, Yayli (2011) identified cross-genre awareness, i.e. transferring generic features belonging to a genre while being engaged in another genre, which should be stressed in genre-based instructions.

Although genre awareness has helped some alumni to relearn new genres in the workplace context, not everyone possessed this awareness and could not utilise their genre knowledge previously gained into the new context, hence, most of the alumni regarded this knowledge to be useful but inadequate to meet the demands of the workplace writing, therefore, their middle-of-the-road views are partly shaped by the deficiencies in their writing experiences in Technical Writing courses.

6.2.2 Deficiencies in college writing experiences

The alumni's perceptions[6] of their preparedness for workplace writing is partly shaped by the deficiencies they recognised in their writing

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[6] These findings are mainly related to alumni's views as the managers are not aware of such deficiencies in the writing courses at HCT. However, the managers' findings related to the factor 'expectations from HCT' are integrated here when applicable.

experiences in Technical Writing courses, as illustrated in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.2.). These findings are valuable as they bear a lot of implications for the role should be played Technical Writing courses at HCT as informed by alumni's experiences in these courses in relation to their perceived preparedness. The deficiencies are fundamentally related to lack of task authenticity, lack of effective feedback and graduates' attitudes towards Technical Writing courses.

6.2.2.1 Lack of task authenticity

Inadequate authenticity of tasks practiced in Technical Writing courses would seem to shape how the alumni perceived their preparedness for workplace writing. This insufficiency is reflected in the irrelevance and the disparity between the tasks in Technical Writing courses and the writing tasks required from the engineer alumni in the workplace. One of the key findings related to this issue is lack of specificity of the writing tasks in Technical Writing courses. Many of the alumni stressed the need for more specific writing tasks related to their engineering discipline and the requirements of the workplace (see section 5.3.2.1.). For instance, despite the explicit explanation provided in the current Technical Writing courses regarding the relevance of the genres and writing tasks practiced to all the disciplines in a way or another, one of them perceived writing scientific reports as irrelevant to engineering. This suggests that the efforts made to impose the idea of relevance of the writing tasks to students' disciplines may be futile. Instead, more discipline-based writing would be a plausible starting point for preparing learners for the workplace writing —along with practicing genre awareness.

However, there seems to be a dichotomy in alumni's views regarding specificity as there is another group of alumni who argued for interdisciplinary writing as they are also required by their workplaces to write genres related to business and finance. In fact, few of them (A3, A4, A12) proposed focusing on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary genres in Technical Writing courses. But, generally, there seems to be a tendency towards having more narrow-angled

ESP (Hyland, 2002) courses as opposed to the current wide-angled courses as perceived by the alumni. This is due to the need for learning engineering genres and rhetorical and discursive practices as required in the workplace, besides, specific ESP ensures that the learners do not study things irrelevant to their fields of study or may be used differently in their own disciplines (Hyland, 2016). Nevertheless, the engineering disciplines and target workplaces are too diverse to be accommodated in a single ESP course. Thus, no matter how specific we strive to make ESP courses, 'it is always a matter of compromise' (Basturkmen, 2003, p.57). That is, some course content will inevitably be more relevant to the needs of some individuals than others.

In the case of the current Technical Writing courses at HCT, all the three Technical Writing courses are wide-angled course type serving the common needs of various disciplines. Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991) contend that wide-angled courses are not appropriate for graduates and professionals. This is also echoed by Basturkmen (2017) who maintained that learners' subject content knowledge is an essential factor in deciding the specificity of EAP courses. She made a distinction between pre-experienced learners (with limited or no prior experience in studying the discipline), during- experience learners (who have knowledge of the discipline) and post-experience learners (who have previously studied the discipline) (ibid). This distinction is crucial to be understood by ESP course developers at HCT in order to decide on the content, objectives and the writing competency students are expected to achieve at each level of their study. For instance, the initial Technical Writing course could be a common core tackling heterogeneous groups with common and general needs of academic writing being the first English course the students are required to take after moving to their first semester in Post Foundation Year Programme (PFYP), thus could be assumed to have no prior or limited disciplinary knowledge. However, as the students advance in their disciplinary studies, more narrow-angled ESP courses should be introduced. This certainly requires plenty of efforts and resources, and

decision makers at the Ministry of Manpower should be convinced to fund the design and development of such specific courses to yield the desired outcomes.

Apart from specificity, the alumni criticised the tasks practiced in Technical Writing courses for not focusing on technical and communicative tasks, such as incidents reports and emails. In fact, even some essay topics were described to be generic rather than technical. One of the key findings here is that both alumni and their line managers largely stressed the need for teaching and enhancing graduates' email writing skills to prepare them for workplace writing. The alumni persistently expressed the challenges they faced in email writing after moving to the workplace and they blamed Technical Writing courses for not preparing them to write emails as required in the workplace. Email is considered an essential component of Business English/ ESP course which seek to prepare learners for workplace writing (Evans, 2012; Spence & Liu, 2013). A local study also reported that the ability to write email was viewed as one of the vital skills required by workplace (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

Previous studies also focused on the importance of introducing authentic tasks which bare relevance to the professional world in writing classroom. For instance, the faculty members in Zhu's (2004) study of the analysis of business course assignments stated that business writing assignments focused on teaching realistic tasks, e.g. writing memos/letters, which are required at the workplace instead of teaching inauthentic tasks which are not needed in the real world, e.g. library research. Thus, more efforts were made to align the business writing assignments with what is needed in the professional context.

The two points mentioned above revolve around the types of workplace genres, i.e. texts, perceived to be absent or lacking specificity in Technical Writing courses, but the alumni also discussed the inauthenticity in terms of lack of awareness of rhetorical and socio-contextual elements shaping workplace writing (see section 5.3.2.1.). This is related to the core argument of this study which stresses the

need for focusing on raising learners' awareness regarding the contextual elements impacting the workplace writing. Hence, alumni's perceptions of the Technical Writing courses as being unhelpful in their preparedness for workplace writing would seem to be grounded in lack of focus the rhetorical and contextual elements. This is in congruence with Northey's (1990) study in which the participants perceived their university courses as unhelpful as they did not go beyond the structural and grammatical skills and did not focus on intricate rhetorical and contextual elements. The alumni alluded to the disparity between the types of audience they would write for in the academic and workplace contexts as they would only write for their teachers in the former whereas they are required to write for various and multiple audiences in the latter (as discussed in Chapter 4 and in 6.1.1. above). Hence, they faced challenges in adapting their writing to cater for the target readerships after moving to the workplace as stated by both the alumni and their line managers.

The alumni also stated the disparity in the writing purpose in both contexts, i.e. writing to be assessed in the academic context and writing for real instrumental purposes in the workplace (see section 5.3.2.1.). Therefore, they recommended providing workplace like scenarios to train the learners to write for various readers and instrumental purposes. This is also captured by Zhu (2004) who stated that workplace genres should "socialize students into the business world through creating a context in which students took on business roles, wrote for business audiences, and employed business communication strategies" (p.123). However, workplace writing simulations in the classroom has been criticised by some scholars. For instance, Freedman et al. (1994) found that their students' case studies produced in response to a simulation task were predominantly constrained and shaped by the readership and purpose of the academic context, i.e. writing for their teacher to demonstrate knowledge and to be assessed. They, thus, concluded that due to the radical differences between the academic and workplace contexts, workplace genres can only be acquired through immersion in the

workplace context and cannot be taught outside their context. Yet, I do not view the disparity between these two contexts as a barrier for teaching workplace writing and preparing learners for it within the classroom boundary. Instead, simulation tasks must be accompanied by raising learners' awareness of such disparity and highlighting when they fail to cater for the intended readership and purpose stated in the simulation task.

The alumni also found a difficulty in learning the terminologies and abbreviations used in their particular workplaces to achieve clarity and preciseness which is a highly valued feature in the workplace (see section 5.3.2.1). Thus, Technical Writing courses should equip the learners with frequently used technical vocabulary specific to engineering along with providing practices on writing concise and precise texts. The current Technical Writing courses include units on technical vocabulary, but these are not necessarily frequently used in engineering. In fact, it has been argued that even the semi-technical words in the known Academic Word List (AWL) can have different meanings and frequencies in different disciplines, thus, teaching such words in a general and equivalent sense can be misleading to students (Hyland, 2016; Hyland & Tse, 2007; Durrant, 2016; Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2018). Therefore, considerable attention should be paid to teaching technical vocabulary specific to the engineering discipline in Technical Writing courses as technical vocabulary is essential for preparing learners for their future employment (Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2018).

As for the socio-contextual elements, different forms of collaborative writing (CW) should be well incorporated in Technical Writing courses and learners' awareness regarding these forms should be raised (Chen et al., 2004; Bremner, 2010) as the study revealed that most of the alumni held a limited conceptualisation regarding CW. In short, not only should the Technical Writing courses provide practices on these contextual elements, but they should also raise learners' consciousness regarding the disparity in the contextual elements in

both contexts and to regard this knowledge as a tool on which they should build on in the workplace.

6.2.2.2 Lack of feedback

Alumni's perceptions of their college preparation for workplace writing is also grounded in lack of effective corrective feedback on their writing (as illustrated in 5.3.2.2.). This is in line with Schneider and Andre's (2005) findings that reported the influence of feedback on how graduate learners perceived their preparation for workplace writing. Their emphasis on the need for providing form-focused feedback on their writing in their college writing courses has stemmed from the challenges they have faced with language aspects, i.e. grammar, spelling and vocabulary and with producing accurate texts in a context which values accuracy (Hu & Hoare, 2017). The line managers also complained about the language errors in texts produced by the alumni, especially spelling errors. While reflecting on their college writing experiences, the alumni persistently expressed their dissatisfaction with the kind of feedback they got from their teachers. Some of them would not know what their mistakes are and on what basis they received the final grade, and others were not satisfied with the teachers pointing out a few errors only.

Two main implications can be drawn from these findings. First, feedback approaches followed in Technical Writing courses should be revised, and teachers must be encouraged to provide ample form-focused feedback on their students' writing. Second, learners' awareness regarding feedback and their teachers' expectations from them regarding treatment of feedback must be raised.

6.2.2.3 Graduates' attitudes

Another factor contributed to how alumni perceived their preparedness for workplace writing is their attitudes towards Technical Writing courses when they were students. Some of the alumni stated that they regarded these courses as extra burden which had to take as per the college requirements (as shown in section 5.3.2.3.). Some of them

took such courses for getting high grades and increasing their GPA. Such attitudes were largely developed due to lack of awareness of the importance of such courses for their future career. The objectives of these courses were not made clear to the students. As noted in the preceding chapter, literature on motivation has confirmed that there is a link between language learning motivation and clarity of purpose for learning it (Dorneyi, 1990; Ghaith, 2003; Oxford; 1996). Also, Hyland (2016) argued that, as other studies have found, students are more likely to be motivated by courses if they are relevant to their own studies. As discussed earlier, the alumni in this study did not conceive a direct relevance of Technical Writing courses to their own disciplines nor to their future career, thus, they ended up bearing negative attitudes towards them compared to their own subject courses. Furthermore, they did not take them seriously nor did they exert considerable efforts in them as they did not see their benefits for their future career (González Ardeo, 2016). This bears vital implication for Technical Writing courses and instructors to raise learners' awareness as to the objectives of the courses and their relevance and value for their employment. It is not sufficient to mention the course objectives on the course outline which students do not care about reading, rather, the students should be persistently encouraged to perceive the relevance and value of the course while carrying on writing activities.

6.2.3 Summary and implications

The discussion of the key findings above has led to the main debatable issue in the area of learners' transition to the workplace writing and the possibility of teaching workplace genres in the classroom. Both alumni and line managers have acknowledged the value of the basic knowledge of writing gained or should be equipped by the writing courses at the college despite the fact that genre awareness and recontextualisation of genre knowledge gained previously is relative among the alumni in this study. To explain, some have perceived the value of the basic knowledge and were able to adapt it to the new context using various strategies as discussed above whereas others conceptualised it as irrelevant and useless. Nevertheless, regardless of how the basic knowledge of writing perceived or utilised, the findings suggest that college did play a role in alumni's preparedness to a certain extent by equipping them with this knowledge. The deficiencies in college writing experiences identified in the previous section and their implications further support the idea that learners' preparation for the workplace writing can be facilitated by fixing the deficiencies in writing courses and instructions.

Furthermore, although the line managers ascribed learners' personal factors to their preparedness for workplace writing, they did not deny the role should be played by the college in learners' preparedness as they provided several expectations from HCT. For instance, they expected that there should be interaction with the target workplaces on the part of HCT and to involve the labour markets' needs when designing technical writing/ ESP courses. They also demanded for reinforcement of curricula to genuinely reflect the communication skills of graduates in their GPA as the hiring procedures usually do not include a writing test, rather the GPA is taken for granted to suggest the level of communication skills graduates possess.

Some may argue that the workplace takes the charge of training and coaching the newcomers, however, the findings revealed that not every organisation provides training opportunities in writing nor every

supervisor provides feedback on writing produced by novices, as one of the line managers commented *"we can only supervise; the burden is on the colleges"* (M1, 20 / 02/ 2017). Here I do not intend to argue that it is only academia's role to prepare the learners to meet the demands of workplace writing, but I equally recognise that the workplace should also play its part in this preparation given that workplaces always emphasise the utmost importance of writing in the professional world and persistently complain about the poor writing skills of university graduates. Thus, a vital implication the findings may have for the organisations involved in this study is to provide training sessions specifically dealing with technical writing for the newcomers as well as to offer feedback and guidance on their writing. The findings also indicate that, following both genre awareness and RGS approaches in teaching workplace writing, the contextual elements shaping workplace writing can be taught in the classroom by awareness-raising as well as through incorporating rhetorical and socio-contextual aspects, e.g. audience, purpose, valued features, collaborative writing, as possible as one can in the writing tasks.

While there are many studies related to learners' socialising into workplace writing which hold a pessimistic view of the role of the academy in this process (Dias et al., 1999; Freedman & Adam, 1996), the findings of this study support the studies which argue in favour of the possibility of preparing learners for workplace writing in the classroom (Artemeva, 2009; Brent, 2011; Schneider & Andre, 2005). In fact, the highly situated nature of workplace writing does not form an obstacle to learning workplace genres outside their contexts (Bremner, 2018). The perceptions of the participants in this study implied that their college writing courses did to a certain extent play a role in preparing them for workplace writing by equipping them with basic genre knowledge which some of them were able to use as tools for acquiring workplace genres after joining the workplace, but they could have been better prepared had these courses considered the gaps, i.e. deficiencies, discussed above. In addition, the contextual elements explored in this study revealed the complexity of workplace

writing and how it is shaped by the various contextual factors which learners should be sensitised to in the classroom. I do not intend to argue that there is a general genre knowledge that can be transferred directly from the academic to professional context, rather, teachers can train the learners to carry with them the awareness that workplace writing is complex, different and constrained by complex social/contextual elements and they should utilise their previously gained learning and understanding to unpack these elements in the new context. This view is captured by Bremner (2018) who proposed that teachers should "go as far along the road towards reality as is feasible" (p.142). That is, they should engage learners in activities that approximate the kinds of activities they are more likely to experience in the workplace as far as it is feasible, and when this is not doable, then learners' awareness regarding the complexity of workplace writing and the difficulties associated with it should be raised along with equipping them with necessary tools to untangle its intricacies (ibid). Previous studies advocated teaching students about audience, purpose and other contextual aspects which shape writing and confirmed its value in developing their genre awareness both within and outside the academic context (Cheng, 2008; Yayli, 2010; Yasuda, 2011).

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the key findings of this study in relation to the RQs, the aims and previous studies. Pedagogical implications have also been provided based on the findings. The first part of the chapter was dedicated to discussing findings related to RQ1 pertaining to how social/contextual elements have shaped the writing practices of the alumni as reported by the alumni and their line managers and attested in their written samples. Such findings provided valuable insights into not only how workplace writing is contextually bounded but also the complexities attended with the various contextual elements shaping workplace writing. The second part of the chapter tackled the key findings related to RQ2 which examines the alumni and their line managers' perceptions of HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace

writing. The main factors shaping these perceptions were discussed in relation to previous studies. What I can conclude from discussing the findings related to both RQs is that the college does have a role to play in preparing learners for workplace writing and this is reflected in the deficiencies identified by the alumni in their experiences in Technical Writing courses at the college, in the value of genre awareness acknowledged by the alumni, and in the possibility of both practicing and raising learners' awareness as to the contextual elements shaping workplace writing within the classroom boundaries. Hence, besides attending to fixing the identified deficiencies, what needs to be developed in learners is the ability to unpack the workplace context for the contextual elements, both rhetorical and socio-contextual, and other constraints shaping writing and to able to adapt their writing to the new context.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study. It first provides a summary of the research followed by the key findings. It then presents the main theoretical and methodological contributions of the study followed by implications drawn from the findings for pedagogy and policy in both academic and workplace contexts. Finally, limitation of the study and recommendations for future work as well as reflection on my own experience in conducting this research are provided.

7.1 Summary of the study

This exploratory study aims to understand and problematise college alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. The assumption underpinned this study is that there is no straightforward answer to the question "how to prepare students for the workplace writing?" and my study does not seek to provide step-by-step guide to answer this question. This is largely due to the unpredictable, multifaceted and distinct nature of the workplace. In fact, asking such question indicates as if genre knowledge and skills can be transferred wholly from one context to another. Thus, due to the complexities and dilemmas surrounding the issue of preparing learners for workplace writing in the academic context, this issue is problematised in this study. To do so, it has undertaken a two-angled investigation. First, from social constructionism and Rhetorical Genre Studies perspectives, the study has adopted a social view of writing to explore the contextual and situated nature of workplace writing. It specifically looked at the ways social/contextual factors have shaped the writing practices of the alumni in the workplace. This endeavour is based on the argument that the situated nature of workplace writing and the disparity between the academic and workplace contexts in terms of writing should not be viewed as an obstacle in preparing learners for workplace writing. Rather, the social and contextual factors constraining workplace writing should be explored and introduced in the classroom to raise learners' awareness regarding them and to engage them in practices entailing such factors, instead of merely

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imparting formal textual conventions of genres (Bremner, 2018; Andre & Schneider, 2004). Second, the study has also tackled the issue of alumni's preparedness through directly investigating how preparedness is viewed by the alumni and their line managers to understand the factors contributing to the perceived preparedness. Investigating these two angles has allowed me to capture a holistic picture of the role played or can be played by the college in preparing the learners for workplace writing, and to further problematise the issue of preparedness.

This investigation has been conducted qualitatively through semi-structured interviews, as a main method for data collection, with 12 HCT engineer alumni and four line managers at five different private sector companies in Oman. The participants included both new and experienced alumni at different fields of engineering (Chapter 3). The interview data was supported with evidences from textual analysis of 29 alumni's workplace written samples. The data were analysed using both 'theory driven' and 'data-driven' thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main findings of the study are presented below.

7.2   Summary of the key findings of the study

The findings of the study reveal several contextual factors influencing alumni's workplace writing practices (Chapter 4). These factors operate at two levels of the context: rhetorical and socio-contextual. The former refers to those factors which are textually-oriented which directly influence the texts produced in the workplace in terms of content, overall organisation, rhetorical moves and tone/register, which include audience, purpose and valued style. On the other hand, the latter are contextually-oriented factors, namely collaborative writing, workplace physical environment and level of workplace experience. Although this influence is not directly manifested in the texts but certainly influence alumni's writing practices both in terms of product and process. This exploration of context-text relationship has given valuable insights into the nature of workplace writing which is regarded as situated and social act. These findings also suggest that

workplace writing is overly contextual and complicated to be regarded as entities and skills that can be simply transferred from classroom to the workplace. However, at the same time the findings imply that the classroom can play a role in the preparedness of the learners for workplace writing by incorporating the explored contextual factors in the writing tasks or through awareness-raising regarding such factors. So, to teach workplace writing in the classroom, it is important to understand in which way context shapes the text (Samraj, 2002), but which level of context should be taught in the classroom depends on the pedagogical goals of the writing course and resources availability.

Regarding the alumni and line managers' perceptions of HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing, the findings reveal that both alumni and their line managers had middle-of-the-road views regarding alumni's preparedness (Chapter 5). While the managers felt that the college does play a role in graduates' preparation as reflected in their expectations from the college, they equally believed that the academic factors are not solely responsible for graduates' preparedness, but personal factors, such as motivation, capacities, family background and previous educational experiences, also determine their preparedness. As for the alumni, most of them did acknowledge colleges' role in equipping them with the basic knowledge (genre awareness) of writing which some of them were able to utilise in the workplace context, however, they also felt the deficiencies and disparities in their experiences of technical writing courses at the college have left them inadequately prepared to meet the demands of the workplace. Such deficiencies were reflected in three factors: 1) lack of authenticity, 2) lack of effective feedback, and 3) graduates' attitudes. These perceptions from the workplace stakeholders especially from college alumni whose views have been informed by both workplace and academic writing experiences have provided valuable insights into the role and impact of college on alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. The findings pertaining to both angles investigated in this study conclude that the college can certainly play an important role in preparing learners for workplace

writing despite the complex and situated nature of writing in the workplace. The findings, thus, have provided valuable pedagogical implications for teaching workplace genres in the classroom (see Section 7.3 below).

7.3 Implications of the study

This section presents a number of implications emerged from the current study which contribute to theory, existing body of knowledge and practice at both local and international levels. These implications are discussed in three categories: theoretical, methodological and practical/pedagogical.

7.3.1 Theoretical implications

The current study was particularly influenced and informed by two bodies of literature which have been enriching for my own understandings of preparing learners for workplace writing: research into transitions to workplace writing and social constructionism and genre theory. Both aspects have influenced my own understanding of the field, guided the line of investigation and informed the objectives of the study and the research questions. Therefore, the study contributes to theorising of this kind of research by exploring text-context relationship as well as investigating the perceptions of workplace stakeholders to understand the preparedness of college alumni for workplace writing. This combination is unique in the literature. The study also extends the debate on the transferability of genre knowledge underpinned previous research on university-workplace transition.

7.3.1.1 Studies on university-workplace writing

Previous studies on workplace writing have focused on tracing the transition of one or few student interns of graduates to highlight their socialisation processes after moving to the workplace. Some of these studies concluded that academic and workplace contexts are far apart from each other, thus, efforts made by college to prepare learners for

writing in the workplace are futile. In contrast, other transition studies did not share this pessimistic view which downplays the value of the classroom in learners' preparedness. These latter studies have found evidences of genre awareness, i.e. ability to recognise and/or draw on previously acquired genre knowledge, in the transition experiences of college graduates, thus, concluded that portability of genre knowledge can be possible under certain conditions, for example, teaching discipline specific genres (Artemeva, 2009) or focusing on enhancing genre awareness (Johns, 2015).

Being influenced by the latter position, the current study maintains that to prepare learners for workplace writing, it is not sufficient to teach the formal conventions of a genre, rather it is vital to practice and raise students' awareness of the many aspects that surround the construction a text in a particular discourse community. Thus, the way of understanding and investigating learners' preparedness adopted by the current study is distinctive. This study extends the debate above by contending that if we aim to enhance students' genre awareness, enable them to develop rhetorical adaptability and to raise their awareness regarding variation in workplace genres, it is essential to help them see the text-context relationship which is how workplace writing is characterised. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of the current study would add to the body of knowledge regarding the role of the college in preparing learners for workplace writing through exploring the contextualised nature of workplace writing and through investigating how college writing experiences impact on alumni's perceived preparedness. The study also extends the debate on genre transferability and genre awareness which has dominated the ESP and technical communication field. Locally, the findings of the study would contribute to the body of research concerned with equipping students with communication skills required in the workplace (Al-Hinai 2018; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2015, 2016; Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014) as to the best of my knowledge, adopting a contextual perspective of workplace writing to understand graduates' preparedness has not been done in the Omani context. Additionally,

the findings are transferrable to similar ESP contexts in other parts of the world.

7.3.1.2 Social constructionism, RGS and ESP

Previous studies on university-workplace transition have successfully combined activity theory, RGS and situated learning theories to highlight the radical differences between writing in the academic and workplace settings as well as to account for the socialisation processes novices went through after moving to the new activity system. The current study, however, combines both social constructionism and RGS to highlight the social and contextual nature of workplace writing. Both of these theories view writing as a social action and inseparable from the context in which it occurs. This view of writing has made teaching workplace genres and preparing learners for workplace writing problematic, as depicted by Dias et al. (1999), "school-based simulations of workplace writing fail to prepare students for professional writing because they cannot adequately replicate the local rhetorical complexity of workplace contexts" (p. 201).

The current study, however, while it agrees that adequately replicating the complexities of workplace writing in the classroom is not possible and should not be the aim of the writing courses, argues that the socially-situated nature of workplace writing perceived by social constructionism and RGS should not be seen as a barrier in preparing learners for workplace writing. Rather, complementing RGS with ESP approach, which stresses the value of teaching genres in the classroom, the contextual nature of workplace writing and text-context relationship should be explored and learners' awareness regarding the contextual factors shaping workplace writing should be raised. Thus, unlike the previous studies, these two theories are not used to highlight the radical differences between workplace and college writing, instead, they are adopted to investigate how text-context relationship is actually enacted by college alumni in the workplace setting and how this enriches our understanding of college's roles in learners' preparedness. This explicit investigation is absent in previous

research which has mainly foregrounded novices' socialisation processes or the disparity between workplace and college as contexts of writing.

Hence, the current study has uniquely combined and foregrounded the contextual elements shaping alumni's writing in the workplace and the perceptions of their preparedness complemented with insights from genre theory and research in workplace writing to understand and problematise the phenomenon of preparedness. Such two-angled investigation has allowed me to fully capture the phenomenon of the role of the college in alumni's preparedness for workplace writing, and it contributes to theorising these kinds of studies. Furthermore, the current study combines RGS, ESP and social constructionism theories which is a rare combination in workplace and university writing research. Other researchers locally or internationally can utilise this theorization to explore different contextual elements and perceptions of preparedness in different workplaces as every organisation has its own way of doing things.

7.3.2 Methodological implications

In terms of methodology, the procedures, challenges and other practicalities involved in recruiting professionals and getting access to industries might be insightful for other researchers (Chapter 3). First of all, the study has chosen to recruit only workplace stakeholders for this investigation without including stakeholders from the academic setting. This recruitment was seen to be more appropriate for the aims and objectives of the current study and to gain in-depth insights of the phenomenon. It was believed that while including various stakeholders would add to the breadth of the study, selecting and focusing on the stakeholders who are more likely to provide the researcher with the data needed to thoroughly address the research questions enhance the depth of the study (cf. Knoch et al., 2016). Furthermore, while many previous studies have focused on the experiences and perceptions of intern students of preparedness for workplace writing, it was decided in this study to recruit the college

alumni at different levels of experience (novices and experienced alumni).

This study sought to explore how context shapes the writing practices of college alumni as self-reported by the alumni themselves, triangulated with their line managers' perceptions, who are professional members of the workplace which places them at the position of providing insights into how workplace writing is done and what are the organisational beliefs shaping their writing practices (Adam, 2000). Also, alumni's perceptions have been informed by their experiences in both academic and workplace settings, which has yielded valuable insights into their preparedness. Further, various levels of experience have resulted in different practices and elements as well as have provided a comprehensive understanding of Technical Writing courses experiences and their impact on alumni's preparedness, as such courses have been evolved over the years. Unlike some previous studies which have recruited random managers to inform what should be taught in the college writing courses or to generally comment on novice graduates' writing performance, because the focus of the study is on HCT alumni, the managers were carefully selected to fit certain criteria. These managers are immediate managers/supervisors/team leaders of the alumni and were selected on the basis of their interaction with the alumni especially in terms of assigning writing tasks.

Another important methodological implication this study provides is in terms of the process of recruiting participants from the workplace and getting access to the corporate world. Being a complete outsider to the companies, straightforward access to them was difficult. Thus, the first option available to me to reach the alumni was through the college itself. However, the concerned personnel at the college was not certain about the companies where I would be able to find the maximum number of the potential participants. Although a number of companies were contacted by the college to assist me with getting access, unfortunately, this option had not been helpful. What had been efficient in assisting me to get access is through my personal

networks and by establishing a good rapport with the gatekeepers at the companies (Lunsford Mears, 2009). The gatekeepers at the companies involved in this study facilitated the recruitment of participants and provided a social and physical bridge between the researcher and the field (Clark, 2011). The rapport I established with my participants not only facilitated more recruitments, but it also allowed me to stay in touch with some of the participants throughout my PhD study for following up questions. Thus, this study implies that an outsider researcher should make the best use of personal network and gatekeepers who "open the doors to the field and the right persons" (Flick, 2007, p. 44).

7.3.3 Implications for practice

Since this investigation into workplace written communication is pedagogically motivated, the findings of the study have provided valuable pedagogical implications for teachers, designers of Technical Writing, ESP or professional writing courses locally and internationally, and implications for practice for novice graduates and managers/supervisors. As discussed in Chapter 6, both angles investigated in this study have yielded valuable insights into the role which can be played by the college in learners' preparedness for workplace writing.

Empirically, one of the main contributions of the study is provided by the evidence showing that traditional needs analysis approaches—characterised as filling the 'gap' of what an ESP syllabus 'lacks' (Brown, 2016)—are not sufficient to examine written communication in the workplace due to its complicated and contextualised nature. Instead, the contextual factors (both rhetorical and socio-contextual) and discursive practices surrounding the written texts produced by employees should be examined to inform the design of technical writing or ESP courses.

The contextual factors shaping workplace writing have provided valuable implications for technical writing teachers and course designers as well as the professional stakeholders. The findings

suggest that teachers should incorporate such contextual elements in their writing materials and tasks as much as they can, and what cannot be incorporated should be taught through explicit awareness-raising.

Audience is one of the rhetorical elements found to shape alumni's workplace writing. Instead of writing only for their teachers, students can be asked to write for various and multiple real audiences, such as clients or administers in the college. If this is not feasible, audience-related factors identified in this study (see Chapter 6), such as audience background, power relations and audience expectations and needs, can be practiced through providing students with workplace-like scenarios.

The study has also highlighted the influence of purpose on alumni's writing in the workplace. The findings suggest that workplace writing is done for instrumental purposes compared to learning-oriented purposes of college writing. Such real purposes cannot be adequately replicated in the classroom setting, but as some alumni have proposed, scenarios similar to those in the workplace can be used to practice writing for problem solving or decision-making purposes. These scenarios can include writing to inform, request, recommend, complain, etc., or can even include 'private intentions' within the socially-recognised purposes. It is also essential to train students to manipulate genres to serve different functions as well as raise their awareness as to how this manipulation shape formal aspects of a text.

Another influential text-related element the alumni and line managers reported to be important and must be considered in writing emails or reports is preciseness and conciseness. An important implication for Technical Writing courses is to emphasise on these two valued styles through providing students with techniques to achieve such styles. For example, practices on using technical terms and factual information in technical reports to achieve preciseness can be useful. Also, instead of asking students to produce lengthy reports or essays, the number of words can be constrained, and the use of technical terms and abbreviations and concise sentences must be encouraged to achieve

brevity. Additionally, the students should be sensitised regarding criticality and accountability aspects of workplace context which necessitate the use of precise words to exactly express the intended meaning when writing in the workplace.

The findings have revealed various forms of CW (see Chapters 4 & 6 for details) which impacted on alumni's writing processes in the workplace, for example, direct simultaneous or non-simultaneous (e.g. sequential) CW, and indirect forms of CW including communicating with other individuals for obtaining content or drawing on other documents, i.e. intertextuality. These complex forms must be taken into consideration while designing writing tasks in Technical Writing courses as these forms reflect the social process of workplace writing, instead of merely practicing one restricted form of CW.

The findings also suggest that understanding the organisational culture, including physical environment, is overly important for learner joining the workplace. Thus, it is imperative that writing courses in the college raise learners' awareness regarding the notion of organisational culture, and how this shapes the written genres. For example, students can be trained to respond in writing to scenarios with different workplace environmental constraints (Johns, 1997). Additionally, having introduced the students to the notion of organisational culture and its various layers, they can be asked to carry on a project to analyse different artefacts which shape the writing practices within the organisations they join for the internship.

The organisational culture also determines the socialisation processes the novice alumni have gone through. The findings suggest that the socialisation processes of the alumni have shaped their writing practices, for instance, in terms of gradual allocation of writing tasks and/or provision of feedback from seniors (see Chapters 4 & 6). These findings imply that students should be trained to take an active role in their enculturation and should be equipped with socialisation techniques, such as seeking out templates, establishing a comfortable relationship with their mentors (Freedman & Adam, 2000), questioning

or soliciting comments on their writing from supervisors and colleagues (Schneider & Andre, 2005). Likewise, the findings also imply that the line managers should understand their responsibility in inducting the novices in order to facilitate their socialisation into the new discourse community.

As I stated in Chapter 6, all of these elements should be taught with the caveat that every organisation has its own way of doing things and rhetorical adaptability should be enforced. That is, students should be made aware of adapting their writing according to various rhetorical and contextual elements valued in their discourse community. This is relevant to the findings related to the factors shaping alumni and line managers' views of alumni's preparedness for workplace writing, the second angle this study has foregrounded to understand alumni's preparedness.

One of the most important factors shaping alumni's views of their college preparation for workplace writing is their acknowledgement of the importance of the basic knowledge they gained from their Technical Writing courses at the college. This was accounted for using the notion of genre awareness (see Chapter 6). The implication derived from this finding is that Technical Writing courses should enhance learners' genre awareness, which is the ability to use schematic genre knowledge to produce new texts in new contexts. This entails raising their awareness of the value of the basic generic knowledge they acquire in college and how to utilise this basic knowledge and resituate it using cultural artefacts, such technology and seeking seniors' guidance (Smart & Brown, 2002). So, instead of teaching fixed structures of genres, i.e. *genre acquisition*, rhetorical and contextual adaptability should be imparted, so that learners can analyse the situation and assess their previous generic knowledge before producing a new text (Johns, 2015). For example, writing tasks should be designed to evoke students' schema gained in the Foundation Programme or in a previous Technical Writing course, and then to analyse the new writing situation and consciously adapt their

previous generic knowledge to be appropriate for the requirements of the new writing task.

The findings also suggest that alumni's perceived preparedness was also influenced by deficiencies in their college writing experiences. For instance, they perceived lack of authenticity in writing tasks in Technical Writing courses. They found the tasks to be irrelevant to their engineering discipline and different from their workplace writing demands. This has an implication for course designers as to the extent of specificity adopted in Technical Writing courses (see Chapter 6 section 6.2.2.1). Apart from specificity, the alumni have stressed the need for focusing on communicative and technical writing tasks, such as emails and technical reports.

Another implication is that teachers should provide effective and sufficient form-focused feedback on students' writing. But even more essentially, they should make their students understand what is expected from them regarding the treatment of their errors after receiving teachers' feedback. In addition, students' must be made aware of the fact that accuracy is valued in the workplace where there is no tolerance against mistakes in written documents; hence, teachers should attend to editorial matters such as grammar and spelling. Additionally, the findings propose that it is of utmost importance that students' awareness regarding the objectives and the value of Technical Writing courses for future career should be raised by their teachers.

Last but not least, the findings also provide vital implications for course designers and employers. Both of these stakeholders should collaborate in preparing learners for workplace writing, as one of the line managers (M1) explicitly recommended that the market should be involved in developing writing curriculum. Further, it is also important for these two stakeholders to understand that both workplace and academic contexts should play a role in preparing graduates for workplace writing. The efforts of the college are valuable and important but can never be adequate without full immersion into the

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professional community. Thus, there should be collaboration between these two contexts, for instance, as one of the line managers (M2) suggested a professional writing course can be developed by both workplace and college stakeholders at the level of internship to allow for authentic writing through considerable involvement into the workplace community. The findings also implied that employers should provide coaching and training courses for novices on the kind of writing required by a particular organisation, and immediate managers should understand their responsibilities in mentoring and guiding novice graduates.

7.4 Final reflections on contribution

This section presents final reflections on study's contribution to the field and summarises the detailed implications presented in the section above:

- This study contributes to theory by using social constructionism and RGS to understand and problematise college graduates' preparedness for workplace writing. Unlike previous ESP studies characterised as closing-the-gap or needs analysis studies, this study does not look for a straightforward answer to how to prepare learners for workplace writing. Instead, it problematises the issue of preparedness by exploring the contextualised nature of workplace writing (rather than focusing on formal features of textual genres) and investigating how preparedness is viewed by the professional stakeholders.

- The study makes a contribution to knowledge by extending the debate on genre portability, genre awareness and the role of the classroom in preparing learners for workplace writing. Unlike some previous university-workplace transition research which holds a pessimistic view of preparedness due to the situatedness of workplace writing, the current study does not consider the *situated* nature of workplace writing as an obstacle; instead, it responds to Bremner's (2018) call for investigations which go beyond the text level to explore the contextual factors to understand why workplace writers write

the way they do to enrich our understanding of preparing learners for workplace writing.

- The study has chosen to recruit professional stakeholders to investigate the phenomenon of preparedness, unlike previous studies which recruited students or student interns who were not fully immersed into the workplace community. Conducting this study with workplace participants has yielded valuable insights as the alumni's perceptions are informed by both college and workplace experiences, besides, the alumni and their line managers are best positioned to clarify the contextual elements shaping workplace writing. Also, the procedures followed to get access to the workplace, especially by using personal networks and establishing good rapport with gatekeepers and participants for recruiting participants contribute methodologically to workplace research.

- The findings of the study have implications for the ESP program not only at HCT but are also transferrable to other similar contexts beyond Oman, such as other ESL/EFL Middle East and Asian countries. Additionally, the findings bear implications for the workplace context and employers in the given context and other contexts where English is predominantly used as a language of business.

7.5 Study limitations and future research

Given the scope of the study, a number of limitations could have influenced the findings obtained. However, several directions to future research in learners' preparedness for workplace writing can be inferred from these limitations. One of the most salient limitations of the study is focusing only on alumni belonging to one discipline which is engineering, while investigating the workplace experiences and perceptions of college alumni from various disciplines would have enriched the data concerning the contextual elements of different discourse communities as well as the factors shaping the perceived preparedness (c.f. Knoch et al., 2106; Schneider & Andre, 2005). Future research could include more than one discipline and compare the contextual elements shaping the workplace writing practices of graduates in different disciplines, as well as it would be interesting to explore if graduates' disciplines influence the way they perceived their preparedness.

Furthermore, the study has only involved HCT alumni and explored their workplace writing practices and their perceptions of preparedness. The experiences of alumni from other CoTs could have provided the basis for comparing between the perceptions of alumni with different experiences of Technical Writing courses, given the fact that these two of courses are not standardised among the CoTs in Oman. Thus, this could have resulted in different understanding of alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. In fact, conducting such research in the future could potentially help decision makers and ESP course developers to standardise the Technical Writing courses in all the CoTs.

Methodology wise, this study is mainly interview-based and most of the data is self-reported by the participants although some of it is supplemented by textual analysis of workplace written samples as a secondary data collection method. Being underpinned by social constructionism and RGS' perspectives of genres, more thorough and

richer data could have been obtained if ethnographic approach (Flowerdew, 2002) had been deployed. For instance, field observations could have been conducted to comprehensively understand how contextual elements influence alumni's writing practices, such as observing different forms of collaborative writing or the influence of different work environments e.g. field/office culture on writing. Another methodological limitation is that, although informal follow-up questions were asked to clarify points raised from textual analysis, the study could have conducted further interviews after textual analysis, such as discourse-based interviews or 'talk around text' or ethnography as method (Lillis, 2008). Future research which primarily focuses on textual analysis could employ such methods.

Apart from these, other several areas for future research have emerged from the analysis of the data. The study has explored and presented a holistic view of some contextual elements influencing these particular alumni in their specific organisations. It would be interesting to explore other contextual elements valued in different organisations. Also, while the current study has broadly provided snapshots of the rhetorical and socio-contextual elements influencing alumni's writing, other studies could usefully investigate individual contextual elements separately in detailed manner. For example, how politeness is enacted in the workplace in consideration of multiple audiences in power relations context would be an interesting area to explore thoroughly. Likewise, genre awareness, organisational culture, intertextuality and CW are immensely huge areas which could be investigated in detail as separate elements, especially these valuable elements are under- researched in the Omani context.

Furthermore, while acknowledging that text and context are mutually constitutive of each other, the present study has foregrounded the influence of context on text, however, future studies could conversely highlight the influence of text on the discourse community in which it takes place to deeply understand the social role of workplace writing and how this has implications for teaching workplace genres in the classroom. The analysis has briefly touched upon the influence of

technology on alumni's writing practices. Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is a huge and important area to be tackled in future research to examine the influence of technology on business communication in modern and ever-evolving workplace context.

7.6 Personal reflection on research journey

My PhD journey has been profoundly fruitful and rewarding starting with my first two and half years at the University of Bath and ending this journey at UCL. Being a complete novice researcher without having done MA dissertation, I started learning about conducting research from scratch. I naively started with the topic of needs analysis which formed the initial proposal I had submitted to the university. The first comment I received on this topic is that it was not original. In other words, it is not a PhD level topic as it does not contribute the existing body of knowledge. Since then, I have started to delve into the relevant literature and formulated an utterly different topic, but still within the boundaries of my original interest and personal impetus for doing this research. Then I turned to educate and familiarise myself with different methodological approaches and the philosophical assumptions underpinning them. As the days passed, I have subconsciously developed into a new person with different and creative ways of thinking. I started to realise that the constructivist and relativist views of world have been translated into my own personality and constituted my own philosophies and perspectives of looking at the world.

The most interesting phase of this journey was when I started my fieldwork and interacted with my participants. Fieldwork experience has made me realise the value of my research to the world outside the academia and how it is impactful for making a difference in people's lives. The idea of originality and contribution of knowledge has been haunting me throughout my study and has formed vague illusions inside my mind, until I analysed and obtained my findings. I then recognised what theoretical and methodological contributions my tiny research would have to the ocean of knowledge.

Indeed, the PhD journey, with its ups and downs, has been worth endeavouring as it has made me more patient, strong, confident and flexible person at the personal level; and at the intellectual level, it has made me a creative, critical and independent researcher. It has equipped me with all the necessary tools to carry on rigorous research individually, and this is what I wish to complete my future career in to take an active role in the educational development of my country. So, the journey is not over; it has just begun.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions & Life grid form

Semi-structured interview questions for alumni

1. What kind of documents do you write at work and what type of writing are you required to do the most?
2. What is the purpose of writing these documents? *(How did you learn about the purpose?)*
3. Who do you write these documents for? *(How did you learn about audience?)*
4. Do you write individually or collaboratively?
5. How much direction do you get from your supervisor about writing?
6. What kind of feedback do you receive from your supervisor about your writing?
7. How different is the workplace writing from your college writing experiences?
8. What challenges have you encountered upon joining XX and having been asked to carry out a writing task? *(What surprised you about your workplace writing experiences?)*
9. Could you describe your learning experience in technical writing and technical communication courses at HCT?
10. What kind of assignments did you do in these courses?
11. How well did you do in them?
12. Do you think these courses prepared you for the workplace writing? Why or why not?
13. What do you suggest should be changed or included? *(Is there anything you wish you had known before entering the workplace?)*
14. Do you think you have started to learn how to write all over again in the workplace? Why or why not?
15. Have you taken any writing courses at XX?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Semi-structured interview questions for managers

1. To what extent do you consider the written communication skills while recruiting HCT engineering graduates?
2. How do you view the English written proficiency of HCT engineer alumni?
3. Do you think these alumni are well prepared at the college for the workplace writing? *(Why or why not?)*
4. What kind of writing tasks do you assign to the engineers in general at the company? What is the most prominent type of writing they are required to do?
5. What is the purpose of these tasks?
6. Do you think they are aware of the purpose of writing in the workplace?
7. What audiences do the engineers write for?
8. Do you think they cater for different audiences when they write?
9. Do they write individually or collaboratively?
10. Are they able to work collaboratively when assigned any team writing task?
11. Do you assign any writing tasks to novice engineers? How do you deal with them?
12. Do you provide any feedback on these alumni's written work? *(What kind of feedback do you provide?)*
13. Do you teach these alumni how to write?
14. Are there any measures taken by the company to develop engineers' writing skills?
15. Do you think the college should put more efforts to prepare those graduates for the workplace writing?
16. What suggestions would you like to give the college regarding the preparation of engineering students for the workplace writing? Any particular skill or element to be considered in the writing courses at the college?
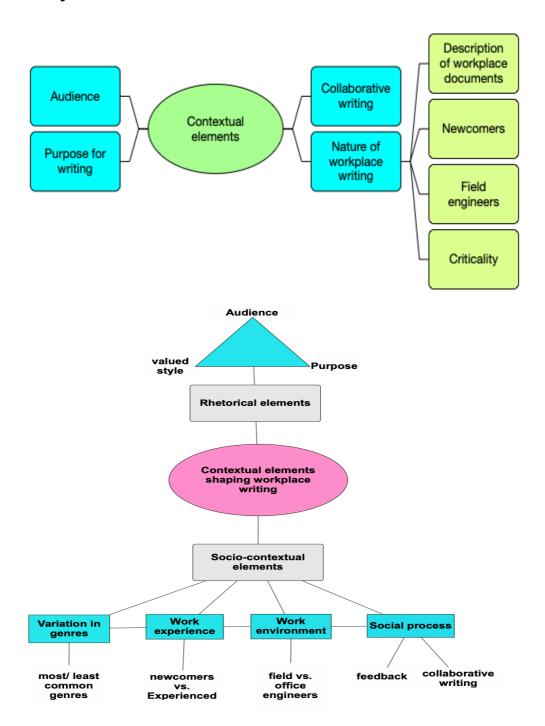17. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Life Grid

All questions on the life grid are optional; however, they are very important in identifying key points for the study. The researcher can explain more if needed.

Note: XX refers to your company

Name: [   ] Date of Birth: [   ]

Gender: [   ] Native language: [   ]

1. When did you graduate from HCT? [   ]

2. Which academic degree have you obtained? [   ]

3. How many years did you study at HCT? [   ]

4. What is your engineering specialisation? [   ]

5. When did you join XX? [   ]

6. How did you get a job at XX? [   ]

7. What is your current position at XX and which department do you work at?

[   ]

8. Could you briefly describe your job at XX?

[   ]

9. How much of your work time is spent writing?

[   ]

Appendix 2: Thematic mind maps created throughout the analysis

Audience

valued style — Rhetorical elements — Purpose

Contextual elements shaping workplace writing

Socio-contextual elements

Level of experience

Physical environment

Collaborative wriitng

Transfer of Basic knowledge

low self-confidence

College writing preparation for workplace

Disparities

Deficiencies

contextual elements

nature of courses

lack of focus on email

Lack of feedback

lack of authenticity

graduates' attitudes

middle of the road views

genre awareness

lack of feedback

managers' views

lack of authenticity

personal factors but college does have arole to play

nature of technical writing courses

lack of awareness of contextual elements

expectations from college

Middle of the road views

acknowledgement of basic knowledge

lack of authenticity

personal factors

deficiencies in college writing

lack of feedback

graduates' attitudes

Contextual elements

Alumni

Managers

Audience:
- Confidentiality
- Formality

Collaborative writing:
- Different sources
- Occasional group writing
- Other documents
- Shifts
- Reviewing

Purpose:
- Documentation
- Communication
- Taking action

Nature of workplace writing:
- Newcomers
- Emails
- Reports

Audience:
- At college
- Diplomatic
- International audiences
- Recipients
- someone important

Collaborative writing:
- At college
- Reference system

Nature of workplace writing:
- Criticality
- Time spent writing
- Other documents

Nature of workplace writing:
- Field engineers
- SMART

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Appendix 3: Notes on coding

Disparity: Contextual elements	Lack of focus on email	Disparity: The nature of technical writing courses	Lack of effective feedback	Acknowledgment and transformation of basic knowledge
- Audience: Challenges: big deal Diplomatic, polite: notified by the managers Brevity, accuracy: power relation Differences: Not emphasised at college, For lecturers only vs. multiple audiences Learned it at the workplace Managers' views: not appropriate register, take time - Purpose: -for assessment Real authentic scenarios are	- Missing or not sufficiently taught - Focus on letter but not email - Difficulties with email writing before and after joining the work - Managers: need to prepare students for email writing - Not taught official emails	-generic, non-technical - irrelevant, lack of specificity - disparity: topic, vocabulary -repetitive of foundation programme -types of genres practiced: no emails, no reports, just essays -challenges: writing from scratch, writing genres related to business and accounts -managers' expectations: not relying on templates, devising new genres	not deep - few errors - just getting the final grade, don't understand their mistakes - consequence: struggle with accuracy: grammatical and spelling errors.	- Acknowledgement of the usefulness of basic knowledge - Some specific examples of useful knowledge - Conceptualization of basic knowledge: abstract, irrelevant, building on basic knowledge, recontextualising Strategies to employ and properly transfer the basic knowledge

needed (technical) The purpose is not clear at college writing or not being able to transform it to fit the real world.	- Manager: not appropriate formal register		
	Lack of authenticity	Low self confidence	
- Context-specific knowledge: Distinct environments Typing on computers Field vs. office Technical vocabulary, abbreviations: for precise and concise writing Templates	- lack of awareness of the authenticity and relevance to the real world - not serious, not motivated - teachers' leniency -concerned with grades not learning	-feeling inferior compared to other graduates - others are better prepared Managers: feeling less confident and less competent compared to others, -Should be like SQU -not prepared for the highly competitive world	

Department of Education | UNIVERSITY OF BATH

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I **give / do not give** (please circle your response) my consent to participate in the study to be conducted from February 2017 by Tayba Al Hilali, titled *A contextual genre-based study of the nature of workplace writing: Towards preparing engineering students for professional writing*

I understand that I may at any time withdraw from the study, and that my participation in this project will have no effect on my standing at the company. I also understand that my opinions and data will be kept strictly confidential in all reporting of findings.

Please indicate below whether you would like to receive a summary of the findings at the completion of the study.

o **Please send the summary of findings to the following e-mail address:**
....

o **Please send the summary of findings to the following postal address:**
....

o **Please do not send a summary of the findings.**

Signature .... Date
....

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (Higher College of Technology alumni engineers)

Research Project

Title: A contextual genre-based study of the nature of workplace writing: Towards preparing engineering students for professional writing

(1) What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to identify and bridge the gap between the writing practices in the ESP courses at the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Oman and workplace writing. Furthermore, it attempts to explore the nature of workplace writing in terms of both text and context in engineering, and provide some implications for the development of ESP courses at (HCT) in order to prepare engineering students for writing in the workplace.

(2) What does the study involve?

The study will require your permission to allow Tayba Al Hilali, PhD candidate at the University of Bath, to interview you and audio-record the interviews. In these short interviews you will be asked about your experience regarding writing practices in technical writing courses and to what extent the college has prepared you for workplace writing. You will also be asked to elaborate on the challenges related to writing in English you have faced upon joining the company and the differences between the college writing practices and workplace writing. Furthermore, you will be asked about the writing tasks you are assigned to by your manager and to what extent writing is important in the engineering field. The study will also involve workplace observations in order to explore the process involved in the company for producing a piece of written text in English. In addition, you will be requested to submit some authentic written texts for analysis purposes.

(3) How much time will the study take?

The study is expected to take up 30 minutes of your time for the interview.

(4) Can I withdraw from the study?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time even after giving consent. Any data collected related to you will not be used in the study and will be destroyed immediately after withdrawal.

(5) Will anyone else know the results?

The results of the study will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information of participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be recognizable in such a report.

(6) Will the study benefit me?

It is hoped that through the study, educational institutions in Oman in general and Higher College of Technology in particular will develop their curricula to consider preparing their students for workplace writing and this will perhaps yield graduates with high level of writing proficiency. This will provide well-prepared graduates for future employment and will save time and money spent by the company in order to develop the English proficiency of its employees. Your contribution will be highly important for the future graduates.

(7) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes. There are no hidden purposes for this study.

(8) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, *Tayba Al Hilali* will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you have further queries, please feel free to contact *Tayba Al Hilali* at ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ or call ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

This information sheet is for you to keep.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (Immediate Managers) Research Project

Title: A contextual genre-based study of the nature of workplace writing: Towards preparing engineering students for professional writing

(1) What is the purpose of the study?

The study aims to identify and bridge the gap between the writing practices in the ESP courses at the Higher College of Technology (HCT) in Oman and workplace writing. Furthermore, it attempts to explore the nature of workplace writing in terms of both text and context in engineering, and provide some implications for the development of ESP courses at (HCT) in order to prepare engineering students for writing in the workplace.

(2) What does the study involve?

The study will require your permission to allow Tayba Al Hilali, PhD candidate at the University of Bath, to interview you and audio-record the interviews. In these short interviews you will be asked about your views regarding the English language writing proficiency of your engineers employees graduated from Colleges of Technology and how well these colleges prepare their graduates for workplace writing. You will also be asked to elaborate on the writing tasks engineers are assigned to in your company, to what extent writing is important in the engineering field, and whether the company provides training in workplace writing as part of its professional development schemes. I am also interested in knowing about the process involved in the company for producing a piece of written text in English.

(3) How much time will the study take?

The study is expected to take up 30 minutes of your time for the interview.

(4) Can I withdraw from the study?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time even after giving consent. Any data collected related to you will not be used in the study and will be destroyed immediately after withdrawal.

(5) Will anyone else know the results?

The results of the study will be strictly confidential and only the researcher will have access to information of participants. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be recognizable in such a report.

(6) Will the study benefit me?

It is hoped that through the study, educational institutions in Oman in general and Higher College of Technology in particular will develop their curricula to consider preparing their students for workplace writing and this will perhaps yield graduates with high level of writing proficiency. This will provide well-prepared graduates for future employment and will save time and money spent by the company in order to develop the English proficiency of its employees.

(7) Can I tell other people about the study?
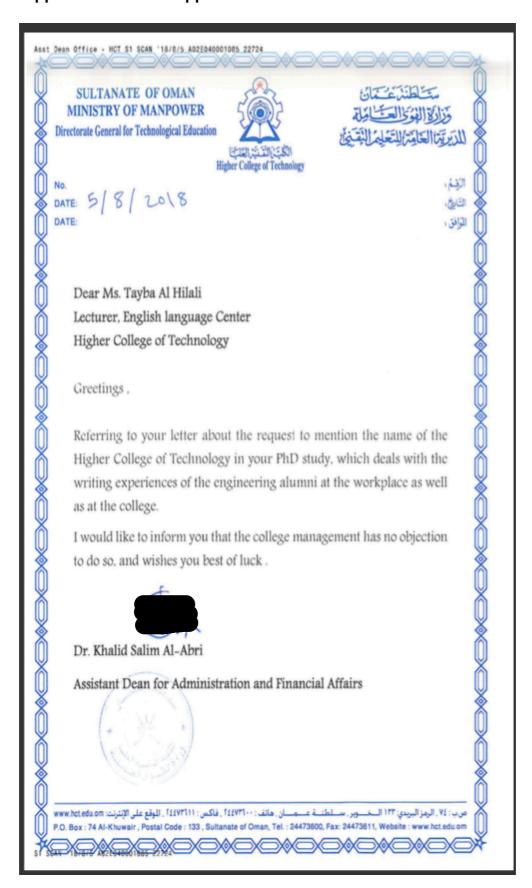
Yes. There are no hidden purposes for this study.

(8) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Tayba Al Hilali will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you have further queries, please feel free to contact Tayba Al Hilali at ████████████████████ or call ████████████████████

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Appendix 5: Deans' approval

SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF MANPOWER
Directorate General for Technological Education

سَلْطَنَةِ عُمّان
وزارة القُوَى العَامِلَة
المديريّة العَامَة للتَّعليم التّقنيّ

الكُلّيّةُ التَّقْنِيّةِ العُلْيَا
Higher College of Technology

No.
DATE: 5 / 8 / 2018
DATE:

الرقم،
التاريخ،
الموافق،

Dear Ms. Tayba Al Hilali

Lecturer, English language Center

Higher College of Technology

Greetings .

Referring to your letter about the request to mention the name of the
Higher College of Technology in your PhD study, which deals with the
writing experiences of the engineering alumni at the workplace as well
as at the college.

I would like to inform you that the college management has no objection
to do so, and wishes you best of luck .

Dr. Khalid Salim Al-Abri

Assistant Dean for Administration and Financial Affairs

Appendix 6: Samples of transcripts

Interview NO: 6

Participant: Alumni

Date: 27 February 2017

Duration: 35:48

I: Thank you very much Sara (Pseudonym) for taking part in my study. I really appreciate it and thank you for completing this form.

P: You're most welcome.

I: As I can see you graduated in 2010 from HCT with bachelor's degree and you're a computer engineer

P: Yes

I: So you work … in information management department as ERP specialist. What is ERP?

P: ERP is transfer for one of the latest system we cannot say latest system, but it is enterprise planning resource system and right now in the market there are around 3 famous systems which handling this one; oracle you heard about it and SAP and Microsoft there is but this the most familiar systems. These systems are as mentioned Enterprise… Resource Planning it means in every company there are different resources you have people resource you have money and projects all those resources of the company, so these systems are working to manage these resources. For example, if we come to people, it will manage the people from part of attendance, salaries, their information when they joined when they are terminated and all those things. Exactly same for financial and purchase it will be same it has many models.

I: Ok. What was specific job description…?

P: Yeah you ask me what I'm usually do. I'm like supporting taking enhancing those systems taking user requirement guide the user how to use the systems, if they have new requirements, how to handle those requirements, so it's between how to support and how to handle project if there is any new requirement coming from the users.

I: Yeah and in terms of writing, you wrote here you spend 3 to 4 hours daily out of my working hours writing

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P: Yes, because if we come to writing, it means you start by putting your finger on the keyboard, it means we are writing emails we are replying to the users to the vendors. Sometimes, we need to write such emails; for example, to attend new features in the system. So, we start to write about those features and how it can benefit the users and how can the user as well we are writing user guide because sometimes we introduce new models or new features in the system so as apart of awareness we need to give lessons or training. To write the training, you need to write of course the presentation, so it's part of writing, and another thing you are writing the user guide how the user independently can use the system by going through that user guide. So, you'll show him step by step, for example, he will log in to the system and this is the feature what will be benefit this feature, and later on you will show him by taking the signature to how he can, for example, insert a transaction and so on.

I: So, what's the purpose of this user guide, I mean to instruct?

P: To instruct and build a right awareness for the users to work independently without need future need for ITs because sometimes you know always continuously happen in the companies… ok so what I was saying usually in companies many employee they join the company and sometimes terminated employee, so whenever there is a new employee join a company, it's very difficult to go and explain separately, so better to whenever we have any model or we have any system, we have such user guide which guides the user how to first what is the system, what will benefit he will get from the system and how he can use it… so as well what we are writing, for example, we are writing project planning because sometimes we are having new projects, so whenever we have new project, we need to write what will be the plan for this project and we will go to implement this project, so during project planning

I: What do you call this… document?

P: Project planning. Ok during that project planning, we elaborate more about the cost about the task all those things mentioned in this project

I: So the purpose is to explain the project

P: Exactly, and execution of that project. Moreover, we have whenever, for example, we want to introduce new system as well before the projects planning, we have to write one document called request for quotation (RFQ) or request for proposal (RFP). This document used to ask vendor what is the service or goods we are looking to have from the market and; for example, in this document what we will write first we write what is the project we are willing to have and why our business going to have this project, and what is the feature would like the vendors to introduce in that system or in that project and what will be our condition to have that project and then this document will given to the purchasing department where they will…invite those suppliers and they see after that we will have another writing called technical evaluation documents to evaluate those quotation or proposal has been submitted by those supplier, and we evaluate technically and as well commercially so technically writing evaluation is small writing you can say it or only to fit to the purpose if this supplier he is will be pass this evaluation or not.

I: Wow you do a great deal of writing and you are a computer engineer! I did not expect this! It's surprising to me! Yeah do you write reports?

P: Yes. For example, I can say that we have different types of reports; for example, let's say you may have one project, and my manager he want to know the summary of this project so I need to write for him small report to summarize what is the project does this project goes successfully or it is project has been failed where it was the situation of fail whatever. This is one of type of report and another type reports that for example you have report usual report we cannot say-technically we are writing report, for example, if I'm leadership management level how my team they are working and efficiency of my system software so this type of reports.

I: What about emails, what kind of emails do you write?

P: Mostly we have writing official emails and main emails is official emails, so we are sending those emails to the employee from employee to employee or from employee to the management or leadership level and we have from employee to the vendors, suppliers and consultant.

I: So, you write to different audiences?

P: Yes exactly. So, you need to take care about your email once you write those emails especially for suppliers or for management level, what type of word you need to mention there and how you can open your email how you are greeting them and …all those things because you know emails is one type of the communication language and the people they cannot see your see your face or cannot see your smile, so you need to reflect your

I: Body language?

P: Exactly. So, that's why emails are usually is the difficult part… but it's depend from personality to others for some of them the email is easier than standing and speaking but for some of them it will be the reverse.

I: Wow! That's interesting! You have said a lot of things that I was about to ask actually. So, here you write all these documents for different purposes like one of them is for evaluation, the other one is to instruct to explain to request, right?

P: Yes

I: So, how did you learn about the purpose of writing? I mean how did you know that this is for evaluation this is for instruction here I'm giving instruction, so we call this purpose of writing. Did you learn this at the college or you learned it here?

P: To be honest with you, yes we learned that, but that time… I'm not take care about the importance of the purpose or shall we use or shall we not because you know later on you don't know what will be your task at work that's why

I: So was it general?

P: Yeah, I remember in the first year we learn general but later on when we were in the تخصص [specialization]

I: Specialization, post foundation

P: Yeah post foundation. We start … I think I remember we have one technical writing

I: Yes I was about to ask you. Technical writing courses.

P: Exactly. I think we go for two part two semesters

I: One and two

P: Yeah

I: What did you learn in these courses?

P: For me to be honest that time it was little bit boring courses, but when I attend the work that time I understand what was the benefit of that courses. For example, … I remember we have different writing, for example, if you have process, how you will write, if you have chart how you will describe, if it is pie chart it is different from graph chart then line chart how to describe all those.

I: You remember all these things!

P: And for example, if you are writing letter, how you are writing informal letter and formal letter, so it was really differentiating and giving the benefit keys we need to use it when we going to the work.

I: So they helped you?

P: Yes of course. And there are different different type of writing actually and the if it is not make me expert at least it make me knowledge, it give me knowledge because at the level

I: The basics

P: Yeah exactly. At the level of learning sometimes without experience be in in expertise level unless you transfer that knowledge to be in the life at life working area or something. So, that time you can be expertise. So I will tell the story, at the beginning it was only knowledge or I know that there informal emails and formal. When I start working in 2011and I start writing my email or before working I was trainee in different different companies, so I start email I found little bit difficulties, ok now I have knowledge how I can this knowledge to apply it in my job in my training. I of course I get assistant from Mr. Google (both laughed). He is always there for us he helping a lot. But, when you searching google, you know what you want to search about, so it help a lot and even when this about email and, for example, if it come to report I know that…when I report I need to know I know I have to use, for example, first second, however and those link words, so it help day by day my improvement and another factor work in improve my writing is that learning from the expertise. When I start work, I have my supervisor who is expert and he is writing different emails and report I start learning from him, so it means that … we need to read

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and see other experience not only in the work even in the writing in the speaking all those things because the learning from the learning skills from people to others is totally different, for example you are learning from reading I'm learning from speaking some others they learning from seeing

I: Yeah different styles of learning

P: Yeah exactly. So, we define my that time I was ask myself what how I can

I: What kind of learner you were.

P: Learning yeah. Then I start seeing how he is writing then practice. When I practice, I feel little bit difficulties because when you writ in English, you need to take care about your words, spelling, grammar and if this paragraph is fully it's giving right meaning, and that time I remember I have one difficulties. You know when I was in school, my teacher was Omani teachers, they are speaking Arabic?

I: Oh! In Muscat?

P: No I'm from XY (town name removed).

I: Ah

P: So, that time what I learned whenever I want to write a paragraph, first I will write it in Arabic then I translate it to in English. What happen for my mind this is from my understanding philosophy, what I understand my mind first it's get it in Arabic then translate it to English and this totally wrong because there is different words in English which cannot be translated in Arabic, and even if you translate it, it will be leading to a different meaning, so that time this difficulty is to carry with me since when I was in school till I finish the college and you know even the teachers does not know that I have this difficulty. They found that my English … the sentence is not matching to each other or the word is not, but then when I come to the work, I understand this was the main issue I handle it with me, then what I within work life… when I start speaking English and forgetting translating Arabic, I found it's more easier and easier and to

I: To write more accurate as well

P: Exactly

I: That's really interesting! So, you depended on translation all your life but not anymore at the work right?

P: Yeah

I: So, you write also these documents to different audiences you said?

P: Yes

I: Is it easy to take care of your audience when you write?

P: At the beginning of course, it was not easy at all because as I mentioned before, when you write for lead manager is different when you write a normal employee or for your friends it's different when for consultant

I: In terms of what different?

P: Different first of their knowledge of their level of understanding especially when we are writing user guide I need to take care who will be my audience, is it, for example, if I'm writing user guide in financial model, I cannot use all IT terms I need to mix my language between financial terms and IT terms, for example, I'm writing this report for management level, I cannot use very technical terms, I need to use very high level terms you know because may the management or leaders they are not deeply in the technical, for example, if I using one of the name of the process whatever they might not understand, they know the conclusion the golden wood to achieve it but the process behind it they are not take care, for me I want to achieve this target whatever you are doing down it is your job guys my goal is to this I want to achieve it that's it. So, that one of the type why the things I need to take care. Also, for example, when I'm going to write any report, first I need to understand this audience what they are looking to achieve. So, when they read my document, they feel that it fulfils their requirement and they feel ok this is right document we can understand what you want to achieve from that.

I: So, you take care of your audiences when you write. Did you learn this in the workplace or at the college? I mean the awareness of audience.

P: We learn it but as I mentioned, you learn it but you cannot understand it very well until you practice it because without practice you might …say this only information it's not something important, but

you practice it and you feel it and, for example, you make some mistakes and someone told you this report make nothing not make any sense for me that time you feel it you need to take care about it.

I: So unless you are here in the right place in the real world, you don't really understand it. It was like knowledge as you said. You've mentioned that you always learn from your manager or

P: Expert supervisor

I: Yeah supervisors, so do they check your writing like if not now at the beginning when you first?

P: Yeah at the beginning my manager show us checking my writing especially in those 3 months.

I: The first 3 months

P: Yes first 3 months because you know she is responsible about me if I'm sending any email would be shame if it has mistakes or something.

I: So how about feedback or direction you get, what kind of feedback do you get?

P: At the beginning, she was correcting some words when I have to use those words and it help me, because it was one of my difficulty is that I was repeating same words, so she asked to use synonym because in the word there is synonym then even for correcting the spellings she asked me to review it read it carefully then send it before send it immediately without reviewing.

I: How different is the workplace writing from your college writing experiences?

P: It's not that different, but in college we learn everything we write stories, we write paragraphs, we write process, but what I remember in college we mainly focus in the hobbies like stories writing stories writing paragraphs about you know different things which is general, but when we come for life, even when we was writing email or letter it all about general not given like business case

I: Not real

P: Yes. If they are giving us like a business case and according to that business case you need to write report or email, it would be more helpful for us because you know you will remember, but the main

reason why this happen because you know when we study English all general.

I: So, it's not specific.

P: It's not specific, for example, the engineer the scientist all of them they have to study English, so be very difficult for teacher that time to differentiate one scenario from others.

I: So, do you think we need specific courses for engineers for IT like English for business English for engineering …

P: I think we need as one course but as a whole we need as general because the engineer later on he will write for business he will write for whatever the other […?]

I: So, you're saying that there should be commonalities among these courses

P: Exactly yes, but at the beginning he needs to understand how he write in his specialist then how to write to others that what I mean you got it.

I: Yeah.

P: How he writes in his specialist, for example, in his specialist, there is technical reports and those things. Let's assume I'm an engineer and I want to buy a machine, I need to write an email or RFP (Request for Quotation) which is learn in business department, how I can as an engineer, show my experience or show my requirement through those business terminology. You got it?

I: Yeah I got it.

P: So, both of those it's important to achieve my goal.

I: Yeah to better prepare you for the workplace writing…once you joined here what was really difficult, I mean do you remember any difficulty that you faced here when it comes to writing?

P: Yeah it was emails my big difficulties because that time I remember we mainly focus in letter we are not focus in email

I: On email and it's a different culture

P: Yeah nowadays no one it's rarely to write letters because now email is more official than letters …letters

I: Old fashioned outdated

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P: Yeah we need to know how to write emails different type of emails how you will write how you are greeting others because you know some of them they write email in very rude language while this person he's not rude, but once you read his email you thought

I: He sounds rude

P: Yeah it sounds rude… because, for example, he is not greeting that person he is not thank him very well terminology or language and sometimes he is shouting in his email while he does not know that he is shouting… because you know nowadays email is very important and is one of the document where [translation: subject to legal liability] يحاسب عليه قانونيا so it's very important to know how to write and what will be the punishment if you write bad words… especially now all companies are using emails

I: As official means of communication

P: Yes, and even as person as we are personal we are using that, even if we are not using that, for example, we are using in our social media like Facebook and those at least we need we know how to reply to others because in those social media we are not only talking to our country we are talking to others we are reflecting how is our culture so at least we need to know how to write those things in proper in polite way.

I: Yeah. So, I'm not going to ask you this question because you've already answered me the question about whether the technical writing courses prepared you for the workplace writing or not. You said that you got the basics right this is what I understood, but you started to apply them here, you started to get their benefits here.

P: Yes

I: So, what do you suggest should be changed or included in these courses after coming here and experiencing the real world writing any specific thing that you suggest should be changed or included, you've mentioned email that we should focus on teaching email, anything else?

P: Even I mentioned writing is better to be in life case study even like you know you can give the students

I: Like scenarios

P: Scenarios even doing project for the users for the students to go to one of the companies to have one case of report to study instead of you teaching them and they are not getting that better to ask them to practice; go for one week and practice how to write this what is the main document is used in that company so they will understand.

I: That's a good suggestion. So you are saying there should be collaboration between college and workplace?

P: Exactly, because you know the main problem we are learning and we are not know why we are learning this so once this come to mind you will not take care about that course you feel only this course because especially for those courses between the for specialist people if they have engineer subject and he have writing he thought that writing is time for relaxing while it's not there is a lot of work need to be done there and that's my suggestion and even if that not possible better to give real case study they can write about it and that's it.

I: How about focusing on audience or purpose, do you think that we should focus on these things?

P: Yeah of course this is very important and even as mentioned the language how they are they use in each email or in each report because you know even if you do and searching in google, it will be very difficult to search, for example, I want to someone pass away or one of my family friend my friend's family how I can write this in proper way and express my feeling in that email little bit you will find some difficulties to do it. This about social let's assume this guy he is in my work and I want to express my sorry for he missed his let's assume his mother or father whatever or even in greeting in thanking in those words is very important and very basic which we have to know and even if you go to the google, you will have different but what is the main things you have to use it during that.

I: Yeah so you are saying we should focus on expressions for different functions.

P: Exactly

I: Have you taken any courses here any technical writing courses or technical communication courses at XX (company name is removed)?

P: No

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I: No courses. Do you think you need courses?

P: At the beginning I was before XX, I was in electricity holding company then I joined XX last year only.

I: Which electricity company Muscat or?

P: X it's the holding company

I: Ok

[Distraction]

I: The question was about courses

P: Yeah I was requesting at that time at the beginning since I told you I faced some difficulties, but within experience … you feel like no I need to focus on another things because when you start, for example, reading in your specialization

I: But for others you think like those who've newly joined the company, do you think that they need to take such courses?

P: Sometimes yeah, they need such courses, but if this covered in the college

I: You don't need right

P: No need of course, you need to focus on other things because if we are fully focus since we are studying in school till the college with proper writing

I: Then you don't need it actually here

P: You supposed to come ready for the company

I: So you think that the college plays a role

P: Exactly because the company wants employee for a job let's assume IT, is not putting in their mind that I need also English course because I already graduated as bachelor which means you supposed […]

I: So they expect that your English should be good they expect that it should be covered when it is not actually

P: Yes

I: Because when you experience, you face a lot challenges right

P: Yeah

I: Is there anything else Sara that you'd like to say or suggest?

P: No

I: Thank you

P: You are most welcome.

I: Do you write individually or collaboratively at the workplace?

P: Usually individually but sometimes we are writing collaboratively.

I: Do you get information for your writing from different sources (e.g. people, previous emails or documents) if yes, who/what are they?

P: It depends according to the document. For example, if I am writing business case, I am getting information from venders' websites and people opinions. If I am writing e-mail usually it is my feedback. And so on.

Interview NO: 10
Participant: Supervisor
Date: 05 April 2017
Duration: 20:12

I: Hello Amer (Pseudonym) and welcome to the interview and thank you for taking part in my interview. And before we start, could you just briefly describe your position here and the kind of job that you're doing?

P: Thank you first I'm Amer X (surname is removed) I'm the graduates' development focal point I'm senior well engineer in well engineering currently directly supervising 191 graduates they work in the field and I'm in the office. I look after their development their drawing the whole map for their career development I do the ranking for them I do the counseling for them the disciplinary actions if any and yeah that's all about it we have lots of other things also.

I: …so you write reports as well you evaluate them…

P: Yes

I: As you know the focus of my study is on technical writing so what extent do you consider the written communication skills while recruiting graduates, let's say HCT or engineering graduates in general?

P: Ok now we have something called an assessment center and they give us a summary of their final year project in that assessment section and yeah there is not much of writing other than that other than the

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summary of their final year project in the assessment center. It's more of the interaction with them personal skills so we don't really look at to their report writing skills when we select we depend on the GPA we have faith that high GPA will indicate a good report writing.

I: How do you view the English written proficiency of HCT engineer graduates?

P: … I have examples of excellent students or excellent HCT graduates but the unfortunately of the HCT graduates are not up to the expected standard.

I: Specifically in writing?

P: In English in general in writing even when they write an email, for example, there're lots of spelling mistakes basic spelling mistakes grammar mistakes and that applies on their reports as well, for the graduates at their level… they don't write many reports, but we see we have reporting system that uses abbreviations even in that there are a lot issues there are people who do the spelling check and proof check before they send the report but based on my experience interacting with HCT students the majority of them they are struggling with that

I: So do you think they are prepared for the workplace writing or not?

P: Not all of them

I: Why do you think so I mean what do you think from you own point of view what do you is the reason for this?

P: I think it's self-interest that is one because I can see the same example in just HCT students in others as well I think it's the basics as well HCT ... college takes certain number of graduates with a certain number of grades from their high schools, so not the cream of the cream goes to HCT students and I think that is the main reason but there are people within these 5 years who developed themselves out of self-interest and they excel and we see that in the workplace but I'm not really sure of the curriculum of the HCT so I cannot really comment on it.

I: You have not ever interacted with the colleges, like is there any kind of interaction or collaboration between the company and the college?

P: HCT specifically no

I: But you do it for others

P: We do it for SQU we do it with Sohar University

I: …what kind of interaction is it?

P: Interaction as in…head hunting selecting top students and there is also attending their events for example, marketing for XX (Company name is removed) in their events in their career fairs

I: You don't do it at HCT

P: No

I: In I don't know what fairs they call them

P: Career fair no we don't go to HCT's career fair, we go only to SQU career fair and we used to Sohar and Nizwa career fair

I: And what's the reason?

P: I was not invited, I was never invited to HCT…

I: Aha so you get invitations from the college to participate or attend

P: Yes

I: And coming to the writing tasks, what kind of writing tasks do you assign to the graduates here?

P: … there is the daily reporting system that we have

I: What do they write in this daily report system?

P: They write what they did in the last 24 hours what operations took place, but it's mainly abbreviations it's a one line report it's not a full report like the technical report that we know. For that stage but at later stage there is a lot of report writing we have lots of standards updates and people get involved in that but that is after 8 years of working in XX…

I: What kinds of report do they write?

P: There is … at the end of the work they send an end of work report that's direct for the we call him the drilling supervisor he sends that to the town there is also after action review report after finishing the operations they send a report of what took place what happened what went wrong what went right, there are also investigation reports that happen occasionally in case there is an incident

I: Yeah so these are some reports with different purposes right?

P: Yeah

I: Could you tell me a bit about the purpose for writing these reports?

P: The purpose is investigation that is one purpose, clarification one purpose another purpose is just for record keeping and also for learning keeping it as learning so that someone can pull out a report and learn from others' mistakes

I: Do you think that these alumni are aware of the purpose for writing I mean … before writing any kind of report?

P: Yes

I: … and do they write for different audiences

P: Yes. The interaction takes place with our directorate and several directorates as well if it's an incident report there are different people different audience, if it is after action reviews it's different audience so each report has its own audience

I: So from your experience with those HCT alumni and dealing with their writing and all, do you think they cater for different audiences when they write … feel free to mention examples?

P: Not really, I don't think we do it consciously that I'm writing this report for this audience so I need to change it that way

I: but… do you check their writing?

P: Yeah

I: So do you face this kind of error in their writing that you writing this to this person?

P: Oh yeah yeah now I get your question, yes there is, for example, the use of abbreviations if I write a report to you I know that you don't have an engineering background I should not use engineering abbreviations so I know that mistake is happening over and over again

I: It means that they don't really think about their audience

P: Yes

I: Do they write individually or collaboratively?

P: Collaboratively

I: Could you tell me more about it?

P: Ah for example, … we work in… rotation so there is one person who starts the report and then but that's not the graduates that's at later stage …

I: Later stage you mean after five

P: Yeah after 4 to 5 years. So, one person starts the report and then his back to back continues the report and then they send it to someone else in town who reads the report do the proof checking if there is anything

I: It's collaborative in this way

P: Yeah

I: Are they able to work collaboratively if they are assigned such tasks?

P: Yes

I: … what about the fresh graduates, what kind of writing do they do just emails like a single line email?

P: They …make call outs for example, they call out for tools they do the … daily reports but the reports are one liners

I: What about the callouts?

P: Callouts, if they call they send an email to a specific unit or a specific station asking them for tools and that station sends the tools on an agreed day and time so we call them callouts so also as I mentioned the daily reports but these are all one liners

I: And that's it apart from these they don't write anything?

P: They do write on a template the written work instructions but these are like template they've been already written by someone in the past and they only change the numbers and they change few things and that's it

I: So not much writing is done during their first years

P: No

I: You said that you provide feedback to the alumni and alumni's written work, so what kind of feedback do you provide them with?

P: We provide to them feedback on their, for example, their tasks they are assigned tasks they need to do few things and show evidence with provide them feedback on their disciplinary if there is something good something bad we give them their areas for improvement we identify their strengths…

I: What about their writing, I mean when you check their writing, do you give them any feedback any comments, or you correct them yourself? How do you deal with them?

P: Well yes and no because for the very few where I see an obvious issue in their writing, I sit with them we have a process called learning needs identification every supervisor sits with his subordinate and agree on their strengths and gaps and he can recommend for them for example, and English course or any other course and we provide those here in XX, so I have done that with one of my graduates where I recommended for him an English course to take…

I: You've mentioned courses, so is this for improving their writing skills or what kinds of courses are these?

P: We have report writing skills that's one course, we have … intermediate English or beginners English for beginners

I: Here?

P: Yes. We have advanced English …

I: … do you think that the college should put more efforts to prepare the graduates for the workplace writing?

P: I believe so yes

I: Do you think that it's important?

P: It is important it is very important and I think it should reflect very clearly on their grades so someone who graduates with the 3.5 GPA we expect him to be able to write to have report writing skills because that's what engineering is about

I: You have different courses as you said here on writing even on report writing, so why did you feel the need for these courses? Is it because they are less prepared by the colleges or by the institutes?

P: The courses are not specific for graduates they are for all XX staff yeah we take people from high school, we take people from diploma holders so these courses are for all of them not just the graduates but the graduates can take those courses

I: So do you think writing is important her and we should focus more on writing?

P: Yes

I: What suggestions would you like to give the college regarding the preparation of engineering students for the workplace writing I mean any particular skill or element that the college courses I mean the

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technical writing courses should consider so that we can better prepare our students?

P: Summarizing that is one area of improvement, strengthening the grammar spelling also I think summarizing paraphrasing so yeah these are rooms for improvement

I: Really! Yeah anything else any specific elements that the graduates struggle with when they come?

P: These are the points …

I: …By the way we already teach them these skills in those courses, we have developed some new courses as I told you we have been working on developing these courses so we include summarizing paraphrasing and all but there are some people who disagree with the kind of curriculum that we are teaching our students I mean they can't see the need for summarizing and paraphrasing…

P: Honestly I believe I haven't seen the curriculum of HCT but I believe it's solid I mean we have examples of solid engineers here from HCT but the enforcement of the curriculum needs to be there why am I saying that because we examples of people who have very high GPAs but they are not really not in the theory part not in the practical part not in the writing part not in the verbal part

I: Not representing their level at all

P: Exactly some sort of enforcement needs to be there so that the GPA reflects what the graduates' calibers are.

I: Coming to summarizing and paraphrasing, why do you think that these are important things that we should emphasize on? Do you use them here?

P: Yeah we do in XX we are we follow standards we follow… standards procedures, everything that we do in XX is dictated by those documents and these documents keep on changing at least we change 30 to 40 documents in well engineering every year so we need people who write those documents I might not be politically correct but until this day we depend on non-locals to write those documents and we need to start depending on locals and how do we start depending on locals if they have the skills how do they have those skills

I: If they have been taught these skills

P: Yes exactly

I: Yeah so in this sense paraphrasing and summarizing are important skills

I: Anything else Amer that you would like to add at the end?

P: Well as I mentioned we are very much struggling with the local colleges in Oman so not just the HCT but also other colleges we compare people coming from SQU to people coming from outside abroad colleges and universities and we see that there is competition between SQU and abroad colleges and universities but the local colleges they are the bottom of the list but among the local colleges HCT comes at the top so that is a good indication maybe they just need to strengthen or enforce their curriculum if the person is not doing well, he gets a low GPA that's it

I: To better … represents their levels

P: Yes

I: That's really an interesting interview … and that's the end of the interview Amer and thank you very much once again I really appreciate it.

P: Thank you.