

Writing, an Old-New Problem for Arab Learners in King Faisal University English Major Program

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ABSTRACT

Research on writing of Arabic-speaking learners of English has mainly focused on errors, rhetorical features and needs of small groups of learners. The present study investigates writing in a sample of 874 participants in a major English program at King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. The first group consisted of (525) undergraduates who took five courses of writing. The second group was made of (225) applicants who took the Department Admission Test (Proficiency and Writing). The third group included (40) graduates who took advanced proficiency and advanced writing tests. The fourth and fifth groups are experimental groups of (50) second-year and 34 third-year students.

First, a comparison of the relative achievement in the writing courses of the English major program and the writing skill of department graduates applying to specialize in English and candidates for Teaching Assistants was carried out. Second, the researcher investigated general writing, content, and structure in second-year composition and third-year essay of two experimental groups. The results show that all groups except major program students suffer from weakness in writing, and that among the writing components grammatical structure presents a particular problem. The homogeneity of the major program scores is seen as mainly due to pedagogical pressure on the instructors and the question types used in the examination.

The paper recommends that there is a need to review pedagogical settings, develop better teaching/learning method, minimize the dependency on recognition and multiple-choice questions in teaching/testing, and emphasize communicative language production.

Key Words: English language skills, Language program evaluation, Teaching English as a foreign language, Writing skill.

Introduction

The interest in learning, teaching, and assessing language skills is not new. In the last three decades, researchers have debated many aspects of English skills in the context of learners of English from Arabic background (Al-Braik 2007). Writing, one can say, has been somehow a special case. This may be due to the nature of writing as a composite skill or the lack of emphasis on this aspect of language by the learners who usually are introduced to writing at a later stage in the school curriculum (Al-Eid 2000).

They generally shy away from writing even in their native language (Weigle 2002). Watt and Lake (2000) have rightly pointed out that the assessment of writing captures “the most effective and efficient aspects of both the holistic and analytic approaches” (Watt and Lake 200, p. 9). The present study examines the achievement of Saudi major students in the four skills; Listening/Speaking, Reading, Writing and Structure, in an attempt to provide evidence about the learners’ ability to write at different stages of a four-year English major university program. The study also compares writing achievement in the program with achievement in writing tests given to graduate students who are applying to enroll on the M.A. program offered by the Department of English Language.

Background

For about a quarter of a century, the Department of Foreign Languages King Faisal University, offered a B.A. program in English and Education, in which the emphasis was mainly on pedagogical courses. The structure of the language component in the program (72 credit hours) reveals a special emphasis on teaching English language skills before moving on to content courses. Starting from the academic year 2009-2010, the department became part of the newly-founded College of Arts at King Faisal University, which incurred a new academic plan that lays equal weight for English language and English Literature. From October 2009, admission ceased in the old program. The findings of the present study amount to an overall appraisal of the achievement of learners who took the English-education program over a period of twenty years. As such it is partially evaluating the program itself (Makey 1994) through evaluating the learning of the writing skill. The structure of the educational program under investigation reflects the emphasis on teaching skills (Table 1 below), a fact which is justified by the general weakness of the program intake (for weakness of intake see Al-Hajailan 2003 and Al-Braik 2007).

A clear picture of students’ achievement in the writing skill in relation to other skills will help curriculum and syllabus designers (REF), material and textbooks writers and instructors. Al-Braik (2007) studied the performance of major English students by examining the relationships among Admission Test, performance in all skill and content courses in KFU program (same program being investigated here). In his study, Al-Braik grouped all language skills under one Grade Point Average (GPA). In contrast, the current investigation mainly focuses on the writing skill, comparing it with the Department Admission Test (DAT) and with the other three skills shown below.

Table (1)
The number and distribution of English Language Skills.

Semester/ year	Course No.	Skills taught	Credit hours	Contact hours
2 nd Semester: 1 st year	110	Listening/speaking (1)	2	4
	120	Reading (1)	2	4
	130	Writing (1)	2	4
	140	Structure (1)	2	4
1 st Semester: 2 nd year	211	Listening/speaking (2)	2	4
	221	Reading (2)	2	4
	231	Writing (2)	2	4
	241	Structure (2)	2	4
2 nd Semester: 2 nd year	222	Non-Fictional Prose	2	3
	232	Composition (1)	2	3
1 st Semester: 3 rd year	323	English Texts (1)	2	3
	333	Composition (2)	2	3
2 nd Semester: 3 rd year	324	English Texts (2)	2	3
	334	Essay	2	2
1 st Semester: 4 th year	413	Advanced speaking Skills	2	3
Total	17 courses		30	52

Previous studies of students' performance have been motivated by "discovering learners errors" mainly at sentence level (Al-Hamadi 1998; Al-Muhaidib 1998; Salebi 2004 and Javid and Umer 2014), and by identifying better methods for teaching writing (Al-Eid 2000; Javid and Umer 2014,p176). Moving to wider concern, Aljamhour (2001) looked at discourse markers and rhetoric features in the writing of Saudi learners of English and concludes that "rather than focusing all discourse-instructional energies on global features, however, more effort should probably be spent on local topical development techniques" adding "a plea for a reorientation of comparative discourse studies away from stereotyping and prescriptivism" (Aljumhour 2001, p. 40). Al-Saadat (2004) looked at the results of two groups (65 students) who took the department examination at King Faisal University in the Spring Semester 2000 to compare the relationship between Writing and Reading. He found out that the two skills "form important relations with each other" and that they "should not be sequenced in linear fashion" (Al-Saadat 2004, pp. 226-227). Al-Khasawneh (2010) investigated "writing problems facing Arab postgraduate college students" using 10 students from Jordan, Iraq, Libya and Yemen to examine

writing tasks such as summaries, reports and book reviews. (p. 11). Most participants (8 out of 10) agreed that “weak foundation and environment,” (Al-Khasawneh 2010, p. 17) were responsible for their weakness in writing, and most participants (8 out of 10) suggested that there is a need to “increase the number of writing tasks” and use “discipline specific materials” (Al-Khasawneh 2010, p. 18) as part of the solution to their problem. Al-Otaibi (2006) examined “information structuring” and the main components of academic abstracts in order to identify the features of writing of Arab researchers.

Rabab’ah’s study of communication strategies identified wider problems faced by Jordanian university students especially Strategic Competence, which he proposes to be the “ultimate goal of English language teaching” (Rabab’ah 2005, p. 69). In the same vein, he concluded that “All teachers and learners need to bear in mind that successful language learning is not only a matter of developing grammatical, sociolinguistic and semantic competence, but also the strategic competence which involves the use of Communicative Strategies to transmit comprehensible information successfully” (Rabab’ah 2005, p. 73). Speaking, orality and Arabic orthography come into play when discussing the writing and reading, and writing difficulties elicited from a group of Arabic speakers learning English (Ryan and Meara 1991, pp. 532-538).

Research on writing in the EFL context has direct bearing on various aspects of learning a foreign language. For instance, Al-Braik’s findings have been useful in drawing the new academic plan currently in use in the department. (Al-Braik 2007). Curriculum writers, syllabus designers and language instructors stand to benefit from research in writing and other language skills. However, the “complexities of L2 writing” are seen by contrasting them with L1 writing as Weigle explains:

Perhaps the best way to begin to appreciate the complexities of L2 writing is to contrast it with L1 writing ... While virtually children are able to speak their native language when they begin school, writing must be explicitly taught. Furthermore, in comparison to speaking, listening, and reading, writing outside of school settings is relatively rare, and extensive public writing (that is, writing beyond the sentence or paragraph level and intended for an audience other than oneself or one’s close associates) is reserved for those employed in special careers such as education, law, or journalism.

(Sara Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 4)

Hence, the teaching of writing should be optimized in cases where the career prospect of trainees is known. But, the complexities involved are not due solely to environmental factors such as orality and lack of practice, but

rather, it is due to the accepted fact that only few students have a real need for writing outside pedagogical purposes top among which is passing examination and getting a job (see Al-Braik 2001 for motivation of Saudi learners of English). Still, a more specific account of the nature of writing and the general trend to strictly penalize writing mistakes is spelled out by Grabowski, who writes:

Writing, as compared to speaking, can be seen as a more standardized system which must be acquired through special instruction. Mastery of this standard system is an important prerequisite of cultural and educational participation ... The fact that writing is more standardized than speaking allows for a higher degree of sanctions when people deviate from that standard.

(Grabowski, 1995, p. 75)

Whether L2 writing in pedagogical settings is viewed as a problem in need for a solution (Rabab'ah 2005), as a process whose stages and procedures can be taught and acquired (Al-Khasawneh 2010), or as a genre whose features should be analysed and mastered (Swales and Feak 2004 and 2009), the fact remains that most people face difficulties when they attempt to commit themselves to writing. This calls for more research and effort to study writing, to bring awareness of its complexities and to offer support to those who need to improve their writing abilities, or those who plan to build their career around writing. In this context, the present work is an effort to understand the achievement and assessment of writing of a large number of students over a long period of time. It aims to shed light on the efforts, expense and return obtained from a program which teaches writing as a part of a wider package of language and content.

The Present Study

The data and method used in this paper are presented in the following two sections.

Methodology and Source of Data

To obtain a panoramic view of students' achievement in writing, the current study uses the archives of the Department of English Language, College of Arts, KFU. The results of five groups (five classes), who studied in the years 1994-2009 are used. The four skills are included in the study in addition to results from graduates applying for a position of Teaching Assistant in the department. Only scores of the final examinations are used, excluding term work results (50%), since these results do not accurately reflect the student's writing ability so much as attendance, participation and the instructor's class assignments (see Al-Braik 2007 for the differences

between final and term work grades). it should be pointed out that the five writing courses cover various writing tasks, summary-making, editing, outline-writing, paragraph, composition writing and Essay writing (see Al-Fraidan 2011 for indirect assessment of writing). A small part of the present data is obtained from an experimental composition/Essay given to the Second/third year students. Table (2) shows the sources of data and the number of students.

These sources of data allow the researcher to make a number of comparisons and test a number of questions. Basically five types of data are used:

1. Grades of Department Admission Test (based on Michigan University Proficiency Test): formal assessment by the department.
2. Grades of final exams of four B.A. skills courses: formal assessment by the department (Listening/Speaking, Reading, Writing and Structure).
3. Grades of Advanced English Proficiency Test for Teaching Assistants (based on Oxford Placement Test): formal assessment by the department.
4. Grades of Advanced English Writing Test for Teaching Assistants: formal assessment by the department.
5. Experimental scores: a composition scored by three instructors in the department including the researcher.

Table (2)
Source of data and number of participants.

Participants		Instrument (s)	Years	Number	Total
				Male/ Female	
Major Program	B.A. Major Students	Department final Exams: Listening, Reading, Writing and Structure	1993-1994	35/60	95
	B.A. Major Students	Department final Exams: Listening, Reading, Writing and Structure	1997-1998	40/70	110
	B.A. Major Students	Department final Exams: Listening, Reading, Writing and Structure	2001-2002	40/70	110
	B.A. Major Students	Department final Exams: Listening, Reading, Writing and Structure	2004-2005	40/70	110
	B.A. Major Students	Department final Exams: Listening, Reading, Writing and Structure	2008-2009	30/70	100

Continued Table (2):

Participants		Instrument(s)	Years	Number	Total
				Male/ Female	
Admission Test	Applicant for English Major	Admission Test: Proficiency and Writing	2004-2008	85/140	225
Graduate: Job candidates	Teaching Assistants	Advanced Language Test: Proficiency and Writing	2007-2208	15/25	40
Experimental Group	Second year students	Composition	2009-2010	0/50	50
Experimental Group	Third year students	Essay	2009-2010	10/24	34
Total				295/579	874

As previously stated, only final examination results are used. The data allow six types of comparisons to be made:

1. Comparing the total scores of the five writing courses with the scores of the Department Admission Test.
2. Comparing the total Writing scores with the total scores of the Admission Test.
3. Comparing the total scores of Advanced English Writing Test with the total scores of the Advanced English Proficiency Test.
4. Comparing the scores of Second-year Writing/General with the scores of the Second-year Writing/Grammar.
5. Comparing the scores of Second-year Writing/General with the scores of the Second-year Writing/Content.
6. Comparing the scores of third-year writing-content with the scores of third-year writing/grammar.

The following acronyms are useful here:

1. DAT: Department Admission Test.
2. LSS: Listening/Speaking Skill.
3. RS: Reading Skill.
4. WS: Writing Skill.
5. SS: Structure Skill.
6. AEPT: Advanced English Proficiency Test.
7. AEWT: Advanced English Writing Test.
8. SWG: Second-year Writing/General.
9. SCS: Second-year Composition/Structure.
10. SCC: Second-year Composition/Content.
11. TES: Third-year Essay/Structure

12. TEC: Third-year Essay/content.

Research Problem, Purpose and Questions

The five writing courses in the program under investigation cover different aspects of writing, giving learners a sound foundation to progress to the content courses and to prepare them to teach at schools in Saudi Arabia. The first course, Writing (1), is an elementary course which focuses on writing a paragraph and producing an outline for a paragraph. Writing (2) aims at training learners in writing a short composition (2-3 short paragraphs) and making a summary. Composition (1) and Composition (2) cover a variety of rhetorical models of developing intermediate composition and emphasizes cohesion (discourse markers) and coherence (overall organization). The fifth course, Essay, is an advanced course which deals with argumentative writing, focusing on debating and persuasive discourse. In spite of this comprehensive treatment of writing and the close monitoring of learners, achieving communicative competence in foreign language writing is not an easy task as research has attested (see Aljamhour 2001, Weigle 2002, and Al-Khasawneh 2010). In light of this, it is imperative to start from real life assessment of the situation in order to understand why only very few students demonstrate an ability to produce a correct, coherent lucid piece of writing after all the training they receive.

The purpose of the present study can be summarized in the following:

1. To show the status of the writing skill in relation to other language skills in the performance of Major English students at King Faisal University (KFU).
2. To identify the aspects and components of writing which are most problematic for KFU English language learners.
3. To contribute to the current debate on language program evaluation by providing evidence of language achievement in a specific language area in which improvement is needed and in which program designers may be interested.

The above-mentioned comparisons attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Are the Writing scores of Department Admission Test comparable to the general language proficiency scores in the same test?
2. Is the achievement in all English Writing courses in the program comparable to the achievement in the skills of listening/speaking, reading and structure?

3. Are the Advanced Writing scores of graduate applying for Teaching Assistant position in the department comparable to their Advanced English Proficiency scores?
4. Are the Structure/Grammar writing scores of second year undergraduates comparable to their General-Writing scores and Content-Writing scores?
5. Are the Structure/Grammar Writing scores of third year undergraduates comparable to their Content-Writing scores?

It is hoped that the above questions will enable us to obtain evidence about the achievement in writing courses of about 800 hundred participants based on formal assessment and also identify the language component most problematic in the writing of two experimental groups of 84 students. In addition, the inclusion of a group of graduate students makes it possible to check the validity of writing scores obtained from examination results where instructors are under pressure to examine what they teach and also pay attention to the pass-fail rate in their final results. In the case of the graduates applying for a teaching position and the experimental groups of second/third year students, such pressure does not apply which adds to the validity of the data obtained. The results, therefore, tap students' performance under different circumstances over a long period of time.

Results and Discussion

The results will be discussed in the same order stated in the five questions above, starting with the admission test and ending with the experimental data. The DAT is a tool to select the best candidates from those applying to join the English major program. The point of interest here is not the exact grade which qualifies a candidate to be admitted, since this grade varies from one year to another depending on the level of the candidates and the admission policy of the College/university. The current emphasis is on the writing skill compared with other language abilities. Typically, the DAT has two components: a) a general proficiency component made up of structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension, and b) a writing component which requires writing a paragraph on a specific topic with some lexical items given to help start the topic. The scores below show a marked difference in favor of general proficiency. The Mean score is 32.73 for general proficiency contrasted with 13.73 for writing (Table 3).

Table (3)
 Mean and SD of Writing and Proficiency Scores of Department Admission Test

Skill	Number	Mean	SD
DAT: General Proficiency	225	32.73	8.86
DAT: Writing	225	13.73	16.73

The scores of male students are generally lower than those of Female students. In addition, one observes a higher SD in the writing results, which shows more discrepancy among candidates in the writing component compared with the general proficiency component. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that writing requires production, while all items in the proficiency test are recognition questions. Another aspect of this situation is seen in the use in the general proficiency component of multiple choice items, a technique which is overused in Saudi schools exams of English language.

The above results from the intake to the major program clearly indicate a weakness in the writing skill, which makes a logical background for expecting a similar weakness in the results of the writing courses. Still the results obtained (Table 4) give a different picture.

Table (4)
 Mean and SD of Major Skill Courses.

Test/Skill	Number	Mean	SD
LSS: List/Speak: Major Program	525	63.29	10.67
RS: Reading: Major Program	525	64.60	27.37
WS: Writing: Major Program	525	60.33	7.20
SS: Structure: Major Program	525	62.64	12.33

The Mean of writing skill courses is only 2.3% lower than structure course, 2.9% lower than listening/speaking courses and 4.3% than reading courses. Because these results are based on a composite score from five writing courses, five reading courses, two structure courses and three listening/speaking courses, and because the sample includes more than five hundred students, the difference of less than five percentage point is not significant. Still, if we remember that the scores include all students even those who fail, i.e. who score less than the required pass grade 60%, the mean around 60% to 65% becomes reasonable. Another interesting result is an unexpectedly low SD in the writing scores. Writing, one would expect to be lower in the Mean and higher in SD. Still, one may partially explain the results by reference to the type of writing examinations used, instructors'

correcting procedures, and the implicit policies on numbers of pass/fail. Al-Saadat (2004) found similar agreement. The mean results obtained by Al-Saadat were: 68.755 for reading and 71.600 for writing and 70.515 for all skills) It should be remembered that these results were taken from one group of 65 students (second semester 2004) on this program, which means that the sample is smaller and more homogeneous, and involved only two instructors, one for male students and one for female students. The scores used for calculating the mean in Al-Saadat were taken from the total grade (including course work), while the present results are obtained from calculations of the final examination results, hence excluding grades for attendance, participation and Quizzes.

This relatively high Mean for writing courses should not be taken as the final word on the subject. This result has prompted the researcher to look for more neutral external source of data, which was found in the Advanced English Test given to candidates applying for Teaching-Assistant position in the department. The language examination for these candidates is advanced and has two main components, a general proficiency component based on Oxford Placement Test, and a writing component. The proficiency component is corrected by computer, while the writing component is scored by two writing instructors using an assessment guide. The scoring procedures in the assessment guide are stated in Appendix One. Four informal ad-hoc criteria have been utilized in building the scoring procedures.

1. explicitness: the procedure should be clearly stated in words.
2. Comprehensiveness: the procedure is basically holistic.
3. Fairness: the procedure should be applied neutrally.
4. Originality: the procedure includes focus and creativity.

The candidates for teaching assistant positions are all graduates who obtained a minimum of 3.75 out 5 Grade Point Average. The results, stated in Table 5, show clear difference in the Means in favour of the general proficiency component compared with the writing component of language assessment.

Table (5)
Mean and SD of Writing and Proficiency Scores of Department Admission Test

Skill	Number	Mean	SD
AEPT: Graduates	40	48.87	16.80
AEWT: Graduates	40	33.42	20.69

The Mean for the writing component is 33.42 which shows improvement compared with the Mean for DAT only 13.73. The same improvement is seen when comparing the means of the general proficiency test: Teaching Assistants 48.87 and DAT 32.73. The Mean of the writing component for AEWT is quite reasonable if one takes the actual abilities of the candidates; but it is very well below the Mean of Writing courses in the major program which is 60.33. This means that the best graduates of the program have scored 26.91 percent less than the average students on the program. Put differently, scores of writing courses of students on the program are inflated to comply with various types of pedagogical constraints.

Now, having obtained a fairly clear idea about the position of writing ability of students majoring in English in the education program at KFU, one would wish to formulate a clear idea about the components which are hindering the writing ability of these students. In Al-Braik (2007) it was observed that students on the same program did better in content courses and their grades in these courses were down due to their poor language. The question here is about the specific problem with the written production of these learners when they write about general topic in writing courses. A group of second-year students were given a composition to write and their compositions were corrected following three procedures. The first procedure scored the compositions for general language; the second scored them just for structure/grammar mistakes; and the third scored them for content only.

The Assessment Guide used in scoring the writing component in Teaching Assistants tests is also used in scoring the general writing ability in the composition of the second year experimental group.

Table (6)
Mean and SD of Writing and Proficiency scores second year.

Writing Skill component	Number	Mean	SD
SCG: 2 nd year Composition/General	50	19.900	15.235
SCC: 2 nd year Composition/Content	50	27.000	16.413
SCS: 2 nd year Composition/Structure	50	19.400	21.132

The emphasis is on three writing components: general, content and structure. The results are shown in Table 6. It is known that mature learners of English have a world view and a knowledge base which may come to

their aid when they learn/use English. This feature comes to the surface when learners are asked to produce the second language and not only to recognize some aspect of it. The results in Table 6 uphold this basic assumption showing that the Mean of Composition content is markedly higher than the Mean for Composition/General and Composition/Structure: 27.000 for Comp/Content, contrasted with 19.000 and 19.400 for Comp/General and Comp/Structure respectively. The Mean for Comp/General and Comp/Structure are similar which shows the overall influence of structure on the final score. The weakness in structure seems to suggest itself as responsible for the general weakness in writing, which is quite plausible taking into account the high number of errors and mistakes in students' actual writing. Still, one has to explain this weakness in structure with the relatively high Mean of two structures courses 62.64 contrasted with 60.33 the Mean of five writing courses in the same sample of 525 students. The weakness in the structure component is associated with a higher SD (21.132 for structure, compared with 15.235 for Comp/General and 16.413 for Comp/Content respectively). This level of mastering English structure in terms of production as part of a text is rather low and uneven among learners.

To follow up with the argument about the weakness in language structure in textual context, a writing task was administered to male and female third-year students who have successfully completed four writing courses. The results from the Essay Writing (Table 7) confirm the presence of this weakness.

Table (7)
Mean and SD of Writing and Proficiency scores Third-year Essay.

Writing Skill Component	Number	Mean	SD
TEC: Essay: Content	34	43.529	17.299
TES: Essay: Structure	34	25.441	21.789

As in the case of second year composition, the essay papers by third-year students were corrected by two instructors using the Assessment Guide(cf Appendix One) (cf AlFraidan 2011,p91) and the average was used as a base for calculation. The results in Table 7 show beyond doubt that the actual writing of major English students suffers from a basic weakness in phrase and sentence structure. There is a general weakness in writing, but the Mean difference between content and structure is more than 18 percent in favour of content. Hence, once again it is not the content or knowledge base which is to be addressed but the basic language structure in addition to

writing mechanics. The SD is also higher in the structure component, showing discrepancy in mastering structure within the group. This takes the argument to the fact that most students in the group are average and below average. The distribution is skewed in favour of the weaker, a feature not uncommon with Arab learners of English when it comes to the writing skill.

Findings and Conclusion

The findings of the present study can be summarized in the following:

1. The intake of the major program demonstrates a weakness in writing.
2. The writing average scores of the final examination based on five writing course for 525 students show comparable results with the three skills of Listening/Speaking, Reading and Structure.
3. Results of English language text given to Teaching Assistants applying for position in the Department, show a definite weakness in the writing component.
4. Experimental results from 50 second-year undergraduates show that the Structure/Grammar component is responsible for their underachievement in writing, since their general writing ability and composition content are relatively better.
5. Experimental results from 34 third-year undergraduates reinforce the fact that the structure component is weaker than the content of their essays.

All above findings except number two, point to a weakness in the writing skill. But this exception is very important since it reflects what takes place in the major English program, and how formal instructional programs seem to fail to detect a major weakness and how department assessment may be open to certain manipulation. Those comparable scores for the four skills reported in the present study uphold Al-Saadat's findings of a high correlation between the reading and writing skills in one segment taken from the same program (Al-Saadat 2004). It has been said earlier that the pressure of pedagogical settings and the examination question types may contribute to the apparent homogeneity of the scores obtained by students in the major English program.

To get a better picture of the program participants in the writing skills, one has to look at findings from the department admission test (DAT) reported in one above and at the performance of teaching assistants (AEWT) reported in three above. Here, the weakness in writing looms early on in the performance of the intake and persists in the performance of the best graduates of the program. In this sense the findings in one and three answer the question posed by the finding in two above about the homogeneity of the

scores in all four language skills. The relative weakness in writing has to be accepted since in DAT and AEWT assessed by more than one corrector, and since the correctors use “strict guide” are not under pressure to pass their own students as in major program courses. In addition, the language weakness of major students has been discussed in Al-Braik who noticed that major students do better in content courses than in language skill courses (2007, P. 226-229).

The discussion of content in the writing skills brings the question of components of the writing ability, which is addressed in the experimental results reported in number four and five above. Here, it becomes clear that there seems to be chronic weakness in mastery of grammatical structure, which may originate in pre-university education. At the same time weakness in structure revealed in writing show that Arab learners of English need basic training in this areas of language as well as in “developing... the strategic competence which involves the use of Communicative Strategies to transmit comprehensible information successfully” as suggested by Rabab’ah (2005, p. 73). There are wider issues influencing the writing of Arab students of English including the question of orality and the reluctance to write in general (see Ryan and Meara 1991, pp. 532-538).

In conclusion, the study of results from an actual program and experimental data enable the researcher to suggest three areas of paramount importance in a comprehensive strategy to tackle the general weakness in writing and the specific weakness of producing erroneous grammatical structure in the context of creative text-making. First, there is a need to review the pedagogical settings prevalent in many Arab universities including problems of absenteeism, motivation and the curriculum. This latter has been addressed in the present case by introducing a new academic plan with less Arabic courses and more focus on English language and literature. Secondly, there is an urgent need to develop better teaching/learning method to teach structure by production and meaningful exercises. Thirdly, there is a need for better assessment techniques and question types to minimize the dependency on recognition and multiple choice questions and emphasize more true to life personalized language production.

Finally, it has to be admitted that higher education program administrators live in a dilemma of having to comply with general and communal pressures to accept more students and at the same time satisfy the requirements of quality assurance and accreditation standards. These are recent but common problems of universities in the last sixty years since mass education has become a paradoxical “permanent status quo”.

Appendix One

Assessment guile used in scoring general writing ability in Teaching-Assistant Test, second-year Composition, and third-year essay Writing.

Correcting method	Construct	subcategory	Points
Procedure (1): General	Spelling, punctuation, capitalization	Language / Structure	40%
	Structure		
	Structure-meaning		
	Structure-vocabulary		
	Collocations		
	Variation and complexity of sentences		
	Organization: overall text structure	Text-structuring	20%
	Sentence boundary		
	Organization: paragraph development		
	Organization: discourse markers		
	Topical vocabulary	Content/ Topic	20%
	Topical/thematic ideas		
	Relevance		
	Purpose		
and Voice and tone	Style/ Originality	20%	
Authenticity: no memorized material			
Procedure (2): Language/ structure	Phrase Structure	Sentence structure	60%
	Clause structure		
	Variation and complexity of sentences		
	Sentence boundary		
	Structure/ meaning	Structural semantics	40%
Structure-vocabulary: Lexico-grammar			
Procedure (3): Content/ authenticity	Topical vocabulary	Content/ authenticity	50% each
	Topical/thematic ideas		
	Relevance		
	Authenticity: no clichés, memorized material		

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الكتابة، المشكلة القديمة الجديدة للمتعلمين العرب: برنامج التخصص للغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الملك فيصل

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الملخص:

ركزت الأبحاث حول الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى الطلبة العرب على تحديد الأخطاء والمظاهر البلاغية وحاجات المجموعات الصغيرة. يهدف البحث الحالي إلى دراسة الكتابة لدى عينة تشمل (874) من طلبة برنامج التخصص بجامعة الملك فيصل في المملكة العربية السعودية. تشتمل عينة البحث على: 1- (525) من طلبة برنامج البكالوريوس الذين درسوا خمسة مقررات في الكتابة الإنجليزية، 2- (225) من المتقدمين للتخصص الذين تقدموا لامتحان اللغة الإنجليزية (كفاءة لغوية وكتابة)، و3- (40) خريجاً تقدموا لامتحان اللغة والامتحان المتقدم في الكتابة، 4- (50) من طلبة السنة الثانية (مجموعة تجريبية)، 5- (34) من طلبة السنة الثالثة (مجموعة تجريبية).

قامت الباحثة بمقارنة الإنجاز النسبي بمهارات اللغة الإنجليزية مع مهارة الكتابة لدى طلبة التخصص في برنامج البكالوريوس، مع مهارة الكتابة لدى خريجي البرنامج المتقدمين لوظيفة معيد. دُرست الباحثة التحصيل بالكتابة عامة مقارنة بمقررات التخصص والتركيب اللغوي في عينة تجريبية من كتابة طلبة السنوات الثانية والثالثة في برنامج التخصص. تبين النتائج أن جميع المجموعات المدروسة عدا طلبة التخصص باللغة الإنجليزية، يعانون من الضعف في مهارة الكتابة، كما تبين أنه ضمن عناصر الكتابة يشكل الضعف في التركيب اللغوي المشكلة الأكبر. ويعود التجانس بين التحصيل في الكتابة والمهارات اللغوية المختلفة في برنامج التخصص بشكل رئيسي إلى الضغوط التربوية على المدرسين وإلى نمط الأسئلة الامتحانية.

ويوصي البحث بالحاجة إلى مراجعة بيئة التعليم، وإلى استخدام طرائق تدريس أفضل وإلى التقليل من الاعتماد على أسئلة الامتحانات التي تختبر مستوى التمييز وتستعمل أسلوب الاختيارات، في حين يتوجب تأكيد إنتاج اللغة المستعملة في التواصل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية، تقييم البرامج اللغوية، مهارات اللغة الإنجليزية، مهارة الكتابة.