



**Factors Affecting Saudi Secondary School
Students' English Writing in Saudi Arabia: A
Mixed Methods Study.**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived factors affecting secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. This study is underpinned by three main research questions: First, what are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English? Second, what are the factors students and teachers perceive as contributing to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English? Third, what are students' and teachers' perceptions of the appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English? A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used for data collection and analysis. Data collection was conducted through administering surveys to 600 students, running focus groups for 18 students and collecting a writing task from 600 students. Twelve teachers were also interviewed. The setting of the study was 10 secondary schools (5 male and 5 female) selected randomly in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were conducted to answer the first research question. Regression analysis and thematic analysis were used to answer the second research question. Only thematic analysis was used to answer the third research question. Also, students' writing samples were collected and analysed using error analysis to compare the participating students' and teachers' perceptions with the students' actual writing. The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed that students experienced difficulties in sentence level issues, including grammar, spelling, punctuation, organisation and development of ideas in their English writing. The findings also showed that there was disagreement between the participating students' and teachers' perceptions and the students' actual writing in the areas of punctuation, capitalisations, verbs, prepositions and articles. The only similarity between perceived difficulties and students' errors in writing samples was in the use of vocabulary. The results pointed to six contributing factors to these difficulties. These include teaching practices, English writing strategies, motivation, anxiety,

curriculum, and previous learning experiences. Both students and teachers suggested some strategies to reduce these difficulties in English writing, such as developing teaching methods, training teachers, improving curriculum, providing extra English classes for additional practice, and encouraging students to use the English language communicatively. An understanding of student and teacher perceptions obtained through data analysis has provided a basis for the researcher's suggestions on how to improve the teaching of writing in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom in the secondary school setting. The results also serve as a basis for a discussion of the practical and theoretical implications of the study.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature: 

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The Importance of Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

The English language has been the most widely used language in the world for many decades (British Council, 2012; Education First, 2015). English is spoken by an estimated 1.75 billion people — a quarter of the world’s population (British Council, 2012). According to a 2012 survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit, nearly 70% of business leaders reported that their workforce needs English proficiency to realise corporate expansion plans (OECD, 2012). International businesses need English-speaking employees to be competitive, and job-seekers need English skills to compete for the best jobs. Education First (2015) highlights that when outsourcing work, British and North American companies are most concerned with the educational level of the general populace and their English language proficiency.

Furthermore, mastery of English is essential to success in academia and the sciences. Science students and teachers see mastery of English as a means of entry into the international academic world. Many textbooks and suggested readings in the sciences are published solely in English (Crystal, 2012). More than 70 % of scientific and linguistic journals published worldwide are in English (Crystal, 2012). International conferences and discussion panels are primarily conducted in English as well. The English language bridges the gap between local or national and international research circles, and thus successful academics are expected to be able to communicate in it.

Mastery of English is essential, for all the above reasons, among students in Saudi Arabia. Lindsey (2010) has underlined the importance for Saudi students to leave school with ‘marketable skills’ in order for the country to maximise its economic potential on the global stage. Most, if not all, of the Saudi private sector makes it a condition for employees to be able to speak and write fluently in English. Saudi Arabian trade, commerce, and industry depend

upon sustained engagement with international markets for their success (Al-Seghayer, 2015). It follows that an advanced level of English competency is required from the professionals working in industries that use English as the preferred language of business communication (Education First, 2015). The English language also plays an important role in both electronic and print media in Saudi Arabia. Basic logistics and administration employees also need to have English reading and writing skills to process paperwork and navigate the Internet (Education First, 2015). In a global market where English is the language of business, Saudi Arabian schools need to effectively prepare their students to successfully enter the workforce and continue to improve the English skills of their students so they are marketable in the 21st century. It is likely students will need many years of English training to be successful communicators in English (Al-Khairiy, 2013).

Aside from successfully making the transition into the work force, Al-Shumaimeri (2003) explains the importance of teaching English in Saudi Arabian secondary schools, stating that learning English in the secondary school setting allows students to engage with the outside world. Students who learn English are able to read and understand key texts that are influential around the world, and learning to read and write in English helps these students express themselves. Effective secondary education can also equip them with the English skills they need to attend universities especially in English-speaking countries (Al-Khairiy, 2013). Due to the importance of having adequate English skills in the global market, many Saudis continue to pursue their education at tertiary institutions (studying science, medicine and business, for example) where English is the primary language of instruction. In these tertiary institutions, students need to communicate effectively in English in order to succeed in their coursework.

1.2 The Importance of Learning English Writing Skills in Saudi Arabia

For EFL students, learning how to write in English is challenging, but the benefits are manifold. Accomplishing English mastery at secondary school is important to achieving

success in higher education and the wider world (de Oliveira and Silva, 2013). Rao (2007) points out that writing proficiently in English as a foreign language (EFL) motivates students to develop their critical thinking skills. By reflecting on the English language, in terms of how it is structured and how it can be analysed, a student can develop both the reading and writing skills necessary for further study. The concept of writing skills can include a variety of abilities or sub-skills; for the purpose of the present discussion, a person who has acquired writing skills in a target language is one who can express their ideas in that language with the needed degree of sophistication and precision. Writing skills comprise knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, as well as the ability to plan and revise a piece of writing (Harmer, 2004). A skilled EFL writer not only produces writing that is comparably fluent to writing produced by a native speaker, but communicates effectively with their intended reader (Hyland, 2003). By being better prepared at the secondary school level, Saudi students will be more proficient and better prepared for the rigors of university writing (Al-Hazmi, 2006, Al-Seghayer, 2015). Research continues to demonstrate the importance of writing well in English for post-secondary students. Bjork and Raisanen (1997) point out that:

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

As Bjork and Raisanen (1997) note, writing has a facilitative role in language development. This is consistent with work by (Harmer, 2004), who points out that writing is a way of proving fluency and accuracy in an acquired language. In other words, writing helps language learners develop the skills of communicating ideas clearly, and assists them in developing grammatical accuracy and proper spelling. Williams (2005) argues that for EFL learners:

It is difficult to get through high school or college without writing, even for computer science majors or those in technical field who claim that they will never have to write....They will have to use written communication extensively-whether informally in emails, or formally in reports and memos. (p. 17)

Thus, writing has broad importance. The importance of English language learning, including writing skills, was apparent to Saudi officials as far back as the 1920s (Al-Seghayer, 1997), and remains a pressing concern today. The Saudi government aims to prepare students with necessary English writing skills for tertiary studies and the workplace; However, questions remain about the extent to which the current system is achieving that goal. Why and how English was introduced in Saudi Arabia and how English, including writing skills, is taught in secondary schools, will be explored in the following section.

1.3 Historical Context of Teaching English in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi government introduced English language education into its school system in 1927 (Al-Seghayer, 1997). The English language was introduced into the Saudi context for two reasons, namely to prepare citizens to deal with oil industry jobs, and to adapt to tourism arising from religious pilgrimage (Al-Seghayer, 1997). Saudi Arabia is the largest oil-producing country in the world; key Western trade partners communicate in English, and thus the government offers training programmes for students and oil company employees to facilitate communication (Al-Seghayer, 1997). The Holy Mosque is also located in Saudi Arabia and this attracts pilgrimage from almost two million Muslims across the world annually. This religious tourism created an English language requirement for communicating with English-speaking religious visitors (Al-Seghayer, 1997).

At present, it is compulsory for English to be taught as a foreign language in all Saudi educational settings including: government schools, private schools, technical and industrial colleges, and universities. English is now taught from the fourth grade of elementary school

(when students are 10 years old) until the end of school (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Even at the university level, all Saudi Arabian students are required to take at least two courses in English, regardless of their major or area of study (Al-Seghayer, 2015). Al-Shumaimeri (2003) posits that the teaching of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabian secondary schools is intended to enable students to use English to explore and interact with the wider world. Other key aims of English education include: enabling students to access key English texts that have been influential around the world, and enhancing critical thinking skills that enable students to engage with such readings; preparing students for higher education using English instruction; and enabling students not pursuing higher education to enter the workforce with the necessary English language skills (Al-Shumaimeri, 2003).

The language-specific aims of English instruction within the Saudi Arabian secondary school curriculum are, set by the Ministry of Education, based around the four core literacy skills (macro skills): listening (understanding spoken English); speaking (coherently with adequate pronunciation); reading (a range of texts) and writing (in essay format) (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In an attempt to aid in developing these skills, students are taught to discuss pictures and images with their teachers and adopt new vocabulary they can use in conversations with their peers. By listening to dialogue, students learn new words; they are encouraged to identify grammatical rules they hear during the dialogue (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In reading exercises, students learn grammatical rules and the meaning of new words they have heard in dialogues. Al-Shumaimeri (2003) says the wider linguistic aims of this education are to impart to the students the skills of learning a foreign language, with the cultural and economic benefits that entails, and also to help foster wider reading skills.

According to Al-Seghayer (2011), curriculum designers believe that mastering the four skills holistically can help students achieve those aims. Secondary school English classes are intended to equip students with skills for life-long learning through reading a range of material.

It is thought that after three years at secondary school, Saudi students should have proficiency in the four core skills. Being able to write proficiently, however, tends to be what EFL students find the most challenging. In general, students' learning is assessed through the written word, for example in tests and examinations (Al-Mohanna, 2010). Research suggests that of the four skills imparted by English education in Saudi Arabia, writing is one of the most difficult to master (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2016).

Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is accelerating day by day in the field of education and English instruction has been prioritised, studies show that the level of achievement in learning English as a foreign language is far below what is required (Education First, 2015). Various committees and bodies have been set-up by the Saudi government in order to develop appropriate curricula for different levels of education (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). However, most schools lack adequate facilities to teach English. Additionally, many teachers are poorly trained (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Mostly, EFL Saudi school teachers “do not receive documented guidance on how to integrate communicative language-teaching techniques into their classrooms, nor do they receive any training on how to translate the principles of the communicative approach into classroom practice” (Al-Seghayer, 2015, p.91). EFL Saudi school teachers mainly pay attention to sentence level features. They mostly neglect teaching students how to write for communicative purposes. Generally, EFL Saudi school teachers focus on teaching grammar, spelling and word choice. EFL students mainly write for their teachers just to pass the exam (Elyas & Picard, 2010). This means many students leave secondary school without the English skills necessary to enter the workforce or to successfully write in English at tertiary institutions (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Shumaimeri, 2003; Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Of even greater concern is the 2015 Education First report, which highlights that in this region of the world English, attainment is declining and adults over the age of forty are more proficient in English than their younger counterparts (Education First, 2015). The deficit of

effective English language teaching in Saudi schools has led to school-leavers seeking English education elsewhere (Al-Seghayer, 2016). According to the Institute of International Education (2016), Saudi Arabia exports the largest amount of university students to the United States of all Middle Eastern countries. While there are many possible reasons for this, one contributing factor could be that students may feel they need to study in an English-speaking country to attain the language skills needed for future careers. Accordingly, the deficits currently present in Saudi Arabian English education, and the means of fixing those deficits, is something in need of further study.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Currently, English language education is falling short in Saudi Arabia (Mohammad and Hazarika, 2016). A recent study indexing the competencies of non-native English speaking nations ranked Saudi Arabia 68th out of 70 countries (Education First, 2015). This report suggests that Saudi Arabia, along with other countries in the Middle East and North African region (MENA), is substantially below the global averages for English language attainment (English First, 2015). Results of the 2015 International English Language Testing System (IELTS) indicate that Saudi Arabian participants were among the lowest-scoring groups in writing, with an average score of 4.6 on a 9-band scale (IELTS, 2016).

Some, but not all, of these deficits can be attributed to the inherent difficulties of EFL learning in the Saudi context. Learning to write is challenging for many native speakers (Hyland, 2003; Nunan, 1999), but as discussed, for non-native speakers, particularly in an EFL context where English is not used widely, mastering writing is significantly more difficult and challenging (Hyland, 2003; Nunan, 1999; Silva, 2014). Writing is perceived by many English language learners as the most difficult language skill to acquire (Ismail, 2011; Negari, 2011; Richards & Renandya, 2002). The challenges are increased when the target language is in a different alphabet than the native language, as in the case of Arabic speakers learning English

(Hyland, 2003). These EFL learners typically know only Arabic script and must learn the very different Roman alphabet before they can even get a sound down on paper, let alone express an idea fluently. However, Thailand and Pakistan all rank higher than Saudi Arabia in terms of English skills despite being countries whose language uses a script different than English (Education First, 2015). This lack of English skills can also not be attributed to a mere lack of education, since Saudi students are required to take English for at least nine years. The country's poor ranking thus suggests that the English instruction they are receiving is not adequate.

English writing skills are essential to success. William (2005, p. xiii) states that, “for those who don’t acquire writing skills, it can mean the difference between professional and economic success and failure.” These statistics demonstrate the need for educators to ask some important questions for Saudi EFL students, specifically: how do EFL Saudi students perceive the challenge of learning to write in English, and what can be done to help them improve their writing skills before they reach tertiary institutions and the workplace?

A number of Saudi university teachers have raised their concerns that most of their students graduate from secondary schools without the ability to write a complete sentence in English correctly, let alone the ability to write an effective essay (Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2015; Faqeeh, 2003; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Shukri, 2008). This problem exists despite the fact that a majority of Saudi school students study English for nine years as a compulsory foreign language from elementary to secondary school. These deficits follow students into higher education. Research indicates that Saudi students leaving secondary school are not equipped to meet the objectives of first-year courses taught in English at the university level (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Research is needed to better understand what problems these secondary school students face when learning to write in English and how educators can help them develop and improve their writing skills for both their academic and professional lives.

A thorough survey of relevant literature uncovered gaps in research on the English writing proficiency of Saudi Arabian secondary school graduates. Amongst existing research, only a few studies (Alsamadani, 2010; Grami, 2010; Salebi, 2014; Sawalmeh, 2013) have focused on Saudi students' academic writing issues, and similarly, only a few (Ahmed, 2016; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Al-Khairi, 2013; Faqeeh, 2003; Shukri, 2008) concentrate on how these challenges create problems for university students in their academic writing in English. While research does show the university teacher perspectives of a lack of preparation of their Saudi students specifically in the area of writing (Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2015; Faqeeh, 2003; Mohammad and Hazarika, 2016; Shukri, 2008), currently, there is a dearth of empirical research that focuses on learning English writing skills from the perspective of both students and teachers in the Saudi secondary school context. de Oliveira and Silva (2013) highlight the paucity of research on the writing skills of secondary school age EFL students. Because of this gap in the literature, there is a need for the focus on English writing skills in the context of Saudi secondary schools. Given the lack of research in the area of teaching EFL writing in secondary schools, and the importance of English writing instruction to prepare students for tertiary studies and job opportunities, the following research questions were carefully designed with the intent of discovering some useful solutions to the problem of teaching English writing skills to secondary students in Saudi Arabia.

1.5 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students' English writing ability. Specifically, this study aimed to investigate difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students, as perceived by students and teachers. It examined the factors these groups perceive as contributing to students' difficulties, and the possible solutions they suggest. This study focuses specifically on teacher and student perception as a neglected aspect of EFL education. While numerous studies have examined other sources of

evidence such as observation and measures of achievement such as test scores (Ahmed, 2016; Mohammad and Hazarika, 2016; Fageeh, 2003), perceptions have been largely ignored. The perceptions of the subjects of the present research could have been compared to other sources of evidence, such as the students' scores on measures of English writing competency, however, due to limited time and resources, collecting these additional data would have posed a significant challenge. The researcher thus chose to focus on perceptions alone.

Data were collected using student questionnaires, student focus groups and teacher interviews. To fully address the purpose of this research, the following research questions were postulated:

1. What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?
2. What are the contributing factors perceived by students and teachers regarding the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?
 - a) Is there a significant association between teaching practices and English writing difficulties?
 - b) Is there a significant association between L2 English writing strategies and English writing difficulties?
 - c) Is there a significant association between motivation and English writing difficulties?
 - d) Is there a significant association between anxiety and English writing difficulties?
 - e) Is there a significant association between L1 Arabic writing strategies and English writing difficulties?
3. What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Since secondary school EFL education is compulsory in Saudi Arabia, all students in the country stand to benefit from improvements to how English writing is taught. Further, the present study helps to answer questions university teachers have about the weak writing skills of their students upon entry into university. The results of this study will be rooted in the experiences and perceptions of both Saudi secondary students and their teachers, so that multiple perspectives on the language education process will be gleaned.

Current teaching methods used in Saudi Arabian schools need to be evaluated with input from the students themselves. While one can speculate on the factors leading to the problem of teaching EFL students to write effectively, it is important to explore not only the contributing factors to writing challenges, but also how these issues should be addressed in the classroom. The researcher hopes to provide impetus for awareness and change so that Saudi Arabian students can become more proficient in writing in English, and as a result can become more competitive when applying for university admission and for jobs at home and abroad.

It is hoped the findings of this study will provide the Saudi Ministry of Education and its policy makers and designers with suggestions for more effective approaches to teaching writing in English education, with a particular emphasis on preparing secondary students for college-level writing tasks. The results could also inform the development of more effective learning methods and processes for both teachers and students at many different levels. The outcomes of this study could be relevant to EFL programs in primary, intermediate, secondary, and tertiary education sectors.

1.7 Limitations

The study is limited to one city, Jeddah. It was not possible to conduct a multi-city study within the scope of this PhD project and research design. This location-based restriction may limit the external generalisability of the study. All the results described in this thesis should be

taken with this limitation in mind. In addition to the geographic limitation placed on this study, there are several that are more methodological in nature:

Methodological limitations

- *Research instruments* – The data were gathered through the use of student questionnaires, student focus groups and teacher interviews. As indicated above (see section 1.5), the findings could have been enhanced with the inclusion of observational data. Due to time constraints and the time-consuming nature of conducting observations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013), it was not possible to collect such data. Observation of teaching and learning would have added to knowledge of how English is taught and learned in the classroom rather than just from the perceptions of the teachers and students.

Teacher supervisors were not included in the study. Questionnaires and interviews would have enhanced understanding of why, in the findings of the present study, teachers complained about methods of training and how supervisors insisted that they finish teaching all English curricula without regard to struggling students.

One limitation related to the use of focus groups is that data may be coloured by students who tend to follow the lead of other students in their opinions. Some students may be apprehensive about sharing information with their peers. Also, focus groups can be time-consuming. The limitations are understood by this researcher and thus noted and respected. However, the focus groups in this present study were significant, as there was a need to understand student perceptions. Conducting such groups allowed the researcher to gather information from many subjects without the need to interview each person one-on-one.

- *Potential Biases* – Part of the study relies on self-reporting, and it is possible that these data may contain biases. Although the results of the present study could be applicable in all EFL contexts, the participants had very little or no knowledge of EFL programmes outside of Saudi Arabia. Analysis and conclusions made on the basis of this data may have a Saudi bias as a result.
- *Limited Measures* – The data within this study was collected at a specific moment in time and thus cannot be seen as a longitudinal study. Over the course of time, participants' perceptions may change (Pettigrew, 1990). Due to limitations of time and scope, this thesis was unable to capture changes in students' perceptions. For example, student perceptions may be coloured by how they feel on that particular day. Longitudinal studies address this issue as the participants can be monitored over a period of time, allowing for change over time to be established.

1.8 Thesis Overview

Chapter two presents the literature review giving an overview of the educational context and also the theoretical underpinning of the thesis. Chapter three consists of the methodology offering a rationale for undertaking mixed methods research; ethics and validity considerations are also presented. Chapters four, five and six present the research findings combined with discussion. Each of these chapters focuses on a separate research question. Chapter seven concludes this thesis drawing the research together. Also, in Chapter seven, a summary of the research is presented along with the implications for students who are learning to write in English and for the teachers who teach them. The thesis ends by offering ideas for future research.

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter one has presented an explanation of the importance of teaching English in Saudi Arabia, the historical context of EFL studies in Saudi Arabia, and the problem of a deficit in English language skills for students graduating from Saudi secondary schools, particularly in the area of writing. The challenges involved in learning to write well in English were highlighted as a significant issue for students pursuing tertiary studies and for Saudis who are inadequately prepared to enter the workforce after graduating from secondary school. A lack of research in the field of EFL writing instruction at the secondary school level demonstrates the significance and purpose of this study to secondary student and teacher perspectives on the difficulties faced with learning to write in English in order for the researcher to present possible solutions to the problem of teaching EFL writing to secondary students in Saudi Arabia. A new approach to secondary English teaching in Saudi Arabia would better prepare students as active learners and critical thinkers ready to undertake the academic challenges of higher education and become successful members of the Saudi workforce.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review has informed the research for the present thesis and addresses the importance of students' and teachers' perceptions; the conceptualisation of writing difficulty and the difficulties experienced by EFL students when writing in English, specifically, challenges with sentence-level issues (e.g. mechanics, grammar and vocabulary) and paragraph-level issues (e.g. organisation, sequencing and development, unity, and coherence). The review is organised in such a way as to highlight possible contributing factors to the difficulties faced by EFL learners when writing in English. The literature also explores the ways in which writing difficulties can be reduced or overcome completely.

The review is arranged according to the research questions asked in the thesis. It will begin with an evaluation of the literature dealing with students' and teachers' perceptions of learning. It will then focus more specifically on literature that evaluates learning difficulties faced by EFL students. It considers the work of researchers such as Collins (2007), Eckstein and Ferris (2018), and Scheffler (2009) who study aspects of language learning that are relevant to writing, including grammar, spelling, and punctuation. These aspects of learning to write in English can be considered some of the main challenges faced by EFL students, and the present study explores them. The review throws light on how sentence and paragraph levels are taught and learned by students and the difficulties students may encounter. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, capitalisation and vocabulary issues are discussed together with paragraph issues.

Following on from this, this chapter explores possible contributory factors which may challenge the students when learning to write English. For example, pedagogy and English writing teaching practices are evaluated. The role of the teacher is an important factor, but equally so are other aspects of the learning process, such as L1 and L2 writing strategies, motivation, anxiety, the curriculum and past experiences. All of these factors are explored in this section of the literature review.

Finally, the literature review discusses possible solutions. How important are the role of the teacher and his or her use of feedback? What role does the curriculum play in improving students' chances of writing proficient English? The section offers theories about the ways in which English writing can be improved. The concluding section will discuss the importance of the existing literature in relation to how it informs this present study.

2.2 Understanding Perceptions of Learning

2.2.1 Students' perceptions of learning.

This section reviews the work done by scholars of education who discuss how people express their thoughts, insights, and views, and their opinions. Fletcher (2014) points out that the term "student voice" is often used in education to represent student perceptions. Mitra (2006) indicates that student perceptions, or voices, can be articulated in various ways. At the basic level, students can share their ideas and opinions about the challenges they face in their learning. However, Mitra's 2006 study also reveals that one of the challenges students face is that "adults rarely listen to their voices" (p. 1). Innes, Moss and Smigel (2001) support this view stating that eliciting students' perceptions on their learning is not just about sharing ideas and thoughts, but instead, empowering students to actively participate in their learning and teaching processes.

Mitra (2006) states that learners have distinctive knowledge and exclusive insights about their learning, teaching and school contexts and these unique insights cannot be fully

replicated by teachers, curriculum designers, or policy makers. The work of scholars such as Rudduck and McIntyre (2007), Hargreaves (2004) and Fletcher (2005) are in agreement that in recent years many educators have come to realise that it can be beneficial to listen to the student voice in order to make improvements in teaching practices and classroom activities. The literature suggests that regardless of the educational level, students' voices—their perspectives on learning and teaching—should be considered.

A significant role played by research is to challenge the meanings and models that are part of a theory, and to question and examine them closely. In the classroom scenario, researching students' perspectives and knowledge, and what they can or cannot comprehend, provides a powerful and efficient instrument for researchers to better understand the roles of teaching methods and their efficacy in the classroom (Innes et al., 2001). This review of literature on the usefulness of student perceptions highlights the potential benefits of the present research, which explores the difficulties faced by Saudi Arabian secondary school students when writing in English, the perceived factors contributing to these difficulties, and how the students themselves think these issues can be addressed effectively.

2.2.2 Teachers' perceptions of student learning.

Like students, teachers also have their own perceptions about what methods work best for their students and why. Kirck and MacDonald (2001) discuss this in their work on teaching strategies. They suggest that as educators, teachers see student success as their primary goal; with experience, teachers begin to learn and improve their techniques to the benefit of those they teach. Thus, the voices of teachers help shape teaching methods and provide insight into both systems that are working and those that are not working for students in their classroom. Clearly, just as student perspectives are important, so are the perspectives of their teachers.

Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005) state that teachers are rarely given the chance to express their views and discuss issues on learning and teaching. They go on to add

that policy-makers and decision-makers often fail to engage and consult with teachers in the process of changing or improving the school curriculum. It is noteworthy that teachers feel the same way as students with regard to the types of changes needed, and the failure of administrators to implement these changes (Gandara, Mazwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Their views provide provide useful comparisons for the present study into student/teacher perceptions of teaching and learning and curriculum change.

According to Kirk and MacDonald (2001), engaging teachers in curriculum reform is vital as these stakeholders have intimate knowledge of educational contexts, students and the curriculum. This theory can be linked to the work of Al-Seghayer (2016), who emphasises the importance of EFL Saudi teachers being given the opportunity to contribute to how English is taught in Saudi Arabia. Teachers need to have their voices heard in selecting textbooks, teaching methods and other aspects of classes (Al-Seghayer, 2016).

Supporting the idea that teachers should be listened to, Gándara et al. (2005) cites a study that was carried out at three educational institutions on English language teachers working in California's public schools using a mixed method approach, and undertaking a survey with more than 5000 English language teachers and four focus groups. Based on the findings, the authors concluded: "It is now incumbent on policy makers at the local, regional and the state levels to use this information to strengthen and improve teaching for California's English language student population" (p. 19). The work of Gándara et al. (2005) is particularly useful and is drawn upon in the analysis of the present research into this issue. Similarly, Sunderman, Tracey, Krim and Orfield (2004) researching teachers' perceptions found that teacher participants have valuable insights on how to attain educational reform and generally improve schools.

The above studies help support the value of including teachers' perceptions in the research for this thesis. The challenges facing both teachers and students when learning to write

well in English are examined in this present study to provide a broader sense of the difficulties encountered with learning to write English as an EFL secondary student in Saudi Arabia. It is therefore necessary to explore how ‘difficulty’ has been conceptualised in other research contexts of L2 language acquisition.

2.3 Conceptualising Difficulty

The relevant literature on learning difficulty shows that the concept has been theorised differently by different writers. Tajino (2003) says difficulty in the context of English language teaching can be positioned conceptually as the difference in a student's L1 and L2 ability. Spada, Lightbown and White (2005) and Ammar and Spada (2006) assert that the key to the understanding of the concept of “difficulty” is in direct relation to the occurrence of learners’ errors in their work. Therefore, difficulty can be understood as the general tendency of errors to occur in students’ demonstration of specific language functions.

In considering difficulty, DeKeyser (2003) highlights an objective and subjective understanding of the term. Specifically, objective difficulty can be understood as whether the language function is complex whilst subjective difficulty is based on the individual learner’s experience (DeKeyser, 2003). Nevertheless, as Amara (2015) points out, it is imperative to consider whether a lack of errors in a student’s work is a true reflection of whether they face difficulty. For example, when learners perceive a task as being difficult, they may avoid it and thus end up with a very low frequency of errors (Amara, 2015). Another understanding of difficulty within the literature pertains to the ease with which one accomplishes a task.

Krashen (1982) argues that difficulty, in the context of L2 grammar, can be understood as being synonymous with ‘hard,’ in relation to ‘easy’. Green and Hecht (1992) build upon this rationale by arguing that ‘easy’ can be understood as language functions that are easily verbalised whilst ‘hard’ reflects language functions that are more abstract. Hulstijn (1995) suggests that difficulty can be understood in terms of the complexity of a task. Using this

rationale, it can be argued that the more complex the language function involved, the higher the difficulty faced. This literature suggests that by analysing perspectives of difficulty for Saudi secondary school students, this research will contribute to the body of knowledge that explores how educators can make valuable improvements in curriculum and classroom methods.

2.4 English Writing Difficulties

This section discusses the difficulties faced by EFL learners in sentence and paragraph-level development when writing in English, given they are the most critical to advancing the basic skills necessary for good writing (Williams, 2005). Therefore, concerning the purpose of this study, it is necessary to investigate explanations for the difficulties in English writing that prevent students from writing a good paragraph or essay. Further, these issues are the main challenges referred to in the literature, as will be discussed below, facing EFL students experiencing difficulty when writing in English. Before moving on to literature that discusses paragraph organisation and development, some writing issues concerning sentence levels will be discussed below. They consist of grammar (verbs, articles and prepositions), punctuation, capitalisation, spelling and vocabulary which reveal the problems associated with learning to write English.

EFL learners struggle with multiple grammar issues that have been covered in the literature review. However, due to the limited scope of the present study, only the most problematic areas mentioned in the literature will be highlighted. As will be discussed below, three of the most problematic aspects of English grammar noted in studies of EFL students derive from verbs, articles and prepositions.

2.4.1 Grammar.

Grammar is one of the main micro skills in learning English writing (Brown, 2007; Halliday, 2004). As language is for communication, using correct grammar helps writers to

communicate effectively with their readers (Hyland, 2003; Paltridge, 2012). Therefore, Halliday (2004) stresses the importance of teaching students how to use grammatical rules functionally. Functional grammar means to utilise grammar communicatively in different real life situations (Halliday, 2004). Research findings indicate that many EFL students have difficulties in producing grammatically correct sentences (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Hyland, 2003; Koroğlu, 2014; Ridha, 2012). Using the same measurement which is error analysis, the researchers Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined errors in a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 secondary students in Malaysia, while Koroğlu (2014) investigated grammatical errors in 23 persuasive essays written by 23 Turkish EFL students, and Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples by 80 EFL Iraqi college students. All found significant difficulties with a variety of grammatical constructions.

The complicated operation of mastering grammar requires English learners to make a series of decisions determining which language forms are the most appropriate in any and every situation (Celce-Murcia, 2002). Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011) used a questionnaire to investigate the perceptions of 90 EFL school teachers in Oman relating to the difficulties involved in teaching grammar to EFL students, as well as those faced by students in learning it. Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam found that teachers believed communicative activities to pose grammatical challenges for students; specifically, written activities were found to be more problematic than speaking. The authors also found that according to some teachers, students particularly struggled with transferring knowledge about grammar into everyday day use. Students tended to be able to recall grammatical rules but were unable to produce accurate sentences when communicating.

Some studies, such as Krashen (1982), have shown that being able to write perfect grammar is not necessary, and that because it is so difficult, some EFL students lose interest. These authors focus more on communicative competency, which focuses on language

interaction between teachers and peers, rather than grammar perfection, as being the best way to teach EFL students. However, in Sopin's study (2015), EFL students interviewed in 3-student focus groups asked about "the use of grammar teaching in the field of second language acquisition" said that "If you don't know the grammar clearly, you can't arrange your sentences" (p. 69). Some level of grammatical competence is obviously necessary in order to express ideas clearly. Therefore, the next section will explore problematic areas in grammar.

2.4.1.1 Verbs.

A verb is the most important part of a complete sentence in the English language (Eppler & Ozón, 2013, Halliday, 2004). Without a verb, you cannot have a complete sentence. It helps in understanding the meaning of a sentence where it shows the action of the sentence or the state being of the subject in a sentence (Halliday, 2004). Spencer (2014, p.45) agrees that a verb is the most important part in a sentence but considered it as "the most complicated part of speech" because it changes its form (e.g. with tenses, and plural and singular subjects) which would result in changing the meaning of a sentence.

Using English verbs is not easy for EFL students (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999). According to Cowan (2008) and DeCapua (2008), using the correct verb form is one of the most challenging tasks faced by English language learners when writing in English. A number of studies have found that verb errors comprise the most frequent grammatical errors committed by EFL students. For instance, Sawalmeh (2013) analysed 32 essays written by 32 Saudi EFL male students (preparatory year programme at a Saudi university) and Suwangard (2014) examined 1800 sentences written by 30 EFL Thailand students (first year English major students). All researchers found verb errors to be the greatest source of writing difficulty. Although these two studies are conducted in different contexts and on students from different majors in universities and male students in the Saudi context but mixed gender in Thailand, both studies indicate that students have the highest number of errors in the use of verb tense

correctly. The similar results indicate the challenge of learning English verbs for EFL students regardless of location or gender.

Conversely, a study by Wu and Garza (2014), which explored the major writing problems of five 6th grade EFL Chinese learners' by analysing the nature and distribution of their writing errors, found that these Chinese EFL students have few difficulties in using verb tense compared to grammatical issues. It should be noted that this was a very small sample. Using students' perceptions, this thesis explores this issue in Saudi Secondary schools to ascertain verb form difficulties.

Verb form errors in the students' writings can result from the misuse of the irregular forms, misaligned subject-verb agreement, or the omission of an auxiliary (Kharma, 1983). Although the literature covers various issues related to English verbs, two issues emerged repeatedly throughout the literature reviewed: the misuse of verb forms and verb tense in English.

A significant problem that EFL students encounter in grammar is the correct use of irregular verbs (Brown, 2007). In a study by Kaçani (2014), many errors with irregular verbs were detected. This study focused on an analysis of the types of errors in EFL written texts of 40 first year Albanian university students. In their native language, L1 Arabic learners of English do not use irregular verbs, and doing so in English causes confusion (Al-Khairi, 2013; Kharma, 1983; Khuwaileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983). For example, in English, the verb *write* is an irregular verb which has three different forms *write* (present), *wrote* (past) and *written* (past participle). L1 Arabic speakers of English, as is the case with most EFL learners, mostly add *-ed* to the verb ending (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983).

In a related situation, Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali (2000) sought to determine if there was a connection between poor writing skills across languages at a Jordanian university. They

collected the writings of 150 randomly selected students who wrote in their L1 Arabic and L2 English on the same topic. They analysed the nature of the errors and concluded that a connection exists between the type of errors in L2 English and in L1 Arabic. Khuwaileh and Al-Shoumali found that about 34% of the participants added incorrect endings to many regular verbs. This is a situation exacerbated by the relatively large number of irregular English verbs, causing overgeneralisations of the general rules of the language, such as adding the suffix *-ed*. The tendency to omit irregular verbs is a common problem in other EFL settings, such as with Chinese and Pakistani EFL learners (Urdu) (Hassan, 2009; Hu, 2005; Cook & Bassetti, 2005).

As the literature demonstrates, learning to write correct grammar creates difficulties for EFL students. Verbs in particular create problems. This literature review helps provide a framework for better understanding the ways in which EFL students in general perceive difficulties in writing verb forms and is used to compare the thesis data to previous studies.

Subject-verb agreement is another verb form problem faced by EFL students when writing in English, as has been found in multiple studies using error analysis (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Sawalmeh, 2013). A large-scale study conducted by Michael (2010) on a sample of 1000 EFL high school students and 200 EFL teachers in Ghana highlighted the usage of subject-verb agreement as a key problem students faced. Michael's study, which used questionnaires, interviews and observations, recorded a consensus between both teachers and students on the problems faced with subject-verb agreements as one of the largest problems for these EFL students.

Arabic speakers of the English language struggle with subject-verb agreement (Al Murshidi, 2014; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997; Shukri, 2008). Al Murshidi (2014) analysed writing samples from 15 male students in various colleges at United Arab Emirates University. The findings revealed that Arabic learners of English frequently use verb forms that do not agree

with the subject. Al Murshidi (2014) attributed this to the ineffective ways of teaching, negative transference of L1, and lack of practice.

Verb tense is also an issue. The findings of many studies (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Kaçani, 2014; Khansir & Shahhoseiny, 2013; Marzoughi & Ghanbari, 2015; Rahman & Ali, 2015; Tan, 2007; Tiensawangchai, 2014; Timina, 2013; Zhan, 2015) indicate that EFL students have difficulties in using verb tense correctly. Other studies found that tense errors constitute the most frequent writing errors committed by EFL high school Taiwanese students (Yang, 2006), Thai EFL university students (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013), Philippine EFL university students (Lasaten, 2014), and Saudi EFL students (Uthman & Abdalla, 2015; Sawalmeh, 2013) when writing in English. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) conducted a study with 40 second-year Thai university students studying English. The students were asked to write 120 English paragraphs in three different genres: narration, description, and comparison/contrast. The authors found that the most frequent error committed by Thai students was verb tense.

According to Collins (2007), the student's first language heavily influences how they make decisions about how they use verbs when using their L2. Collins' assessment of language acquisition research supports this, concluding that learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds may face challenges when learning English verb tenses. The methods employed in Collins' study used 139 students. A total of 70 were Francophone and 69 were Japanese speakers. They were all university age and ranged from high, intermediate and beginners. Collins asked English as a second language (ESL) classes in Canada to manipulate verbs using four semantic categories. These categories were states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. Students were given 25 short passages. According to Collins, all target items were in the simple past. The findings were revealing. Learners found it difficult to move away from the simple past tense and demonstrated little control over a range of contexts. For example, the researcher

indicated that one female participant found it difficult to express herself in a range of contexts in the accomplishment category using the words ‘swim’, ‘run’, and ‘ride’. The author concludes that more instruction needs to be given to learners in relation to verb context in order for them to express themselves clearly.

Çelik and Kocaman (2016) examined the perceptions of 164 EFL Turkish middle school students about their problems in learning the English language. Using open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, the researchers found that 79 students faced significant problems in English grammar including word order and verb tense. The authors attributed these problems to a number of reasons such as lack of ‘effective’ learning strategies, traditional teaching techniques, anxiety and demotivation.

Concerning the Saudi context, verb tense has been found to be one of the most problematic areas in grammar (Sawalmeh, 2013; Uthman & Abdalla, 2015). Sawalmeh (2013) examined errors in essays written by 32 Saudi university students in the Preparatory Year Program at University of Ha'il in Saudi Arabia. Using error analysis, Sawalmeh found ten common errors produced by the Saudi students and verb tense eclipsed those ten types of errors. Similarly, Uthman and Abdalla (2015) designed a composition writing test and administered it to 250 first year EFL Saudi male university students at Jazan University. The researcher used error analysis to identify the most common errors produced by the students and the causes of these errors. The findings revealed that the students have a number of grammatical errors and verb tense is the most problematic area.

A number of key issues emerges from the above literature. Regardless of their differences in L1 and the range of methods in collecting and analysing the data, these studies demonstrate that correct use of verb tense presents a significant degree of difficulty for EFL students. Although these studies presented valuable information, most of the studies used only error analysis. The studies were conducted mostly on university level students. However, for

the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to examine the verb difficulties on Saudi secondary school students using perceptions from a number of methods to better understand the problem comprehensively, thus contributing to wider knowledge of the challenges faced by students in secondary school as well as university.

2.4.1.2 Articles. In addition to problems with the correct use of English verbs, students learning to write in English often have issues with the omission and correct use of articles. As the literature suggests, many EFL students struggle with English articles (Brown, 2007; Cowan, 2008; Hyland, 2003; Nunan, 1999). This difficulty can be attributed to the differences between English and some of the other languages in the use of articles (Cowan, 2008). This attribution is supported by Montrul and Ionin (2010) who examined the place of transfer of definite articles in Spanish and English. They asked 23 adult Spanish heritage speakers to do the same three writing tasks in both English and Spanish. Due to the similarities between the article system in both English and Spanish, the findings revealed that the Spanish speakers exhibited transfer from English into Spanish with the use of definite articles in some contexts.

Incorrect use of English articles has been found to be one of the three most common errors committed by EFL students (Marzoughi & Ghanbari, 2015; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). By contrast, other studies such as Shiu (2011) and Montrul and Ionin (2010) showed that EFL/ESL students have no problems in using English articles when writing in English. Using a student questionnaire, an interview, a proficiency test, and oral production and metalinguistic tasks, Shiu (2011) examined the difficulty of 20 English grammar features, as perceived by 277 university-level Chinese EFL learners in Taiwan. Thirty of the students who completed the questionnaire were interviewed to further investigate why the selected grammatical features were perceived to be less or more difficult. The quantitative and qualitative data results revealed that the participants did not perceive the 20 target features to be difficult to learn. The reason for this, as discussed by Shiu, was because of the good prior

experience of learning grammar which was frequently taught in EFL instruction in senior and junior high schools.

Köroğlu (2014) examined the most common grammatical errors in 23 essays written by 23 Turkish EFL university students in Turkey. The findings showed that the most frequent grammatical error was in the use of articles. She concludes that the errors are directly linked to the Turkish language's complete lack of article use leaving nothing to transfer to the English language's intricate article system. This absence of articles in L1 can also be observed in Czech and Slovak grammatical systems as argued by Chamonikolasová and Stašková (2015) who indicated that this absence is the reason for his participants using English articles incorrectly.

Scheffler (2009) investigated the perceptions of 100 Polish students of English at a college of modern languages about the perceived challenges in a number of grammatical aspects and the effectiveness of instructions in the same aspects. Two groups of adult Polish students who were learning English received a questionnaire. Group A was asked to focus on their view of the difficulty of specific areas of English grammar learning using a 5-point scale. Group B was questioned about the value of explicit instruction for these problem areas. An agreement was found between the two groups in that if a topic in English was problematic then specific instruction was deemed useful. For instance, Group A students felt that they have difficulty in using articles and Group B students consistently indicated that instructions in this area would be useful. Scheffler concludes that "once teachers know which areas their students perceive as difficult, they can safely assume that instruction targeting those areas will be welcome" (p. 11). This study demonstrates the importance of being aware of learning problems faced by students when the teacher plans their instruction in the area. The author recommends that eliciting learners' perceptions about the teaching process increases chances of successful foreign language pedagogy. A critical evaluation of Scheffler's study shows its relevance for

this thesis which considers the difficulties in grammar issues, including articles, and the importance of listening to students' perceptions of their learning and teaching processes.

Concerning L1 Arabic speakers of English, the complexity of grammatical language transfer from Arabic to English is exacerbated by the omission of the indefinite article in Arabic (Alhaysony, 2012; Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989; Bataineh, 2005; Sawalmeh, 2013). This omission has led to common errors being made by L1 Arabic learners when speaking and writing English. This has led to two underlying problems: incorrect pronunciation of sentences and incorrect formation of sentence structure. The other challenge this has caused for language acquisition is with the written formation of a statement, provoking substitution errors for “the” for “a” and “an” (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989). Alhaysony (2012) also examined problems with the use of articles from written samples of 100 first-year female EFL Saudi students at the Department of English in the University of Ha'il. Her findings showed that the most frequent error committed by the students was the exclusion of the indefinite article “a” with the addition of the definite article “the” being the most repeated error. She attributed this overuse of “the” to the effect of the L1 Arabic, where “the” is used more often than in English.

These studies may provide insight into the type of difficulties we should expect to find among English learners in secondary schools. However, initial research into the literature concerning grammar reveals distinct gaps, with many studies focusing on specific issues, such as verbs and articles and few focusing on secondary school students' perceptions of these grammar difficulties. This thesis will attempt to close this gap by presenting the perceptions of students when faced with using verbs and articles. In addition to problems with verbs and articles, the correct use of prepositions has also been identified as a common error in EFL student writing.

2.4.1.3 Prepositions. The English language is rich in short words with great importance called prepositions. According to sources, prepositions comprise over 20% of the most

commonly used fifty words in English (Liu, 2013). These short words delineate context for other words in the sentence. They can illustrate other words' positions in time, location, and relation to each other. For example, one could write a letter *to* one's mother or one could write a letter *for* one's mother. These short words can potentially alter the meaning of a sentence, depending on which one is used.

Researchers have found that using prepositions correctly is one of the challenges faced by EFL students in a range of EFL contexts, such as in Malaysia, Iran, Iraq, China, Albania, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Philippines and Jordan (Al-bayati, 2013; Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Kaçani, 2014; Lasaten, 2014; Phuket & Othman, 2015; Shukri, 2008; Scheffler, 2009; Uthman, & Abdallah, 2015; Yousefi, Soori, & Janfaza, 2014; Zhan, 2015). For example, as mentioned previously, Scheffler (2009) investigated the perceptions of 100 EFL Polish learners about the areas of difficulty in learning English grammar. The results revealed that using prepositions correctly is the second-high ranking perceived difficulty faced by Polish EFL students.

Conversely, some researchers found EFL students have fewer difficulties, or even no difficulties in using English prepositions when writing in English. For example, ranking 12 out of 22 with 3% in prepositions errors committed by five 6th grade EFL students in an elementary school in Taiwan (Wu & Garza, 2014). A study on 277 university-level Chinese EFL learners in Taiwan found that they had no perceived difficulties with prepositions (Shiu, 2011). Shiu attributed the students' perceptions of having no difficulty with many grammatical features to the fact that they had been taught grammar, including prepositions, very extensively in junior and senior high school.

The literature shows that the issue of incorrect prepositions is a primary source of errors for L1 Arabic speakers of English, as evident in such practices as the omission, substitution, and addition of prepositions resulting in errors (Tahaine, 2010; Zahid, 2006). For example,

Tahaineh (2010) analysed 162 compositions written by EFL Jordanian university students. His findings asserts that many L1 Arabic learners of English overgeneralise one item over another as in the above example; they tend to overgeneralise the preposition *at* to be used instead of *in*. In addition to using the wrong preposition, EFL learners may leave out a needed pronoun altogether (omission error), or add one where none is required (addition error). The most common addition error is found with the word '*from*'. For instance, incorrect use of 'from' can be seen in the following sentence, '*Salisbury is near from the City*' (Tahaineh, 2010). In this example, the preposition *from* is a substitution for the preposition *to*. This can be justified by the interlingual literal translation of the words from English into Arabic, then from Arabic back into English (Zahid, 2006).

Al-bayati (2013) identified the most common errors of English prepositions made by 32 advanced Iraqi university EFL learners majoring in English through analysing 32 written samples. The findings revealed that students have difficulties in using the prepositions correctly although they were advanced EFL learners. Specifically, the findings of Al-bayati showed that the students committed 30 types of errors and the most common errors were in the use of the prepositions *of*, *in*, *from*, and *by*, respectively. The author pointed out that the source of these errors was that an Arabic preposition is equivalent to more than one English preposition and the negative interference from the native language could account for the errors. As the research presented demonstrates, L1 Arabic speakers of English struggle with the correct use of prepositions when writing in English.

In addition to problems with grammar, yet another challenge for EFL students learning to write in English is the correct use of punctuation, capitalisation and spelling.

2.4.2 Punctuation.

Punctuation is a key aspect of English writing. Using punctuation correctly is important due its function in giving meaning to the written words (Harmer, 2004). According to Hillary

(2015), using punctuation correctly helps the reader follow the written text easily. Using punctuation incorrectly is a common challenge for EFL students. Studies of students writing across a range of countries have found remarkably similar errors in punctuation. This has been confirmed by research conducted in Turkey (Elkılıç, Han & Aydin, 2009), Malaysia (Ghabool, Mariadass & Kashef, 2012), Korea (Shaffer, 2013), Iran (Nezami, Najafi & Sadraie, 2012), and Arabic-speaking regions (Al Badi, 2015; Alfaki, 2015; Awad, 2012). For instance, Elkılıç, Han and Aydin (2009) examined punctuation and capitalisation errors in papers written by EFL students in Turkey. There were 300 papers written by 32 intermediate level students and 225 papers written by 29 upper-intermediate level students. The authors indicated that EFL Turkish students face difficulties in using punctuation and capitalisation correctly. Both student groups were found to produce mostly general errors rather than L1 interference errors. The intermediate students committed 20.3% interference type errors and the upper-intermediate students only 17% of these errors.

Eckstein and Ferris (2018) used a mixed-methods study to compare L1 and L2 texts and writers in first year compositions in a university in the United States. Three instruments were used to collect data. These were writing samples from 56 L1 and 74 L2 students, survey responses from 109 L1 students and 129 L2 students, and in-depth interviews with four L1 students and eight L2 students. The L2 students were from different backgrounds, such as Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese. They began learning English at early ages. The findings of Eckstein and Ferris' s (2018) study revealed that there was a significant difference between L1 and L2 students in terms of linguistic accuracy, lexical diversity, and language-related anxiety. Of the main findings and concerning the L2 students, the researchers indicated that there was a consistency, to some extent, between students' perceptions and their actual writing errors. For example, about 50% (n=129) of the L2 students felt they have problems in using commas and 52% (n=129) of the students indicated that they struggle with other punctuation, such as

semicolon and quotations marks. Students produced about 473 errors in punctuation out of 1,758 made by each person. This means about 27% of the errors are in punctuation which was the highest percentage of ranking. The interview results indicate that the interviewees generally expressed frustration about having a lack of knowledge of English instruction and lack of understanding linguistic features prior to college. Thus, as the researcher pointed out, L2 students were less confident to apply that instruction to their own writing

Ghabool et al. (2012) investigated the difficulties faced by Malaysian secondary school students in the writing process. Ten teachers completed questionnaires observing writing tasks by 30 students. According to the teachers' responses, students faced problems in using punctuation, in the form of question marks, colons or semicolons, apostrophes, and commas. The findings of the study showed that there was an agreement between the Malaysian EFL teachers' perceptions and the students' writing samples with regard to challenges in the use of punctuation.

Shaffer (2013) examined 113 university students majoring in English at a Korean university. Data were gathered from an online questionnaire about students' beliefs and practices of punctuation, and writing samples were collected, including text punctuation tasks and a sentence punctuation task. The results showed that there was a consistency between students' perceptions of punctuation and their real writing samples. The students perceived that they lack confidence to use punctuation correctly, and they do not check or change their punctuation. The findings of the writing samples confirmed the results of the survey where the students made many errors in using punctuation. The author concluded that the participants had minimal knowledge of how to use punctuation correctly. This study is particularly useful for the present study because it employs similar methodology. Therefore, questionnaires and writing samples in the present study can be compared to Shaffer (2013).

L1 Arabic speakers of English face similar challenges to their EFL counterparts in Malaysia, Korea, Turkey and Iran with utilising punctuation correctly. A number of studies found that L1 Arabic speakers of English face challenges in using punctuation correctly in their English writing (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Al Badi, 2015; Alfaki, 2015; Awad, 2012; Ghrib, 2004). Ghrib (2004) surveyed 130 secondary school students in Tunisia about their perceptions of the challenges they face in learning the English language. In the context of writing skills, the majority of the participating students perceived punctuation as one of the main problems they encounter when writing in English.

A study was carried out by Awad (2012) on 45 males and 55 females from the TEFL Department in the Faculty of Education and the English Department in the Faculty of Arts at An-Najah National University, Palestine. Awad's study examined the major punctuation errors committed by his participants in their writing, and found that the most common errors were using commas in place of periods, using capital letters incorrectly, using quotation marks and semicolons incorrectly.

Some studies in the Saudi context investigated the writing problems faced by Saudi students and found punctuation as one of the challenges students face when writing in English. These studies (Alamin & Ahmed, 2012; Al-Khairi, 2013; Almukhaizeem, 2013) were conducted on university level students using writing samples as a way to analyse students' errors in their writing. By conducting a written test, Almukhaizeem (2013) identified the most common errors related to punctuation and spelling in a sample of 100 EFL Saudi college students. The study found many errors in writing mechanics (spelling and punctuation). Specifically, the number of spelling errors was 984 greater than the number of errors in punctuation. Mohammad & Hazarika (2016) also compared university-level students' writing samples with their perceptions of their English writing skills and found that 53.3% of the EFL Saudi students surveyed believed they had no problems with punctuation, despite the fact that

their writing samples demonstrated overt problems. The researchers attributed these results to students' lack of awareness of the punctuation rules they were violating. While Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) found inconsistency between perceptions and reality regarding problems with punctuation, other studies, such as Ghabool et al. (2012) and Shaffer (2013), found agreement between students' perceptions and actual performance. Shaffer (2013) found a high rate of errors; he attributes students' problem with punctuation to the lack of good instruction in punctuation use in Korean high schools.

Alamin & Ahmed (2012) carried out a study on 100 male general science students from the College of Science at Taif University. Researchers collected data from quizzes, homework and results of final examinations. The results revealed that the participating students in Alamin and Ahmed's study had problems with some punctuation marks such as periods at the end of a sentence and the use of commas and semicolons.

The aforementioned studies show that students have challenges when using punctuation marks correctly. What is important to note is that many students did not recognise that they had punctuation difficulties. When asking the question 'what are the perceived contributing factors to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English', then the issue becomes more complex since students may not acknowledge or even recognise the errors they make when writing English. Their perceptions of the feedback given by teachers when correcting papers could even be at odds with how students think they have performed. This issue may colour how students respond to questionnaires, and needs to be addressed in the present study when analysing responses.

2.4.3 Capitalisation.

Research has shown that capitalisation rules present a challenge to many EFL Chinese (Jichun, 2015), Turkish (Elkılıç et al., 2009), Thai (Nonkukhetkhong, 2013), Iranian (Davoudi, Nafchi & Mallahi, 2015), Saudi (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Salebi, 2004; Siddiqui, 2015),

and Jordanian students (Al-Khasawneh, 2014). Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) found that 76.66 % of the participating EFL Saudi university students did not perceive problems in capitalisation despite the fact that writing samples indicated that participants struggled with using capitalisation.

The capitalisation errors of 20 female Saudi EFL students were observed in a 2015 study that took place at the College of Applied Medical Science at Bisha University in Saudi Arabia (Siddiqui, 2015). Out of 12,000 total words analysed, the research found 983 capitalisation errors a 'significant' portion of the students' total writing errors. Interviews with 10 of the students indicated that they knew the rules of capitalisation, but when pressed for time on a writing assignment, they quickly forgot to apply them (Siddiqui, 2015). Similarly, in Al-Khasawneh's (2014) study that was conducted at Ajloun National University in Jordan, an error analysis ranked 11 categories of grammatical errors observed in 26 paragraphs written by 26 (16 females, 10 males) Jordanian university students, and capitalisation errors made up 7.2% of total errors, which ranked as the eighth most common error from among the 11 categories. Though the rules of capitalisation may seem apparently easy at the surface level, perception is not always reality. Salebi (2004) analysed student errors and conducted error analysis of the writing of 32 female EFL Saudi college students. Reinforcing what was found in the Siddiqui study above, students claimed to know grammatical rules, but error analysis showed otherwise (Salebi, 2004). Students asserted that they made the errors for reasons such as test anxiety and their tendency to focus on content rather than form (Salebi, 2004). Another reason for capitalisation challenges faced by EFL students, according to Nazim and Ahmad (2012), is that students often lack sufficient input to delineate appropriate instances for capitalisation in different contexts, such as proper nouns, titles, or even the first word in sentences.

The review of abovementioned research regarding students' writing errors in English shows the fact that capitalisation errors comprise a relatively noteworthy portion of the

documented errors. While the reasons for difficulties with capitalisation cited by students vary based on their L1, these reasons have been thoroughly documented in the literature. Numerous researchers have noted the importance of capitalisation in English, as it relates to the conveyance of meaning and its role in relaying the significance of certain words. Due to this eminence, the reasons behind these errors merit further investigation so that they may be addressed in order to help students learn or develop strategies to correct their errors.

There is a consensus in the above studies that capitalisation errors are common in students' writing. However, whilst the emphasis of most studies is on the errors made by the students with regard to capitalisation, there does not appear to be much discussion about why students, who may be anxious or in a hurry, tend to make these particular mistakes in capitalisation. By focusing on students' perception of difficulty in writing English, this present study hopes to throw more light on this issue thereby adding to the existing literature.

2.4.4 Spelling.

In addition to grammar, punctuation and capitalisation issues, the literature indicates that spelling is also a common problem in Saudi students' academic writing (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989; Shabbir & Bughio, 2009; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983). Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) found that 67% of the participating EFL Saudi students perceived that they have no difficulties in spelling despite the fact that their writing samples demonstrated the opposite. Learning to spell in English is inherently difficult from a Saudi perspective as, unlike Arabic, the English language often does not correlate to the writing system in terms of the sounds of the words to be written (Albalawi, 2016; Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud and Gaudel, 2015; Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). Spelling is generally not a focal point for teaching or assessment in Arabic speaking countries' schools (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). This has sparked problems in foreign language spelling because the strategies used to develop spelling competency have not been taught initially in learning the first language. Having said this,

spelling mistakes still occur in Arabic, but they are less common since there is no silent alphabet in the Arabic language, which has one letter for each sound (Al-Mutawa & Kailani, 1989).

The other main challenge with English spelling is that the structures and conventions are very dissimilar in nature to Arabic. This is due to the fact that there is no capitalisation of words in Arabic, meaning that no distinction can be made between upper and lower cases (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). Additionally, some letters in the English alphabet do not exist in Arabic, such as “p” and “v”, making it hard for L1 Arabic writers to spell words in English that contain these letters (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983). In the Saudi context, Alhaisoni et al. (2015) and Albalawi (2016) conducted studies on Saudi university level students using writing samples to investigate the spelling errors. Alhaisoni et al. (2015) collected data from written samples by 122 EFL students (male and female) enrolled in an intensive English language program at the University of Ha'il in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of errors found errors of omission to be most common. In a later study, Albalawi (2016) investigated the common spelling errors made by 80 EFL Saudi female university students, using a writing and spelling test. This study also found that errors of omission were the most common category at 59%. Both studies found that their participating students had difficulties in spelling but that the most common errors were errors of omission. Gerlach (2017) attributes the errors of omission to the inadequate knowledge of the English rules and to the interference of the L1 language.

Wilcox, Yagelski and Yu (2013) investigated the type and frequency of errors in essays written by 49 L1 and 18 L2 students from 10 American high schools. The sample included 120 essays written by English language arts (ELA) students and 58 essays written by social studies students. Concerning ELA students, the results revealed that error rates were significantly higher with L2 students compared with L1 students. Spelling errors were the most frequent

(13%) followed by verb usage (12%) and capitalisation at 8% among many other types of errors produced by L2 students. The authors indicate that L2 learners of English could benefit from instruction and feedback focused on these areas. Such instruction needs to be correctly guided and timed appropriately to meet the students' needs.

As the literature presented here suggests, factors that contribute to spelling errors have a negative impact on the effectiveness of writing by L1 Arabic speakers of English. Spelling errors can lead to misunderstandings and demonstrates ineffective command of the L2 language. The research that demonstrates spelling as an issue for L1 Arabic speakers of English is relevant to this study, as student participants were asked to consider similar issues in their writing too.

2.4.5 Vocabulary.

Vocabulary is a key aspect of language learning that affects EFL learners' ability to communicate effectively. There has been a general consensus among many researchers that EFL students face challenges in using vocabulary correctly (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nation, 2001; Nunan, 1999; Thornbury, 2009; Williams, 2005). It has been suggested that vocabulary or lexicon may be the most significant component for EFL learners (Nation, 2001; Thornbury, 2009). Grammar is certainly an important aspect of writing correctly, but as Wilkins (1972) notes, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111-112). Nation (2001) asserts that assessing the quality of writing depends mainly on the appropriate use of vocabulary. Researchers state that poor vocabulary use is a prevalent problem in EFL students' academic writing (Al-Seghayer, 2015; Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nation, 2001; Nunan, 1999; Thornbury, 2009). Research findings also suggest that vocabulary knowledge entails mastering receptive and productive skills (Nation, 2001). The former describes recognising the meaning of a word when it is heard or seen, whereas the latter describes producing a word appropriately in spoken or written

communication. Nation (2001) and Hinkel (2015) indicate that many second language learners face more difficulties in productive rather than receptive vocabulary. Harmer (2007) and Krashen (1982) point out that students need to learn how words are used in context.

Çelikand and Kocaman (2016) point out that problems faced by EFL Turkish middle-school students are directly related to difficulties in vocabulary. Of the 164 students surveyed in their study, 103 students perceived problems in their use of vocabulary. Eckstein and Ferris (2018) (the study is introduced above in section 2.4.4) found consistency between L2 students' perceptions and their actual writing errors. They found that difficulties with word choice ranked second highest while errors in punctuation was first.

As already noted in this review, Ghrib (2004) has studied the perceptions of students learning English language, and who have difficulties in vocabulary. Her study relates to secondary school L1 Arabic speakers of English, and thus is similar to the context of the present study. Doushaq (1986) stresses that L1 Arabic learners of English have problems using appropriate lexical items such that their writing often lacks clarity. Consistent with Doushaq (1986), more recent research findings state that EFL students sometimes use words in a way that can be considered confusing or inefficient (Al-Ghonaim, 2005). Moqimipour & Shahrokhi (2015) used error analysis (EA) to analyse 65 English paragraphs written by 65 Iranian intermediate EFL students. Writing samples were subjected to error analysis, and results showed that word choice is one of the challenges faced by EFL Iranian students due to the interference of their L1. Indeed, many EFL students misuse words in their writing, conveying meanings that were not intended.

Failing to produce appropriate vocabulary words while writing limits the student's ability to communicate effectively. Al-Seghayer (2011) points out that many EFL Saudi students memorise vocabulary in isolated terms, which is insufficient to communicate effectively. Similarly, Al-Mohanna (2010) explored EFL teaching in the Saudi Arabian

context. He used classroom observation and interviewed 40 Saudi male English teachers in a secondary school. His goal was to determine how communicative language teaching is understood and implemented in Saudi classrooms. He found that Saudi EFL students learn vocabulary receptively by memorisation and translation. Similarly, in the EFL Chinese context, Ma (2012) points out that “traditional teaching mode put more emphasis on mechanical memorisation to enlarge students’ vocabulary instead of developing their lexical competence” (p. 1999). Due to many EFL teachers’ focus on teaching receptive vocabulary (Hinkel, 2015), it is not surprising that many EFL students have difficulties in using productive vocabulary.

Other researchers, such as Amiryousefi (2015) and Ma (2012) indicate that problems faced by EFL students with using vocabulary correctly can be related to lack of vocabulary learning strategies. Amiryousefi (2015) studied teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards using a variety of vocabulary learning strategies. In order to gauge their beliefs, 320 EFL Iranian students and 70 English teachers were given questionnaires. The findings revealed that participants found strategies, such as guessing the vocabulary from context and closely examining vocabulary forms were useful. What they found less useful was bilingual dictionaries and mnemonic strategies. Thus, what learners were really attracted too were discovery strategies, such as guessing words within the context of an image or piece of writing. Teachers also believed that this was a useful strategy for learning new words, believing that by linking L1 Farsi words with English ones, it helped learners to evaluate images and see words in their correct context.

A study conducted at a Chinese university by Ma (2012) proposed a vocabulary instruction mode to increase students’ receptive vocabulary size, productive vocabulary richness and the use of learning strategies. The subjects were 70 undergraduate EFL Chinese learners. Measurement instruments included a test of receptive and productive vocabulary size,

and a questionnaire about learning strategies. The author found that the proposed strategy helped in adding to the size and richness of the students' receptive vocabulary. It also assisted in raising an awareness of using learning strategies and it increased students' motivation. Moreover, Ma (2012) attributed the problems in using vocabulary correctly to lack of vocabulary learning strategies, lack of motivation, lack of practice, and inadequate exposure to authentic language input. These findings mirror the research used in this study in that student participants were asked to give their own perceptions of the contributing factors that affect their writing including some of the problems recognised by Ma (2012).

At the heart of studies made of vocabulary competence is the consensus that students recognise that vocabulary difficulties inhibit them when writing in English. The studies effectively demonstrate the strategies that can be used to overcome some of the difficulties students find when struggling with vocabulary and lexicon resources. This study will add to existing research by investigating what students themselves say about the issue. By doing so, it will throw new light on how the students themselves believe teaching strategies can be improved during their secondary school education.

When considering the Saudi EFL context, Shukri's (2008) study aimed to evaluate the perceptions of medical students concerning their English writing difficulties. Shukri distributed 267 student questionnaires, and conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with students and nine semi-structured interviews with teachers. The findings revealed a consensus of opinion between students' and teachers' who perceived that using vocabulary was the most difficult area for students writing English.

Alsaif and Milton (2012) conducted a critical study of vocabulary uptake with EFL students in Saudi public schools. Saudi Arabian students are reluctant to take up English as a foreign language based on the methodologies employed by teachers. They argue that their research has shown that students lack motivation to learn because programs of study require

much repetition and very little input. In more traditional pedagogies there appears to be little variation in themes and topics. Overall the authors suggest that what is offered to students is dull and de-motivating. The authors conclude that textbooks play a significant role in making learning dull and unattractive. The authors are highly critical of English language textbooks of the kind used in Saudi public schools arguing that in their examination of such books only 40 percent of the vocabulary within the books is actually learned. When learners were consulted they stated that learning vocabulary would be easier if there was a combination of strategies including length, repetition and concreteness. In other words, words repeated frequently and those that are concrete and easy to visualise seem to be learned easier than words which are not. It should be noted that this study was done in 2012. In recent years e-learning has been introduced which provides learners with different ways of learning vocabulary, including interactive video games. Nevertheless, this literature shows that teachers still prefer to use more traditional methods. Thus, the work of Alsiaf and Milton (2012) is still of critical importance in current debates.

To sum up, a number of EFL studies, such as Al Murshidi (2014), Darus and Subramaniam (2009), Timina (2013), and Wu and Garza (2014) have examined the difficulties faced by EFL students in sentence-level issues including grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and vocabulary when writing in English. Most of these studies used error analysis and most of them were conducted on university level students. These studies could have different results from those that would be found in the Saudi contexts. In the Saudi EFL context, studies by (Alamin & Ahmed, 2012; Alhaysony, 2012; Al-Khairi, 2013; Almkhaizeem, 2013; Salebi, 2004; Sawalmeh, 2013; Siddiqui, 2015; Uthman & Abdalla, 2015) focused only on university level students and studies of writing samples. Also, these studies used only error analysis as a way of analysing the data. Although they contributed to knowledge by highlighting the most problematic areas, they did not investigate students' perceptions in the

secondary school context. Students' perceptions may provide different results. Moreover, the methods employed in some studies, such as Alamin and Ahmed (2012), used only quantitative methods. Research for this study uses mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, which can help in understanding the research problem comprehensively. In addition, only a few studies such as Mohammad and Hazarika (2016), compared perceptions and reality of university students' actual writing in the Saudi context. By examining all aspects of sentence-level issues with high school students in the Saudi context, using mixed methods to compare perceptions with reality, the present study fills a gap in the research.

Most teachers of EFL writing would agree that knowledge of sentence-level issues such as grammar, punctuation; capitalisation, spelling, and vocabulary are prerequisites for writing good paragraphs (Nunan, 1999). However, it can be argued that these skills alone are not sufficient to result in effective paragraph writing that reflects good organisation, flow and unity (Hyland, 2003). In the next section, literature that covers other necessary components for writing effective paragraphs and the problems EFL writers encounter will be reviewed.

2.4.6 Paragraph organisation and development.

Another problematic area in learning English writing is organisation and development of ideas. Many international studies in the field of writing for EFL learners, including those from L1 Arabic backgrounds, found that students lacked the ability to organise their compositions (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Hasan & Akhand, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Williams, 2005). Foreign language learners of English often transfer their native language style to writing in English, and this may cause problems for how they organise their English prose (Hyland, 2003; Williams, 2005). This can lead to further complications in the organisation of their writing, as students from L1 Arabic backgrounds have rarely been trained or taught composition writing. This claim is consistent with a study by Doushaq (1986) in which Jordanian students wrote two compositions, one in Arabic and the other in English. Doushaq found that 47% of

correspondents failed to correctly organise their compositions in both languages. Similar results were obtained by Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), who conducted a study on Omani students to investigate the English writing challenges experienced by Omani school and university students. Studies focused on written language sequencing identified that many L1 Arabic learners of English were not aware of the importance of ordering their ideas, nor did they understand how to do so (Doushaq, 1986; Kharma, 1985). A number of researchers point out that different genres and styles of writing organise ideas differently (Brown, 2007). A lack of experience with the various rhetorical styles can affect the EFL student's ability to effectively organise paragraphs within the rhetorical context of a writing task (Hyland, 2003). Students' inability to organise paragraphs effectively could be partly explained by the lack of prior knowledge, training and emphasis provided by the English teacher, and the greater emphasis given by teachers to the syntactic or linguistic features of writing than the rhetorical aspects of organising ideas in order to write effectively (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Hasan & Akhand, 2010). The research provided by this study contributes to the literature presented here, in that student participants were asked to explain their perceptions of some of the factors contributing to their inability to organise their paragraphs effectively when writing in English.

The above studies indicate that a range of EFL students have challenges in organising their paragraphs when writing in English largely because they lack some of the component skills needed to construct paragraphs. Ahmed (2010), using a mixed method design, investigated coherence and cohesion problems experienced by Egyptian students of English teachers when writing in English. A total of 165 students answered the questionnaires, 14 of them were interviewed, and seven essay writing lecturers answered the questionnaire and were interviewed. The main findings of Ahmed's (2010) study showed that students have difficulties in using the topic sentence, thesis statement, concluding sentence, transitions of ideas, and sequence of ideas; each of these problems results in a lack of organisation and unity in the

paragraph structure in student writing. Ahmed's study is relevant to the research presented in this study as student participants were also asked to share their thoughts about problems with paragraph construction that result in similar issues with organisation (Ahmed 2010). As far as development of ideas is concerned, many researchers have indicated that in Arabic compositions many students have a tendency to be quite ambiguous or too simplistic in their writing (Al-Kahtani, 2002; Doushaq, 1986). Another study revealed that Arab students' paragraphs had no linear development or supportive lateral development (Kharma, 1985). Fareh (2014) argues that this can be attributed the difference in rhetorical styles between English and Arabic. Students tend to transfer the style they use in their native language to a new language. Arabic compositions tend to make more use of indirectness; for instance, in Arabic writing the topic sentence may be implied rather than explicit. This relative lack of directness may be viewed as a flaw when carried over into English writing.

While organisation has been identified as a serious challenge, paragraph development has also emerged as a concern in research into issues faced by L1 Arabic EFL writers. The proper development of ideas through language functions is important in that it gives scope and direction to the writing (Harmer, 2004). This includes using words that contrast, critically analyse and evaluate to give direction to the paragraph. As stated above, it has been indicated that in Arabic compositions many students have a tendency to be quite ambiguous or too simplistic in their writing (Al-Kahtani, 2002; Doushaq, 1986). Most fail to logically use the communicative function of expressions, definitions, ideas, formations and structure (Al-Kahtani, 2002; Doushaq, 1986). Another study revealed that Arab students' paragraphs had no linear development or supportive lateral development (Kharma, 1985). This is consistent with other international studies suggesting that EFL learners find it difficult to engage in the type of critical thinking needed in academic writing (Asaoka & Usui, 2003; Hu, 2005; Mojica, 2010;

Yang & Cahill, 2008). Lack of development in paragraph structure in EFL writing impacts both the organisation and unity of student writing.

Other studies by Al-Khairiy (2013) Abu Rass (2015), Doushaq (1986), Ezza (2010), Kharma (1985), and Shukri (2008) revealed that many L1 Arabic learners of English introduce irrelevant ideas in their compositions. Using questionnaires, Al-Khairiy (2013) investigated 75 Saudi male university students majoring in English about their perceptions of EFL writing challenges, the reasons behind these challenges and the suggested solutions to them. The findings of his study indicated that one of the highest-ranking challenges was using topic sentences and developing ideas. Also, Al-Khairiy's findings indicated that the reasons behind these problems included inappropriate teaching methods, insufficient writing practice and low English language proficiency.

Using irrelevant ideas, as research suggests these students often do, causes a paragraph to lack unity (Harmer, 2004). Subject unity differs from paragraph unity in that it aims to form a relationship or flow between different paragraphs. While paragraph unity emphasises a controlling idea and supportive ideas in the one paragraph (Harmer, 2004), subject unity refers to the organisation of a general idea and relating other ideas to the general idea, thus providing an overall relationship for the paragraphs in the one paper.

Some research suggests that unity is not a well-practised skill in Arabic or English (Abu Rass, 2015; Doushaq, 1986). This may be due the lack of transitional signals in Arabic that alert the reader to the relationship of the different paragraphs (Doushaq, 1986). Abu Rass (2015) claimed that the failure to produce good topic sentences by L1 Arabic learners of English can be attributed to “the transfer of the style of Arabic which is characterised of being indirect, very personal and emotional most of the time” (p. 55). Similarly, Ahmed (2016), who examined the writing errors by 20 Saudi male university students, attributed the EFL writing problems to a number of reasons, such as L1 interference, lack of writing practice, lack of

immediate teacher feedback and ineffective teaching methods. In a study consistent with these findings, Hyland (2003) and Nunan (1999) highlight the potential for EFL teaching curricula to be weakened by not incorporating subject unity into teaching or raising awareness of transitional sentences.

Research suggests that EFL students face challenges in writing meaningful compositions (William, 2005). EFL students mainly pay attention to sentence-level features (Hyland, 2003). They are rarely taught communicative functions of the written text (Harmer, 2004). This might be attributed to the teaching methods as their teachers mainly focus on teaching grammar, spelling and word choice (Nunan, 1999; William, 2005). Hyland (2003) suggests two points: first, EFL students need to develop effective paragraphs through writing topic sentences supported by relevant ideas and cohesive transitions, and second, they need to write different kinds of paragraphs which have different purposes. Elyas and Picard (2010) point out that the assessment methods for writing effectively in secondary schools in Saudi Arabia concentrate on assessing the correctness of grammatical rules, spelling and punctuation rather than on assessing the communicative functions of the written text. This implies that students' purposes are just to meet their teachers' evaluation and/or pass the final exam.

This is in line with Reichelt (2005) who indicates that writing instruction at the secondary schools, private language institutes and universities in Poland is affected by the focus of preparing students for writing various English-language exams. Reichelt indicated that "this [focus] seems to cause little consternation except at the university level, where the pressure to prepare for year- end exams causes significant frustration among instructors and students" (p. 225). The article goes on to describe the experiences of teachers and students in preparation for students writing in English-language examinations. Immense pressure is placed on students because of poverty in traditional L1 and EFL writing instructions. In this study, Reichelt interviewed 13 English teachers who taught in the university's English department.

The study also included two secondary schools and a large private-language school. There were group discussions with ten students studying English in the private school, 10 students from secondary school and around 50 university students who were on teacher training courses. This was a huge study which concluded that the pressure placed on students to pass exams significantly hindered their ability to learn English writing to a degree where they could apply it in further contexts. Also, errors tended to be made because of pressure to learn for examinations. A critical evaluation of this study confirms that the findings support much of what is being discussed in this literature review.

Barzanji (2016) investigated 58 level 4 Saudi students using these methods. Students were asked to write timed essays; the number of errors were then analysed rather than the communicative functions within the essays. It seems that errors made by secondary school students are still being made at university level. More work needs to be done to find strategies that improve Saudi students' written English before they reach university level.

Although the aforementioned reviewed studies on EFL writing problems have advanced our knowledge, these studies (Barzanji, 2016; Doushaq, 1986; Ezza, 2010; Shukri, 2008) were mostly carried on university level students. In the Saudi EFL context, few studies such as (Ahmed, 2016; Shukri, 2008) were concerned with paragraph problems. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate paragraph issues in the Saudi school context and elicit their perceptions about their problems.

The literature presented in this review illustrates some of the problems L1 Arabic EFL students encounter with paragraph organisation and development, and problems they have in crafting rhetorically meaningful texts. These findings help support a need for further investigation into student perceptions of these issues within the context of Saudi secondary schools which was the impetus for the study presented in this thesis. This leads to the question

“What are the sources of difficulties Saudi secondary school students face when writing in English?”

2.5 Contributing Factors to Difficulties in English Writing

Having discussed previous research into problems L1 Arabic EFL students have with sentence and paragraph-level writing, further inquiry into research on the reasons for these writing difficulties needs to be undertaken given the focus of the present study. Many researchers attribute writing difficulties in EFL students to the lack of L2 writing strategies (Harmer, 2004; Hyland, 2003), the effect of L1 writing proficiency (Alsamadani, 2010; Dweik & Abu Al Hommos, 2007; Faqeeh, 2003), lack of motivation (Bacha, 2000, Dörnyei, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2003), writing anxiety (Abdel Latif, 2007; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) and teaching methods (Brown, 2007; Mukattash, 1983; Nunan, 1999). Each of these possible sources of EFL students' difficulties when writing in English will be discussed below.

2.5.1 English writing strategies.

Oxford (1990) and Oxford-Carpenter (1989) propose that learning strategies underpin the learning process. It has been argued that using a range of writing strategies is a characteristic of language learners (Cook, 2008; Ellis, 2012). Writing strategies are defined as “a part of a wider research movement known as process writing” (Manchon, 2001, p. 48). Many researchers claim that skilled writers utilise specific strategies before, during and after writing their texts (Harmer, 2004; Hyland, 2003). Generally, strategies are seen as deliberate actions or types of procedures that learners select, implement and control to achieve desired goals and objectives in the completion of learning or performance tasks (Manchon, 2001).

Harmer (2004) claims that the writing process includes four important stages: planning, drafting, editing (reflection and revising), and producing the final version. Harmer (2004) defines planning as the stage where a writer decides what s/he is going to say before starting the writing process. Drafting is another important strategic process when composing a written

text. Drafting allows opportunities for students to commit and correct errors prior to production of a final draft. Revision is defined by Reid (1993, p. 233) as “seeing again.” It refers to writers revisiting or ‘re-seeing’ their written text to make any changes before submitting their work (Piolat, 1997). The main reasons for revising are to check for grammatical accuracy, mechanics, cohesion, coherence, organisation, clarity, text purposes and functions (Sommers, 1996; Witte, 1985; Zamel, 1982). Ozagac (2004) stated that editing is the stage where writers check *what* they write, whereas proof-reading concerns checking *how* they write. Writing is not a linear process, but instead is actually a recursive one in which a writer may plan, draft, edit, proof-read but then often re-plan, re-draft, re-edit, and re-proof-read (Harmer, 2004).

Rao (2007) conducted a study to investigate how brainstorming can improve EFL Chinese learners’ performance and how they perceive their writing. The subjects were 118 EFL Chinese university students. The researcher randomly divided the participants into three classes. Each class included 38-40 students. Two classes were used as the experimental group and the third class was the control group. Learners’ writing was assessed at the beginning of the study and then assessed again at the end. The results were compared to the group who did not undertake brainstorming activities but completed the same tasks. The results concluded that brainstorming had a significant impact on the how students learned. Importantly the learners themselves demonstrated a positive attitude towards brainstorming as a learning strategy. The learners were provided with a traditional approach which focused on the practice of writing. Controlled writing exercises were initially undertaken but gradually replaced by freer writing exercises. In essence the methodology followed a traditional course. Students learned to memorise and write simple and complex sentences. They were then asked to construct paragraphs from various models and guides. This was followed by a written text which expanded on the outline. The conclusion of this study revealed that brainstorming stimulated the students enabling them to be more creative and able to compose original text into the

compositions. It can be suggested by this study that teachers need to reconsider their use of traditional methods of teaching English. Rather than focusing on the correctness of products, a more process-based approach provides students with more opportunities to interact with their subject and make their writing meaningful.

Naghdipour (2016) suggests that approaches to L2 writing in Iran and other EFL settings needs to be considered from a different viewpoint. In essence, Naghdipour argues that reliance on product-based methodologies do not provide learners with the opportunity to learn *how* to write rather than using writing as a way to learn the discipline of content knowledge. Naghdipour sees problems with this, however, believing that an over-emphasis on learning how to write might inadvertently deprive learners of the chance to learn multi-functional skills needed to apply their knowledge in different contexts. To make amends for this, he advises that teachers should use reading-to-write- strategies so that they learn what to write about as well as how to write. Again there is the emphasis on using a variety of learning strategies rather than instructional approaches that rely on memorising and repetition.

As far as the Saudi context is concerned, using interviewees and classroom observations, Faqeeh (2003) asked 37 Saudi male university students to describe how they processed their writing and the writing strategies they employed. The researcher divided his participants' responses into two groups. The first group (41%) perceived that they did not use any writing strategies. In fact, they started writing without planning and finished without revising (editing and proofreading) what they had written. The majority of students in this group believed that they would not be able to make any changes since they did not recognise what mistakes or errors they had made. The second group (59%) showed that they utilised limited strategies. Faqeeh (2003) concluded that his participants were neither aware of the importance of writing strategies nor were instructed about them. Also, revising for

organisation, coherence, unity and/or content were totally neglected by all the participants. This is consistent with the work by Al-Hazmi's (2006) who pointed out that the linguistic forms and mechanical aspects are the main concerns of L1 Arabic learners of English.

Faqeeh (2003) points out that his Saudi college participating students lacked L2 writing strategies because they might not have learnt about them in L1. Faqeeh claimed that those students utilising limited strategies by focusing on editing spelling and grammatical errors might be influenced by the way they process their L1 writing. Students were not taught how to use L2 writing strategies and this implies that the lack of applying strategies in L1 writing and the inadequacy of teaching L2 writing strategies may contribute to poor L2 writing strategies or concepts (Faqeeh, 2003).

Focusing on the revising strategy, Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) carried out a study on how to improve the English writing of low proficiency Saudi university students. The researchers imposed an enforced revision with checklist and peer feedback for 51 male Saudi university students. The participants were divided into two groups. Three writing tasks were completed, partly in the classroom and partly at home. One group revised their tasks with peers and the other did self-revision. The findings revealed that although revision (peer revision and self-revision) with a checklist did concentrate on linguistic features and procedural knowledge (organisation, unity), students mainly focused on revising their grammar and spelling. Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) stated that their participants perceived that revision meant error correction. The authors attributed this concentration on language form to the way the students had been taught. When giving feedback, their teachers focus on checking grammatical and spelling errors. What is relevant in the above studies is that many EFL students are consistently unable to recognise errors in their writing strategies. This mirrors their concerns about vocabulary errors discussed earlier. These studies will be compared with the present study

which considers the same issues in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about English writing strategies that can be used to facilitate student writing skills.

Debate persists in the literature as to whether or not a correlation exists between English writing strategies and English writing performance. A number of studies indicate that there is a significant correlation between using English writing strategies and English writing proficiency (Chen, 2011; Hammad, 2013; Mohseniasl, 2014; Troia & Graham, 2002; Silva, 2014). However, other studies argue that English writing strategies are not significantly correlated with English writing proficiency (Alkubaidi, 2014; Khalil, 2005).

The studies described below all showed that students who were taught writing strategies had improved proficiency. Chen (2011) conducted a study with 132 Chinese college students at Dezhou University. The methods used included a writing test, a writing strategy questionnaire and an interview. In another study, Mohseniasl (2014) aimed to investigate the effect of explicit writing strategy instruction and prewriting strategies in particular on decreasing writing apprehension and improving writing performance. Participants included 42 EFL Iranian intermediate students. Hammad (2013) investigated Palestinian EFL university-level students' writing strategies and students' writing performance to investigate associations between these two factors. Sixty-six students completed a questionnaire and nine of them were interviewed. Also, 66 written samples by the 66 students were analysed. The findings revealed a strong correlation between the use of writing strategies and writing performance.

On the other hand, research reported by Alkubaidi (2014) came to a different conclusion. This study examined the correlations between writing tasks, learners' learning style preference, and writing strategy use. Two questionnaires were completed by 74 Saudi female undergraduate students. One questionnaire was on Perceptual Learning Style Preference, and the other was on a writing strategy. The researcher analysed 74 essays written by the students. Concerning the English writing strategies, Alkubaidi found that the participants used more

“before writing” strategies than "during writing" strategies and "reviewing writing" strategies. Also, the results revealed that there was no correlation between writing strategies and their writing proficiency. The conflicting conclusions of these studies further support the value of additional research into student perceptions of writing strategies and teacher expectations, particularly in relation to Saudi EFL students.

2.5.2 L1 writing proficiency.

Numerous studies have attempted to dissect the intricate processes entailed in L2 written composition. Many of these studies illustrate, to varying degrees, a positive correlation between L1 writing proficiency and L2 written production (Alsamadani, 2010; Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Dweik & Abu Al Hommos, 2007; Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Kim & Yoon, 2014; Wang & Wen, 2002). Others have found no significant correlation between L1 and L2 writing (Abu-Akel, 1997; Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990).

Using L1 and L2 writing samples in conjunction with questionnaires, Huang, Liang and Dracopoulos (2011) conducted correlational analyses of L1 and L2 writing samples from 26 non-English majors at a Chinese university. Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) selected their all male participants from public secondary schools in Jordan. Although the participants in the latter study are younger than those in the Huang et al. (2011) study, their L1 (Arabic) uses a different orthographic system from English, as does the first study’s participants’ L1 (Chinese). Also like Huang et al. (2011), participants composed writing prompt exercises in L1 and L2. Both of their analyses of L2 English compositions revealed that students who were more proficient in L1 writing proved to outperform their peers who were less proficient in L1. However, Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) did not include questionnaires, which might have provided a powerful insight into the subjects’ internal processes during L2 composition. The questionnaires from Huang et al. (2011) indicated that 88.5% of the participants used L1 during the L2 composing process.

As far as the Saudi context is concerned, Alsamadani (2010) examined the correlation between Saudi EFL students' writing competence and L1 Arabic writing proficiency, using a sample of 35 college-level male students majoring in English at Umm Al-Qura University. The participants wrote argumentative essays on the same topic in both languages and the writing tasks were scored by a group of EFL university teachers using the ESL Composition Profile, ultimately finding a strong correlation between EFL college-level students' writing competence in L2 (English) and their L1 (Arabic) writing proficiency. Alsamadani points out that "students who scored high on Arabic essays received very similar scores on English essays, and the opposite is also true" (p. 58). Alsamadani claims that it can be expected that high achieving L1 Saudi students who do well in writing Arabic will also perform well in English writing.

Other research did not lead to a clear positive relationship between L1 and L2 writing proficiency (Carson et al., 1990; Pennington and So, 1993). This could be attributed to the fact that their participants' L1 were Chinese, given the vast difference in orthographic systems between Chinese and English. However, Abu-Akel (1997) obtained similar results in his study of 55 L1 Arabic and 45 L1 Hebrew speakers. Abu-Akel's (1997) results yielded only a negligible correlation between L1 and L2 writing for Arabic speakers and no correlation for Hebrew speakers. Interestingly, though Huang et al. (2011) found an overall positive correlation between L1 and L2 writing proficiency, their results also indicated that Chinese grammar may have a negative effect on English composition. While the positive correlation outweighs this provision, the caution still exists.

It can be concluded from these studies that more work needs to be done on how the relationship between L1 and L2 proficiency is measured. For example, can a common strategy be used to find possible solutions for EFL students of different L1s? Conclusions from this study will contribute to this debate.

Beyond the debate about the effects of L1 proficiency on L2 written products, there is also discussion over the effects of the use of L1 strategies in the process of L2 composition and their effect on L2 written products. Several studies positively linked the use of L1 strategies, such as planning and organising, to successful L2 written products (Alhaisoni, 2012; Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Kim & Yoon, 2014; Schoonen, Gelderen, Stoel, Hulstijn, & de Glopper, 2011; Wang & Wen, 2002). During her examination of case studies and protocols from six postgraduate L1 Chinese students, Arndt (1987) illustrated the bilingual nature of L2 writing. She found that writers' activities, from planning and composing to revising, remained constant across the two languages (Arndt, 1987). Similarly, Jones and Tetroe (1987) observed six Spanish-speaking EFL adults. They established that these students demonstrated a strong correlation between L1 planning and L2 planning procedures and that they exhibited similar patterns during the planning process. For example, participants who planned in great detail in L1, likewise planned in great detail in L2, much like what Arndt (1987) documented. Extending the positive correlation, Jones and Tetroe (1987) demonstrated that students who used L1 during the planning process produced more effective L2 writing. These two studies highlight what has previously been a point of contention in L1 to L2 research as Arndt's (1987) participants' L1 was Chinese and Jones and Tetroe's (1987) participants were L1 Spanish speakers. The similarities between these studies, despite the different L1 backgrounds of the participants, suggest that some language processes transfer across languages in spite of the disparities between L1 and L2.

Cumming (1989) studied 23 L1 French students from a Canadian university and found that those who planned extensively in L1 writing tasks proceeded to plan extensively for L2 writing. While Cumming (1989) focused his research primarily on the use of strategies in L2 writing, he did not delve into the language in which these strategies were completed (L1 or L2). Later, Wang and Wen (2002) expanded on these results through their use of think aloud

and retrospective interviews with 16 L1 Chinese university students. They determined that the participants not only exhibited similar writing processes in L2 as they did in L1, as in Cumming (1989), but also clarified the extent to which the writers used their L1 in the various stages of L2 written production (Wang & Wen, 2002). Their participants stated that they relied on L1 heavily during the planning stages of L2 composition, but were more likely to rely on L2 when actually composing L2 text (Wang & Wen, 2002).

A recent study conducted by Pae (2018) analyses the relationship between first language (L1) and second language (L2) in reading and writing. The researcher used 211 Korean students from an upper middle-school who were learning English as a foreign language. Concerning the relationship between L1 and L2 writing, each participant was asked to write two expository essays, one in English and the other in Korean. Employing path analysis, the results demonstrated that ability at L1 does predict L2 ability in writing. The findings of Pae's (2018) study were consistent with studies, such as Cumming (1989) and Wang and Wen (2002) but were inconsistent with studies, such as Carson et al. (1990) and Pennington and So (1993). Pae suggests that the inconsistency with those studies could be because of differences in data analytic methodology and sampling processes, such as sample size and targeted L2. Pae's findings suggest that to achieve success in writing, L2 learners should not only use existing L2 knowledge but they should also focus on text organisation and idea generation: skills which can be transferred from L1 to L2 writing. This knowledge provides learners with the opportunity to be aware of the relationship between writer and audience so that they can develop cohesion in their writing and express implied meanings.

These studies, like those discussed previously, highlight a positive correlation between L1 writing strategies and L2 written products while providing valuable insight as to where in the process L1 is primarily used. They also corroborate the fact that some linguistic processes transfer between L1 and L2 despite the gaps between them. There are contradictory results in

these studies regarding the correlation between English writing proficiency or strategies and L1 writing strategies. This study will contribute to the existing literature by examining whether there is a correlation between English writing proficiency strategies and L1 writing strategies in the Saudi secondary context.

2.5.3 Motivation.

Student motivation contributes significantly to writing proficiency in any context. A number of studies have examined motivation specifically in the EFL context. As far as L2 writing is concerned, Hayes (2012) points out that motivation can determine whether or not people will write, how long they will write, and the quality of their writing. Motivating students to write well is necessary because writing is a difficult and complex skill (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Lam and Law (2007) argue that when students are more motivated, their ability to write improves significantly.

Some researchers argue that lack of motivation is a contributing factor to the difficulties faced by second language learners when writing in English (Bacha, 2000; Faqeeh, 2003; Khrama, 1985, Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011; Rabab'ah, 2003). Bacha (2000) surveyed the perceptions of 1,685 students attending the EFL program at Lebanon American University (LAU) in four English composition courses, focusing on examining the main causes of their writing difficulties. The results indicated that motivation was the major problem compared to other factors, such as use of required textbooks, classroom practices, assessment methods, L1 negative transfer, and individual learning styles. Similarly, in a mixed methods study, Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni (2011) used questionnaires and interviews to investigate the academic writing problems Iranian graduate students faced at the National University of Malaysia. Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni (2011) point out that most of their subjects agreed that the lack of motivation was one of the major causes of their writing problems.

Issues concerning student motivation are very important in this thesis. The study done

by Lee, Ey and Liu (2017) highlights the extent to which Hong Kong secondary students are motivated to learn English and is therefore pertinent. The study also explores the relationship of language proficiency, gender and grade on motivation. The study employed a questionnaires methodology. This was a large scale project using 1,395 students: 696 boys and 699 girls. The participants were spread “across three different grades: secondary 1/grade 7 = 386, Secondary 3/Grade 9 = 500 and secondary 5/grade 11=509” (p. 178). The findings from this study are interesting and highlight aspects of motivation. For example, it appears that secondary students were *not* motivated to write English. Taking into consideration the level of learning and experience components, the findings suggest that maybe the learners’ writing environment and experience de-motivates them. Some of the questionnaires revealed that teachers’ methodologies contributed to the de-motivation as the focus of practice was on de-contextualised grammar practice. Students also noted the dull resources used. Insufficient time to write was also mentioned in the questionnaires and lack of enthusiastic feedback which focused on errors. A critical evaluation of this study shows its relevance for this thesis which considers the extent to which motivation contributes to learning to write in English.

While some studies (e.g. Djigunović, 2006; Fazel & Ahmadi, 2011; Hashemian & Heidari, 2013; Zhang & Guo, 2013) found a significant relationship between English writing performance and motivation, other studies (e.g. Binalet & Guerra 2014; Jeon, Arlic, Brown, Lenz, Pusey, Rakita, Schnur & Wright, 2013; Matsumoto, 2011) found no significant correlations between the two variables. One of the aims of Fazel and Ahmadi’s (2011) study was to investigate the correlation between motivation and writing proficiency among Iranian IELTS candidates. Their participants were 196 Iranian IELTS candidates, who took the IELTS test and completed a motivation questionnaire. The findings revealed that there was significant relationship between motivation and writing proficiency.

Another study by Zhang and Guo (2013) examined the relationships between English writing and domain-specific motivation and self-efficacy in a sample of 66 Chinese EFL learners. The students were asked to complete a writing task and complete two questionnaires on English writing, motivation, and self-efficacy. The authors found that English major freshmen's writing proficiency was positively and significantly related to English writing motivation. In other words, sophomores' English writing proficiency surprisingly did not correlate with English writing motivation. It might be that at this educational level, sophomores have already mastered their English writing skills, and therefore, they were not driven by motivation anymore to either practise writing or further develop it.

Jeon et al. (2013) explored the correlation between L2 writers' affective factors and their writing, paying special attention to studying the role of motivation, individual's writing skills perception, and the effect of anxiety in English as a second language (ESL) student writers on their L2 writing fluency and accuracy. At Northern Arizona University, 71 PIE (Program in Intensive English) students took part in both the survey distributed and two-type writing form PIE placement tests. In the case of their perception's correlation to their writing scores, no connection was discovered. However, students who possessed better writing skills developed more writing anxiety. The study also indicated a revealing absence of connection between either proficiency levels or writing scores and motivation (Jeon, et, al., 2013). Research findings do show that there are some factors that influence language learners' motivation to acquire English language skills including writing. Such factors include using a variety of teaching techniques, the relevance of topics to real life, students' belief about learning English, students' autonomy, classroom environments, memorisation, and imitation (Dörnyei, 2001).

When second-language teachers present writing lessons using the same techniques repeatedly, students may become demotivated (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2001). Teaching

writing lessons in the same way for all would not cater to different students' learning preferences, and consequently, students' motivation would decline (Dörnyei, 2001). Presenting a variety of teaching methods in the form of different activities plays a crucial role in motivating students to write (Dörnyei, 2001; Harmer, 2007). Implementing a range of activities caters to different students' learning preferences. Consequently, students' motivation will likely improve when they write more (Graves, 2003). For example, one way to vary EFL instruction is through the use of games. Games are recommended as a strategy, specifically for learning new vocabulary (Casanave, 2002; Huyen & Nga, 2003; Rinvoluceri & Davis, 1995).

To support this view, E-learning can be seen as one of the new ways of teaching second language English writing. As this literature review stated earlier, teachers may still prefer to use traditional methods of instruction and tests to teach grammar and vocabulary. A study by Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi (2017) critically considers students' enthusiasm for learning by using a digital video game. The aim was to predict high school students learning of vocabulary. By splitting the learners into players and watchers it hoped to predict the difference in levels of learning vocabulary. The participants were 136 Iranian male EFL students aged between 12 and 18. They were randomly chosen either to be a player or a watcher. They played for five weeks for one session a week. Afterwards there was a post test to determine the results. There were also field notes taken during the five weeks. The findings revealed that the digital video games supported the learning of vocabulary, at the same time making learning enjoyable. This study concluded that enjoyment was a significant factor in how students learned vocabulary with some students claiming that they could apply this learning to other DVGs, thus improving their vocabulary. This claim is supported by Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2006) who indicate that games have educational purposes, such as engaging students in learning actively and giving the students the chance to practise their language meaningfully in a motivating way.

The literature review has also revealed that a factor that may have an impact on students' motivation is classroom environment. Dörnyei (2001) points out that classroom environment may facilitate or prevent students' motivation to learn the target language. In a quantitative study, Tomlinson and Dat (2004) measured the perceptions of "300 intermediate-level EFL adult learners' views about the instruction they receive and of 15 of their teachers at the National University of Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City" (p. 199). It concluded that the atmosphere in class is not conducive to motivational learning. About 12.6 % of students said teachers were impatient when they made mistakes. Around 35 % indicated that teachers showed little enthusiasm. Tomlinson and Dat argue that a negative environment of this kind impacts on how effectively students learn to write English and that how teachers behave in class affects the atmosphere of all the students, creating a community of de-motivated learners. The conclusion of this study was obvious. Where there is no enthusiasm for the teaching, students are not motivated to learn. Teacher talk is a crucial contributory factor in creating a positive atmosphere which should involve interaction with the students.

Teacher motivation is considered a vital factor for enhancing classroom environment (Gardner, 2010; Hannah, 2013). Dörnyei (2001) indicates that teachers' enthusiasm refers to educators conversing with their students about their personal interests, using the secondary language, as well as being able to show their students that learning a second language is a valuable experience, which not only generates satisfaction but also improves their lives. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Hannah (2013) maintain that the more teachers are motivated and interested in what they teach, the more students' motivation will become increased, too. This may indicate that teachers' motivation is important for increasing students' motivation and students' learning achievements.

Scholars, such as Brown, (2007), Gardner, (2010) and Harmer, (2004) suggest that students need to see the connection between what they write and what they face in their real lives. This has relevancy for this study. Listening to the student voice and evaluating their perceptions may throw light on how they make the connections between what they write and what they face in their real lives. Writing about activities that are relevant to students' real lives and interests motivates them to write better and more often. Harmer (2007) asserts that the activity is more motivational when it relates to students' experiences and cultural backgrounds. Conversely, when students write about artificial topics or uninteresting ones, they become less motivated to write (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999). Consequently, this lack of motivation will likely cause writing difficulties for second and/or foreign language learners (William, 2005). Elliot (1999) argues that his students believe topics that are irrelevant to their lives, needs, and interests cause their lack of motivation, making writing burdensome. According to Harmer (2007), students want to write about what interests them and not about what may interest curriculum designers or teachers.

Using a quasi-experimental design, Bonyadi (2014) examined the influence of topic selection on EFL Iranian students' writing performance. Based on an initial placement test, 30 students, studying for the MA degree in teaching EFL were chosen. Bonyadi randomly divided the participants into two groups; a self-selected topic group (SST) and a teacher-assigned topic group (TAT). The results of the study revealed a significant difference between "the performance of the students who wrote on their self-selected and for those who wrote on a teacher-assigned topic". Bonyadi indicates that when EFL students are encouraged to have a say in what they are writing, it is expected their level of engagement will be enhanced. Also, the findings of Bonyadi's study showed that giving EFL students the opportunity to choose their topics to write about will increase students' motivation to write in English.

It has been suggested that many students feel demotivated when they are not given the opportunity to express their ideas (Dörnyei, 2001; Rabab'ah, 2003). According to Al-Seghayer (2011) and Al-Mohanna (2010), Saudi secondary school students are required to write about topics that are stipulated in their textbooks. Therefore, as argued by Al-Mohanna (2010), students do not have the chance to produce their own sentences and express their ideas or thoughts, and consequently, become passive in their own learning; neither teachers nor students can change the topics presented by the Ministry of Education. The lack of opportunities to express ideas is another factor that may cause students to become demotivated and consequently face challenges in their English writing.

It can be concluded that motivation contributes largely to the EFL students' English writing skills. The above studies have shown that if a positive class environment is maintained, writing material is being chosen by students, and teachers consistently show their students an ambitious attitude towards their subject matter, motivation is more likely to be generated in students, which consequently may elevate secondary language learning results. However, when considering the literature as a whole there appears to be a significant gap in research in relation to Saudi secondary school students, a gap which this present study will address. By using mixed methodologies, this study will provide a comprehensive analysis of emotions and feelings among EFL students learning to write English. In contributing to the debate concerning the correlations between motivation and English writing, the present research will provide insight into what can be done to facilitate student writing skills.

2.5.4 Writing anxiety

Anxiety is defined by Spielberger (cited in Brown, 2007) as a feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness or worry due to the automatic nervous system becoming aroused. Concerning learning a foreign language, Horwitz et al. (1986) defines anxiety as self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours specific to the process of language learning in a

classroom. Anxiety, as it relates to learning a foreign language, can play a major role in the learning process for EFL learners, as it can have an impact on their confidence, skills, perceptions and results when learning their second language. There is ample evidence on the relationships between anxiety and EFL learning, particularly in regard to EFL writing.

Anxiety has been a controversial topic in the second language acquisition field. Many researchers argue that anxiety is a problem that hinders the process of successful second language learning (Horwitz, 2010; Pimsarn, 2013). Yet, other scholars contend that anxiety can be a facilitative factor in learning second and/or foreign languages (Brown, 2007; Jahangiri, Rajab, Jahangiri, Honarvar & Sharif, 2014; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001). Abu Shawish and Atea (2010, p. 2) argue that writing anxiety is "bilateral"; it can cause bad writing, or be a result of a difficult and challenging writing process. This is consistent with Daud, Daud and Kassim's (2005) view that there is a fundamental connection between language writing deficiency and anxiety.

Some researchers point out that anxiety increases among EFL learners when they are asked to produce communicative tasks, i.e. writing and speaking (Hilleson, 1996; Tsui, 1996; Zhang, 2011). A number of studies have shown that highly apprehensive students find writing difficult, produce poorer quality written work, and avoid writing whenever possible (Abdel Latif, 2007; Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010).

Several studies have found that writing achievement is negatively correlated with writing anxiety (Jebreil, Azizifara & Gowhary, 2015; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; Susoy & Tanyer, 2013; Zhang, 2011). For example, Negari and Rezaabadi (2012) conducted a study in which the relationship between anxiety in student's essay writing and their EFL writing performance was investigated. Their study used 75 Iranian EFL students, 27 of whom were majoring in English. They collected data using a Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (SLWAI), and open-ended questionnaire and writing performance tests.

Negari and Rezaabadi's (2012) results indicated that when students had reassurance from their teacher that their papers would not be scored, they felt less anxious.

The correlation between anxiety and writing performance was found to be similar in an EFL Turkish context. Susoy and Tanyer (2013) conducted a study that investigated the relationship between the writing performance and anxiety of 48 Turkish pre-service EFL teachers. Their study examined the participants' perceptions and attitudes towards writing anxiety and their sources of anxiety. Their analysis suggested a considerable negative relationship between writing anxiety and writing performance (Susoy & Tanyer, 2013).

Test anxiety is common within education, from primary school to university. There are also noted correlations between test anxiety and test performance for EFL students. For example, Salehi and Marefat's (2014) study examined the impacts of foreign language anxiety and test anxiety on test performance, and attempted to determine if there is any relationship between foreign language anxiety and test anxiety. Their study used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and the Test Anxiety Scale to examine the foreign language anxiety and test anxiety levels of 200 EFL students. The scores were then compared with the final exam grades of the students. The results showed a considerable correlation between both foreign language anxiety and test anxiety and the students' exam grades, suggesting that these two types of anxieties do have negative impacts on the test performance levels of students. Thus, any teaching strategies that successfully reduced student anxiety levels might also improve EFL learning outcomes.

Choi (2013) explored the relationship between foreign language anxiety and second language writing anxiety using second language English learners in Korea. The study also looked at possible sources of anxiety for the learners. Three tools were used to collect data in the study: the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986), the English Writing Anxiety Scale (EWAS; Lee, 2005), and a background

questionnaire. The study used 26 junior high school students who were completing a writing portfolio assignment that their teacher had assigned. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between the FLCAS and the EWAS; however, there was no significant correlation between the EWAS and student writing performance as measured by their assignment. These results contradict those of other studies that have found correlation between anxiety about second-language writing and poor performance (Abdel Latif, 2007; Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010). Choi suggests this may be because his study focused on free writing, a relatively low-stress form of writing that is less likely to prompt anxiety.

Several authors have attempted to identify the sources of students' writing anxiety. Abdel Latif (2007) and Lin (2009) found that fear of negative feedback or criticism is a cause of writing anxiety. In his qualitative study, Lin (2009) investigated 16 junior university students about their perceptions of writing anxiety at the Department of Foreign Language and Literature in Taiwan. The results revealed that teachers' negative feedback was a source of anxiety, as well as time restrictions, peer competition, writing topics and different forms of writing. Most participants perceived that thinking of negative feedback by their teachers made them anxious when writing in English.

In another study, Abdel Latif (2007) arrived at similar results when he investigated the factors accounting for 67 Egyptian EFL university students' poor writing proficiency. The subjects were administered two scales measuring their English writing apprehension and English writing self-efficacy. He found that high writing apprehension and low writing self-efficacy were a result of, but not a cause of, the participants' poor linguistic knowledge. The causes revealed were fear of criticism, low foreign language competence self-esteem, poor history of writing achievement, poor perceived writing performance, low English writing self-efficacy and instructional practices of English writing (e.g. lack of teacher feedback or overuse of criticism). Younas et al. (2014) showed that fear of teacher's negative comments, linguistic

difficulties, pressure of time and perfect work, insufficient writing practice and problems with the topic all had an impact on the students' writing in English.

Other researchers noted reasons contributing to writers' high level of writing anxiety. These causes included focusing on and overemphasising language form, evaluating written work, and receiving negative responses from teachers and/or peers (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010, p.3). Likewise, Lee and Krashen (2002) analysed 53 native speakers of Chinese who had finished studying their elective English writing class at a university. They examined the factors that lead to these participants experiencing success in writing English. As far as writing apprehension is concerned, the findings showed that participants who paid more attention to organisation and meaning had less writing apprehension, while those who concentrated more on grammar and words had much more apprehension.

Al-Asmari (2013) collected data from 198 Saudi university students with an EFL-major. The aim of Al-Asmari's study was to explore the relationship between writing apprehension and writing strategies and its influence on writing outcome. In all, 198 students provided a written response to four questions about writing, and provided responses to a writing strategies measure and a writing anxiety measure. Sixteen subjects had a personal interview as well. Al-Asmari found a significant negative relationship between students' writing apprehension and writing achievement. Also, the results showed that students with little writing anxiety employed more writing strategies than did students anxious about writing.

To sum up, several authors have closely examined the relationship between anxiety and EFL writing. The majority of the studies have shown a significantly negative correlation between students' anxiety and their writing performance; however, some studies have found a significantly positive correlation or no correlation at all. Many authors argue that anxiety can be a facilitative factor in the classroom, while others argue it is more debilitating. Several sources of writing anxiety have been identified, with fear of negative feedback or criticism

being a commonly identified theme among several authors. Anxiety in foreign language learning is a topic that has been explored by numerous scholars, as it is important to understand how this factors in learning and impacts a students' ability to fully comprehend their second language. Understanding student perceptions about anxiety could potentially lead to significant improvements in teaching methods, another important factor to consider when addressing problems in EFL writing. It is hoped that the present study will throw more light on the correlation between anxiety and writing English. By using mixed methodologies this study will provide a more comprehensive analysis of emotions and feelings among EFL students learning to write English.

2.5.5 Teaching Methods.

The significance of teaching methods in the learning process cannot be underestimated. Larsen-Freeman (2000), Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Ediger and Rao (2005) indicate that effective teaching can lead to effective learning. As far as EFL is concerned, research findings indicate that the teacher is one of the most important variables affecting learning English (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Scrivener, 2005). A number of studies found that teachers and their teaching approaches play a role in the progress of EFL students' writing (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Brown, 2007; Elyas and Picard, 2010; Haider & Hussain, 2014; Halimah, 2001; Harmer, 2004; Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011; Mukattash, 1983).

Using data from 21 teachers and 36 students, Naghdipour (2016) employed qualitative data drawn from interviews and observations. The participants were randomly chosen from different levels of education (middle school, secondary school, university and private language school) in Iran. For interviewing teachers, the author focused on the pedagogical approaches used by teachers, and the classroom resources and activities they employed, together with assessment strategies and feedback. Considering this work critically, it is clear that Naghdipour is no supporter of traditional methods of teaching and learning. He concluded that when English

writing was included in the curriculum, teacher feedback was “retrospective and corrective addressing mainly grammatical errors without offering students a road map for their future learning” (p. 85). Overall, the author found that neither private nor state run schools where English programmes were provided could provide opportunities for students of L2 writing to improve their skills because they use “ineffective writing curricula and pedagogies” (p. 85). In addressing this study, Naghipour’s core belief is that whilst traditional methods of teaching English writing is persistently used in classrooms in Iran, schools are overlooking the importance of new forms of communication and global connectivity through the internet which students now want to tap into and is thus attracting more students to learn English writing. Hyland (2017) agrees with this, stating that successful writing in a foreign language cannot be achieved in a vacuum. Students are social beings and require context to their learning. A critical evaluation of both the methodologies and the conclusions reached by these authors reveals the importance of close investigation of the processes used to teach English writing in Saudi secondary schools.

Teaching methodology is hotly debated as new forms of global learning and reforms in the curriculum are impacting on the way that English writing is learned. Interview data provided in Zhang and Liu (2014) stressed the importance attached to teacher perceptions and preferences in pedagogies. Conducting a huge research project, using nine teachers in semi-structured interviews and over 700 returned questionnaires the study revealed that teacher choices reflected this debate. For example, whilst teachers’ attitudes towards developing communication skills were mostly favorable, they also indicated that they still used more traditional methods with an emphasis on grammar and language because of their belief that it is a more practical way of teaching English. Quite simply, many teachers believe that good knowledge of grammar provides a solid base for further language development. The testimonies of teachers also revealed their belief that reform in teaching methodologies have

tended to weaken the important role of grammar in the curriculum and this is detrimental to learning how to write in English. Thus, a critical evaluation of Zhang and Liu's (2014) study indicates that whilst new constructivism oriented curriculum reform, which is grounded in the social and physical experiences of individual students, is on the whole welcomed, in actual fact many teachers still favour more traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, both beliefs appear to be operating side by side and this may constrain the way English writing is taught. The implications for this present study are obvious. This thesis enters the debate in an attempt to provide insights into how this dichotomy is played out in the teaching practices in Saudi classrooms.

Halimah 2001, Al-Hazmi (2006), Elyas and Picard (2010) and Al-Seghayer (2015) point out that L1 Arabic learners of English face difficulty in expressing themselves clearly when they write which is attributed to teaching methods that emphasise teacher-centered learning. Teachers emphasise teaching the form of the language (accuracy) rather than its function (fluency). This way of teaching does not encourage second language learners to create their own language and express their voices clearly (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1999).

Halimah (2001) researching writing proficiency concluded Arab English Writing for Science and Technology (EST) students had problems in the use of paragraphing, unity of paragraphs, development of ideas, and content quality of writing. Halimah attributed these problems to the ineffectiveness of teaching methods of EST teachers. He claims that EST teachers pay more attention to teaching language form than to the rhetorical elements of writing. Halimah's research implies that teaching methods may attribute to the challenges experienced by EFL students when writing in English.

Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni (2011) address the academic writing challenges and the causes of these challenges faced by Iranian Post-Graduate Students at National University

of Malaysia (UKM). The results indicate that the participants perceived that they experience some challenges (e.g. using grammatical rules appropriately, organising information correctly, and demonstrating coherence and progression of ideas) when writing in English. The outcomes of Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni's (2011) study also show a number of causes for these challenges. One of the main causes of students' writing challenges was the teaching methods. Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni (2011) argue that students were not encouraged to use the language communicatively in real life situations. In short, EFL teaching methods mainly emphasised memorisation and imitation rather than production and creation (Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011). This kind of teaching style could affect EFL students' writing improvement (Hyland, 2003). Mousavi and Kashefian-Naeeni's research suggests that teaching techniques could be a main cause for students' difficulties when writing in English. The authors also indicated that using traditional teaching methods that focus on teacher-centered teaching was one of the main factors contributing to low student motivation. Therefore, Waddington (2017) suggests that teachers should be trained on how to motivate learners to change the focus from teacher-centered into learner-centered teaching style.

Scheffler (2013) is included in this literature review as a valuable insight into the debate surrounding old teaching methods and modern teaching methods which this thesis hopes to contribute to by providing perceptions of teachers and students who are learning English as a foreign language. A critical analysis of this text indicates that Polish students found translating sentences into English was "as useful and interesting as communicatively orientated consciousness raising" (p. 255). Although a small scale study, the findings are useful for this thesis, as pupils from a Polish secondary school perceived that translation alongside metalinguistic reflection was just as desirable as communicative consciousness raising. What is interesting, according to Scheffler, was what many students dread: the emphasis on grammar rules is welcomed by these Polish students. However, this was qualified by one learner who

said that whilst it was useful, she would not like to do this all the time. In essence, this study critically analyses pedagogies and asks what teachers and students prefer. Because students feel they learn significant grammar rules through translation, Scheffler argues that teachers would acknowledge but at the same time ensure that communicatively orientated teaching and learning should also take place. Thus, it is clear that mixed methods of teaching are the desired approach according to this study with the author arguing that translation alone cannot form the basis of L2 learning.

As far as the Saudi context is concerned, Al-Hazmi (2006) and Elyas and Picard (2010) point out that methods used in teaching vocabulary in Saudi schools and universities seem to be a cause for EFL students' problems. English language vocabulary instruction is mostly taught through rote learning of isolated words. Many teachers translate the meaning of words into Arabic and ask the students to memorise what the words mean (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010). Focusing on translating new words and memorising them in isolated terms are some features emphasised in the Grammar Translation Methods (GTM). EFL students, in GTM, can master a second/foreign language if they are able to master the form of the target language and translate from one language to another (Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Multiple studies focus on students' achievement in writing. Some of these studies, reviewed below, highlight the relationship between EFL teaching methods and students' achievements in English, and also between EFL writing teaching methods and students' achievements in EFL writing. Concerning English writing skills, studies found a significant correlation between teaching methods and students' achievements in productive English skills, including writing (Baghaei & Riasati, 2013; Haider & Hussain, 2014; Rahimipour & Kheirisatar, 2013).

In 16 secondary schools in Pakistan, Haider and Hussain (2014) examined the influence of teacher variables, such as, teaching methods and the teacher's personal characteristics (e.g. experience and in-service training) on the 9th grade students' achievement in three subjects (English, Chemistry, and Mathematics). The instruments used in this study were student exam results from 2404 students and a survey of 114 secondary school teachers. Concerning, English achievement, the findings of the research found weak negative relationships between a number of teacher variables (e.g. teaching methods) and student achievement. However, the results found a significantly negative relationship between in-service teacher training and student learning achievement in English.

Research also demonstrated a relationship between teachers' feedback on writing and students' writing performance. For example, Bijami, Pandian and Singh (2016) aimed at examining the effect of teacher's written feedback on the writing performance of 400 EFL Iranian undergraduate students majoring in English translation and English language literature in four universities. The participating students were asked to write essays, and complete questionnaires. Also, 40 students were interviewed. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to describe the findings from the questionnaire. The quantitative results revealed that there was a significant correlation between teacher's written feedback and students' writing performance. The interviewed students perceived that getting feedback on their writing assisted them in improving their writing. They indicated that they understood their errors through direct feedback and negotiated these errors with their teachers through teacher-student conferencing.

Rahimipoor and Kheirisatar (2013) conducted a study on teaching methods with 120 EFL school students in Kuwait who were specifically selected based on their test scores in order to create a homogeneous group. The students were divided into four groups, two of which received experimental treatment, meaning more interactive teaching methods including, but not limited to, role-play, positive reinforcement, creative writing games, drama, and group

work. Students in the control groups, meanwhile, continued with instruction aligned with the more traditional teaching methods. Students in each of the four groups completed identical pre-tests and post-tests, which included reading comprehension items as well as grammatical and lexical items. The results indicated that the students in the experimental groups exhibited greater achievement gains than those in the control groups. While the results did indicate a slightly greater gain for the females in the experimental participant pool, the difference was not significant. This finding demonstrates that the difference in teaching methods played a more significant role in student achievement than gender.

As important as the teacher's role is in an EFL classroom, the need for effective teacher training is vitally important by consequence. Findings suggest that lack of teacher training is a factor contributing to the challenges faced by students when writing (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). Teachers who have received more in-service training tend to be more skilled in the art of instruction and their students reap the benefits (Al-Nasser, 2015; Sifakis, 2009).

Yook and Lee (2016) offer insights into Korean ELF teachers' perceptions of EFL teacher education. This study uses qualitative data and analytical methodology to explore Korean teachers' classroom practices. Participants included six secondary school teachers in semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was employed using data from the interviews. In brief, the teachers were not happy with the pre-service EFL teacher training because it was theory-orientated and did not relate to their teaching practice. Yook and Lee suggest that this is not a new concern. They noted it in the work of Chang, Jung and Choi (cited in Yook & Lee, 2016). However, the teachers perceived that the practical curricula in their in-service teacher training was a positive experience and helped them to improve their English. Overall the main issue for Korean teachers was their low English proficiency. Also, the teachers indicated that this training provided opportunities to practise new teaching methods. The present study will take advantage of the findings of the previously mentioned studies by asking questions

designed to elicit information about the type of training teachers have received, and the areas or aspects of teaching in which they feel they need more training.

2.5.6 Curriculum.

The following studies consider curriculum design, which has long been hotly debated because of the importance it holds in an EFL class. Nunan (1989) and Graves (2000) stressed the need for a carefully planned curriculum because learning a language is so different from learning anything else. It is plausible then that irrelevant writing syllabi and employment of outdated approaches could cause writing problems among EFL learners (Hyland, 2003).

Zhang and Liu (2014) believe that curriculum reform is having great influence on the way secondary school English teachers perceive teaching and learning. The authors suggest that in many respects teachers believe that the reform offers greater opportunities for them to develop sound knowledge of constructivist approaches (i.e. focus on student participation, interactive learning and learner-centeredness) to language learning and teaching. The authors found that older teachers have a harder time accepting new innovations in teaching methodologies whilst younger teachers have adapted naturally to new pedagogies. The crucial point of this is that older teachers do not feel obligated to change their methods of teaching and feel they are not pressured into changing their teaching beliefs and practices (Zhang and Liu, 2014). The authors indicated that older teachers still believe that focusing on teaching grammar and preparing students for tests is still the most important aspect of their teaching practice. These findings support much of the literature in this current review.

An important aspect of curriculum and student success is textbook design (Graves, 2000). A critical look at Leung and Andrews (2012) reveals a convincing argument that stresses the use of English language textbooks which will be discussed in this thesis. The authors argue

that textbooks have a significant “mediating role” (p. 356) in the way reform is implemented. This small scale study offers insights into the role of textbooks in the mediation of a high-stakes assessment reform (Leung & Andrews, 2012). The methodology employed for this study focused on four sets of school-based assessment (SBA) textbooks along with teacher’s books and CD-ROM resources. A total of 115 questionnaires were also administered to English teachers. The question being asked was to what extent the teachers actually relied on SBA-related textbooks in their teaching practice and how useful they felt they are. The findings of this study showed that the object of using the SBA textbooks was to allow more authentic use of language. Nevertheless, the textbooks revealed scant opportunities for students to learn writing strategies and to use them in tests. Overall, the conclusion was that the textbooks provided quick support rather than improved students’ oral proficiency and that teachers need to be “wise consumers of textbooks” to ensure they meet all occasions especially when they are used for “high stakes examinations (Leung and Andrews, 2012).

Al-Mudibry and Ezza (2014) described three writing courses in three Arab Universities. The authors verified the notion that the current writing syllabus in these three Arab universities cannot be expected to enhance composing skills of learners. They found that all of the three writing courses mainly focus on the linguistic aspects, especially grammar, at the sentence level. The authors indicate that “it seems to have fallen on a deaf ear in the Arab world since writing course designers still believe in the acquisition of grammar as a key to the mastery of writing skills” (p. 83). They argue that the students will continue to have challenges in English writing if the focus is still on the sentence level issues, such as grammar and punctuation at the expense of writing skills such as paragraphing and coherence. Two researchers, Darani (2002) and Ahymadpoor (2004), found a disconcerting lack of relevance in the reading comprehension selections, ineffective pictures and texts, and a dearth of genuine conversation samples in textbooks. Similarly, Al-Shumaimeri (2003) found that some English

textbooks in the Saudi secondary schools have been shown to adversely affect students' achievement, primarily due to a lack of authentic texts and dialogues. Consistently, Al-Zuhairi (2008) linked Saudi students' low achievement in English to the poor quality of the textbooks used in the classrooms. Al-Zuhairi (2008) and Al-Seghayer (2014) point out that English textbooks in Saudi schools focus on grammar, vocabulary and reading passages but place little focus on communicative functions that help students express their own ideas in different real life situations. Similar to the findings in the literature pertaining to relevancy and motivation, students are discouraged by the curriculum having no relevancy to their lives and by the topics which students cannot relate to themselves.

However, this is not the case with what Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman (2014) found in their study. Al-Nafisah and Al-Shorman (2014) administered a survey to 27 EFL male instructors at King Saud University. The authors aimed to investigate the English instructors' perceptions of EFL textbooks, Interaction Series. Overall, the results of their study suggest that the textbooks are appropriate for their students. For example, the findings showed that the content is relevant to students' lives, challenging and motivating. The participating instructors indicated that the course objectives were clearly defined. In addition, they believed that the textbooks provide a variety of activities that enhance communicative and meaningful practice.

In addition to the selection of texts and activities on the basis of relevancy and interest, sequencing in curriculum should also be considered by EFL teachers as it is a generally accepted principle of lessons construction to teach simple structures first, and later more difficult lessons should be built on the familiar ones (Pienemann, 1985; Nunan, 1989). Likewise, Muller, Jain, Loeser and Irby (2008) criticised integrating a curriculum that lacks organisation because, in some cases, the problem lies not with the content, but with the framing and organisation of the lessons. To overcome students' problems of learning writing skills, the

literature suggests it is important to decide when to present certain information and to avoid giving students advanced content before teaching them basic concepts.

2.5.7 Past learning experiences.

As discussed above, there are several factors other than curriculum that contribute to learning English writing skills. Previous learning experiences in English and poor English foundation could have far reaching impact on students' learning skills (Al Badi, 2015; Ansari, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007; Sawir, 2005; Souriyavongsa, Rany, Zainol Abidin & Mei, 2013). Likewise, in many other Asian and Arabic countries where students are not introduced to English curriculum until early secondary school, this may result in poor base/foundation knowledge of English language. A recent study conducted with 1000 Kuwaiti teachers and head teachers (of whom only 678 completed a questionnaire) highlights that most students begin secondary school lacking a solid foundation in English; there was a large gap between expected proficiency and the reality of the students' ability (Alotaibi, Aldiahani & Alrabah, 2014). Likewise, Muller et al. (2008) agreed to the importance of a solid foundation in core content knowledge as it provides a context and a roadmap for students in bringing complex subject matter together as well as in building their own representation of complex course material. One indicator of whether secondary schools are teaching English effectively is the degree to which university students are prepared for coursework in English. By this metric, there is room for improvement; Ansari (2012) attributed the problem of Saudi university students in their English academic writing to the fact that they have little or no knowledge of even basic English.

Seyyedrezaie and Barani (2013) take this idea a little further by suggesting that the emphasis for learning should be the shared experiences between teacher and learner. They argue that everything in the system should be derived from this. Whilst it is right that Ansari (2012) suggests that many Saudi students do not have a basic understanding of English,

Seyyedrezaie and Barani suggest that more can be achieved by using support materials and better teacher training. Seyyedrezaie and Barani point out that “emergent curriculum is a constructive curriculum in which teachers, students, teaching materials and environment interact in the context of dialogue” (p. 66). Constructivists believe that learners interpret knowledge based on their own experiences and perceptions. Seyyedrezaie and Barani (2013) argue that in the classroom students construct their own understanding by drawing on prior experiences. This study is useful because by employing a constructivist approach to understanding learners’ perceptions researchers and teachers are better able to understand the learning process. In other words, when learners encounter something different or new to them they “reconcile it with[their] previous ideas and experience, maybe changing what [they] believe or maybe discarding...new information as irrelevant” (p. 62). The work offers useful insights into how Saudi secondary school students perceive the learning of English writing.

A large study in Oman by Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) continued the theme of difficulties in learning English writing. They conducted a study with a sample of 1114 randomly selected school students and 317 randomly selected university students from Oman. The results indicated that both groups of students acknowledge that they have problems when writing in English. The researchers point out that many Omani students graduate from secondary schools with good grades in English that often range between C+ and A. Although students have good grades, they face many problems in using their English, including writing skills, when studying at university. This is justified by the fact that they come from a language learning background that mainly focuses on memorisation and imitation rather than on production and creation when writing in English. This implies that students get good grades in English due to the focus on memorisation and imitation. Therefore, this lack of meeting the university requirements is because of the weak foundations in learning English skills in schools. This is supported by Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), who indicate that General

Foundation Programs (GFPs) were designed to help university students in Oman with a number of basic language skills they had not mastered in secondary schooling. It seems that a weak English language learning background in early stages, such as in school, is likely a factor contributing to the challenges EFL students face in later stages of education, such as in university. Overall this is a common thread in most of the above literature.

This literature as a whole offers convincing evidence that students who are not introduced to English Language learning at an early age are more likely to find English writing a major challenge when they reach university level. However, there do appear to be significant gaps in research in relation to the Saudi context. It is interesting to note that Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) assert that secondary school students in Oman achieve good grades in English through memorisation and imitation, but cannot apply it in a university context. With the present study, the researcher aims to contribute new evidence by focusing on secondary school English writing, providing a Saudi context. Also, the above body of work indicates some contradictions in relation to the correlation between English writing proficiency or strategies and L1 proficiency. By employing a mixed method of enquiry, the present study hopes to contribute to this debate through the perceptions and comments of Saudi students. Links to the research question will be provided in the final conclusion of this literature review.

2.6 Addressing Writing Challenges

Having examined literature that highlights common problems in EFL writing and some contributing factors to those problems, it is necessary to examine studies that have proposed possible solutions to the writing challenges faced by EFL students relevant to Saudi secondary students and the context of the present study. Many researchers have suggested possible solutions to EFL learners' problems in English writing. These suggested solutions are such as the importance of providing feedback, enhancing language use, improving curriculum,

enriching practising writing, having extra classes and lessons, strengthening the early years of learning English, and improving teachers and their teaching practices.

2.6.1 Feedback.

From a learning L2 writing perspective, feedback involves inputs, a process, and an output or outcome. Feedback occurs when an output is reached and a return response from the outcome is sent back to the input for modification and improvement (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Ferris (2003), claims that feedback could be the most significant element for improving students' writing skills. Hyland (2003) points out that many students perceive that feedback is a crucial process to help them improve their writing. Feedback is regarded as encouraging, motivating and consolidating for learning (Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Giving feedback could be helpful for both EFL teachers and students (Harmer, 2007). However, giving feedback on written compositions is one of the debated issues in FL and/or SL contexts (Ferris, 2003; Truscott & Hsu, 2008).

There is little agreement among researchers on whether giving feedback helps students improve their written compositions and whether it helps writers increase the accuracy and the fluency of their writing. There are some controversial issues such as which type of written feedback is more effective: teacher, peer, or conferencing, and how feedback is best presented in terms of focusing on form, content or both (Truscott, 1996; Ferris 2003).

Some researchers think that teachers should mainly pay attention to linguistic features of errors to increase the accuracy of written texts (Ferris, 1999, 2003, 2012; Ferris & Roberts 2001; Lee, 2008) Conversely, others claim giving feedback on form is not only useless but also harmful and time-consuming, and should be abandoned (Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 1996; 1999, Truscott & Hsu, 2008). These researchers argue that form-focused feedback has shown little evidence in helping students improve their written compositions. They believe that meaning-

focused feedback is more important and it is the better way to improve students' writing proficiency.

Fathman and Whalley (1990) investigated the effectiveness of teacher feedback that focuses on form (grammar, spelling, punctuation), and the effectiveness of teacher feedback that focuses on content (organisation, development of ideas) in improving students' writing, and investigated when a teacher should provide feedback that focuses on form versus content. Fathman and Whalley's subjects were 72 students enrolled in intermediate ESL college compositions classes. The participants were put into four groups: no feedback, form feedback, content feedback, and form and content feedback. The findings of their study suggested that their participating students made more improvement when feedback was given than when it was not. Also, feedback on grammar helps students reduce the number of grammatical errors and their texts improved more than those who did not get form feedback. Similarly, students who were provided with content feedback rewrote their texts more effectively than those who got no content feedback. The findings also suggest that providing form feedback and content feedback simultaneously or separately does not negatively affect the quality of students' writing. This implies that providing corrective feedback on form, content or both helps students improve their written product.

Scrivener (2005) adds to this debate by pointing out that large class sizes contribute to issues regarding feedback. Scrivener argues that heavy workload constrains teachers who are unable to give sufficient feedback. Similar studies have indicated that heavy workloads are a contributor factor in providing sufficient feedback (Lee, 2004; Seliem & Ahmed, 2009; Zaman & Azad, 2012). Looking at this issue from another perspective, Nation (2001) believes that to compensate for heavy work load, teachers should encourage students to conduct peer feedback and self-assessment. This form of feedback may be a solution for both students and teachers in reducing teachers' workload.

Supporting the value of peer review, Kurihara (2017) conducted a study with 35 EFL high school students examining whether peer reviews assist in improving students' writing abilities. Over a 12-week period, the researcher used an experimental group that received peer reviews and teacher feedback, and control group that only received teacher feedback. Moreover, a delayed posttest was used to determine if the improvements seen in writing abilities were retained. The researcher also employed a questionnaire and interview to investigate the association between the findings of the test and the peer review feedback. The results of Kurihara's study revealed that peer reviews helped in improving student writing abilities. Specifically, the data analysis showed a significant improvement for the peer review group over the control group in the coherence and organisation of the students' writing. Most of the students, completed the questionnaire, felt that the peer review was very useful. According to the interview data, the peer review procedure was perceived to help the students' get a better comprehension of text organisation and coherence because of the emphasis on the critical reading of the writing of peers.

However, other studies indicated that there are little or no benefits from feedback. For example, Truscott and Hsu (2008) conducted an experimental study to investigate whether feedback on an assignment assists students in diminishing their errors on that assignment during the revision process. The experimental group initially showed more improvement from the first draft to the final draft of the first narrative; however, when asked to write a follow up essay one week later, the groups did not show significant difference (Truscott and Hsu, 2008). This lack of long-term success speaks to the larger issue that error correction does not necessarily lead to improved writing ability.

As far as the effectiveness of teacher feedback is concerned, Lee (2004) sought to explore this issue by looking at error correction practices in secondary school writing classes in Hong Kong. The methodology used for this study was teacher questionnaires and follow-up

interviews, and student questionnaires with follow-up interviews, and teacher correction tasks. Convenience sampling was used and all together 206 teachers completed the questionnaires and 19 teachers were interviewed. Also, 320 students completed the questionnaires and 27 students were interviewed. The findings revealed that students were reliant on teachers' error corrections. What also came out was that teachers in general did not consider the long-term significance of the error correction feedback they gave. This study was revealing in as much as only just over half of the teachers' error feedback was accurate. This evidence bought into question the competence of teachers involved in error correction. Therefore, it cast doubt on the effectiveness of error feedback. The study concluded by suggesting that more teacher training is required for what Lee (2004) sees as a time-consuming task.

The debate on what kind of feedback and how much feedback is useful to what degree continues. The research presented in this study contributes to the discussion by examining the perceptions of secondary school EFL writers. Yet another debate in the teaching of EFL writing is whether it is more beneficial to focus on teaching language form or teaching language function. The literature below focuses on form versus function and considers its importance for EFL students when writing English.

2.6.2 Language use: Form vs. function.

Foreign language education traditionally focused on the form of language rather than the function, and several researchers have found merit in teaching language form (Canale, 1983; Ollerhead & Oosthuizen, 2005). Through reliance on teaching language form, the structures of words, phrases and sentences, teachers would present lists of vocabulary and grammar structures for students to study and memorise (Goldberg & Roswell, 2002). Other trends call for students to learn language function over form so that students have more opportunities to experience language in context.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Nation (2001) argue that functional practice of a language is an important way of gaining lexical competence because it affords L2 learners the opportunity to understand how the usage of words differs in various contexts. Ellis (1997) and Harmer (2007) point out that functional use of language helps people to understand the context of language and is therefore a way to fulfill the true purpose of communication. According to Richards (2005), a focus on language function results in students having fluency with the target language, as well as improvement in sentence structures and enhanced writing skills. Still other researchers argue that a blend of both form and function are necessary to effectively teach or learn a language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nation, 2001).

Ollerhead and Oosthuizen (2005) studied Grade 5 pupils in South Africa comparing two different curricula and approaches to second language instruction. The Grade 5 students were Xhosa-speaking learners of English, who attended a primary school in the Western Cape. The teachers were following the Grade 5 South African Schools Curriculum 2005. Researchers assigned tasks to each of three fifth-grade classes, with 56, 58, and 57 students respectively, in order to investigate their hypotheses. Analysis of the progress between pre-test scores and post-test scores across the three classes clearly showed a distinction between the two experimental groups and the control group. However, results between these two groups were mixed. The first two tasks on the test yielded similar results for each of the experimental classes while the FoF class significantly outperformed both other groups in the third task. It should be noted that even though this more successful experimental group's instruction focused on grammatical form, it still did so within meaningful contexts. While the data from this small study is highly relevant to its South African schools and their selected curricula for English classes, it is significant in more general EFL studies in that it reaffirms Norris and Ortega's (2001) assertion that focus on form is often most effective for second language classrooms.

While Ollerhead and Oosthuizen (2005) established a positive correlation between teaching language form and student performance on L2 tests, Hammad (2014), in a study on 12 Palestinian university teachers, discovered through tests and open-ended questionnaires that their subjects did not believe that focus on form is more beneficial. The students in Hammad's study reported through the questionnaires that while they felt confident in their knowledge of English grammar rules and forms as well as vocabulary, they did not feel prepared to incorporate these rules, forms, or vocabulary into fluent writing or speech (2014). The students attributed these shortcomings to a lack of teaching these structures and terms in meaningful contexts (Hammad, 2014). Similarly, Ellis (1997) and Spada et al. (2005) posit that teachers who focus on form within meaningful context have more success than those who never focus on form, or those who only focus on form in a decontextualised format, thus advocating for the inclusion of instruction on language function within second language classrooms.

While language function is demonstrably necessary, as evidenced by the previously discussed studies, it should be clear that function alone does not lead to language competence (Ollerhead & Oosthuizen, 2005). The control group from Ollerhead and Oosthuizen (2005) illustrates this point. In their study, the control group continued to use the state-approved EAL curriculum, which relies on implicit teaching of form through meaningful texts. While the inclusion of meaningful texts is to be commended, this alone does not lead to proficiency, as exhibited in the test results. Both of the experimental groups surpassed the control group's performance based on weeks of explicit teaching with different foci between the two classes. These results still clearly demonstrate the advantages of explicit instruction; thus, the debate continues on whether or not the focus teaching language form should overshadow the focus on teaching language function. The issue of form versus function is one of many that should be considered when solutions are offered to improve curriculum.

2.6.3 Improving curriculum and teaching methods.

It is argued by the writers below that effective second language instruction requires an effective curriculum. Most schools will have English language as part of their common curriculum. Within the context of the literature below, the curriculum is referred to as the specific lessons, resources and assignments that the individual language teacher uses. However, Nunan (1989) suggests that curriculum is constructed of more than a set of materials, but rather the actual actions of teachers in classrooms. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) asked 387 Taiwanese teachers of English “to rate a list of comprehensive motivational strategies” (p. 153). The ratings focused on how important they were to the teachers and how often the teachers used them in class. They argue that language curricula necessitate an in-depth understanding of learners’ current proficiency levels prior to planning a course curriculum. In addition to learners’ proficiency, finding ways to attract and maintain their attention through motivating materials is another significant consideration. Writers such as Cheng & Dörnyei (2007), Graves (2000), Oxford & Scarcella (1994), and Yang (1999) have determined that content topics for an intended curriculum are an essential component to be analysed when selecting or developing a curriculum.

Many scholars view the inclusion of standard language textbooks as a central component of second-language curricula. However, some researchers have spent time documenting the shortcomings of various EFL textbooks used by students in their studies (Ahymadpoor, 2004; Darani, 2002; Hooman, 2014). Darani (2002) and Ahymadpoor (2004) detailed similar shortcomings of high school EFL textbooks, including dull, unexciting textual content and pictures, a scarcity of insight into the target culture, and insufficient reinforcement of newly learned vocabulary. Based on these findings, it follows that if poor-quality textbooks are chosen by the teacher, this often becomes another hurdle that students must overcome in order to achieve L2 writing proficiency (Hycroft, 1998; Tomlinson, 2012). Research by

Azizifar and Baghelani (2014), Graves (2000), and Tok (2010) found that language textbooks that provide scenarios and opportunities in which students can practise their L2 communicative skills while offering the option to differentiate activities based on students' needs and interests are valuable additions to the EFL classroom. Min (2009) studied the writing of 18 university sophomores in Taiwan who had Mandarin Chinese as a first language. The researcher employed a principled eclectic approach to teaching essay writing in an EFL class. The author posited a principled, elected approach to teaching EFL writing, which is to consider the reader, the writer, the text, the contexts, and the culture of all EFL learners. Numerous researchers (Al-Shumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015; Dantas-Whitney & Rilling, 2009; Mishan, 2005) highlight the importance of authentic and relevant materials in language textbooks as necessary to provide students with exposure to realistic language contexts. The inclusion of high-quality textbooks can inspire students, improve real communication in L2, and foster positive attitudes toward L2 learning, all of which could potentially translate into better L2 writing.

The above discussion of the need for inspirational reading materials seems to be in opposition to the concept of sequencing and may throw light on why students become less motivated to learn. A basic tenet of foreign language instruction has traditionally been that language structures should be taught beginning with the most simplistic and progressing through the most advanced. This allows for the more complex structures to be taught after the mastery of the simpler structures (Pienemann, 1985; Nunan, 1989). However, the definition of simple varies from teacher to teacher, suggesting that some teachers provide inspirational, motivating learning material, and others provide dull, exercise-driven learning materials.

There appears to be a general consensus among writers such as Arikan (2010), Hajizadeh and Salahshour (2012), and Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) that inspirational learning materials have a great impact on the quantity and quality of learning in EFL classrooms. Inclusion of this in the literature review is relevant to the research undertaken in this study.

Student perceptions are central to it and it is expected that concerns about teaching strategies will form part of their perceptions of their experience of learning to write English. Perceptions are subjective therefore the literature below provides an objective framework for understanding the concept of good teaching. Within this framework, writers have identified the ability to build and maintain students' motivation as a key feature.

The work of Agudo (2015) points out the controversial nature of instruction of grammar and corrective feedback already discussed in this present literature review. Agudo used student questionnaires to investigate these issues. A total of 173 EFL Spanish secondary school students completed the questionnaires. Agudo's work substantially contributes to this thesis by adding a critical dimension to the study. As pointed out earlier, there is considerable debate about how English writing should be taught. Quite rightly, Agudo argues that is not so much whether grammar should be taught. Rather, it is about how grammar should be taught. The findings of Agudo's study showed that students believed that grammar should be considered a useful component of learning to write in English, but they "prioritised communication over grammar" (p. 411). Also, students wanted to have corrective feedback on a regular basis with many students feeling deprived at not receiving it. In essence, the study showed that students want their learning to be more relevant to their own experiences. In addition, Agudo found that his participating students believed that communicative learning would help them more than an emphasis on grammar. Agudo's study showed that students desire more opportunities to incorporate communicative practice into their learning. Students' beliefs were also complex. On the one hand they wanted more communicative work but on the other hand wanted more corrective feedback. This dilemma may indicate the true significance of new reforms in pedagogies versus traditional methods and is thus valuable for exploration in this thesis.

In their study of Iranian EFL instruction, Hajizadeh and Salahshour (2012) distributed questionnaires to 22 EFL students asking them about the qualities of good EFL teachers. The

findings affirm that the students indicate a strong preference for teachers who choose teaching strategies to maintain students' interest and motivation. In some places, technology and more modern teaching tools such as YouTube, television shows, videos, digital games and movies are regarded as powerful means to motivate students in learning EFL. These tools often lead to increased motivation which has a positive correlation to achieving L2 proficiency (Al-Nasser, 2015; Blake, 2016; Hyland, 2004; Lier, 2014; Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of incorporating new technology in EFL classes. Rennie (2012) and Nejati (2010) note that EFL classes could benefit from the use of technology as a part of teaching strategies for purposes such as discussion starters, writing tasks and reading comprehension activities. There is hope that the incorporation of technology in the EFL classroom may mitigate the use of outdated teaching practices such as rote memorisation. Additionally, the technology has the fortunate side effect of more direct involvement of teachers through various activities such as look-up dictionary, flashcards, word elaboration, association, etc. (Deesri, 2002; Oxford & Scarcella, 1994).

Fidaoui, Bahous and Bacha (2010) conducted a study to ascertain the effectiveness of computer assisted language learning (CALL). The question asked was whether this method actually motivated 4th grade Lebanese elementary students in their English writing classrooms. The participants were 48 students. The methods used for this study were questionnaires, interviews and observations. The data was gathered over a three-month period by a questionnaire sent out to students. About 96% found "the use of IT as enjoyable and exciting" (p. 163). The students also claimed that the Internet assisted them in acquiring more new vocabulary and exhaustive knowledge about associated topics. What is important to note here is that the study showed that 83 per cent of students felt they were already computer literate and therefore found computer resources valuable. The findings indicated using CALL motivated the students to practise writing because it helped them to find mistakes quickly,

correct them, embellish their work and share it. Also, what motivated the students was the fact that they could personalise their work and this motivated them to study harder.

In a current study by Blikstad-Balas, Roe and Klette (2018) the authors argue that for students to develop their English writing skills they should have a conducive environment to work in which is supportive and provides opportunities for sustained writing. This study uses arts classes to explore how texts are produced by the students. According to the authors, this is an undeveloped research area. The study involved analysis of 178 video-recorded language arts classes in 46 secondary schools in Norway. The task was to identify how many opportunities the students had to engage in writing. When students did write the results tended to be fragmented and short. This was particularly true when students were re-copying teacher materials. What is important about this study is the ways teachers encouraged students to write and where opportunities were missed. This study is a valuable addition to the literature review because it offers a different perspective on teaching and learning English writing.

Moreover, Min (2009) suggests that it is also essential that teachers take into account their students' cultural backgrounds in order to customise their teaching to meet their needs, particularly where mainstream classroom approaches have failed. In addition to Min (2009), Bashiri and Shahrokhi (2016) conducted a study with 60 Iranian intermediate EFL students. They were divided into control and experimental groups. The findings showed that a process-based approach (i.e. the process of writing, such as planning, drafting and revising) had a positive effect on learners' writing proficiency, critical thinking ability, and autonomy. The authors found that the process-based approach they used was appropriate to meet their students' needs and learning processes. The authors argue that teachers should adhere to the best strategies to meet their students' needs.

Existing literature also notes that as important as the teacher's role is in an EFL classroom, the need for effective teacher training is vitally important by consequence. In Asian

countries, as well as in Arabic countries like Saudi Arabia, teacher training has been found lacking (Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2016). Teachers are often in classrooms with no classroom experience, no professional training for teaching, and little to no knowledge of the content (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013). As writing is a difficult skill to acquire to teach, the task presents great difficulties for EFL teachers (Leki, 2001). Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) argue that training for teaching writing is of the utmost importance for effective teachers' performance in EFL classes. For teacher training to be considered adequate, it should improve teaching strategies, methods, procedures, teaching quality, and, by extension, student achievement (Al-Seghayer, 2016; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Harris & Sass, 2011).

Due to the complex nature of writing and the cognitive activity it demands, Bashiri and Shahrokhi (2016) insist that in order to develop writing ability in conjunction with critical thinking skills, EFL teachers should encourage students to generate their own compositions following brainstorming and generating ideas. According to Benson (2011), when allowed the liberty to generate their own text, students become actively involved in and responsible for their own learning. Each of these studies advocates for more modern approaches to teaching writing including students producing their own drafts as well as very nearly independently revising, proofreading, and rearranging ideas. This is a great departure from more traditional writing classes in which teachers intervene a great deal in every step of the students' writing processes. According to Leki (2001), some balance may be in order. Leki (2001) determined that the proper interventions from teachers can be potent tools for students as they proceed through the writing process as long as they are focused on correcting grammar, vocabulary, composition, and outlines.

Suggested solutions from the literature presented here help to give context to the third research question in this study which seeks to explore how the writing difficulties encountered by Saudi secondary school students can be effectively addressed.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of issues that researchers have identified as the main challenges faced by EFL students in English writing, particularly issues with grammar, punctuation and spelling. It has further dealt with key issues of organising and developing ideas, and problems writing texts that are rhetorically situated and meaningful. The studies that have been presented suggest the contributing factors to these shortcomings in EFL writers such as L2 writing strategies, L1 writing proficiency, motivation, writing anxiety, and teaching methods. The studies relevant to the topics presented in this chapter highlight the perceptions of teachers and students from varied EFL contexts and from different year levels. This review has sought to provide a basis for the current study's examination of student and teacher perceptions in the context of Saudi Arabian secondary schools. This review of literature has presented some of the suggested solutions found by researchers such as enhancing language use, practising writing inside and outside the classroom, improving curriculum, boosting students' foundational writing skills in early education, and improving teaching methods. The literature suggests that for educational outcomes to improve, policy makers need to listen to students' perceptions about their learning, and this was the first important focus of the research presented in this study.

The literature in this review has helped to inform the design of the present study. Student questionnaires and interview questions were created utilising the EFL challenges, contributing factors, and solutions presented in this chapter. However, much of the research is focused on quantitative methods, leading to a scarcity of research that uses mixed methods, as the present research does. Further, most existing research focuses on error analysis, and does not elicit students' and teachers' perceptions about learning and teaching writing. There is also a relative shortage of research on secondary students, with most of the research focusing on university students. Thus, there are gaps in the literature which, if filled, could lead to greater

understanding of how students and teachers in Saudi secondary schools perceive the difficulties they face in learning and teaching how to write in English, which is a central research question in the present study.

The research presented in this study will contribute to the literature in the field as it addresses the participants' perceptions about the problems faced by Saudi secondary school students' as they learn to write in English, the perceived contributing factors of those problems, and the perceived solutions such as giving feedback, enhancing language use, and improving teaching methods. The literature reviewed provides a foundation for the analysis of the data obtained through the present study by examining how other researchers analysed their data. An understanding of how student perceptions are viewed in the context of other studies will contribute to a broader understanding of the implications found in the student perspectives of Saudi secondary students. The following chapter presents and addresses the methodological approach for the data collection and analysis adopted in the present study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates how the methodology used for this thesis supports the enquiry, and asserts the contextual background for the data. The main aim of this study was to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English, the perceived contributing factors to these difficulties and the perceived appropriate solutions to these difficulties.

The first section will indicate the philosophical approach to the study. This will be followed by an explanation of the research design. Then the research site and participants will be described. Following this, the research instruments used to collect data from the study participants, including both students and teachers, are presented. These instruments included student questionnaires, student focus groups, and one-on-one teacher interviews. The rationale and design for each instrument employed will also be discussed, as will the approaches used in the analysis of the collected data.

3.2 Paradigms and Approaches

The broad philosophical approach adopted for the study is positivist. In this respect, this study aims to explain and predict outcomes which are grounded in the belief that research should be objective and findings can be replicated. Thus, quantitative data is heavily reliant on numbers to produce valid outcomes (Ma, 2015). However, the study was conducted employing a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach. As such, an interpretivist approach was also employed to give a deeper understanding of the statistical data. Thus, meanings could be attached to the quantitative data. This is important because this study is not based on a pre-determined hypothesis but is built around research questions relating to perceptions. Qualitative data allows the respondents more freedom to express their perceptions, but it has to be recognised that these perceptions can be subjective and based on unfounded assumptions

(Creswell, 2014). By using quantitative data, a degree of objectivity can be given and results can be measured using representative samples.

3.3 The Research Design

The mixed method forms the framework for the design of the study. It was used to provide a more holistic way to investigate student/teacher perceptions through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013). However, the mixed method also has its limitations in that quantitative data (the questionnaires) is deterministic and reductionist. Data is reduced to numbers (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data such as closed-ended questionnaires mostly do not explore complex issues in great depth as it is the case with focus groups and interviews. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is subjective. With regard to the interviews and focus groups, biases can be formed and may impact the scientific nature of the quantifiable data. This type of research design was chosen to address the research questions in a holistic way and to provide stronger conclusions through the corroboration of findings than through a single research method (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013).

In this study, the quantitative data were collected to enable the researcher to obtain descriptive information from the questionnaires, examine correlations among variables, and then generalise the results to the population of interest as a whole. The qualitative data were used to give participants the opportunity to elaborate on their responses. These measures also allowed the researcher to clarify the findings obtained from the quantitative data by gathering in-depth data about the participants' personal experiences. The mixed methods design allowed for multiple types of information to be triangulated to compare, contrast, and contextualise findings (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013).

To ensure that both research methods complimented each other, the researcher employed a convergent parallel mixed methods design (see Figure 1 below) to simultaneously

collect both qualitative data (through student focus groups and teacher interviews) and quantitative data (through student questionnaires), to merge this data, and then use the results to address the research problem (Creswell and Clark, 2011). This design was used to better understand the research problem in a complete picture through complementary qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013) and as stated above, the qualitative data were used to support or discern a deeper contextualised understanding of the statistical findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2013).

Figure 1 below depicts the design of the convergent parallel mixed methods design undertaken in this study. The diagram highlights the four steps in a convergent design as suggested by Creswell and Clark (2011). During the first step, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously but independently in a single phase. The researcher collected the quantitative data through student questionnaires, and the qualitative data through student focus groups and one-to-one teacher interviews. In the second step, both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately but concurrently. Whilst the quantitative data were analysed via descriptive statistics (percentages) and inferential statistics, the qualitative data were examined utilising thematic analysis. The first and second research questions were both quantitatively and qualitatively analysed while the third was only qualitatively analysed. In the third step, quantitative and qualitative results were merged by linking the quantitative variables and factors to the qualitative themes. The final step involved interpreting the merged findings by determining the degree to which the two data sets related to each other and generating a more holistic comprehension of the research problem.

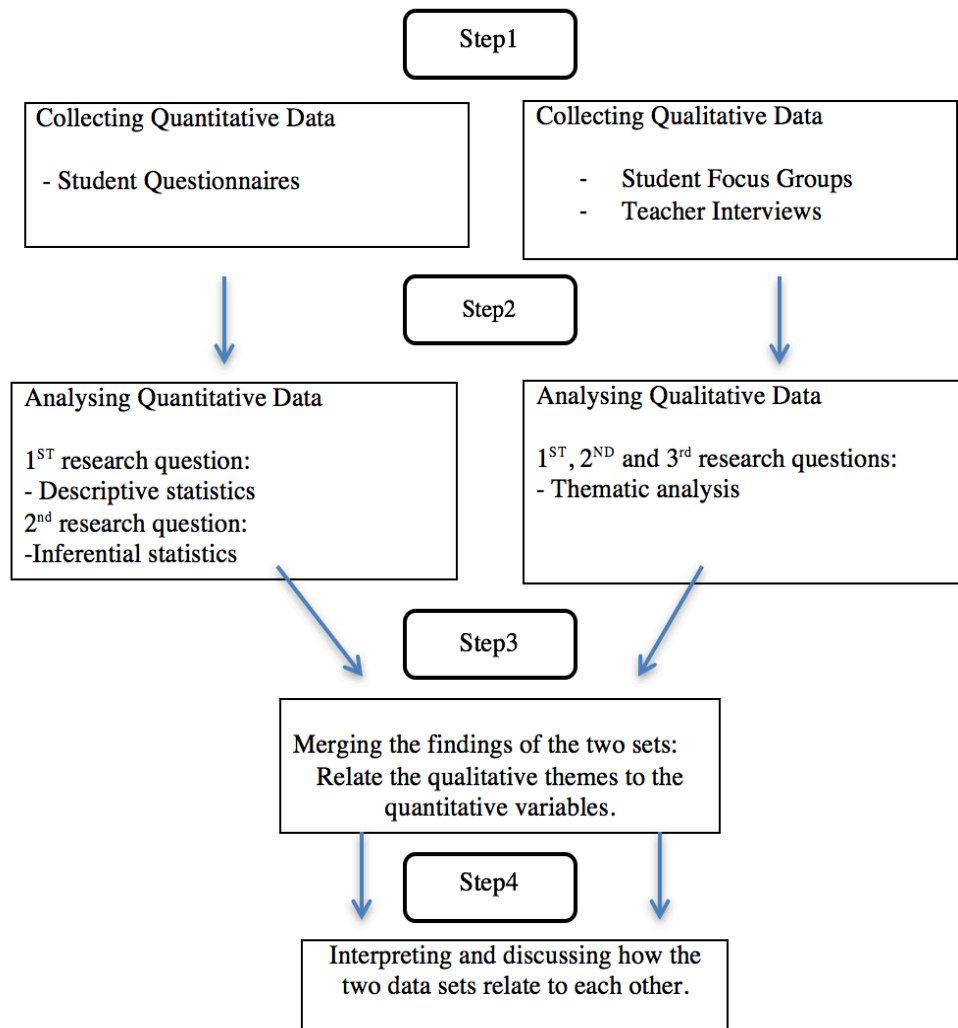


Figure 1: Convergent parallel mixed methods design procedures. Adapted from Creswell and Clark (2011, p. 79).

3.4 Research Site

The research was conducted in 10 segregated secondary schools (five male and five female) located in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The researcher used systematic random sampling and thereby every third school on a list (provided by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia), was included and then visited. The primary reason for conducting the research in more than one school was to obtain as many varied responses as possible so that greater generalisability could be inferred (Creswell, 2014). Due to the education system in Saudi Arabia being

segregated, the researcher was not able to enter female-only schools. For this reason, the researcher used a female research assistant, who has a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics, to collect the data from female participants. Before this research was carried out, a pilot study was conducted.

3.5 The Participants

3.5.1 Students.

The participating students were secondary school students in years 10, 11 and 12 aged between 16 and 18 years old. As mentioned in Chapter One (see Section 1.3), students study English as a compulsory subject for six years (i.e. from the fourth year in elementary school until the twelfth year in secondary school). Participating students were chosen for two reasons. Firstly, according to the education system in Saudi Arabia, these students were in the last stage of general education. Therefore, they were expected to have enough experience in learning English to actively reflect upon it. Secondly, because this study focused on sentence and paragraph-level issues; these issues are emphasised in the secondary year levels.

3.5.2. Teachers.

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with three male English language teachers, and the female research assistant interviewed three female English language teachers. The participating teachers were all Saudi teachers who taught EFL. They all graduated from Saudi universities with a degree in English literature or linguistics. Their teaching experiences ranged from six years to 25 years. The teachers were selected as participants in this study because they were involved in the teaching of the English language; the method through which they were selected will be described below. It was anticipated that they would be able to explain the reasons why students had problems with the English language, and could perhaps suggest techniques to reduce and/or overcome such challenges.

3.6 Sampling Procedures

3.6.1 Student questionnaires.

In this study, the sample included 600 male and female secondary school students (300 males and 300 females) In the five male secondary schools, there was a total of 300 students from year levels ten [n=100], eleven [n=100], and twelve [n=100]. The same criteria for selecting the male students was utilised by the female research assistant for selecting female students. As indicated above, the 10 secondary schools were chosen randomly. There were 404 schools to choose from: 200 male schools and 204 female schools. However, a convenience sampling procedure was employed while selecting the classes from each year-level in the various schools. According to Dörnyei (2007), convenience sampling, is a widely used method of enquiry. Participants are chosen for their geographical proximity, availability and accessibility. However, employing convenience sampling within research projects has limitations, specifically the potential for bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). A convenience sample includes whatever participants within a given group of people are easiest for the researcher to access (Creswell, 2014). Bias occurs when there is some quality that differentiates those that are most accessible from other members of the group. For example, students who feel more confident about their writing skills might be more willing to participate in a survey. Despite this limitation, convenience sampling was utilised due to the availability of participants (Cohen et al., 2013). Whilst there is potential for concern over bias, the principals of the schools suggested that any class could be considered representative of the total population. This is due to the random students' allocation to classes, time-tabling, and facilities' availability. In the analysis stage, care was taken not to make over generalisations about the representative nature of the data.

3.6.2 Student focus groups.

From a group of volunteers, 18 out of 600 students (i.e. who completed the questionnaire) were selected to participate in six focus groups. Each focus group consisted of three students and each focus group represented a year level. The number three was chosen because the research was not able to conduct one-on-one interviews. The relatively small number of participants allowed for a more in-depth conversation with each one, compared to what could be obtained with a larger focus group. Focus groups with three participants are suggested by Krueger & Casey (2009) in cases where a researcher wants to obtain detailed information about a relatively high number of questions. In the male schools, three focus groups were conducted with nine students from the three year-levels (i.e. years 10, 11 and 12). In the female schools, the same procedure was used. In selecting students for focus groups, the researcher directly asked the students whether they were interested in participating in a focus group. All the students who indicated their willingness to participate raised their hands and then three students were randomly selected. The 10 secondary schools and parents gave permission to the researcher to conduct the student focus groups. For the male students, those in the 1st and 2nd year were selected from one school and the 3rd year-level students were from another school. For the female students, the 1st and 3rd year-level students were selected from one school, while the 2nd year-level students came from another school. This selection was based on the availability of the class and the administration process of the school.

3.6.3 One-on-one teacher interviews.

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with three male English language teachers, and the female research assistant followed the same procedure with three female English language teachers. The six interviewed teachers were from different schools; the male English teachers were invited via email and the first three who gave positive responses were chosen. The same processes were used with the female English teachers. The interviewed

teachers were asked about their length of experience, academic qualifications and types of training. The teachers' length of experience varied. The most novice teacher had 5 years of experience while the teacher with the most experience reported 25 years of teaching experience. In terms of academic qualifications, each held a bachelor's degree in English and a minor in education. The focus of their university coursework was on English literature and linguistics rather than teaching English as a foreign language. There was also considerable variation in the level of training among the teachers. While two teachers had no training, the others were trained in classroom management and assessment. None of the teachers were trained in teaching English as a foreign language.

3.7 Development of the Research Instruments

3.7.1. Development of the student questionnaires.

The questionnaires were developed through exploration of the literature as well as thorough piloting. The questionnaires were intended to investigate the perceptions of Saudi secondary school students about their difficulties when writing in English, the contributing factors to these difficulties, and how they could be effectively addressed or overcome. The researcher developed a 58-item questionnaire in Arabic (the L1 of the participants), incorporating a Likert scale from one to five, ranging from 'Always' to 'Never' (*always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never*), and a continuum scale ranging from one to eight with 1 meaning "not at all" and 8 meaning "extremely high". Consistent with Dörnyei (2010), these two scales were used to measure the range of students' perceptions. The researcher made use of existing questions due to a belief that these questions effectively capture students' and teachers' perceptions about aspects of the learning process (Dörnyei, 2010).

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections and five sub-sections based on specific themes to enhance the overall logic and coherence of questions given to the students (Cohen et al., 2013). Instead of numbering the items from 1-58, the researcher sectionalised

the questionnaire and numbered the items in each section separately to make it easy to read and follow (Cohen et al., 2013). The questionnaire had a covering letter that elucidated the purpose of the study, gave an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality and general instructions about how to answer it (the questionnaire and covering letter are included in Appendix A).

As stated above, the questionnaire was divided into three main sections, namely, demographics, writing difficulties, and the factors that contributed to these writing difficulties. The first section was the demographics section that asked the students about their gender, year-levels, parents' educational level and extra English lessons taken by students outside the classrooms.

The second section included two types of questions (closed-ended and two open-ended questions). The closed-ended questions asked the students about their perceptions of the difficulties they encounter when writing in English. This part dealt with difficulties in sentence-level issues such as grammar (e.g. verb tense, prepositions, and articles), mechanics (i.e. spelling and punctuation), and vocabulary, as well as difficulties with paragraph-level issues such as paragraph organisation, unity, development of ideas, and coherence. Also, this part included five items about whether their teachers teach them paragraph-level issues. The second part of this section consisted of two open-ended questions that asked the students about their suggestions for addressing their writing difficulties effectively. One question concerned their suggestions for reducing these difficulties with reference to linguistic issues, while the other was about suggesting ideas to reduce their difficulties in procedural knowledge (i.e. paragraph-level issues) when writing in English. These two open-ended questions were designed to give the students the opportunity to suggest possible solutions.

The last section was designed to look into the contributing factors to these writing difficulties. It included five sub-sections: teaching methods, lack of English writing strategies, lack of motivation, writing anxiety, and lack of L1 writing proficiency. The students were asked

whether they perceived these factors contributing to their writing difficulties in English. Seven of the items investigated factors related to teaching methods used by their English teachers, such as giving feedback, varying teaching techniques, explaining the objective of the writing lessons, and encouraging students to practise English outside the classroom.

The second sub-section sought information about writing strategies used by Saudi secondary school students when writing in English. As well, some of the items investigated whether the students were taught how to use a strategic writing process such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proof-reading.

The third sub-section consisted of five items about students' motivation to write in English. These items dealt with a number of factors relating to student motivation, such as writing about irrelevant and predetermined topics, having the opportunity to generate sentences, and the way their teacher presented writing lessons.

The fourth sub-section discussed the theme of writing anxiety. It sought students' feelings about the situations that could cause this to happen. These situations included having their written work evaluated, and focusing on sentence-level and/or paragraph-level issues. Confidence, which is considered to be another factor related to anxiety when writing in English, was also included in this part.

The fifth sub-section consisted of two items used to indicate the level of difficulties students face when writing in both English (L2) and Arabic (L1). Finally, the sixth sub-section concerned students' L1 writing proficiency. This part consisted of five items representing the factors believed to contribute to students' difficulties with written English expression. These factors are: planning and drafting in L1 writing, focusing on sentence-level issues and/or paragraph-level issues in L1 writing and being motivated to generate their own sentences in their L1 writing.

The questionnaire employed in this study was adopted, with slight modifications, from studies carried out by Shukri (2008) and Liu and Wang (2011) addressing similar issues related to the present study. For example, the main focus of Shukri's (2008) study is the perceptions of university medical students and their teachers regarding university medical students' problems in English writing, and on what they need to learn more effectively. The present study asks similar questions, but in relation to secondary school students rather than university students. Aspects of the questions used in the Liu and Wang (2011) study, which examined paragraph-level errors in Chinese undergraduate EFL students' compositions, were also incorporated into the questionnaires for the present study. One example is the use of open-ended questions. However, unlike in the present study, the Liu and Wang study did not include questions about sentence-level errors or about the participants' suggestions for reducing their writing difficulties in English.

The second major section of the questionnaire focussed on Saudi secondary school students' perceptions of the factors contributing to their English writing difficulties. Based on the literature review, the possible contributing factors were L2 teaching practices, lack of L2 English writing strategies, lack of motivation, writing anxiety, and lack of L1 writing proficiency. These factors were put into separate categories. Some of the items in these sections of the questionnaire were adopted, with slight modifications, from Doushaq and Almakhzoomy (1989), Mojica (2010), Daly and Miller (1975), Masny and Foxall (1992), and Ismail (2011). The other items were based on the findings of other relevant studies.

While the aim of the current study is different, some of the items from Doushaq and Almakhzoomy's analysis were adopted to investigate students' perceptions of how Saudi teachers of English evaluate Saudi secondary school students' writing in English. The questions were used to investigate whether teaching methods could be considered one of the contributing factors to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students when writing in English.

Some items used in the *writing anxiety* section were adopted from Daly and Miller's (1975) study which measured writing apprehension. Four items adopted from Daly and Miller's research set out to evaluate students' anxiety when writing in English. Two items used in the questionnaire (in relation to writing anxiety) in this present study were adopted from Masny and Foxall's (1992) study.

3.7.1.1 Validity of the questionnaire. In this study, a number of techniques were used to establish content validity. The researcher gave the questionnaire to two English teachers, one teacher having a Masters degree in TESOL and the other being a PhD student in TESOL, checked the clarity of the content (Cohen et al., 2013). These teachers made reference to the structure of some sentences. For example, some questions related to spelling issues which the teachers felt were too detailed. Therefore, the spelling question was simplified (see the questionnaire in Appendix A). An example of a reconstructed question now reads: "I have difficulties in spelling English words correctly." Another example of sentences that were reconstructed was "my teacher corrects my assignment". This was changed to "my teacher gives me feedback on my written assignment". Examples of redundant sentences were: "I practise writing in Arabic outside the classroom" and "I write in Arabic when I have free time".

To further establish content validity, advice was sought from a number of 'judges' including the researcher's supervisors, and one student who has a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics, two students who have Masters Degrees in TESOL and two are PhD students in TESOL. They were asked to examine and assess the content of the questionnaire in terms of its relevance to the topic. These judges were asked to comment on how well the questionnaire covered the topic under consideration; in particular, how well it could identify factors related to writing in English in the Saudi context.

Additionally, two bilingual colleagues, one with a Masters degree in TESOL and a PhD candidate in TESOL, examined the Arabic and English copies of the questionnaire. To ensure

content validity in both languages, the researcher translated a copy of the questionnaire into Arabic. The bilingual colleagues translated the copy back into English without any knowledge of the existence of an English copy. The two versions of the questionnaires were then compared to check whether they had the same content (see Appendices A and B for the English and Arabic versions of the questionnaire). The purpose of back translation was to allow the researcher to improve the questionnaires' similarity since translation involves linguistic retooling and restructuring that may create a 'semantically dissimilar' questionnaire (Harkness & Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). However, the back translation revealed that the two versions were not semantically different.

In addition to seeking consultation regarding the items, the researcher also worked to ensure validity by conducting a pilot test. The feedback obtained from the students were used to draw conclusions about the validity of the questionnaire. Piloting the questionnaire was before administering the final version of the questionnaire for the main study. This is explained in detail below.

3.7.1.2 Piloting the questionnaire. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted to check for any ambiguity, uncertainty, and wordiness in the questionnaire items, and to estimate the time taken for participants to complete the questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2010). The pilot questionnaire was conducted in two secondary schools in August 2012 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, which were selected using systematic random sampling where every third school on the list was included and then visited. One school for males and one for females were chosen, and neither of which were included in the main study. The pilot questionnaire was distributed to 25 students from the male first-year level and 23 students from the male second-year level and to 22 students from the female first-year level and 23 students from the female second-year level. These two year-levels were chosen because they were from the same target population who would be selected for the main study. Also, they were selected because the classes from these

two-year levels were the only available classes for the piloting questionnaire stage. After student and parental consent forms were obtained, the students were asked to complete the questions and write their comments on any problems they encountered. The same procedures for conducting the pilot study were used by the female research assistant with the female students.

The pilot questionnaire took about 25 to 30 minutes. All the respondents completed the questionnaire with the exception of three who failed to answer four questions. One male student failed to respond to two open-ended questions concerning the provision of suggestions to solve problems that students face based on paragraph- and sentence-level issues. One female and a male student failed to respond to two closed-ended questions. The verbal feedback, immediately obtained from the respondents after the completion of the questionnaire, revealed that most of the questions were understandable. Nevertheless, the feedback indicated that a few statements should be reworded to make them clearer. For example, some Arabic terms and definitions that mean “cohesive devices” and “planning” were clarified by adding examples. Moreover, the oral feedback showed that the scale used in the motivation and anxiety sections required modifications that were subsequently made. According to the students, an arrow was added to clearly display the varying levels on the anxiety and motivation continuum.

3.7.1.3 Reliability of the questionnaire. The researcher tested the external reliability of the questionnaire by measuring its temporal stability. Temporal stability refers to a measure or repeatability of a test over a given time frame, and leads to a similar result whenever it is used (Muijs, 2004). To examine this stability, the test-retest reliability was employed (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2009). The test-retest reliability of the questionnaire was determined by administering the questionnaire on two different occasions to the same students (Bryman, 2012).

In this study, the same procedures used in the pilot stage in terms of recurring students and sampling were utilised in the test-retest reliability. One school was chosen randomly. A total of 24 students from a third year level class agreed to complete the questionnaire twice at two different times. The students were informed that each one needed to use a code instead of their names. The same code would be used again when completing the same questionnaire on the second occasion. A total of 21 students completed the questionnaire twice as the other three students were absent in the second test. The time interval between the administrations of the two tests was two weeks. The researcher administered the second test when a fortnight had passed. The researcher expected that two weeks could be enough for participants not to remember the first test, and also they might not have an impact on their perceptions regarding the issues addressed (Grinnell, Gabor & Unrau, 2010).

The researcher summed the total scores on the two administrations of the two tests (i.e. the “test” and the “retest”) that individually consisted of 58 questions. In other words, the score of each paper was summed to obtain the overall score of each student in each test. After that, the data were entered into SPSS to calculate the correlation coefficient which can define the nature of the relationship between the score performance in the two tests (Muijs, 2004). Table 1 below shows the correlation between the test and the retest. As shown in Table 1, the correlation between the two scores is 0.817; thus, the two scores are positively highly correlated

since the correlation is greater than 0.7 (Dancey & Reidy, 2004). Furthermore, this high correlation suggests a strong relationship and hence high stability of the score. Conclusively, the score of the 21 students is stable over the two-week period.

Table 1. Test-retest Reliability of the Pilot Student Questionnaires

		Test 1	Retest 2
Test 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.817**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	21	21
Retest 2	Pearson Correlation	.817**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	21	21

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.7.2 Development of the student focus groups.

Using a focus group as a research instrument in this study was done because it was suitable to choose the focus group as an instrument for data collection given that the purpose of the study was to acquire an array of people's perceptions about the target issues, and to comprehend differences in perspectives among various categories of individuals (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Specifically, the focus groups were conducted to elicit a variety of perspectives and opinions that students share about the factors affecting their writing in English, and to investigate the differences among the three year-level students in their perceptions of the factors impacting on their English writing skills. Another reason for using focus groups was to generate more in-depth views or opinions concerning the information raised in the questionnaire (Creswell, 2014). Another advantage in utilising this type of data collection strategy lies in the participants' interaction. Such interaction helped to maximise exchanges of views, attitudes and beliefs (Kitzinger, 1994).

Having presented the reasons for utilising focus groups as a research instrument employed in this study, it should be mentioned why focus groups were used with the students rather than teachers. Conducting focus groups with adolescents and young students was useful as they were inclined to be accompanied by their classmates and thus might be more inclined to talk freely about a specific topic (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Also, rich data would be obtained when particular topics are discussed by a small group of participants who know each other and have similar experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Similarly, the participating students might find discussing some topics in a group with an adult interviewer was easier and more comfortable than during a one-on-one interview (Hopkins, 2013).

3.7.2.1 The design and content of the student focus groups. Participating students were selected based on their educational level. The focus groups in this study had guiding questions (see Appendices C and D for the English and Arabic versions of the focus groups questions guide) which were organised under three main themes based on the main research questions, these being: (1) *writing difficulties*, (2) *contributing factors to these writing difficulties*, and (3) *suggested techniques for addressing these writing difficulties*. These three major themes incorporated a number of sub-themes and they are explained in more detail below.

The literature review highlighted the various forms of writing difficulties that most EFL students often experience. Some of these difficulties include linguistic difficulties that encompass, grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and vocabulary difficulties. Besides these kinds of difficulties, procedural knowledge is another area in which students often experience problems. This area encompasses the development of ideas, organisation, unity, and coherence in writing. Examples of the guiding questions on this theme were: '*What are the difficulties you face when writing in English?*'; '*What are the difficulties you face in grammar when writing in English?*'; '*What do you think of spelling?*' and '*Is it difficult? Why/why not?*'

As shown in the literature review, a number of factors have been identified as playing a crucial role in students' writing difficulties, including a lack of English writing strategies, teaching methods, lack of motivation, lack of L1 writing proficiency, writing anxiety, and the variations that exist between the English and Arabic language systems (see Chapter Two). Examples of the guiding questions on this theme were as follows: *'What do you think are the main reasons for writing problems?'*; *'How does your teacher teach writing?'* and *'What are the strategic processes you use when writing in English?'*

The researcher did not present specific techniques for the students in the questionnaire or in the focus groups. This approach was intended to give the students the opportunity to suggest their own possible solutions for their writing problems in English. Examples of the guiding questions on this theme were: *'What do you suggest to address your problems in English writing?'*; *'What do you suggest to address your problems in spelling?'* and *'How do you think problems in grammar can be effectively addressed?'* Although the questions used in the focus groups addressed specific issues, they were quite general in nature in order to give the moderator (the researcher) the opportunity to respond to issues raised in the conversation. These open-ended questions were designed to help the researcher address the research questions, and they also allowed the students to discuss and raise issues and themes they perceived to be important (Bryman, 2012).

As indicated before, each focus group in this study consisted of only three students. As the primary purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of the participants in detail, it was preferable to conduct the interviews with small groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Therefore, choosing a small group in the present study assisted its purpose, which was to understand the research problem in detail by investigating students' perspectives about the pertinent factors influencing Saudi secondary school students' writing in English. The researcher opted for a small group also because the participants were from similar backgrounds,

and therefore, had much to share about their experiences regarding the factors influencing their English language writing.

The questions used during the focus groups came from a range of sources. As shown in the literature review, particular concepts and ideas were used to develop the interview questions. In addition, other questions were adopted and slight modifications made from particular studies that were relevant to this present study, such as that of Faqeeh (2003). Moreover, other questions used in the focus groups were based on the pilot study, discussed below.

3.7.2.2 *The rationale for using semi-structured questions.* Semi-structured questions were used in the student focus groups for reasons related to the culture and age of the students, and their ability to use and understand language. Primarily, semi-structured questions were used because the interviewees (the students) might feel more culturally comfortable in less formal settings. Saudi Arabia is a hierarchical culture where authority and seniority are highly respected and rarely challenged (Keats, 2000; Loosemore & Al Muslmani, 1999). For example, in Arab culture, it is preferred that a person mentions the title of another person, such as a doctor or an engineer, before calling them by their names. A feeling of anxiety might cause the interviewee to produce incomplete and confused answers, and perhaps forget important and detailed information. Since the researcher is a PhD student and the female research assistant has a Master's degree, the interviewees may consider the interviewers to be of a higher social status. Conducting the interviews in as informal a nature as possible was intended to lessen this possible effect.

In addition to cultural reasons, the age of the students was considered. As the students were adolescents (i.e. 15-18 years old) they may have felt uncomfortable in a formal setting. In other words, the researcher expected that adolescents would be very sensitive and generally not comfortable in formal meetings because they generally like to express their views freely

and ask questions, rather than just answering (Keats, 2000). Also, adolescents often ask many questions and think deeply about themselves, their personalities, self-esteem and self-confidence, along with a range of social issues (Keats, 2000).

Another important factor to consider when interviewing adolescents is their ability to comprehend and use language (Keats, 2000). Specifically, adolescents are well-developed linguistically in comparison to children, and have a wide range of different competencies in reflecting upon questions and responding to them. Adolescents may produce complicated responses that require the interviewer to probe and give feedback in order to obtain a clear and meaningful message. Probing and giving feedback are typical of the semi-structured interview, so this format was deemed appropriate for dealing with the likely complex language produced by many adolescents.

3.7.2.3 *Piloting the focus groups.* Conducting a pilot study for focus group questions was a very important step (Bryman, 2012) as it served to double-check the usability of the questions, and also revealed unanticipated problems associated with the interview (Sampson, 2004). In addition, piloting the focus groups enabled the researcher to measure how long the process would take and to investigate if there were any issues, ideas, or themes raised by the interviewees that could be used in the main study (Gomm, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Further, piloting was aimed at familiarising the researcher with the procedures for conducting the focus group interview. Specifically, the focus group pilot with the male students was conducted prior to the pilot with the female students, because the main researcher intended to train the female research assistant, check the clarity and appropriateness of the questions, practise how to control the flow of discussion, and ensure that each participant had sufficient time to express their views (Bryman, 2012).

After obtaining permission from parents and the school principals, the researcher selected three students randomly from the 2nd year level. The focus groups were conducted in

Arabic because the students' level of English oral communication skills was quite low and they might not fully understand the questions if the focus groups were conducted in English. As well, it was considered that conducting focus groups in Arabic might make the students more comfortable in discussing the issues, and therefore provide more information.

The students were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in writing. The researcher started the session by asking ice-breaking questions on topics such as the participants' favourite football team and their school environment. The aim of starting the session with an icebreaker was to create a relaxed atmosphere to make the participants feel comfortable, to give the students the opportunity to 'find their voice' in the group discussion, and to help the interviewer and the interviewees to get to know each other (Bailey, 2007; Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011). The researcher explained the aims of the study and the purpose of the pilot stage of the focus group, and confirmed that the pilot study would not be included in the main study.

The piloting stage took place in an empty classroom and lasted for 52 minutes. Most of the questions were clear and understandable. Regarding the piloting stage with the female students, the session took 75 minutes because it was stopped for 15 minutes. The session ran for 20 minutes and then stopped because the principal asked the female research assistant to go into a smaller room due to the counselling room being required for an urgent situation.

The students' feedback suggested that the questions were clear. Some of the terms used required more clarification, such as the meaning of the brainstorming process and coherence in English writing. Examples were given to the students to clarify the meaning of these two terms. The participating students commented that they wanted to participate in the study because their views about English writing had been previously neglected. They understood that this study targeted their concerns about learning English generally, and writing specifically.

3.7.3 Development of one-on-one teacher interviews.

In conducting the main study, the researcher used one-on-one teacher semi-structured interviews. The aim here was to ask the teachers about their opinions and perceptions of the writing difficulties experienced by Saudi secondary school students, the contributing factors to these problems, and teachers' suggestions to reduce and/or overcome them. In addition, this interview primarily aimed to ask the teachers about their approaches to teaching English writing and what they believed about teaching writing.

There were a number of reasons for conducting one-on-one interviews as a research tool. Indeed, many researchers argue that the exploration of data about subjects' perceptions, views, and feelings is best obtained through an interview (Patton, 2015; Trainor & Graue, 2013). Therefore, one-on-one interviews served to collect information that could assist in achieving the main objectives of the study. Moreover, using one-on-one interviews helped the researcher to raise questions about the participants' perceptions to obtain more in-depth information on important issues. In addition, interviews were used because it has been pointed out that interviews have a high response rate allowing the researcher to obtain a clear understanding of what the interviewees mean when ambiguities and misunderstandings occur (Cohen et al., 2013). Another purpose of using one-on-one interviews as a research tool was to support the responses obtained from the students through other data collection instruments. In other words, the responses of the teacher interviewees were used in conjunction with the other instruments, i.e. the student questionnaires and the student focus groups.

The interview questions originated from a range of sources. Firstly, based on relevant studies (e.g. Shukri, 2008) in the literature review, a number of ideas helped to develop the questions. Secondly, a number of questions were adapted with slight modifications from relevant studies, such as Fageeh (2003). Thirdly, other questions were extracted from the issues discussed in the pilot study and these helped to generate further questions.

3.7.3.1 The design and content of the questions. The questions (see Appendices E and F for the English and Arabic versions of the teacher interviews questions guide) included demographic information, teaching experiences and focused on a number of specific themes raised in the literature review such as *writing difficulties*, *factors contributing to these writing difficulties* and *suggestions for addressing these writing difficulties*. Thus, the interview questions were designed to concentrate on the same themes investigated in the questionnaire and the focus groups.

3.7.3.2 Piloting the teacher interviews. The researcher contacted a teacher interviewee to arrange the place and time for the pilot interview. It was agreed that it would take place in the teacher's office at the school. The teacher was informed that the interview would not be used in the main study. The aims of the interview and the piloting stage were explained to the teacher, and the teacher was asked to comment on the instructions and questions items in terms of whether there were any ambiguities or problems.

The interview took approximately one hour. The interviewee actively participated and responded to all the questions in detail. According to the interviewee, the instructions and questions were clear and comprehensive because he had extensive experience in learning and teaching English as a foreign language and was therefore familiar with the terminology used. He was considered to be representative of the target population.

After piloting the interview questions with this interviewee, the researcher trained the female research assistant in how to conduct the pilot study with the female teachers. The same procedures used for conducting the pilot study with the male teacher were used by the female research assistant with a female teacher. The interview with this person took approximately 50 minutes and she indicated that the questions were clear and understandable.

It should be noted that the pilot interviews were conducted in Arabic (the native language of the participants), as the interviewees preferred, in order to encourage them to talk

freely and give as much detail as possible according to their own perceptions, views, and feelings in their native language. This is because the aim was not to test English teachers' proficiency levels but instead to elicit their perceptions and views about the target issues.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected over a period of two months in three different sessions, each representing a point in the convergent parallel design. As indicated earlier, the instruments used for collecting data in this study were student questionnaires, focus group interviews with students, and one-on-one interviews with English teachers. As well as these instruments, a sample of written work was collected from all students. The data collection methods are described in more detail below.

3.8.1 Administration of the main questionnaire.

After obtaining permission from the principals of the target schools, student and parental consent forms were distributed and then collected by the researcher prior to the implementation of the questionnaire (see Appendices G, H, M and N for the English and Arabic versions of the student and parental consent forms). The consent forms provided a brief description of the study, its purpose and aims, and emphasised the confidentiality of the students' responses. In addition, prior to the completion of the questionnaire, all students were verbally assured of complete confidentiality. They were informed that they would be identified only by number codes and not their names. Also, the researcher verbally provided a general introduction to the entire study, explaining its purpose and objectives (Dörnyei, 2010). The students were also notified about the importance of the study and how important it was to complete the questionnaire correctly and honestly.

The researcher administered the questionnaire to the three secondary school levels (years 10, 11 and 12) on different occasions (see Appendices A and B for the English and Arabic versions of the questionnaire). The administration of the questionnaires depended on

the participants' availability. In certain schools, the questionnaire was distributed to one particular year level on consecutive days. However, sometimes, all three year-levels completed the questionnaire on the same day. The researcher stayed with the students to assist them if they misunderstood any items on the questionnaire. Following the completion of the study, the researcher thanked the students for their contribution to, and participation in the study. The same procedure was used by the female research assistant to collect data from the female students.

3.8.2 Administration of the student focus groups.

As indicated before, six focus groups were conducted with the students. Three focus groups consisted of male students and the other three comprised female students. Each focus group represented a year level. Each of the main student focus groups contained three students. Prior to the focus groups commencing, the students and their parents were provided with consent forms to complete (see Appendix I, J, O and P for the English and Arabic versions of the student and parental consent forms). The consent form requested permission to conduct and record the group discussion. This form was given to the students who had been selected, after which it was collected by the researcher over the following days.

The researcher, together with the student participants, agreed to a suitable venue and time for conducting the focus group at the school. The students were assured in writing of their confidentiality, anonymity, and their right to withdraw from the study and the focus group at any time. Moreover, the student participants were notified that they could raise any questions either during, before, or after the interview. A similar procedure was used by the female research assistant for the female students.

Before commencing the focus group interviews, the researcher provided refreshments to create a friendly and supportive atmosphere (Krueger, 2009). Then, the researcher gave the students a brief introduction about the study aims and the reasons why the focus group

interviews were being conducted. In addition, the participating students were informed about why the interview session was being recorded and how the data would remain confidential. The researcher furnished the study participants with instructions about their roles in the session and how their roles needed to be carried out. For example, the study participants were encouraged to speak freely and interactively, and informed that only one student was to speak at a time to facilitate the recording. The students were made aware that each one of them had unique views that needed to be discussed. In addition, students were reminded of the importance of talking about their own perceptions and opinions rather than simply agreeing with what had been expressed by the other participants (Patton, 2015). To facilitate transcription, the focus group interviews were audio-taped, and two digital recorders were used in every session to avoid technical problems (if one failed, the other would be available).

The focus groups for the female students ran for approximately 55 minutes while that of the males went for 50 minutes. All the participating students were asked to describe the challenges and contributing factors to their writing problems, essentially to draw conclusions from their perceptions, attitudes, and opinions.

Before thanking the students for their participation, the researcher asked the students for their contact details in order to send them a transcript of their interviews. Specifically, the students were told that they would be shown a transcript of their interview and given the opportunity to revise and/or edit their comments. The researcher explained to the interviewees how their data would be presented through various themes. This would give the students a chance to revise their data and possibly raise some questions or concerns with the researcher. However, the students revised their data and no changes were suggested.

3.8.3 Administration of the teacher interview.

The one-on-one interviews were conducted with the teachers after written informed consent had been obtained, and the researcher had given verbal assurance of confidentiality

and anonymity (see Appendices M and N for the English and Arabic versions of teacher consent forms). The EFL teachers were invited via email after their email addresses were provided by the principals of the schools. The first three positive responses were chosen. This process was also used by the female research assistant for recruiting female teachers. The interviews were conducted from August to October 2012. Considering the need for privacy and suitability, the interviews took place at a pre-arranged time in the teachers' offices.

Before starting each interview, the researcher discussed with teachers a range of issues, such as the school environment, travel, and sport. This part of the discussion was used as an icebreaker to establish a rapport and to create a relaxing atmosphere in order to facilitate discussion around teachers' views and opinions (Bailey, 2007; Shaw et al., 2011). After this, the interviewees were assured that they could ask any questions before, during, and after the interview, and the aims of the current study and the interview were explained. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes to an hour, depending on the complexity of the answers provided. The interviews were audio-taped with official permission from the teachers and analysed later. The researcher explained to the interviewees how their data would be presented in terms of themes. The interviewees were shown a transcript of their comments and given the opportunity to revise and/or edit them. No changes were suggested.

3.8.4 Procedures for collecting writing samples.

Students were requested to produce a written assignment in conjunction with expressing their own perceptions. This enabled a comparison of the students' and teachers' perceptions to the students' writing samples to assess whether the responses matched or not.

Collecting writing samples was done simultaneously with collecting the data from the student questionnaire, student focus groups and one-on-one teacher interviews. After obtaining the students' permission, all 600 students who completed the questionnaire were asked to write on paper a paragraph of about 80 words about their daily routine. This was timed for 45

minutes, the usual length of the lesson. When the data were collected, the 328 students wrote less than the required number of words, so the researcher accepted a minimum of 40 words to have a sufficiently large sample size. Some samples were omitted from the analysis as they did not meet the required criteria. For example, some students wrote some words in the list, others just wrote one or two sentences. Other wrote “I do not know.” It can be speculated that these results indicated that some students did not know how to write paragraphs, or they were not motivated enough to complete the task.

3.9 Validation Strategies for Qualitative Data

In this study, validation refers to the process of improving “accuracy” in observations, interpretations, and the conclusions reached (Creswell, 2013). A number of validation strategies to assess the credibility and rigor of the qualitative data were employed, these being triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation was employed to avoid misrepresentation that may occur from using a single instrument to collect data, thus enriching the data and enhancing the rigour of the research (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation is advantageous for the present study because the results of qualitative components of the research, the interviews and focus groups, contributed to the development of the measurable data within the questionnaires. For example, the researcher, in this study, employed two levels of triangulation, namely triangulation of methods and investigators (Bryman, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The first level involved triangulation of the methods in which the researcher used several methods, including student questionnaires, student focus groups, and teacher interviews to collect data. The second level involved investigator triangulation, where the researcher relied on three translators who had Master’s degree in TESOL to cross-check the translations and transcriptions that the student focus groups and teacher interviews provided (Bryman, 2012). Having more than one investigator

helped reduce the probability of bias in transcribing and translating the data, and thus the credibility and confirmability of the findings of this study improved (Thurmond, 2001).

Another strategy used for validation was member checking, which involves the confirmation of the preliminary findings by sending these to the research participants to check for accuracy (Barbour, 2014; Merriam, 2009). In promoting member checking, the researcher emailed those students having the transcripts of their focus groups and those teachers having the interview transcripts. The students and teachers were requested to check the transcriptions' accuracy and to assist in verifying the interpretations made from their focus groups and the interview data.

3.10 Overview of Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods, was applied to analyse the data. Quantitative analysis was carried out at two distinct levels – univariate and multivariate (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). All quantitative analyses at the univariate and multivariate levels were done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Excel software packages. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using the package “lavaan”, written for the R environment (Rosseel, 2012).

The univariate analyses yielded frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of central tendency, as appropriate, taking into consideration Likert scale results. The normality of each interval-level variable was assessed using standard skew and kurtosis measures. An approximate normal distribution was assumed for variables having values for skew < 1 and values for kurtosis between -3 and $+3$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The rationale for using multivariate analyses was that the findings could be cross-validated using a sequence of steps that first involved exploratory factor analysis (EFA) followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). EFA and CFA were performed over two, separate, randomly selected samples that were each given the same 53-item questionnaire. In

the last step, a hierarchical multivariable regression analysis was used to examine the associations between the derived factors, representing English writing difficulties, and several predictor variables (English writing strategies, teaching practices, motivation, anxiety and L1 writing strategies).

3.10.1 Exploratory factor analysis.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to reduce the items in the questionnaire and identify the latent factors. Three steps were followed in performing EFA: 1) determining suitability of the data for factorability; 2) component extraction, and 3) component rotation (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011). These steps were taken to determine if the factors were correlated and, if so, whether any highly correlated factors could be combined to form a single factor before extraction and factor maximisation.

Suitability of the data for EFA was first explored by examining the sample size, the power of the item correlations, and sampling adequacy. Sample size for factorability was based on the rule that a minimum of five participants per item are needed; however, the total sample size for each set of analyses vastly exceeded this benchmark (Coakes, Steed & Price, 2009; Streiner, 1994). Variables with correlations of .32 or higher (and -.32 or lower) were determined as having a meaningful association with an extracted factor (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Values of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO Index; Kaiser, 1974) were used to test sampling adequacy with values greater than .70 suggesting suitability. This indicated the sample data were adequate for analyses. Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) was calculated to determine if the correlation between items and extracted components were sufficient for the data to be considered adequate with significance lower than $p < .01$ used as the criterion for appropriate suitability. This pre-condition was also met.

After these initial checks, a principal axis factoring (PAF) extraction was performed. This method makes it possible for the researcher to extract the largest factors that explain the largest amount of the shared variance between items (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). This method ensured that the researcher retained as much of the original data variance as possible (de Winter & Dodou, 2012). PAF results generated a long list of potential factors, which the researcher reviewed to determine the ideal factor number and structure. After these PAF results were generated, three common rules for determining the number of factors to retain were applied to the results: first, the researcher followed (1) Guttman-Kaiser's eigenvalue greater than one rule (GK1; Guttman, 1954; Kaiser, 1960), meaning that any factor that received an eigenvalue of greater than 1 was retained, and all the items that loaded onto that factor were kept. Next, the researcher followed (2) Cattell's scree test of eigenvalues plotted against factors (Cattell, 1966), and retained any factors that appeared on an upward slope in a graph of the extracted components, and therefore kept every item in the questionnaire that loaded onto one of those factors as well. Finally, the researcher followed (3) Horn's parallel analysis method (PA; Horn, 1965), and compared the eigenvalues generated by the PAF analyses to simulated eigenvalues for a simulated data set (which is also generated as part of the PAF analyses in the statistical program). The researcher selected only those factors which had adequate loadings in both real and simulated data, and retained all questionnaire items that loaded onto those factors. In order to achieve the simple structure of the collected data, an oblique rotation was used following the extraction of those factors. This was done in accordance with recommendations from Tabachnick & Fidell (2013). Factor reliability was calculated using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which assessed the internal consistency of the items by examining the extent to which they were correlated with one another (Cronbach, 1951). Measures of inter-item reliability should reflect that items are strongly associated with one another (above 0.60;

Loewenthal, 2004), but they should not be so strongly correlated (for example, .90), as to suggest that every item on the scale is measuring the exact same thing.

3.10.2 Confirmatory factor analysis.

CFA was used to confirm the factor model arrived at via EFA, to ensure that the factor structure arrived at in the initial sample could be replicated in a separate sample. Model fit was estimated using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation and assessed using standard goodness-of-fit indices: **1)** χ^2 , **2)** Comparative Fit Index (CFI), **3)** Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), **4)** Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and **5)** Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). A nonsignificant χ^2 test and values of CFI, TLI, and GFI greater than .95 were taken to indicate that the model fit the data well (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Values of RMSEA and SRMR less than .05 were used to indicate a close-fit whereas RMSEA/SRMR values of less than .06 with an upper limit of .07 were used to indicate a model fit that was reasonable and acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007). Model modification was specified based on reviewing standardised item loadings, residual values, and generated modification indexes (MIs).

3.10.3 Multivariable regression analysis.

In the last step, a multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the associations among the derived factors, which were treated as the dependent variables in the regression models, and predictor variables, which the researcher examined for associations with English writing difficulties. Prior to conducting the multivariable regression, bivariate Pearson correlations were obtained for the candidate predictors and the factor scores. Only those candidate predictors significant at the $p < .01$ level were retained for the regression analysis. Hierarchical multivariable regression analysis was used in the final modelling step.

3.10.4 Qualitative Analysis.

With reference to examining the qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied to both the responses from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the interview data obtained from 24 participants (six teachers and six student focus groups comprising 3 students each). The qualitative data were first transcribed and then translated into English by the researcher who read the transcript, made notes to obtain an overall impression of the data, and then re-read the transcript several times to get more fully immersed and to better understand the nuances of data. After that, chunks of data were coded by labelling the most frequent words and sentences interviewees used to describe the meaning of the segment of text. Codes were then further collated into themes (Creswell, 2013). In line with the primary research questions, the content of the themes derived from the qualitative analysis was compared with themes suggested by the factor analysis results. These quantitatively derived factors were difficulty in writing, teaching methods, L2 strategic processes, motivation, and anxiety.

3.10.5 Writing samples.

A five-step error analysis was used to analyse the writing samples collected from the students. Errors were identified in each student paragraph, coded, and classified into the following different types: word choice, verb, prepositions, articles, missing subject, punctuation, spelling and capitalisation. After coding, errors were counted and transformed into percentages to quantify the frequency of errors. Next, errors were categorised as lexical (word choice), grammatical (verb, missing subject, articles and prepositions) or mechanical (punctuation, spelling and capitalisation).

3.10.6 Merging the qualitative and quantitative data in the results.

Although the qualitative and quantitative data were examined separately, they were integrated in the findings reporting stage. The strategy used to report the results is known as side-by-side comparison for a merged data analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2011). This strategy

combines the qualitative and quantitative results for the discussion. The quantitative results were presented first, followed by the qualitative findings, which was then followed by statements indicating how the qualitative findings agreed or disagreed with the quantitative outcomes. Specifically, the results of the questionnaires were introduced initially in the form of descriptive or inferential statistics, which was then followed by the findings from the focus groups and one-on-one teacher interviews in the form of statements. After merging the two data sets, convergence or divergence between the merged qualitative and quantitative findings was described.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and discussed the methodological underpinnings and design of the study. To summarise, the present study utilised a convergent parallel mixed methods design. Through the use of quantitative research methods of questionnaires and employing qualitative research methods for focus groups and one-to-one interviews, this study generated rich data from students and EFL teachers with the aim of obtaining multiple perspectives on Saudi secondary school students and their English writing experiences. This chapter has described in detail the data collection procedures and subsequent analysis decisions. Finally, this chapter has highlighted how validity and reliability were established in the study. In the following chapters, the findings, which are combined with discussion, of the study are presented.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion of Difficulties with English Writing

4.1 Introduction

Chapters four, five and six present the results and discussion of the three research questions. Each chapter focuses on a separate research question. This current chapter examines the data collected using three research instruments, namely the student questionnaires, the student focus groups, and teacher interviews to explore the first research question: *What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?* The findings will be presented, through both qualitative and quantitative data, and the key themes will be brought out through analysis. This will then be discussed in relation to relevant literature. However, before presenting the results and discussion of Q1, the researcher will highlight background demographics obtained through the questionnaire, along with descriptive statistics of the questionnaire and the writing samples.

4.2 Demographic Data

The questionnaire was completed by 600 students (300 males and 300 females); 100 from each year level (i.e. 10th, 11th and 12th) in secondary schools. The demographic section included five questions about gender, year level, parents' education and extra English lessons the students took outside the classroom (see Appendix A).

Data analysis reveals that with regard to students' father's education, 231 (38.5%) have secondary school certificates, 155 (25.8%) have Bachelor degrees, 37 (6.2%) have Masters Degrees, 18 (3%) have PhDs, and 159 (26.5%) have "other". Considering their mother's education, 192 (32%) of students' mothers have secondary school certificates, 125 (20.8%) have Bachelor degrees, 19 (3.2%) have Masters Degrees, 8 (1.3%) have PhDs, and 256 (42.7%) have "other". Only 94 students (15.7%) indicated they had taken extra English classes either

in an English language institute or via private tutoring, which is a small number of students involved in this study.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the perceptions of Saudi secondary school students in relation to the factors affecting them when writing in English. It targeted a number of items represented by seven factors identified through factor analysis (discussed in section 5.2). These factors were: English writing difficulties, L2 English writing strategies, teaching practices, motivation, anxiety, difficulty in English and Arabic writing and L1 Arabic writing strategies. Data were available for 600 respondents. For English writing difficulties, teaching practices, L2 English writing strategies and L1 Arabic writing strategies, a five-point Likert scale was used (Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2 and Never=1) and for motivation, anxiety and difficulty in English and Arabic writing, a continuum scale with 8 levels was used (1 representing the lowest degree and 8 representing the highest degree).

4.3.1 English writing difficulties.

The participating students were asked about their perceived difficulties in English writing through 12 items (see Figure 2 below). The questionnaire scale used for investigating these difficulties was the five-point Likert scale (Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2 and Never=1). Figure 2 below shows that around half of the students indicated that they always or often have difficulties in sentence and paragraph-level issues. Given that 50.2% (301 out of 600) of the students indicated that they always or often face difficulties in writing grammatically correct sentences, it is not surprising that the majority of the students considered themselves unable to produce a coherent and developed paragraph. The main areas of difficulty were paragraph organisation (73%, or 435 out of 600, always or often having difficulty), presenting supporting sentences (71%, or 424 out of 600, always or often having difficulty)

and paragraph coherence (71%, or 423 out of 600, always or often having difficulty). In English writing, it is also important to construct an appropriate topic sentence and employ cohesive devices in paragraphing. The findings also show that about 57% (340 out of 600) of students always or often have difficulties in constructing an appropriate topic sentence, and 60% always or often have difficulties in employing cohesive devices. Apart from this, verb tenses (61%, or 367 out of 600, always or often having difficulty) and using vocabulary (62%, or 372 out of 600, always or often having difficulty) presented major problems for students.

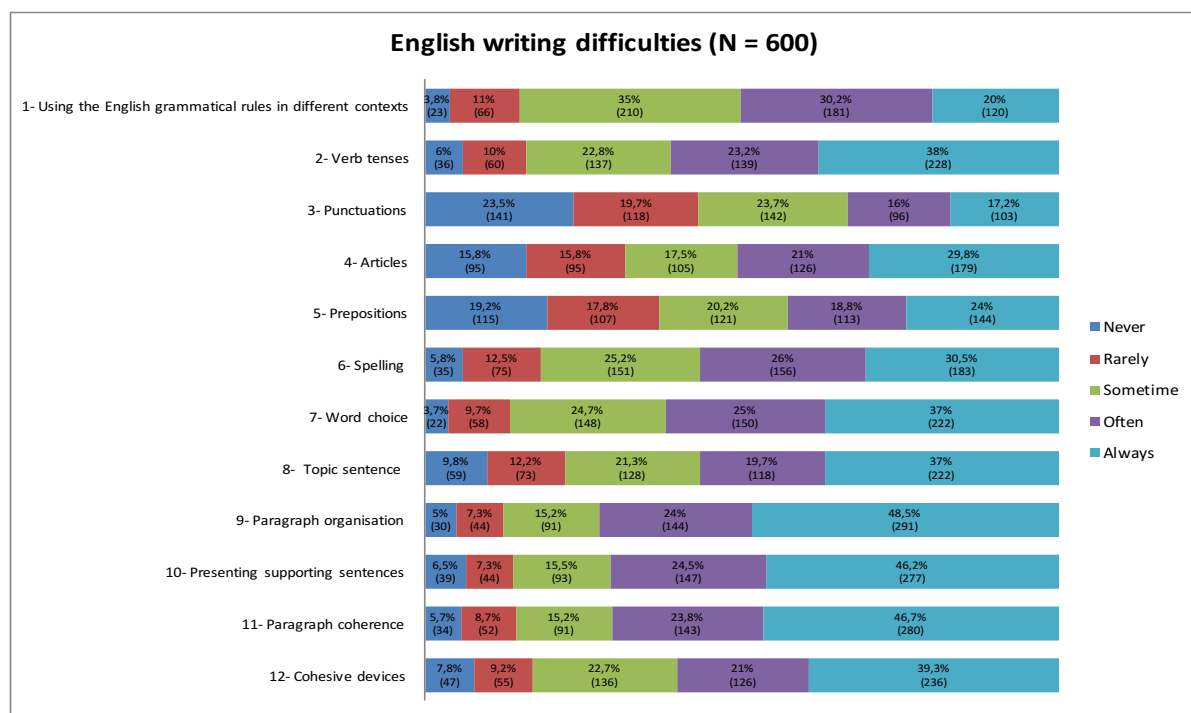


Figure 2. Students' perceptions of their English writing difficulties.

4.3.2. Teaching Practices.

The 14 questions on teaching practices were intended to analyse the teaching strategies or techniques (see Figure 3 below). The questionnaire scale used for these items was the five-point Likert scale (Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2 and Never=1). Figure 3 below indicates that more than half of the students reported that their teachers rarely or never teach them how to introduce the topic sentence in a paragraph, how to organise a paragraph, how to

develop main ideas presented in the topic sentence and how to keep paragraphs coherent when writing in English. However, by contrast, about 40% (241 out of 600) indicated that their English teachers rarely or never teach them how to use cohesive devices correctly when writing in English. These findings suggest, in the context of this research, that the teaching of paragraphing does not seem to be considered a priority by secondary school teachers in Saudi Arabia. This lack of attention by teachers to teaching paragraph-level issues may explain the high percentage of difficulties, as indicated earlier, that students perceived they face in their English writing. Moreover, Figure 3 below reveals that approximately 67% of the respondents (454 out of 600) perceived that their English teachers always or often ask them to memorise written passages in the textbook. Encouraging students to memorise predetermined texts is consistent with a focus on the form of the language rather than on the use of language to express ideas. When teachers ask students to memorise a text, it is expected that they focus on making the final product correct and free from grammar and spelling errors, rather than on development of ideas and paragraph coherence.

As far as memorisation is concerned, while slightly more than half of the students (51%, or 305 out of 600) indicated that their teachers always or often ask them to memorise grammatical rules, it is not surprising that around 58% of the students (345 out of 600) thought that their teachers do not encourage them to generate their own sentences when writing in English. This lack of engagement was supported by approximately 40% of the students (237 out of 600) who suggested that their teachers always or often teach lists of vocabulary items in isolation rather than in context.

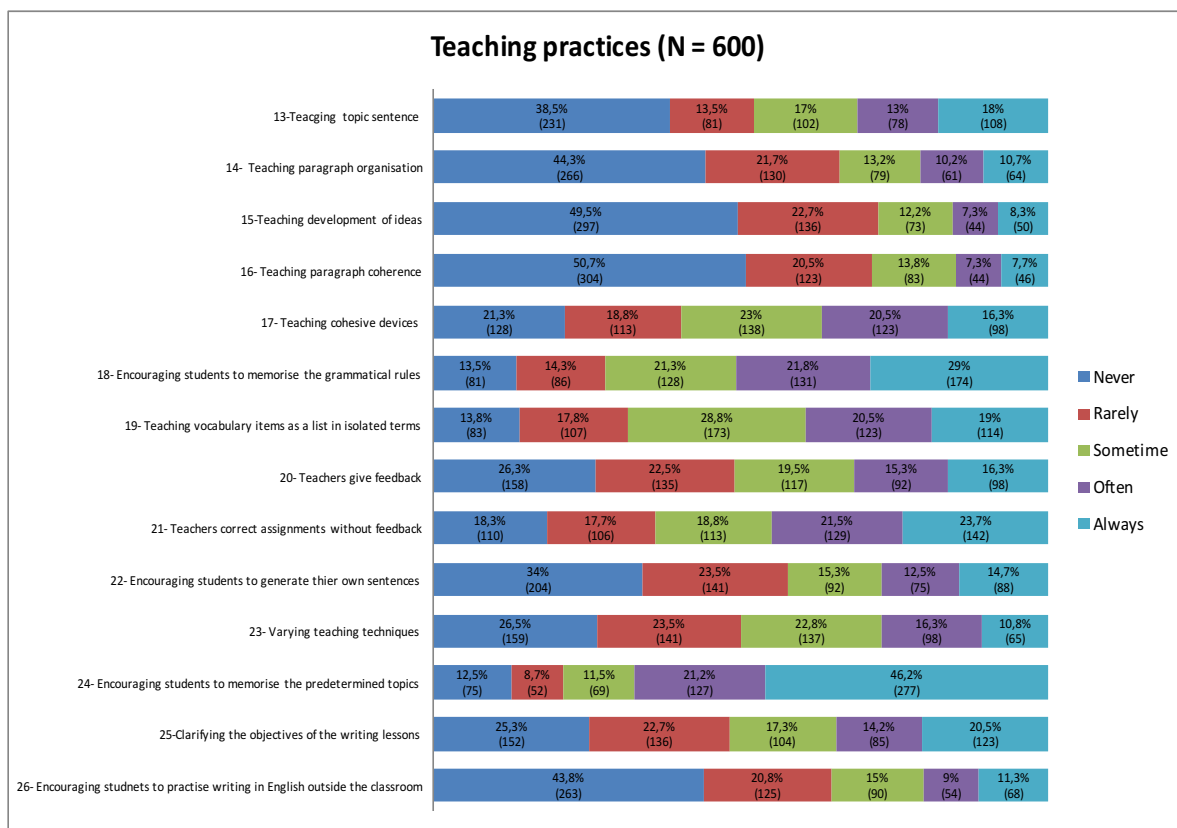


Figure 3: Students' perceptions of their teachers' teaching practices.

4.3.3. L2 English writing strategies.

The items developed to explore the L2 English writing describe the strategies that were employed by students when writing in English (see Figure 4 below). The questionnaire scale used for these items was a five point Likert scale (Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2 and Never=1). Figure 4 shows that more than half of the students (57% or 346 out of 600) indicated that they rarely or never plan and draft when they write in English. Based on this, it is not surprising that 71% of the students (464 out of 600) reported that they rarely or never focus on revising the unity, organisation and development of ideas and coherence of what they write in English. Consistently, this lack of focusing on revising the structure of paragraphs may explain the focus on revising the linguistic features of the language such as grammar and spelling. Specifically, the findings revealed that 55% of the respondents (330 out of 600) showed that they always or often focus on revising the spelling and grammar mainly when they

write in English. The responses about these four strategies suggest that learning English writing in Saudi secondary schools concentrates on mastering the form of the language and the final product (the summative writing) rather than on the function of language and the writing process itself.

Focusing on the language form and the final product (the summative writing) was also seemingly reinforced by memorisation strategies where about 69 % of the respondents (398 out of 600) perceived that they always or often memorise the predetermined texts for answering the composition question in the final English exam. Interestingly, while more than two thirds of the students pay attention to memorisation, it is not surprising that more than two thirds (66% or 339 out of 600) reported that they rarely or never practise writing in English outside the classroom. It appears that the focus on the strategy of memorisation explains the lack of concentration on either practicing writing in English outside the classroom or creating their own paragraphs, neither planning nor focusing on the development of ideas and paragraph coherence.

Figure 4 below also shows that translation is another strategy used by the students when writing in English. More than half of the students (56% or 336 out of 600) articulated that they always or often write and/or think the sentence in Arabic and then translate it into English when they write in English. The most commonly used strategies are translating from Arabic to English and vice versa; memorisation of predetermined texts, and revision of the linguistic issues to output a correct final product.

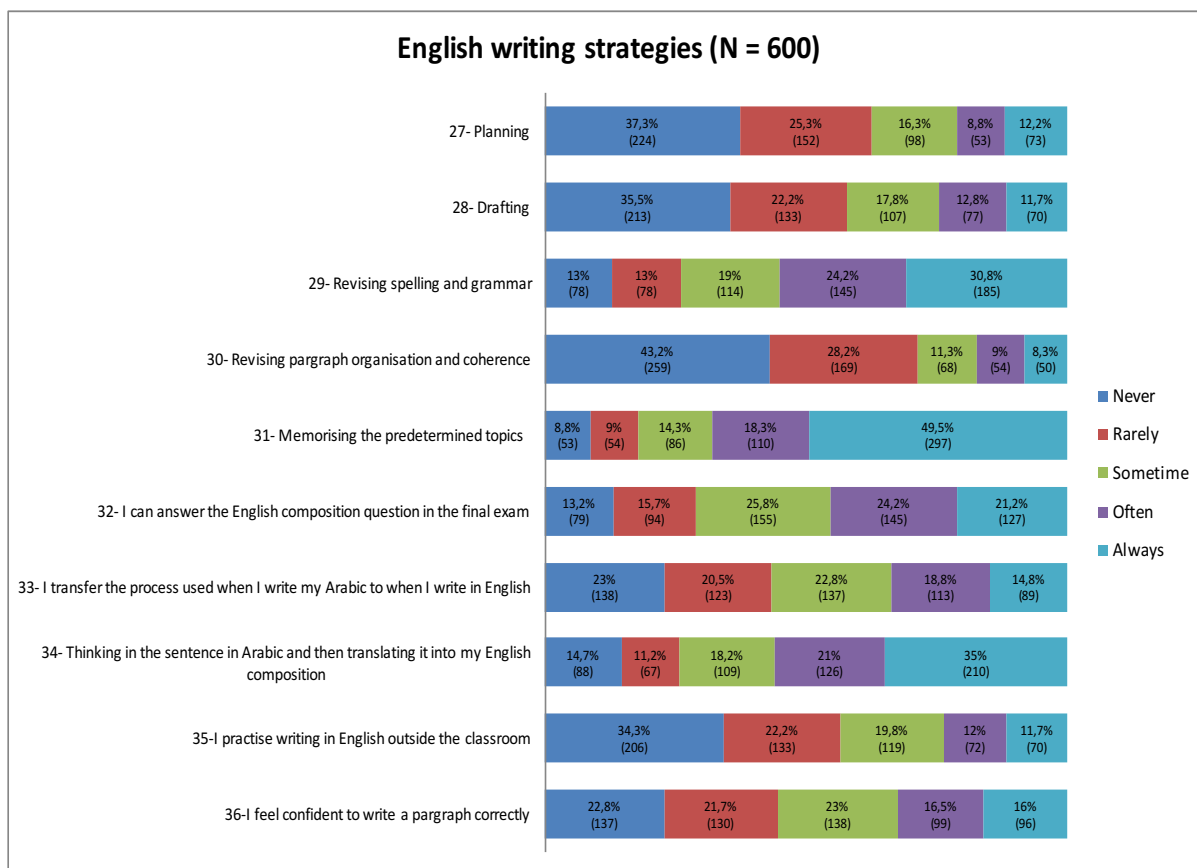


Figure 4: Students’ perceptions of their English writing strategies.

4.3.4 Motivation.

Motivation was examined through five successive variables which attempted to reveal students’ motivation when writing in English (see Figure 5 below). A continuum scale was used to measure the degree of students’ perceived motivation regarding specific issues with writing in English. Here, 8 represented the highest degree of motivation and 1 represented no motivation at all. Generally, low motivation levels can be observed regarding the different scenarios posed to the students in terms of writing English. Choices from 1 to 3 all indicated low motivation in the statement about writing. A total of 65% (390 of 600) of the students indicated that they are less motivated when they write about topics irrelevant to their lives. In response to their motivation level when writing where the objectives were not clear, about 79% (471 of 600) of the students indicated a lack of motivation. Of the respondents, 64% (400 out

of 600) chose response 1-3 which indicates that they lack motivation when their teachers use the same routine of teaching techniques. Interestingly, about 71% (421 out of 600) felt less motivated when they were not given opportunities to generate their own sentences when writing their own composition. In addition, 67% (401 out of 600) had little motivation to write on a predetermined topic given by the teacher. On average, more than 64% of students responded with the number 1-3 to each of the five questions, which demonstrates that the majority of the students have a low level of motivation to write in general.

To have a broader picture of students' motivation to write in English, some of the items on motivation and teaching practices are highlighted. Generally, it appears that there is a consistency between the students' perceptions of motivation and teaching practices. Specifically, 47% of the students (281 out of 600) stated they lack motivation when objectives are not clear. A similar percentage (48% or 281 out of 600) reported that their teachers rarely or never explain the objectives of the lessons. Therefore, it could be inferred that students are less motivated to learn English writing because their teachers rarely or never clarify the lesson aims. Interestingly, 44% (262 out of 600) did not feel motivated at all when they were not given the freedom to create their own sentences when writing compositions. Consistently, around 58% (345 out of 600) mentioned in the questionnaire, that their teachers rarely or never encourage them to write their own sentences when working in English. There seems to be a link between motivation and students' ability to construct sentences. 38% (228 out of 600) never felt motivated to write on a predetermined topic. This feeling of lack of motivation was reinforced by the perceptions of 67% (404 out of 600) who indicated that their teachers always or often ask them to memorise the predetermined topics for the final exam.

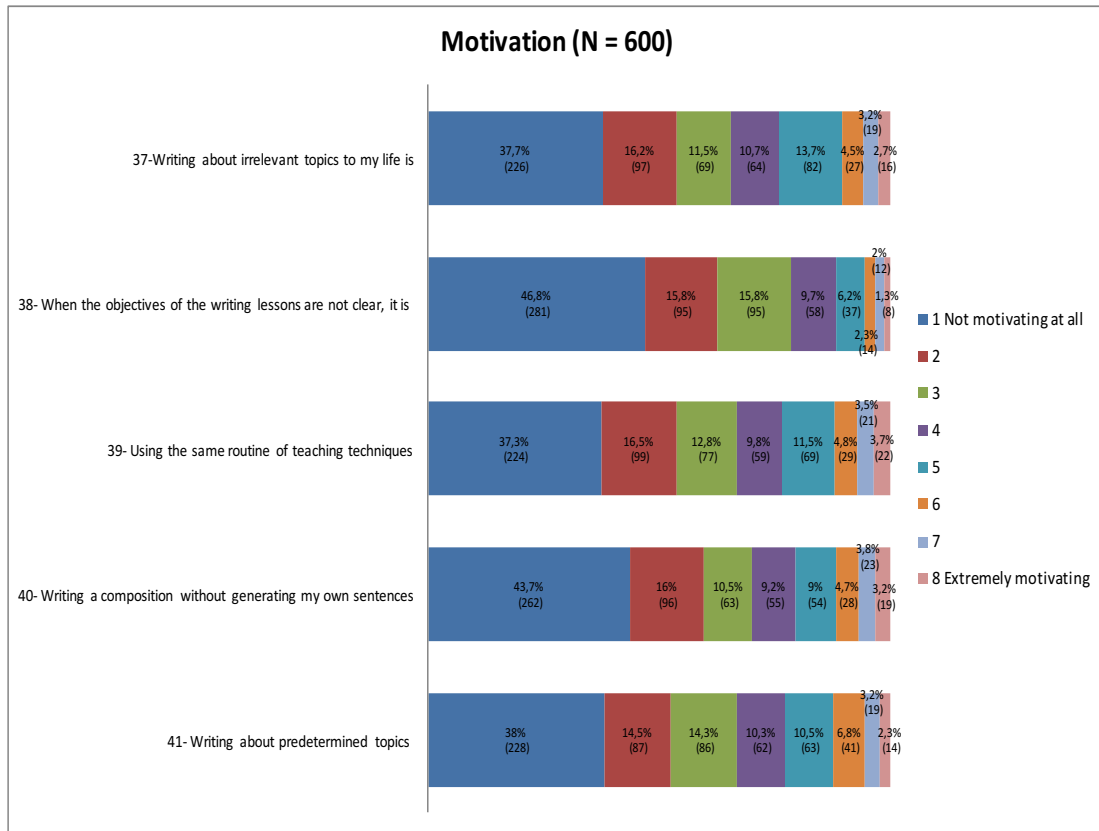


Figure 5: Students' perceptions of their motivation when writing in English.

4.3.5 Anxiety.

Anxiety is observed through four successive variables (see Figure 6 below). The continuum scale measured the degree of students' perceived anxiety regarding specific issues in writing in English. Here, 8 represented the highest degree of anxiety and 1 represented no anxiety at all. There was a wider spread of responses, compared with the motivation factor. Only answering the English composition question in the final exam prompted significant anxiety, with 38% of students (229 out of 600) reporting themselves as extremely anxious and roughly 63% (375 out of 600) reporting themselves at points 6, 7 or 8 on the scale. Consistent with this was that approximately 60% (358 out of 600) rated themselves as 6, 7 or 8 for anxiety at the thought of having their English writing evaluated. Taking these two items together, it seems that the students have high anxiety when their writing gets evaluated and graded. For anxiety in writing an English composition free of spelling and grammar mistakes, 22% (129 out of 600) rated themselves as 8 and 5.5% (33 out of 600) as 2. In writing an organised and

coherent composition, 21% (128 out of 600) stated they felt anxiety at level 8 and 13% (82 out of 600) rated themselves at both levels 2 and 3. Across the four items, more than 50% of students rated themselves as 6, 7 or 8 in terms of anxiety.

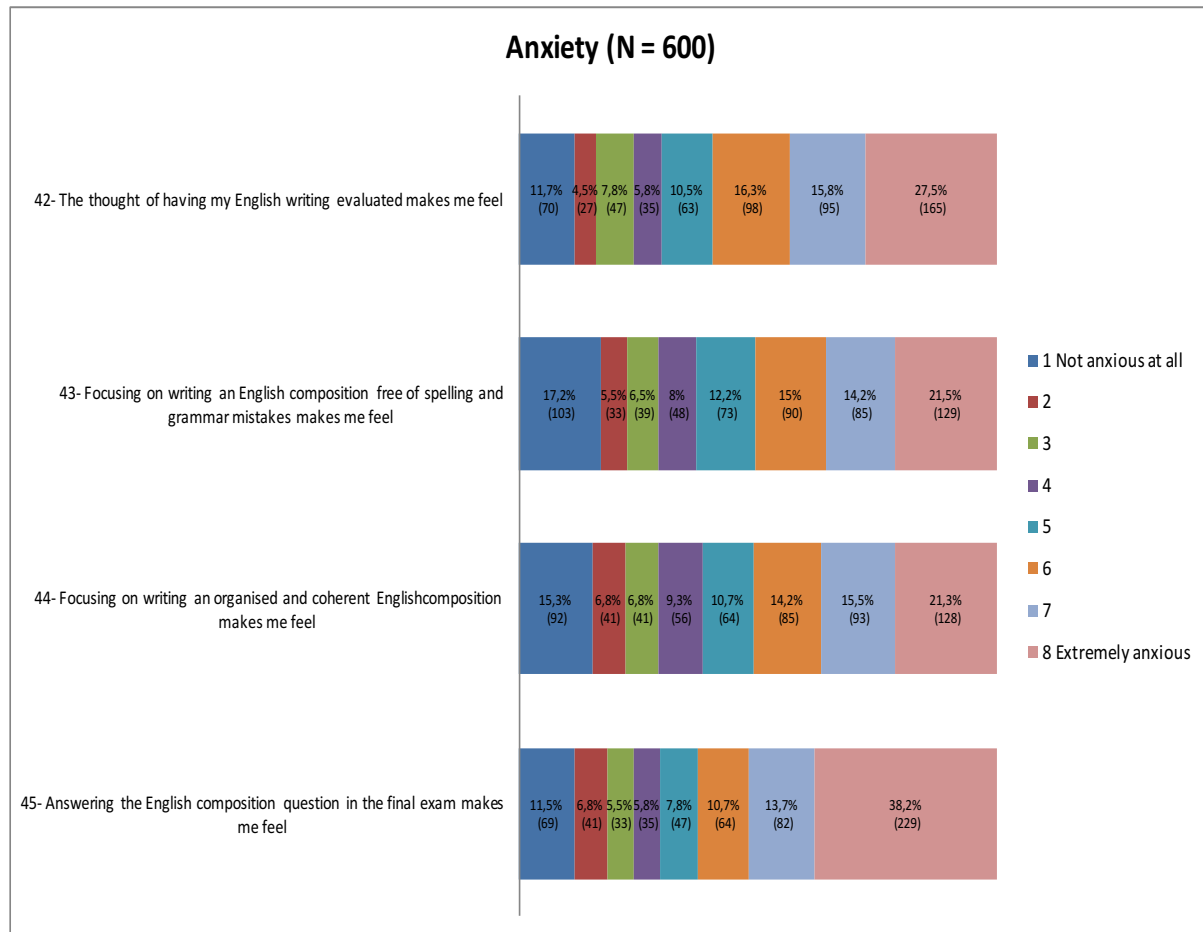


Figure 6: Students' perceptions of their anxieties when writing in English.

4.3.6 Difficulty in English and Arabic writing.

Two items were used to indicate the level of difficulties students face when writing in both English (L2) and Arabic (L1). Difficulty in English and Arabic writing was observed through two successive variables that are measured by the difficulty level (see Figure 7 below). The same kind of continuum scale was used for perceived difficulty in writing in English and in Arabic where 8 represented the highest degree of difficulty and 1 represented no difficulty at all. Figure 7 indicates that 36% of students (217 out of 600) perceived at level 8 with 5% (30

out of 600) at level 1. Conversely, 56% of students (337 out of 600) expressed no difficulty at all in writing in Arabic while about 6% (35 out of 600) reported they perceived it to be extremely difficult.

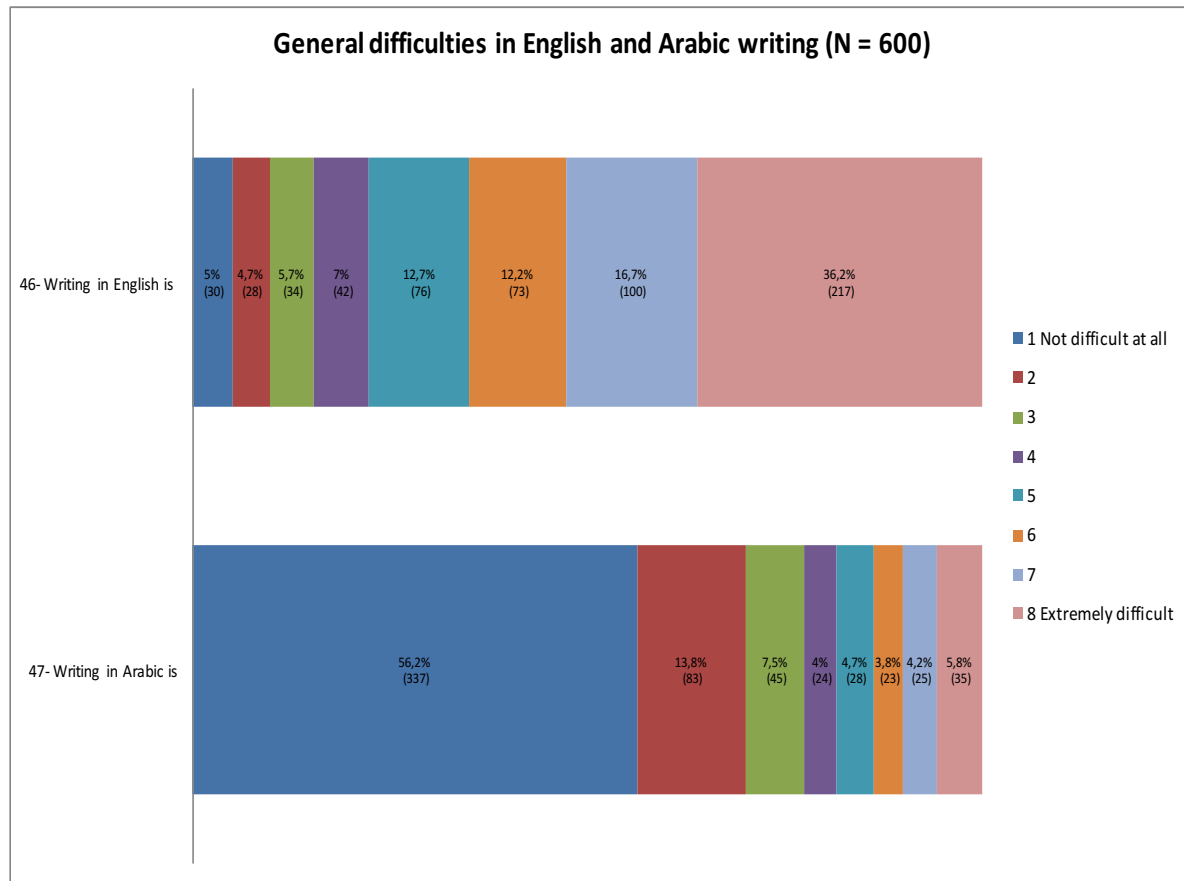


Figure 7: Students' perceptions of their difficulty in English and Arabic writing.

4.3.7 Writing Strategies in L1 Arabic.

As indicated in the literature review, L1 competence (writing strategies) might be considered a contributing factor to the difficulties students face in their English writing. Figure 8 below describes the strategies employed in writing in Arabic. The scale used to investigate these strategies was a five-point Likert scale (where Always=5, Often=4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2 and Never=1). The percentages were as follows: 45% (269 out of 600) reported that they always plan before and write in Arabic first, 23% (135 out of 600) reported that they always write a draft before submitting the final version, 53% (319 out of 600) reported that they always generate their own sentences, 41% (245 out of 600) stated that they always focus

on grammar and spelling, 48% (288 out of 600) revealed that they always focus on developing ideas to convey messages, while only 4% (24 out of 600) did not do so. Finally, 44% (266 out of 600) indicated that they always practise writing in Arabic outside their classroom, while 19% (114 out of 600) never practise outside the classroom.

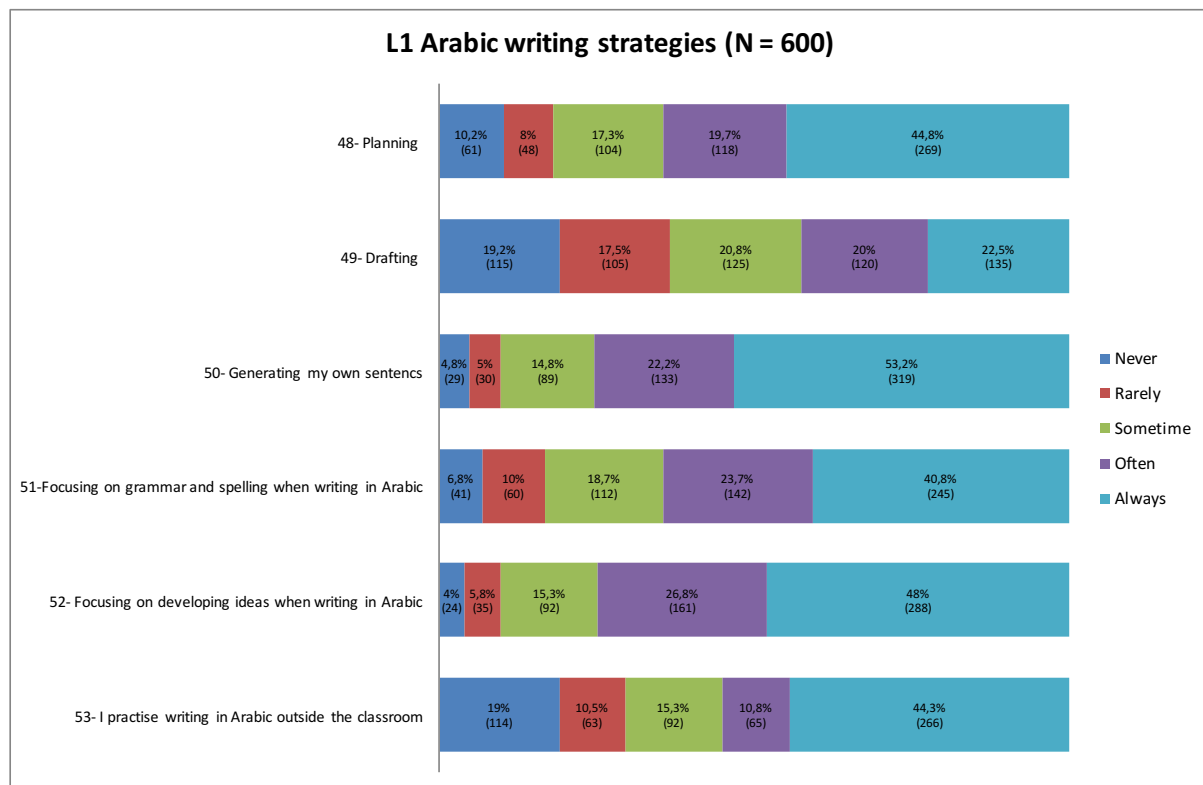


Figure 8: Students' perceptions of their L1 Arabic writing strategies.

Obviously, Arabic is the students' first language and it is predominantly used during teaching and consequently shapes the writing patterns of Saudi secondary school students in terms of planning, practising, organising and focusing on the development of new ideas. Given this data, it is clear that practising English writing is not something that students do as a matter of course. Therefore, the writing samples students provided for this research reflect that the activity (the writing sample) was a true example of the students' abilities at the time of the research. The errors in students' English writing samples are presented below, to compare students' perceptions of their skills and their actual writings.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics of the Results of the Student Writing Errors

Writing samples were collected to give insight into students' actual writing and enable comparison with their perceptions of their skills collected in the questionnaire. After obtaining the students' permission, all the students (n=600) who completed the questionnaire were required to write a paragraph in English on a familiar topic: "What is your daily routine?" They were given 45 minutes to write approximately 80 words. The students were assured that the aim was to assess their writing proficiency and not evaluate and grade them. The collected writing samples were assessed in terms of sentence-level errors (grammar, word choice and mechanics). Only sentence-level issues were analysed from the writing samples because the researcher found students were mostly not familiar with paragraph level issues. Teachers and the curriculum focused on sentence level issues too, so it was these that were analysed in writing samples.

The writing samples were examined as follows. Firstly, errors were identified in each paragraph and coded, classified into different types: word choice (W), verb (V), prepositions (PRE), article (ART), missing subject (SU), punctuation (P), spelling (SP) and capitalisation (C). After coding, errors were counted and transformed into percentages to quantify the frequency of each type. Then, the classified errors were categorised, based on several studies such as Darus and Ching (2009), Ellis (1997), and Ferris (2005), into lexical (word choice), grammatical (verb, missing subject, articles and prepositions) and mechanical (punctuation, spelling and capitalisation). Identifying each type of error was based on the literature review (Darus & Ching, 2009; Ellis, 1997; Ferris, 2005). The analysis of the writing samples was validated by a PhD candidate in TESOL in terms of checking types and number of the errors counted. There were no-significant differences between the analysis of the researcher and the PHD candidate. Table 2 below shows the taxonomy of the error types used for identifying the errors in the students' writing samples.

Table 2: *Taxonomy of Error Types in the Students' Writing Samples*

Type of error	Meaning
Verb	All errors in verb tense or form, including relevant subject verb agreement errors.
Article	Article or another determiner incorrect, omitted, or unnecessary.
Vocabulary	All specific lexical errors in word choice or word form.
Subject	Subject missing.
Spelling	Any error in spelling.
Punctuation	Missing or misuse, insertion, deletion, and replacement of punctuation marks.
Capitalisation	Missing or misuse
Preposition	Replacements, insertions, and deletions.

Out of 600 students who were asked to write a paragraph, 328 undertook this writing task of at least 80 words. The students wrote less than the required number of words, so writing samples of at least 40 words were accepted in the sample. The purpose of accepting these paragraphs was to have a sufficiently large sample size. The total of the students' errors in their written samples were 6467 (with average 20 errors in each paragraph). While these samples did not meet the originally intended length criterion, they did include complete sentences that could be used in the analysis. However, those with less than forty words were omitted from the analysis as they did not meet the required criteria. For example, some students wrote some words in a list, others just wrote one or two sentences, and others wrote "I do not know," suggesting that they did not know how to write a paragraph (see Appendices R and S for students' written samples that were omitted from the analysis). It should be noted that one short sample of student writing is limited in its value. However, it served to give a basis to measure the kinds of errors made by students in their writing of paragraphs. Even then not all students

wrote 80 word paragraphs and some failed to write any. Nonetheless, this limited sample is of some value in assessing the writing errors made by the Saudi secondary school students.

Table 3 below shows the errors made by the students in the writing samples. It displays the frequency count, percentage and rank of each type of error. Errors were ranked from the most frequent to the least frequent. The main error types analysed were errors relating to lexical knowledge (word choice), grammatical knowledge (verb, subject mission, prepositions and articles), and mechanical knowledge (spelling, punctuation and capitalisation). As shown in Table 3, the two most frequent types of errors produced by the students were word choice, with a total of 1,728 errors (26.7%) and punctuation, with 1,064 errors (16.5%). This was followed by the number of spelling errors, with 949 (14.7%) and by capitalisation, with 935 errors (14.5%). In contrast, the numbers of errors in prepositions and articles were relatively small (432 and 276 errors, which accounted for 6.7% and 4.3% of all errors, respectively).

Table 3

The Frequency of Students' Errors in Sentence-Level Issues.

Ranking	Type of error	Count of errors	Percentage
1	Vocabulary (word choice)	1728	26.7%
2	Punctuation	1064	16.5%
3	Spelling	949	14.7%
4	Capitalisation	935	14.5%
5	Subject	547	8.4%
6	Verb	536	8.2%
7	Prepositions	432	6.7%
8	Articles	276	4.3%
	Total of errors	6467	100%

In the following pages, some examples of the error types will be given. First, as an example of the errors made by the students in the use of articles, one student wrote about his

daily routine on the weekend (I wake up 11 in morning) meaning (I wake up at 11a.m in the morning). The student omitted the article “the” where it is required. This error implies that some students are not conscious of the article rules and even if they know them, it seems they do not practise creating their compositions so that they may make errors in using them correctly.

Second, for an example of the errors made by the students in the use of prepositions, one student wrote (I wok on the moreneing and going to school and Cam bak at home) meaning (I wake up in the morning and go to school). In this example, “on” is used instead of “in”. It seems that the student translated the sentence from the colloquial language Arabic L1 into English. If he/she translates it from standard Arabic into English, it may work well because the preposition has the same function in this context in both languages. Another example, students may omit the preposition. The student omitted the preposition “in” which should be “in the moringin” rather than “morning”. A possible explanation for making these errors by some students is the lack of knowledge of the rules of English prepositions. This is what Ellis (1996, p.710) terms “incomplete application of rules”. Ellis (1996) sees this as a failure to apply the rules because the students do not really understand them. Also, these errors in the use of prepositions could be due to the lack of practise in creating their English compositions.

Third, an example of errors made by the students in the use of verb tense. One student wrote, (I woke uP usuily at 6..pm) meaning (I usually wake up at 6 p.m). This example shows that the student used the past simple instead of the present simple. It could be that the student used the past tense because she wakes up in the morning and it is the first thing to be ‘done’ in her daily routine, thus she thinks it should be in the past tense. Although grammar is stressed in the Saudi secondary school, students still make errors in writing sentences with correct grammar. This could be due to the lack of practicing or where students just imitate written models. This possible explanation is supported by the findings of the questionnaire that

indicated that students could know the grammatical rules but have challenges in using them functionally in different contexts.

Fourth, the analysis of student writing samples showed that many students started sentences without using a subject at the beginning of a sentence. These sentences are fragmented because of the missing of a subject. For example, a student wrote (when Finish school, back home) meaning (When I finish the school, I back home). This example shows how the student started the two clauses of the sentences without using a subject at the beginning of each clause. A possible reason for these kinds of errors could be to the lack of knowledge of the structure of a sentence, namely the need for a subject.

Fifth, the findings of the writing samples showed that a number of students started sentences without using a capital letter. For example, a student wrote (Win I back From School I Bray Al-Dohr) meaning (When I back from school, I pray Al-Dohr). It seems that many students are not aware that a new sentence must start with a capital letter. Even in the middle of the sentence, the example shows that the student capitalised “from” and “school”. These errors in the use of capitalisation may be due to the lack of knowledge of the rules of capitalisation and lack of practicing writing in terms of creating their compositions. These findings showed that the students just imitate written models without understanding why and how to write. Another possible explanation is the difference between English and Arabic as the latter does not have a capitalisation system.

Sixth, an example of the errors made by students in spelling is a student wrote (Win I back From School I Bray Al-Dohr) meaning (when I back from school, I pray Al-Dohur). Regardless of the other errors in the sentence, the example shows how the student misspelled the word bray which is “pray”. The students use the letter “b” instead of “p”. This could be due to the impact of the L1 Arabic native language of the student as the orthographic system in Arabic has no “P” sound. However, there are many other misspelled words that could be made

due to different possible reasons. For example, a student wrote (I wok on the moreneing and going to school and Cam bak at home) meaning (I wake up in the morning and go to school). This could be to the lack of awareness of the spelling rules and the relation between pronunciation and spelling. It seems the students do not realise that most of the English words that have the letter “e” at the end is not pronounced. Therefore, it seems the student writes what is pronounced.

Seventh, most of the errors made by the students in punctuation were in the lack of using comma (,) and period (.). For example, (I writing to you about my dayly rotien First I have 3 sister and 5 brothers I spend my time’s...) meaning (I am writing to you about my daily routine. First, I have three sisters and five brothers. I spend my time...). This example shows that the student writes three sentences without using a period or full stop at the end of each sentence. Some writing samples do not have any punctuation marks at all (See appendix Q). Concerning proper the use of comma for example, (wen I back I open my computer) meaning (When I back home, I open my computer.). This example displays how the student did not use the comma after the first clause “when clause”. As indicated earlier, this could be to the lack of awareness of the rules of using punctuation correctly.

Finally, the eighth point, concerning vocabulary where most errors were made, the findings of the student questionnaire and the writing samples showed that using vocabulary correctly is the most problematic area in sentence level issues. As an example of the errors made by the students in using vocabulary, one student wrote (...and eating Lunch with myself) meaning (I eat lunch alone). This could be to the impact of L1. It seems that the student translated it from L1 into L2. However, there are other words that are used incorrectly and the reason could be due to the lack of practicing and using the words in different communicative contexts. For example, (I see the televion) meaning (I watch Television). It seems that the student thinks that “see” works the same as “watch”. This indicates that students lack practicing using the same

word in different contexts for different functions. This explanation can be supported by the findings of the questionnaire that indicated that 69% of the students just imitate written models and 68% are not encouraged by their teachers in creating their own sentences. Therefore, it is not surprising that students are not aware of the different functions of words.

The descriptive statistics presented in the previous two sections elucidates the data from the questionnaire and the writing sample. It is particularly interesting to note that 44% of respondents expressed low motivation for writing on teacher-identified topics (see Figure 5 above) and only 55% completed the writing task. This suggests that the predetermined nature of the task may have contributed to low motivation on the part of some students to complete it. Moreover, of the 328 students who completed the writing task only 191 (58%) met the criteria. This relatively low completion rate of writing samples which met the criteria relates to the findings of the questionnaire, wherein 50% of respondents indicated that they memorised the content for their exams suggesting that many students were ill-prepared to answer a question in written form that they had not prepared for.

Following the collection of quantitative data, qualitative data were collected in order to better understand the findings from the quantitative data. Focus groups and teacher interviews were conducted in order to obtain detailed information and also as a point of comparison to the quantitative data. Taken together, these results can be used to suggest possible answers to the research question, as will be discussed in the following section.

4.5 Findings: English Writing Difficulties

Having highlighted the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire and the writing samples, this section presents the findings and discussion of the first research question: *What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?*

Student questionnaires, student focus groups, teacher interviews, and student writing

samples were used to identify key difficulties perceived by these two groups (students and teachers) with regard to English writing. The findings of the students' questionnaire were reported first, followed by the findings of the focus groups and teacher interviews. The results of the errors from the students writing samples were provided for comparison to the perceptions of the students and teachers.

The analysis of the student questionnaires, student focus groups, teacher interviews, and student writing samples, presented below, revealed that there were sentence-level and paragraph-level difficulties experienced by Saudi secondary school students when writing in English. Sentence-level difficulties included grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and vocabulary. Paragraph-level difficulties included the topic sentence, paragraph organisation, development of ideas, coherence and cohesion. These difficulties will be examined below.

4.5.1 Sentence-level difficulties.

An analysis of students' and teachers' perceptions of the students' difficulties in sentence-level issues is presented. Particular attention will be paid to the student's grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalisation and vocabulary, when writing in English. In order to support this analysis, an examination of the students' sentence-level errors found in the writing samples will also be presented.

This study investigated a number of grammatical issues experienced by Saudi secondary school students: verbs, articles and prepositions. As the discussion below will argue, the data indicated there was a convergence between the students' and teachers' perceptions regarding students' problems with using verb tenses, articles and prepositions. However, this finding was not replicated in the writing samples.

4.5.1.1 Verbs. The findings of the quantitative data in the questionnaires reveal the following: approximately 61% (367 out of 600) of students perceived that they always or often have difficulty in using verb tenses correctly in different contexts; 23% (136 out of 600)

sometimes had difficulty and only 16% (96 out of 600) indicated they rarely or never have difficulty in this matter (see Figure 2 for the frequencies of the students' perceptions of their difficulties in writing English sentences). This was supported by the qualitative data collected during the student focus groups. As described in the Methodology Chapter, the responses were spoken in Arabic and translated into English for the purpose of this thesis. In the comments below, the students mostly agreed on the difficulty of using verb tenses where 89% (16 out of 18) of students reported they always have problems or difficulty, while 11% (2 out of 18) did only sometimes. Highlighting the difficulty, a male student and his peers face, one student said:

We always face difficulty in using the English verb tenses. We get confused. We do not know which tense should be used. We do not know how and when to use the appropriate verb tense. They are very difficult and especially the present perfect tense. [*1st year level male student 1*]

Additionally, the analysis of teachers' interviews supports the students' views on verb tense use. All six teachers interviewed considered verb tenses to be the most problematic issue for students, specifically the present perfect tense. One teacher indicated this by stating:

Students do not know how to use the correct tense. There are many different verb tenses. Perfect tense is the most difficult as there is no equivalent tense in their L1 Arabic. I think verb tenses are the most frequent difficult issue faced by students in grammar. [*Male teachers 2*]

As far as the use of English verbs in writing is concerned, three new issues emerged from the student focus groups and teacher interviews: difficulty in using irregular verbs; subject-verb agreement; and missing and/or misuse of helping verbs. An analysis of student focus groups showed that all students agreed they experience difficulty with irregular English verbs. One student stated:

Every year, we always face this problem of using the irregular verbs correctly. We cannot memorise them because there are many of them. [*3rd year level male student 1*]

Another student commented:

Our teacher asks us to memorise all forms of irregular verbs. It is very hard. I cannot. We rarely use them in complete sentences, so it is difficult to remember the forms of all the irregular verbs. I find challenges in choosing the right irregular verbs when answering a multiple choice question in the exam and when I write a composition in English. [*2nd year level female student*]

The last comment casts some light on the teaching and learning practices at play. Specifically, this student relates the lack of opportunity to use irregular verbs in complete sentences as the key factor for her difficulty in remembering the conjugations of irregular verbs. The students' views about their difficulty in using irregular verbs correctly were supported by their teachers. According to one teacher:

I believe that my students always face difficulty in choosing the right irregular verb in different situations. I have been teaching English in secondary schools for more than 16 years. Using irregular verbs correctly is one of the hardest areas encountered by students when writing in English. To be honest, they mostly do not want to memorise the irregular verbs; they just want to add "ed" to the regular verbs. They often say to me, "Please teacher, don't ask us about irregular verbs in the exam; they are very hard". Students rarely want to memorise them. [*Female teacher 3*]

Additionally, most teachers (83% or 5 out of 6) perceived that subject-verb agreement and missing and/or misuse of helping verbs were further areas of difficulty experienced by Saudi secondary school students. This is demonstrated in one teacher's comment on the correct use of English helping verbs:

They [students] forget the helping verbs. For example, they say "it playing". They forget the verb "is". I don't know why. Sometimes they put the helping verbs in the wrong place or add another one in the sentence. I believe using helping verbs correctly is challenging for many of my students. [*Female teacher 2*]

This quote and the one below from a teacher both point to students' lack of mastering English verb patterns:

I perceive that subject-verb agreement is an area of difficulty for my students,

especially third singulars. For example, they write “he eat instead of he eats”.

[Male teacher 1]

In short, 62% (367 out of 600) of the students surveyed by the questionnaire, 89% (16 out of 18) of the students in the focus groups, and 100% of teachers in the interviews perceived that students always or often encounter difficulties in correctly using verbs. However, these findings were not supported by the results obtained from the analysis of the students’ writing samples. It was found that 191 students committed 536 errors (8.2% of total errors) when employing verbs in their actual writing which is a small number of errors compared to the students’ use of the words “always” and “often”. A possible reason for the discrepancy between the frequency of errors in verb-related issues and students’ and teachers’ perceptions could be the nature of the writing assignment. The task was simple and could be completed using only one verb tense, thus allowing even students with limited understanding of verb usage to complete it with few errors.

Errors in the use of verbs were ranked sixth. This is in comparison to 1728 errors (26.7%) regarding vocabulary, which were ranked first (see Table 1 above for the frequency of errors in sentence-level issues). In summary, based on the findings of the student questionnaire, student focus groups, and teacher interviews, it has been demonstrated that many students struggle with the use of verb tenses correctly in different contexts or scenarios. They also encounter problems in using helping verbs and subject-verb agreement.

4.5.1.2 Articles. The analysis of the questionnaire responses indicates that approximately 51% (305 out of 600) of students indicated they always or often encounter difficulties in using the articles correctly; 18% (105 out of 600) sometimes, whilst approximately 31% (190 out of 600) said rarely or never.

With reference to the student focus groups, 50% (9 out of 18) of students related that they always have a problem in this matter while (5% or 1 out of 18) did so only sometimes and 45%

(8 out of 18) students reported that they never had any. One student from the focus group that identified facing problems with articles said:

We face difficulties in using “a, an”, and “the” because we get confused. We do not know when to use them. Although it is easy, we face difficulties in using them correctly when writing in English. [*1st year level female student 1*]

The comment reveals that lack of clarity of when to use the articles correctly may be difficult for students. Conversely, a student from the other focus group which reported no issues in articles said:

I don't see any difficulty in using articles. We know when we use “a, an” or “the”. They are clear. [*2nd year level female student*]

With regard to teachers' views, two reported that their students always face problems in using articles, two sometimes and two said never. One teacher stated that:

Students do not write regularly. Many of them cannot recognise when to use “a, an” or “the”. I think the most frequently difficult article for them is using “the” because there are some conditions, such as proper nouns, which they mostly do not remember. Many students get confused as they add the article “the” in the wrong places. [*Male teacher 3*]

On the other hand, another teacher said:

I do not think they face difficulty in using articles. They are clear and easy. They recognise that using “an” before vowels and “a” before the others. They recognise how to use “the” with names. [*Female teacher 1*]

Nearly half of the students and their teachers perceived that students always or often experience difficulties in correctly using articles when writing in English, and nearly half of the students and their teachers believed the students did not have such difficulties. This demonstrates that there is a consistency between students' and teachers' views on the difficulty encountered by students in using articles in their English writing.

Article errors in the writing samples were the least frequent, with a total of 267 (4.3%)

errors. Despite the relatively low percentage of errors, half of students and teachers expressed the view (in the student questionnaires, student focus groups and teach interviews) that students face difficulties in correctly using articles in English writing. It is possible that students and teachers view these difficulties as of relatively minor importance.

4.5.1.3 Prepositions. The analysis of the questionnaire responses reveals that 43% (275 out of 600) of students indicated they always or often experience challenges in using prepositions correctly in different contexts, 20% (121 out of 600) sometimes, and about 37% (222 out of 600) rarely or never. This did not correspond to the qualitative findings.

In the student focus groups, 72% (13 out of 18) of students mentioned that they always or often have issues with prepositions while 18% (5 out of 18) mentioned that sometimes they do. Implicit in the results is that a great majority of the interviewed students experience difficulty with English prepositions. One student asserted:

Prepositions are easy when we know the meaning; we can choose the right answer in a multiple choice question or we can relate the right preposition to the right picture. But we find it difficult to use them correctly in different situations. [*3rd year level female student*]

Teachers' views corresponded with those of their students. One teacher said:

My students always ask me when, how and where they use English prepositions. They often get confused with the prepositions "in, at, into" or "onto". They ask me why they must memorise their meanings when their uses are different. [*Male teacher 3*]

Another teacher commented:

My students have a big problem in using prepositions correctly because they need to read. The more they read the easier using prepositions will be. They translate from Arabic into English so that they make mistakes because some prepositions do not have equal ones in Arabic. [*Female teacher 2*]

The findings show that the students' and teachers' perceptions did concur on the difficulties in correctly using prepositions in English writing. However, the perception that students have difficulties in the use of prepositions was not consistent with the reality of students' writing samples, which revealed that the students made a total of 432 (6.7%) errors in using prepositions. In this study, prepositions did not constitute a major area of difficulty for those students who completed the writing samples.

4.5.1.4 Spelling. The analysis of the student questionnaires, student focus groups, teacher interviews and students' writing samples revealed that the Saudi secondary school students taking part in this study face difficulties in using mechanics: the term 'mechanics' is used by Sommers (1996), to mean the conventions governing technical aspects of the language. In this context mechanics includes: spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. Specifically, in regard to spelling, the findings revealed an agreement between the students' and their teachers' perceptions, and the students' actual written production. By contrast, both the students' and teachers' opinions regarding the difficulty faced by students when utilising punctuation and capitalisation were not reflected in the students' actual writings.

From the student questionnaires, approximately 57% (339 out of 600), stated that they always or often encounter difficulties in spelling; 25% (151 out of 600) sometimes and only 18% (110 out of 600) perceived that they rarely or never did. It is evident that spelling is a challenge for many Saudi secondary school students. This was supported by the students in the focus group. About 61% (11 out of 18) of students stated that they frequently have problems with spelling; 17% (3 out of 18) said sometimes and 22% (4 out of 18) said never. According to one student:

Spelling is a big problem for us especially in the silent letters. For example, words that end with "e" such as apple. We cannot expect to write the letter 'e'. Also, we cannot spell words such *cat* and *school* correctly because they are not written like as they are pronounced. We haven't learnt the spelling rules. We lack spelling practice. The teacher never asks us to practise spelling.

One time I asked the teacher about the rules of spelling. He said it is too early to learn them. How is it too early? I am in year 10. When can I learn them?!
[1st year level male student 1]

By contrast, there were students who did not encounter such problems:

I believe spelling is easy because I practise writing the word many times at home. For answering the composition in the exam, I write the predetermined paragraphs many times until I memorise them. *[3rd year level male student 2]*

This student's writing exam strategy involves merely memorising slabs of text. Repeated writing of the word is how this student successfully memorises the spelling. In contrast, the previous student sought rules and consistencies, aiming for a way of predicting the spelling rather than memorising each word separately.

Another student indicated that spelling is not difficult, articulating a phonics based approach:

I try to divide the word into different parts when I memorise it. *[3rd year level female student 2]*

While some students perceived that they do not have problems with spelling, the teachers agreed that it is a major issue. There was some concern about gaps in students' basic alphabetical knowledge:

Unfortunately, some students reach the third year level and they do not memorise all the alphabetical English letters. Some students do not know all the capital and small letters. Some students do not differentiate between the letters d and b when writing in English. I think their foundation is very weak.
[Female teacher 3]

Another teacher stated:

I can say that more than two thirds of my students encounter challenges in spelling in English. Generally, students misspelled many words especially the words having silent letters. *[Male teacher 3]*

To sum up, 57% of students in the questionnaire, 61 % of the students in the focus group,

and 100 % of the teachers in the interviews perceived that students often experience difficulties in spelling when writing in English. Consistently, the analysis of the writing samples showed that spelling errors were the third most frequent type of errors committed with a total of 949 spelling errors made out of a total 6,467 errors made (14.7%). Therefore, spelling constitutes an important area of difficulty for Saudi secondary school students.

4.5.1.5 Punctuation. The questionnaire results reveal that punctuation is the least area of perceived difficulty in English writing for Saudi secondary school students. The questionnaire responses demonstrate that 33% (199 out of 600) of students felt they always or often experience challenges, 24% (142 out of 600) sometimes, whereas 43% (259 out of 600) stated they rarely or never have.

In the student focus groups, only 16.6% (3 out of 18) of students mentioned that they always or often have challenges in punctuation, 11.1% (2 out of 18) said sometimes, whereas 72% (13 out of 18) of the students felt they never experience problems. This indicates that the majority of students do not consider they have major issues with English punctuation. One student stated that:

We know that question mark means question, full stop means the end of the sentence. Punctuation is not difficult. [2nd year level female student 3]

Another student reflected on confidence in punctuation:

We have no difficulty because we have learned them very well. The teacher always focuses on these issues. We practise them in the writing book. [3rd year level male student 2]

However, the teachers expressed a variety of opinions. The teachers of the first year level contended that students have difficulties in using punctuation marks, while their second year counterparts were not sure about this situation because punctuation was not taught at that level. Teachers of third year students indicated that their students do not have serious problems

regarding punctuation. From this, it might be assumed that punctuation problems are, in the main, resolved within the first year of secondary high school English training. This is not the case, as shown in the following comment by a teacher of that year level:

They face a big problem in it because it is just emphasised in the curriculum for the third year level. I think it is too late to focus on punctuation at the third year level. Because I have taught the third year level for three years, I teach the first year level punctuation to avoid punctuation problems when they reach the third year. I think the teachers who have never taught the third year level may not give attention to punctuation in the first and second year levels. [*Male teacher 1*]

One teacher who is responsible for third year students remarked:

I think my students can use punctuation easily. I focus on teaching how to use punctuation marks correctly. They already have a special writing book focusing on punctuation and capitalisation. So, they have no difficulty in punctuation. [*Female teacher 3*]

Although 43% of the students in the questionnaire, 72 % of the students in the focus groups, and nearly 50% of the teachers in the interviews did not consider students to have problems in punctuation, the students' writing samples did not appear to reflect the students' and their teachers' perceptions. The writing sample analysis revealed that punctuation was the second most frequent error committed by students, with a total of 1064 (16.5%) errors.

4.5.1.6 Capitalisation. The use of capitalisation was not included in the student questionnaire. However, it emerged as a theme in the student focus groups, teacher interviews and writing samples. All the students and their teachers agreed that students never encounter problems with using capitalisation in English writing. For example, according to one student:

I think they are easy. We know that we start each sentence by a capital letter.
[*1st year level female student 3*]

A teacher stated:

I don't think it is difficult. Students are aware of how to capitalise words.
[Female teacher 2]

Despite these confident responses, the writing samples seem to show that correctly using capitalisation constituted an area of difficulty for students. Analysis of writing samples showed that capitalisation was the fourth most frequent type of error committed by students, totalling 935 (14.5%) errors. This indicates a clear inconsistency between the teachers' and students' perceptions and the final result of students' actual writing. These inconsistencies in perceptions and actualities are discussed further in section 4.6.1.2, together with some explanations as to why these inconsistencies occur.

4.5.1.7 Vocabulary. The questionnaire revealed that the majority of Saudi secondary school students find it hard to choose words when writing in English. Specifically, 62% (372 out of 600) said that they always or often encounter difficulty in finding the right words for the right contexts, 25% (148 out of 600) sometimes had problems whereas only 13% (80 out of 600) mentioned they rarely or never had difficulties. The same question was directed to the students in the focus group. It emerged that all students agreed they always encountered a problem in word choice when writing their own sentences. One student said:

I have no problem in knowing the meaning of many words. The problem is often to choose suitable words in different contexts. We find it difficult to put the words in complete sentences because we haven't been taught to create our sentences. *[2nd year level male student 1]*

Another student indicated:

We can recognise the meaning by looking at the picture or translating the words. However, the problem is in using the words in different situations correctly. We don't practise. We do not create our own sentences and use the words we learn. *[2nd year level female student 2]*

This may indicate a largely passive rather than active vocabulary base, and limited understanding of the range of words, or their potentially multiple meanings. Significantly, the

problem arises when developing original pieces of writing. Students pointed out that they sometimes know more than one meaning for a word but find it difficult to write the appropriate one in the right context. One student remarked:

I use Google to translate English words but a word has different meanings. I get confused and find difficulty in choosing a suitable meaning. I get confused because a Google translated website often gives me a nonsense sentence. *[3rd year level male student 1]*

One teacher also noted the tendency to use electronic software, with similar results:

The students use Google to translate and they often get confused. Mostly, they do not know how to choose the appropriate meaning for the context. *[Female teacher 1]*

These comments imply that while translation devices are useful to a point, they cannot be overly relied upon to help students use their English vocabulary as the students struggle to identify whether translated words are appropriate for the context. The teachers' views were consistent with the students' comments about the difficulty of using English vocabulary for the correct context.

Teachers also agreed that word choice is a major problem, as one teacher explained:

Some students come to me asking about the meaning of some words they find when they play games on the computers. They are eager to know them because knowing their meanings helps them to move from one stage to another. However, I think the difficulty is how to use their words appropriately in different situations. I think the high level students can find the meaning but using the words correctly in different situations is very difficult. *[Male teacher 2]*

In addition to correct word choice, other issues emerged in the student focus groups and teacher interviews, such as the related points of word order and a lack of vocabulary. These are explored more fully below.

The student focus groups raised concerns about word order. Most of the students (87%

or 14 out of 18) mentioned their lack of understanding regarding word order when writing in English. As one student commented:

I find ordering words hard. I do not know how to order some nouns such as *city Jeddah* or *Jeddah city*. I don't know which one comes first. [*1st year level female student 2*]

Most of the teachers stated that students became confused when trying to put nouns and adjectives in their proper order, given the tendency to translate from Arabic to English. One teacher stated:

Students have a lesson about compound nouns; they face difficulty in ordering the nouns. They face a big problem in ordering words correctly. They get confused with word order. They make mistakes with two nouns together, noun with adjective or adverb and adjective. They think in Arabic and order the nouns in English. For example, we have a lesson about compound nouns such as *car park*. They mostly write *park car* because they translate from Arabic into English and use the same order in Arabic. They like my way of teaching vocabulary and they like guessing the meaning until they get the right meaning. I like it when they translate the words and state their meaning in Arabic when I introduce the words to them but I do not ask them to translate. [*Female teacher 2*]

Further to the challenge of word order, a lack of vocabulary is also an issue. This is reflected in the student focus groups where 83% (15 out of 18) of students highlighted that their vocabulary was limited. Two students' remarks reflect this:

I do not have many words to write. I may know the meaning of the word when I see the picture related to it but I cannot remember when I want to write. [*2nd year male student 2*]

We do not memorise the words we learn. I feel I have a very small amount of words. In the exam, the teacher mostly brings the definition and we just choose the right word for the definition. Or the teacher shows some pictures and we relate the words to the appropriate pictures. We just try to remember the shape of the word and relate it to its picture I have a few words only so I cannot write a composition in English. I don't have enough words to write complete sentences or composition in English. Sometimes, I want to use my own words but I could not so that I just use and, and, and when answering

the composition question in the final exam. [3rd year level female student 3]

Teachers commented that the students suffer from a limited vocabulary and therefore, refer to translation from Arabic to English. According to one teacher:

My students always tell me that they have ideas but do not have enough words to write. [Female teacher 2]

Students depend on translation. Most of them do not memorise the words they learn. They sometimes write the words in Arabic because they do not know them in English. [Male teacher 3]

As stated above, the findings revealed that 62% of students in the questionnaires, 100% of the students in the focus groups and 100% of the teachers in the interviews revealed that correctly using vocabulary was perceived as the most frequent issue faced by Saudi secondary school students in English writing. Similarly, the findings of the writing samples analysis indicated that the biggest error was incorrectly using vocabulary with a total of 1728 (26.8%) mistakes.

To summarise, the findings demonstrate that there are a range of difficulties faced by students in sentence-level issues when writing in English, the most commonly perceived difficulties being correctly using vocabulary, followed by verb tense and spelling. While there was consistency between the students' and teachers' views about the difficulties experienced by Saudi secondary school students in using verbs, punctuation, capitalisation, articles and prepositions in English writing, this consistency was not supported by the results in the students' actual writing. In other words, while students and teachers consistently perceived that using verbs, articles and prepositions constitute a difficulty for students, the actual writing samples in this study did not illustrate this. Moreover, while students and teachers did not believe students had problems with punctuation and capitalisation, the writing samples actually showed the contrary.

4.6 Discussion: Sentence-Level Difficulties

The vast majority of students indicated that they (sometimes, often, or always) have difficulty following English grammar rules, conjugating verb tenses correctly, using English articles and prepositions, and choosing the most appropriate words for a sentence. Within the literature analogous findings have been reported highlighting grammar as a particular challenge for students learning English as an additional language. This is supported by Collins (2007), Hassan (2009), Koroğlu (2014) Phuket & Othman (2015), Sawalmeh (2013) and Zhan (2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the findings of this study do not agree with the results of Shiu (2011) who found students had no perceived difficulties in using 20 English grammatical features such as verbs, prepositions and articles. It is possible that in the case of Shiu (2011) and this research, the difference in findings may be attributed to the different contexts of the studies. Shiu (2011) studied 277 university-level Chinese EFL learners in Taiwan, while the present study focuses on Saudi secondary school students.

Within the context of this study, the students' challenges with grammar may be due to the lack of opportunities to practise applying the grammar within the classroom. As the qualitative interview results reveal, in the case for English verbs, students spend class time memorising rules for regular verbs but scarcely have opportunities to put their learned rules into practice. In identifying factors contributing to challenges faced with irregular verbs, students identified both the copious amount of irregular as well as limited opportunities to practise; however, the latter was a secondary factor. Therefore, it seems that the focus on memorising grammatical forms does not help the students to use their language in practice. These findings are analogous with other findings in the field and suggest that target language should be learned communicatively and used functionally in real life situations rather than through rote learning (Agudo, 2015; Brown, 2007; Collins, 2007; Harmer 2004; Hyland, 2003; Nunan, 1999).

As far as the difficulties in sentence-level issues are concerned, the data further suggests that students indicate difficulty with English vocabulary. This is synonymous with the key findings in the literature (Al-Ghonaim, 2005; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Moqimipour & Shahrokhi, 2015). In this current study, students reported that while they knew word definitions, they were often unable to incorporate them into sentences due to lack of practice. Additionally, students often learn vocabulary by memorising lists of words, isolated from any relevant context. Therefore, it should be recognised that learning words in isolation is a strategy that does not facilitate students to use the words communicatively and functionally in complete sentences. This is why Amiryousefi (2015) and Ma (2012) related the challenges in using vocabulary correctly to the lack of using effective vocabulary learning strategies which is reflected in actions, such as trying to guess words within a bit of writing by context and pictures.

Moreover, the challenges in using English vocabulary correctly, as found in this thesis, could be attributed to the well-researched theory of receptive versus productive vocabulary. It has been highlighted that second language learners are likely to face more challenges in productive vocabulary as opposed to receptive (Hinkel, 2015; Nation, 2001). Therefore, students may find that they can understand a word when they hear it or read it yet they are unable to replicate its use in a different context. As highlighted in the above findings, the students in this study have little opportunity for genuine practice with English writing, including selecting and using vocabulary. Again, this suggests that the focus of teaching language is on the language form rather than language functions.

With respect to the Saudi EFL context, the results of the current study correlate with Al-Seghayer (2015) and Alsaif and Milton (2012), who point out that many Saudi EFL students acquire isolated vocabulary through rote learning, which does not give the students the skills to apply this language in a context. Additionally, Al-Mohanna (2010) argues that students learn English as an additional language passively in Saudi Arabia, meaning memorisation and

translation are used as the main teaching strategies. The prominence given to receptive vocabulary within the EFL sector compounds the problems EFL students face in utilising productive vocabulary (Hinkel, 2015). Both the findings of this study and the findings from the literature highlight that language input on its own is not enough to develop language output.

In addition to problems with grammatical forms and vocabulary, participants also indicated perceived difficulties with spelling. Similarly, other studies in the field found that spelling is a challenging mechanical component experienced by EFL students (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). These writers state that difficulty in spelling can be explained by the differences between L1 and English and the conventions for writing language. For example, variations in the way words are spelled are exacerbated when learning to spell. This is supported by Albalawi (2016) and Alhaisoni et al. (2015). The findings for the present study are consistent with these studies. It appears that the different orthographic system presents an obstacle for L1 Arabic students learning to spell in English, as do the presence of silent sounds and irregular spelling patterns and rules, which are synonymous with the findings of Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989) and Shabbir and Bughio (2009). The students in this study indicated that the main factor contributing to their challenges in spelling is that a lack of practice with spelling, as evidenced by the fact that some students reach the third year of secondary school without recognising all of the English alphabet. This may indicate that teachers do not give students the chance to practise their spelling. Also, it seems that students do not have strong previous learning experiences in spelling so that they can spell well in the later stages. In short, it appears that teaching practices and previous learning experiences are contributing factors to students' problems in spelling. These two factors will be discussed in depth in a following chapter when answering the second main research question that is related to the contributing factors to students' difficulties in English writing.

4.6.1 Discussion: Perceived difficulties and actual written errors.

As indicated in the discussion above, there was a general consistency found between the different stakeholder's perceptions. For example, both students and teachers expressed perceptions regarding the difficulties experienced by Saudi students in sentence-level issues. However, this is not the case between the participating students' and teachers' perceptions and the students' actual writing. Specifically, there was no consistency between the perceived difficulties and the students' actual writing in punctuation, capitalisations, verbs, prepositions and articles. This discrepancy may reflect the nature of the writing sample; because it was short and did not require students to attempt a variety of styles and topics, it may not accurately reflect the true scope of their writing skills. Set in the broader context of the Saudi school system, this suggests that students do not receive the quality of feedback on their English writing necessary to recognise their strengths and weaknesses in this area. The only similarity between the perceived difficulties and students' errors in writing sample was in spelling and the use of vocabulary. Whilst these similarities and differences will be discussed below, it should be made clear that writing samples meeting the criteria were not obtained from all participants, and therefore drawing strong conclusions may not be advised. This section will continue by discussing the differences between the perceived difficulties and actual written errors related to verbs, articles and prepositions.

4.6.1.1 Discussion: Verbs, articles and prepositions. The perceived difficulties in verb-related issues, as expressed by students and teachers, is much more serious than the errors committed by the students in the written texts. In considering why the frequency of errors in verb-related issues were not reflective of students' and teachers' perceptions, the researcher believes it is possible this could be due to the nature of the writing task. The task was simple and could be completed using only one verb tense, the present simple, to discuss students' daily routine. Had the writing task required the use of a variety of verb tenses, for examples, asking

students to write about past, present and future events, then a broader view of tense difficulties may have emerged which may have highlighted greater difficulty in using verbs. This explanation is supported by Collins (2007) who found that his Francophone and Japanese ESL learners were able to use the past simple correctly but failed to use other verb tenses appropriately in different contexts.

The results show that there is a consistency between the students' and teachers' views regarding the difficulty encountered by students in using articles in their English writing. As far as the limited evidence collected from writing samples is concerned, the findings revealed that the errors committed by the students in the use of articles were the least frequent type of error. These do not support the views of the participating students and teachers as half of them expressed that students face difficulties in using the articles correctly in English writing. As above, one possible explanation for the divergence between the students' perceptions and their actual writing may, again, be that the written task was simple. If students were given a complicated task that requires sophisticated language, it might have shown different results. Another explanation could be that students do not fully understand the rules of English grammar and get anxious when writing in English. This knowledge may colour their perceptions of how well they think they have accomplished tasks.

For prepositions, the findings show that there was consistency between the students' and their teachers' perceptions regarding the difficulties experienced by students in using prepositions correctly in English writing. However, these perceptions were not consistent with the reality of students' writing samples, which revealed that the students made 432 (6.7%) errors in using the prepositions. This proportion indicated that using prepositions did not constitute a major area of difficulty for students. The inconsistency between the participants' perceptions and the students' actual writings regarding the difficulty experienced by students with using prepositions correctly can possibly be attributed to the simplicity of the written task,

as it was the case with the other grammatical issues that were verbs and articles. These findings concur with the work of Mohammad and Hazarika (2016), who found that their Saudi university students were confused in the use of prepositions and made some “serious mistakes” (p. 112), and yet perceived that prepositions did not cause them difficulty. Mohammad and Hazarika also pointed out that one of the reasons for this inconsistency could be that students may be reluctant to admit their mistakes, or were unaware that they had made mistakes.

Another reason for the lack of correlation between the perceptions reported and the writing samples may be due to following a simple written model for the writing sample task. A group of students inferred that they did not make errors because they just imitated written models: In the words of one student, “How can we make errors and find difficulty while we just copy and paste?”

This perception reinforces the view stated above that many students do not fully understand the rules of English grammar, and this further suggests that students lacked practicing writing and created their sentences when writing in English. Therefore, it is expected that if the students were asked to undertake a task that entailed using a number of different verb tenses, articles and prepositions, the writing task would have shown different results.

4.6.1.2 Discussion: Spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. With respect to spelling, about two thirds of the students in the questionnaire, two thirds of the students in the focus group, and all the teachers in the interviews perceived that students often experience difficulties in spelling when writing in English. Consistently, the analysis of the writing samples showed that spelling errors were the third most frequent type of errors committed by the students. Therefore, spelling constitutes an important area of difficulty for Saudi students when writing in English.

The results of this study are partly consistent with the findings of Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud and Gaudel (2015) and Albalawi (2016) in terms of their Saudi university students having many

spelling errors. However, these studies only used writing tasks on university students. The current study only considers Saudi secondary school students. To an extent, the results of this study agree with Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) who found many spelling errors in their participating' writing samples. However, the results of this study differ with that of Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) who found that their participants believed that they have no perceived difficulties in spelling. Participants for this study did perceive they had difficulties with spelling. The difference between the results of this study and Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) could be attributed to the different context (university may be different from school student) and the writing tasks.

As far as mechanics are concerned, although most of the students and their teachers did not identify punctuation as problematic, the students' writing samples suggested otherwise. The analysis of the writing samples revealed that punctuation was the second most frequent error committed by the students, with a total of 1064 (16.5%) punctuation errors. This agrees with Mohammad and Hazarika's (2016) who found discrepancy between their Saudi university students' perceptions and reality concerning the problems with punctuation. They attributed that to the students not knowing the basic rules of punctuation and they might not be aware of their problems. However, the results of this study disagree with those of Shaffer (2013) who found agreement between the students' perceptions and their writing samples. Her participants perceived they have problems in punctuation and their writing samples showed many errors in punctuation. She attributed the problems in punctuation to the poor knowledge in the basic rules of using punctuation.

The divergence between the results of the analysis of the participants' perceptions and the writing samples might be attributed to two reasons. The first reason is because the students lacked practice writing, as illustrated in the analysis above. The second reason is because the students were not encouraged to create original composition and were allowed to replicate

written models. Therefore, when the students undertook the writing task that entailed creating a composition they did not have adequate practice with punctuation.

Evidence supporting this assertion can be found in the students' comments during the focus groups. One student mentioned:

We do not make any errors in punctuation or other issues when we do our homework because we just imitate the written models with slight modifications such as names and numbers.

Another student mentioned:

When we answer the composition question in the final exam, we memorise the written models existed in the curriculum as they are.

A 2nd year level teacher mentioned:

We do not focus on these issues as the students will learn them in the third year level.

These three examples highlight that students did not practise creating their compositions themselves where they can use the punctuation rather they just imitate a written model. Therefore, if students only replicate language from written models it may be challenging for them to identify punctuation errors.

In the case of capitalisation, all the students and teachers reported capitalisation to be very easy for secondary school students in their English writing. Therefore, it was surprising when analysing the writing samples to note that capitalisation did in fact constitute an area of difficulty for Saudi secondary school students. The analysis of writing samples showed that capitalisation was the fourth most frequent type of error made by the students, with a total of 935 (14.5%) errors. Similar to punctuation, it is likely that this inconsistency between perception and writing sample is caused by the overreliance on written models. As the writing task did not offer a written model, the students may have made many errors due to not having regular practice in creating original compositions.

The results of this study agree with the results of Mohammad and Hazarika's (2016) study that showed 76.66 % of the participating EFL Saudi students did not perceive difficulties in using capitalisation although their writing samples showed errors in capitalisation. Also, this study is consistent with Siddiqui's (2015) and Salebi's (2004) who found their female participants perceived that they knew the capitalisations rules but error analysis showed the opposite. Similarly, in this study, participants indicated that they do not have problems but made errors in their writing samples. So, it can be surmised that the participants were not aware of their problems. The problems in capitalisation could be attributed to the lack of teachers' feedback. The comments from students and teachers reveal that feedback is rarely given. Neither do teachers give much attention to capitalisation which also contributes to students' misconceptions that they have no problems. Another issue which contributes to students' misconceptions is that they imitate written models without paying attention to capitalisation because it is already corrected in the text they imitate. Therefore, when students were asked to create their own composition in this task, they committed a number of capitalisation errors.

4.6.1.3 Discussion: Vocabulary. The findings showed that more than two thirds of the students who completed the questionnaire, all the students in the focus groups and all the teachers in the interviews identified using vocabulary correctly was the biggest difficulty faced by Saudi secondary school students. The findings of this study are in line with those of Shukri's study (2008) that found her Saudi university students perceived vocabulary as the most difficult aspect of language to master when writing in English. Supporting both students and teachers in this study, the writing samples indicated that the greatest number of errors was related to vocabulary. The consistency between perceptions and reality may indicate that both teachers and students are aware of the vocabulary problems faced by Saudi secondary students in English writing. The likely causes of using vocabulary correctly, as articulated by both the students and their teachers are that students rarely practise writing and creating original

compositions thus have limited functional vocabulary. This is supported by Al-Seghayer (2011) whose study revealed that many EFL Saudi students memorise vocabulary in isolation. This leads to students being unable to communicate effectively. Al-Mohanna (2010) points out that Saudi EFL students are required to learn vocabulary by memorising and translating. On the other hand, Ma (2012) attributed these problems in terms of lack of practice, rather than of memorisation and translation.

To conclude, it is interesting to note that, although the task was simple, 272 out of 600 students chose not to do the writing task at all. Moreover, 137 students of those who completed the writing task only wrote one or two sentences or words in a list. Eighteen students wrote on the paper of the task "I don't know". This may show that students' rejection of the task does in fact support the perceived difficulties indicated by the participating students and teachers and the writing samples which were completed and met the criteria may not be representative of the sample group. Difficulties in writing paragraphs were also an issue that emerged in the writing samples. The reasons for this are discussed below.

4.7 Paragraph-Level Difficulties: Findings and Discussion.

Students and teachers were asked about the challenges experienced in paragraph-level issues (i.e. procedural knowledge) when writing in English. Specifically, they were asked about the difficulties they encounter in achieving paragraph unity, organisation, development of ideas and coherence when writing in English. By looking at Figure 2 above (see Section 4.3.1), more than 70% of students surveyed by questionnaire perceived that they always or often struggle with organising a paragraph correctly; secondly, writing supporting sentences for developing the main ideas presented in the topic sentence; and thirdly, writing a coherent paragraph. Around 60% of the students indicated that they always or often find difficulty in using linking words correctly in different contexts. The least important difficulty is with introducing the topic sentence in a paragraph although a significant 57% of students perceived that they always or

often have difficulty in this matter. Generally, more than two thirds of students always or often encounter difficulties using procedural knowledge when writing in English.

The analysis of student focus groups showed that they believed they would have problems in all the paragraph-related issues if they were asked to write one. They mentioned that neither their teachers nor the curriculum focuses on this. One female student in the focus group stated that their teachers explain to them what the topic sentence means rather than encouraging them to use it:

Our teacher explains the topic sentence but she doesn't tell us how to use it or write an example paragraph using it. She just tells us the topic sentence is the main idea in the paragraph. [*2nd year level female student*]

One teacher commented that she focuses on the topic sentence, organisation and linking words. In expanding on this, she maintained that she simply informs her students that the first sentence is often the topic sentence. Regarding paragraph organisation, she indicated that she teaches her students to write a paragraph from referring to notes and/or tables sequentially. Sometimes these are introduced by questions. Students are required to answer these questions in the order in which they appear. This agrees with Al-Hazim (2006) and Hasan & Akhand (2010), who indicate that final product focuses on the organisation of the ideas rather than the ideas themselves.

The importance of being able to write coherent paragraphs is an issue that generated some discussion in interviews. For example, one teacher explained that students cannot answer question number 3 before number 1 because they have been developed to be answered consecutively. She added:

Students are very good in cohesive devices (linking words) especially the students who are highly proficient. [*Female teacher 2*]

However, she mentioned that she rarely focuses on coherence. The studies done by Al-Hazmi (2006) and Hasan and Akhand (2010) also came to this conclusion. For example, both authors

agree that teachers tend to focus on linguistic features of learning to write in English. Thus, while some teachers indicate that organisation and coherence are important aspects of the writing process, in general this skill takes a back seat to sentence-level issues. Syntactic considerations are given preference over the organisation of ideas so that when they arrive at university they have not had adequate training in rhetorical writing.

This concern is highlighted by another teacher who mentioned that when he teaches third year students he asks them to write a paragraph focusing on both organisation and coherence:

I taught them how to use the topic sentence and how to write a paragraph in an organised and coherent way. I need them to learn how to write a paragraph before going to university. [*Male teacher 1*]

Generally, all the teachers agreed that they do not focus on developing ideas because they are not required to. When the interviewed teachers were asked about the objectives of teaching writing, some mentioned they only focus on creating a complete sentence with an emphasis on grammar and spelling. Other teachers claimed that their teaching objectives are indentation, capitalisation, underlining the title, and so forth.

It is important to note that the findings of the student questionnaires, student focus groups and teacher interviews revealed that procedural knowledge (unity, organisation, development of ideas, coherence and cohesion) has not been emphasised by teachers when teaching English in secondary schools. Furthermore, four teachers indicated they did not introduce these topics into their classroom. However, one of the interviewed teachers indicated that she did examine topic sentence and paragraph organisation. Another interviewed teacher stated that he teaches these themes to his students at the third year level, especially the highly proficient students. In short, although procedural knowledge was not mainly stressed in the Saudi secondary school curriculum, the students and teachers perceived that students would experience difficulties in using procedural knowledge in English writing.

4.8 Discussion: Difficulties in English Writing

The perceived difficulties in sentence-level English were similar to the perceived difficulties at the paragraph-level. The participants' responses indicated generating and incorporating topic sentences, organising paragraphs, generating and including supporting sentences, creating cohesion within a paragraph, and utilising cohesive devices were the biggest obstacles in their English writing. Similarly, other studies in the field have found the same factors to be barriers to writing English for second language learners (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Hasan and Akhand, 2010; Yang & Cahill, 2008). The development of ideas along with paragraph organisation, unity and coherence is regularly cited within the literature as a particular challenge (Abu Rass, 2015; Al-Kahtani, 2002; Asaoka & Usui, 2003; Doushaq, 1986; Faqeeh, 2003; Hu, 2005; Mojica, 2010). In the present study, the students' and teachers' responses indicate consistent difficulty in using the language. Focus group interviews illustrated that even though students were familiar with rules of grammar, putting that knowledge into practice proved difficult. The knowledge of English that the students have retained is mostly at the knowledge level as opposed to the deeper skill levels of analysing or creating key for generating coherent and meaningful texts (Williams, 2005). This is in line with Al-Mudibry and Ezza (2014) who point out that "it seems to have fallen on a deaf ear in the Arab world since writing course designers still belief in the acquisition of grammar as a key to the mastery of writing skills" (p.83).

It is important to note that the findings revealed that procedural knowledge has not been emphasised by teachers when teaching English in secondary schools despite the main goal of teaching writing skills in English curriculum in secondary schools is that students should be able to write an original essay (Al-Seghayer, 2011). It seems that there is a huge gap between the goals of teaching English in Saudi secondary schools and the classroom practices. However, the participating teachers justified the lack of teaching the procedural knowledge by indicating

that the curriculum does not mainly focus on these issues. The teachers confirmed that they had to follow the textbooks and teach as they are required to. Also, some teachers added that it seems impossible to teach these issues even if the curriculum focuses on them because they have no time, moreover, the students' proficiency is generally too low with most of the students being unable to write a complete sentence. An interesting issue to come out of the current research is the view by teachers that paragraph issues are not important because they are not on the curriculum. However, existing research shows that the organisation of ideas is a key skill in learning to write in English. Lack of prior training in this area could hinder students when they reach university level (Al-Hazami, 2006; Hasan & Akhand, 2010).

4.9 Conclusion

This section presented the analysis of the results of the main research question: *what are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?* The most prevalent issues, as perceived by both the students and their teachers are centred on writing paragraphs. The students' writing samples, however, revealed that there were also significant issues at the sentence level. The perceptions of the students and teachers were consistent with the findings from the writing samples demonstrating students have a major problem with spelling and using vocabulary correctly. There was some disagreement about the difficulties related to the use of verb tense, articles, prepositions, capitalisation and punctuation. While the students and teachers perceived difficulties in using verb tense, articles and prepositions correctly, the results of the writing samples revealed the opposite. In addition, while the students and teachers agreed that students could use capitalisation easily when writing in English, the actual writing samples showed that students made many errors. However, it is important to reiterate that only 191 students of 600 completed the writing sample paragraphs. Despite this, the findings indicated that many students experience problems when writing in English, but there was often a discrepancy in the data

shown by teacher interviews, student focus groups and students' actual writing as to what the difficulties are.

Chapter Five: Results and Discussion of Perceived Contributing Factors to English Writing Difficulties

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on analysis relating to the second research question: *What are the contributing factors perceived by students and teachers regarding the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?* The subsidiary questions will also be explored:

1. *Is there an association between **teaching practices** and **English writing difficulties**?*
2. *Is there an association between **L2 English writing strategies** and **English writing difficulties**?*
3. *Is there an association between **motivation** and **English writing difficulties**?*
4. *Is there an association between **anxiety** and **English writing difficulties**?*
5. *Is there an association between **L1 Arabic writing strategies** and **L2 English writing difficulties**?*

A student questionnaire, student focus groups and teacher interviews were used to answer this question. The information obtained from the quantitative data was integrated with themes from the qualitative data.

This chapter begins by presenting the results of the quantitative data. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to reduce the items on the questionnaire and uncover the possible underlying latent factors. Latent factors are underlying sources of variation that help explain or account for observed variance in individual items (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). When a latent factor is included in a factor analysis model, it helps to improve model fit and explain why certain items more strongly correlate with one another (de Winter & Dodou, 2012). Then, Measurement Model or Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was employed to test the final factor structure arrived at via the EFA. In the final stage, a hierarchical multivariable regression

analysis was used to examine the associations among the derived factors representing English writing difficulties and several predictor variables such as English writing strategies, teaching methods, motivation, anxiety and L1 writing strategies. In the final sections of this chapter, the second research question is explored, with its sub-questions examined separately using the qualitative data collected. Finally, each of the qualitative and quantitative findings will be discussed below in a summary section drawing on the relevant literature.

5.2 Results of the Quantitative Data

5.2.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).

An EFA was performed to examine the latent factor structure of the 53-item questionnaire. The original questionnaire was distributed to a randomly selected sample ($N = 600$); this sample of participants was split into two mixed-gender sub-samples ($N = 300$ each). The sample data from one half was analysed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The second half of the sample (also $N = 300$) was later analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analyses (CFA), to confirm the results found in the EFA.

A Principles Axis Factoring (PAF) version of EFA was conducted to ensure that the largest factors that explain the largest amount of the shared variance between items could be extracted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Obtained results from the EFA revealed that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was greater than the cut-off value ($KMO = .79$; Kaiser et al., 1974), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), providing further support for the use of EFA. An initial examination of the correlation coefficient matrix revealed that several coefficients between items were above the standard cut-off point of .32, indicating that the data were suitable for EFA. An inspection of the correlation matrix indicated a range of correlations from weak to moderate, however no items had correlations above .85 (Kline, 2005). A correlation above .85 is typically interpreted to indicate very high overlap between items, which suggests that some items are so similar as to be statistically indistinguishable from

one another (Kline, 2005). Since this was not found to be an issue in this dataset, analyses proceeded.

The initial factor solution was extracted using a principal axis factoring method examining over 53 items, and resulting in non-interpretable 14 factor solution (using the GK1 rule; see Section 3.10.1 for details). This initial factor solution was non-interpretable, meaning it did not sufficiently account for the variability in the data, as some items in the questionnaire were not loading onto any factors. Further scrutiny of the data revealed that nine items did not load onto the theoretical factors they were intended to (i.e., they exhibited low factor loadings, loaded onto a factor that was shared with no other items in the questionnaire, or loaded onto too many factors equally, with no clear statistical preference). These items were eliminated from further analysis due to their poor loadings, and to ensure that future iterations of the EFA yielded a stronger factor structure. After the nine items were removed, EFA analysis was re-conducted, as part of an iterative process. The results of repeated factor analysis, without nine items (again using principal axis factoring and direct oblimin oblique rotation) revealed 12 extracted factors (based on the GK1 rule; see Section 3.10.1 for details), which accounted for approximately 62 % of the overall explained variance. Inspection of the produced pattern matrix revealed that three items did not load onto specific factors, and thus they were also eliminated from further analysis. A third EFA was conducted with these three factors also removed. The results of the third factor analysis consisted of over 41 retained items (and again used principal axis factoring and direct oblimin oblique rotation). The results of this analysis revealed 10 extracted factors (using the GK1 rule), which accounted for approximately 60% of the overall explained variance (see results in Table 4 below). However, the results of Cattell's scree test suggested the use of 9 extracted factors (see Figure 9 below).

Table 4*Eigenvalues and % of explained variance*

Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Parallel analysis	
				95. percentile	Raw data
1	6.09	14.86	14.86	1.03	5.61
2	4.49	10.95	25.81	.90	4.09
3	2.94	7.18	32.99	.82	2.32
4	2.08	5.04	38.08	.76	1.51
5	1.95	4.77	42.85	.71	1.33
6	1.74	4.25	47.11	.65	1.22
7	1.45	3.54	50.65	.60	.86
8	1.36	3.25	53.91	.55	.80
9	1.26	3.07	56.99	.51	.69
10	1.07	2.62	59.61	.47	.47
11	.99	2.41	62.03	.43	.36

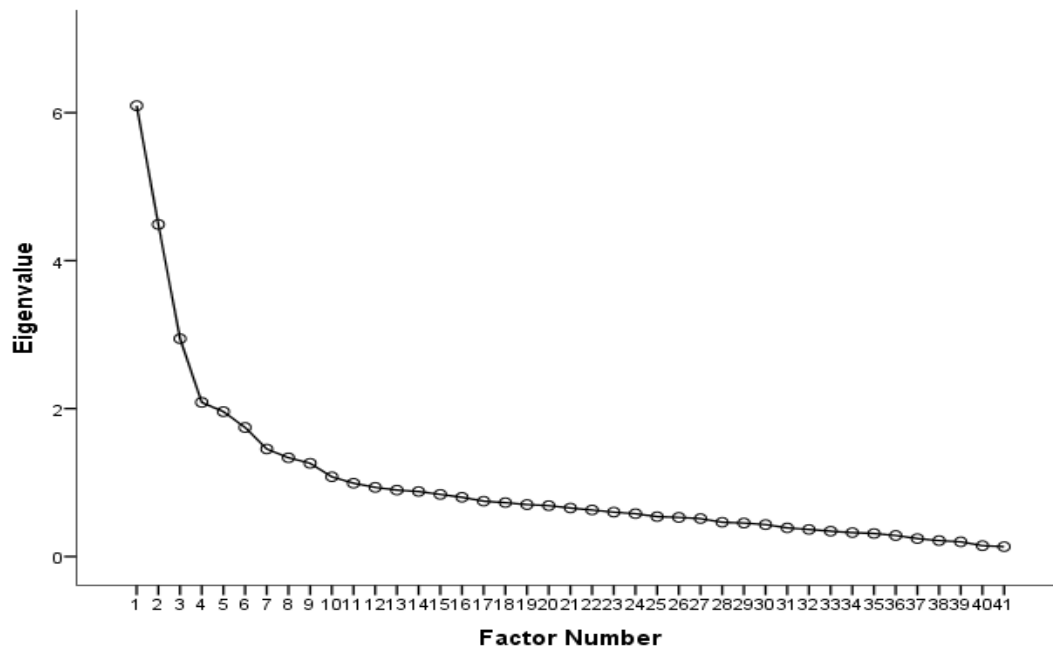


Figure 9. Graphic representation of extracted components

Further inspection of the produced pattern matrix showed that the last extracted factor was loaded only on one item, indicating that the tenth and final factor was not contributing to the overlying factor structure of the full pool of items. This led to the retention of 9-factor solution. The final forced 9-factor model EFA (again using principal axis factoring extraction; direct oblimin rotation) was conducted over the 41 retained items. The obtained results showed that the first extracted factor (see Table 5 below) was loaded with eight items, each describing sentence-level difficulties in English language. Loadings for this factor ranged from .34 - .71. Based on the researchers' review of the items' content, the first extracted component was named *Sentence-Level Difficulties* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$). Measures of inter-item reliability (Chronbach's alpha) were used to indicate the extent to which the items on a factor were correlated with one another (Loewenthal, 2004). Measures of inter-item reliability should reflect that items are strongly associated with one another (above at least 0.60; Loewenthal, 2004), but they should not be so strongly correlated (for example, .90), as to suggest that every item on the scale is measuring the exact same thing.

Table 5*Pattern matrix of the first extracted factor – Sentence-Level Difficulties*

Abv.	Item	r
D1	I find difficulty in using the English grammatical rules correctly in different contexts.	.57
D2	I find difficulty in using different verb tenses correctly in different contexts.	.61
D3	I find difficulty in using punctuation such as comma, semicolon, correctly in my writing.	.47
D4	I find difficulty in using English articles (a, an, the) correctly in my writing.	.71
D5	I find difficulty in using English prepositions correctly in different contexts.	.71
D6	I find difficulty in spelling English words correctly.	.39
D7	I find difficulty in using the appropriate words correctly in different contexts when writing in English.	.37
D12	I find difficulty in using the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or, however, therefore) correctly when writing a composition in English.	.34

The second extracted factor (shown in Table 6 below) was loaded with five items, which were specifically related to different teaching methods of appropriate paragraphing, with loadings in the range of .36 - .93. Based on the content of the items loading onto this factor, this component was named *Teaching Paragraphing* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

Table 6*Pattern matrix of the second extracted factor - Teaching Paragraphing*

Abv.	Item	r
T1	My teacher teaches me how to introduce the topic sentence in a paragraph.	.76
T2	My teacher teaches me how to write an organised paragraph.	.93
T3	My teacher teaches me how to develop the main idea(s) presented in the topic sentence by presenting supporting sentences.	.91
T4	My teacher teaches me how write a coherent paragraph.	.89
T5	My teacher teaches me how to correctly use the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or, however, therefore) when writing a composition in English.	.36

The third extracted factor (see Table 7 below) was loaded (.42 - .69) with five items referring to the special writings strategies in Arabic (first language). Due to the items' content, this factor was named as *L1 Writing Strategies* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$).

Table 7

Pattern matrix of the third extracted factor - L1 Writing Strategies

Abv.	Item	r
L1	I plan before I write in Arabic.	.42
L3	I generate my own sentences when I write in Arabic.	.60
L4	I mainly focus on grammar and spelling when I write in Arabic.	.59
L5	I mainly focus on developing ideas and conveying a meaningful message when I write in Arabic.	.69
L6	I practise writing in Arabic outside the classroom.	.54

The fourth extracted factor (shown in Table 8 below) was negatively loaded with only two items. These items referred to the providing assignment feedback, and due to the items' content, this factor was named as *Teacher Feedback* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Table 8

Pattern matrix of the fourth extracted factor - Teacher Feedback

Abv.	Item	r
T8	My teacher gives me feedback on my written assignments.	-.82
T9	My teacher corrects my assignments without giving feedback.	-.75

The fifth extracted factor (see Table 9 below) was exclusively loaded with five items referring to the different motivational aspects of language learning, with factor loadings between .48 - .57, and considering the items' content, it was named as *Motivation* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$).

Table 9*Pattern matrix of the fifth extracted factor - Motivation*

Abv.	Item	r
M1	Writing about irrelevant topics to my life is...	.52
M2	When the objectives of the writing lessons are not clear.	.48
M3	When my teacher uses the same routine of teaching techniques in teaching writing.	.49
M4	Writing a composition without being given an opportunity to generate my own sentences.	.52
M5	Writing about predetermined topics rather than about topics of my choice.	.57

The sixth extracted factor (see Table 10 below) was solely loaded (.43 - .69) with four items referring to the present anxiety when it comes to the English learning, and this component was named *Anxiety* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$).

Table 10*Pattern matrix of the sixth extracted factor - Anxiety*

Abv.	Item	r
A1	The thought of having my writing (in English) evaluated.	.43
A2	Focusing on writing an English composition free of spelling and grammar mistakes.	.69
A3	Focusing on writing an organised, united and coherent composition in English.	.64
A4	Answering the English composition question in the final exam.	.60

The seventh extracted factor (see Table 11 below) was loaded (.35 - .70) with four items describing different types of teacher's encouragement and subjective support in English writing, and this factor was named as *General Teaching Techniques* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$). Based on the content of the items, it was determined that "General Teaching Techniques" was an appropriate name because of the common ground shared between the four items.

Table 11*Pattern matrix of the seventh extracted factor - General Teaching Techniques*

Abv.	Item	r
T10	My teacher encourages me to generate my own sentences when I write in English.	.35
T11	My teacher varies his/her teaching techniques in teaching writing.	.70
T13	My teacher explains the objectives of the writing lessons at the beginning of the semester.	.54
T14	My teacher encourages me to practise writing in English outside the classroom.	.54

The eighth extracted factor (Table 12 below) was loaded (.52 - .85) with four items referring to the difficulties in different aspects of paragraph organisation when writing in English, and due to the items' content, this factor was named as *Paragraph-level difficulties* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).

Table 12*Pattern matrix of the eighth extracted factor – Paragraph-Level Difficulties*

Abv.	Item	r
D8	I find difficulty in writing the topic sentence which introduces the main idea of the paragraph.	.52
D9	I face difficulty in paragraph organisation which mainly has a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.	.67
D10	I face difficulty in writing supporting sentences for developing main idea(is) presented in the topic sentence when writing in English.	.85
D11	I find difficulty in paragraph coherence which means ideas flow smoothly and one sentence lead to another easily and logically.	.79

Finally, the ninth extracted factor (Table 13 below) was loaded (.42 - .57) with four items. Each item in this factor referred to the different writing strategies in English language, and due to the items' content, this factor was named *English writing strategies*. Inter-item

reliability for this factor was assessed and found to be appropriate (Cronbach's $\alpha = .58$; indicating that the items share nearly 60% of their variance).

Table 13

Pattern matrix of the ninth extracted component - English Writing Strategies

Abv.	Item	r
S3	I mainly revise the spelling and grammar of my written composition.	.57
S5	I memorise the predetermined topics in the textbook to answer the English composition question in the final exam.	.42
S7	I transfer the process (planning, drafting and revising) used when I write my Arabic to when I write in English.	.47
S8	When I write an English composition, I write and/or think in the sentence in Arabic and then translate it into English.	.46

5.2.2 Confirmatory factor analysis.

As mentioned earlier (see Section 5.2.1 above), to confirm that EFA results are replicable, it is necessary to reproduce them in a separate sample using Confirmatory Factor Analyses. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by imposing a pre-determined factor structure on the existing pool of items, to determine whether that factor structure adequately explained the shared variance in the items. This confirmatory model consisted of nine factors: *Sentence-Level Difficulties* – 8 items; *Teaching Paragraphing* – 5 items; *L1 Writing Strategies* – 5 items; *Teacher Feedback* – 2 items; *Motivation* – 5 items; *Anxiety* – 4 items; *General Teaching Techniques* – 4 items; *Paragraph-Level Difficulties* – 4 items and; *English Writing Strategies* – 4 items. In the first set of calculations, all components were correlated, and none of the residuals were correlated. The fit statistics associated with this model were: $\chi^2 (783) = 1198.32, p < .001$; CFI = .91; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .04 (.04 – .05); and SRMR = .06 (for additional information on the meaning of these fit statistics, see Section 3.10.2). Further investigation of modification indices (MI) suggested that the quality of the model's fit could be improved by allowing the statistical program to freely generate its own estimates of the

associations between error terms of several item pairs (Steiger, 2007). In other words, some individual items on the questionnaire were found to be more closely associated with one another than other pairs of items were. By modifying the settings for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, it was possible to control for any strong correlations between two items that were assumed by the model to be caused by random chance (Steiger, 2007). After these modifications, the calculated fit statistics were: $\chi^2 (779) = 1115.26$, $p < .001$; CFI = .93; TLI = .92; RMSEA = .04 (.03 – .04); and SRMR = .05.

The results of the performed EFA and CFA imply that the 9 factor solution is robust and reproducible, as it was found organically in the initial 300-student sample and reproduced with high fit indices in the second 300-student sample.

5.2.2.1 Confirmatory factor analysis of English writing difficulties model. The obtained results (with EFA and CFA) suggested two factors which could relate to the English writing difficulties (EWD): *Sentence-Level Difficulties* and *Paragraph-Level Difficulties*. Since these factors exclusively describe difficulties in English writing, a general confirmatory model of EWD was tested (see Table 14 below for a list of the individual items in this model, and their factor loadings). The fit statistics associated with this model were: $\chi^2 (41) = 96.13$, $p < .001$; CFI = .97; TLI = .97; RMSEA = .05 (.04 – .07); and SRMR = .03. In evaluating the fit indices for a CFA, it is useful to remember that a non-significant χ^2 test and values of CFI, TLI, and GFI greater than .95 suggest the model fits the data well (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Values of RMSEA and SRMR less than .05 indicate a close-fit, though values up to 0.70 remain acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007). The fit indexes of EWD model suggested a very good model fit, which additionally imply that the aforementioned factors could also be observed as a part of more general dimension of English writing difficulties.

Table 14

Standardised regression loadings: two-factor model of EWD

Subscales' items	λ
<i>Sentence-Level Difficulties</i>	
I find difficulty in using the English grammatical rules correctly in different contexts.	.74
I find difficulty in using different verb tenses correctly in different contexts.	.75
I find difficulty in using punctuation such as comma, semicolon, correctly in my writing.	.55
I find difficulty in using English articles (a, an, the) correctly in my writing.	.68
I find difficulty in using English prepositions correctly in different contexts.	.71
I find difficulty in spelling English words correctly.	.77
I find difficulty in using the appropriate words correctly in different contexts when writing in English.	.71
I find difficulty in using the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or, however, therefore) correctly when writing a composition in English.	.68
<i>Paragraph-Level Difficulties</i>	
I find difficulty in writing the topic sentence which introduces the main idea of the paragraph.	.77
I face difficulty in paragraph organisation which mainly has a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence.	.85
I face difficulty in writing supporting sentences for developing main idea(s) presented in the topic sentence when writing in English.	.77
I find difficulty in paragraph coherence which means ideas flow smoothly and one sentence lead to another easily and logically.	.73

In the following analysis, these two factors will be considered as a part of EWD dimension.

5.2.2.2 Confirmatory factor analysis of teaching practices model. The results obtained with the previously conducted EFA and CFA suggested a 9 factor solution of factors affecting English writing. Since several distinct factors are loaded with items describing different types and techniques of teaching practices (TP), a confirmatory model of teaching practices was tested. In the TM model, three correlated factors were included (*Teaching Paragraphing*, *Teacher Feedback*, and *General Teaching Techniques*) and the following fit statistics associated with this model were obtained: $\chi^2 (41) = 80.40, p < .001$; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; RMSEA = .05 (.04 – .07); and SRMR = .05. These fit indices met conventional fit standards, with CFI, TLI, and GFI values greater than .95, and values of RMSEA and SRMR less than .05 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Steiger, 2007). The fit indexes of TP model suggested a good model fit, which additionally could imply that the aforementioned separate factors could also be observed as a part of more general dimension of teaching practices (see Table 15 below for a list of the items in this factor and their factor loadings, all of which are above .40, suggesting moderate to high fit).

Table 15

Standardised regression loadings: three-factor model of TP

Subscales' items	λ
<i>Teaching Paragraphing</i>	
My teacher teaches me how to introduce the topic sentence in a paragraph.	.68
My teacher teaches me how to write an organised paragraph.	.90
My teacher teaches me how to develop the main idea(s) presented in the topic sentence by presenting supporting sentences.	.92
My teacher teaches me how write a coherent paragraph.	.92
My teacher teaches me how to correctly use the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or, however, therefore) when writing composition in English.	.42
<i>Teacher Feedback</i>	
My teacher gives me feedback on my written assignments.	1.04
My teacher corrects my assignments without giving feedback.	.69

Table 15*Standardised regression loadings: three-factor model of TP*

Subscales' items	λ
<i>General Teaching Techniques</i>	
My teacher encourages me to generate my own sentences when I write in English.	.61
My teacher varies his/her teaching techniques in teaching writing.	.53
My teacher explains the objectives of the writing lessons at the beginning of the semester.	.53
My teacher encourages me to practise writing in English outside the classroom.	.52

In the following analysis, these three factors will be considered as a part of TP dimension.

5.2.2.3 Descriptive statistics of factors affecting English writing. Composite scores for each of the used subscales were calculated (EWD was calculated as a composite of two, and TP as a composite of three subscales). Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*), and measures of the variables' normality are presented in Table 16 below. Univariate skewness and kurtosis had acceptable values (an absolute skew values were < 2 , and an absolute kurtosis values were < 7). Tolerance values ranged from .87 to .96 (VIF values were in range 1.09 - 1.14; absolute VIF values were < 10), suggesting that individual items were strongly associated, but not excessively so.

Table 16*Descriptive statistics for the study variables (N = 600)*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Writing Difficulties	43.35	10.46	-.51	-.26
Teaching Practices	27.49	9.25	.47	-.46
English Writing Strategies	15.81	4.10	-.40	-.09
L1 Writing Strategies	19.36	4.45	-.95	.71
Motivation	13.63	6.34	.58	-.33
Anxiety	21.24	7.28	-.55	-.43

5.2.2.4 Correlations between the subscales.

Pearson product-moment correlations between the subscales were calculated (see Table 17 below for correlation coefficients). The obtained results suggest that the factor of English Writing Difficulties is negatively correlated with almost all of the extracted components. These results indicate that as Teaching Practices, English Writing Strategies, and Motivation increase, English writing difficulties decrease. It is also shown that English Writing Difficulties is not significantly correlated with L1 Writing Strategies ($r = -.05, p > .05$), indicating there is no significant relationship between those two subscales. Finally, English Writing Difficulties is positively correlated with Anxiety ($r = .27, p < .01$), indicating that high levels of English Writing Difficulty are associated with high levels of Anxiety.

Table 17*Correlations between composite of English Writing Difficulties and other subscales*

	TP	L1WS	EWS	M	A
EWD	-.18*	-.05	-.35*	-.19*	.27*

Note. * $p < .01$; TP – Teaching Practices; EWD – English Writing Difficulties; L1WS – L1 Writing Strategies; EWS – English Writing Strategies; M – Motivation; A – Anxiety.

5.2.2.5 Predictors of English writing difficulties. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to determine how much of the variance in the English Writing Difficulties (EWD) composite subscale was explained by the dimensions of: the teaching practices (TP), English writing strategies (EWS), and affective components (AC; i.e. motivation and anxiety). Predictors were entered in the following steps: Step 1 – teaching practices; Step 2 – English writing strategies; Step 3 – motivation and anxiety (see Table 13 above). Since the role of TP in prediction of EWD needs clarification, TP scores were entered first. In order to examine the independent contribution of EWS in explanation of the EWD, EWS scores were entered in the second step. As such, in the first step of the equation only TP scores were used as a predictor; in the second step, both TP and EWS were included as predictors. This allowed the researcher to compare two versions of the model to evaluate the impact that including EWS in the model has on the model's overall predictive power (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Table 18 below shows that all of the tested regression models were significant. Teaching practices was a significant predictor of the English writing difficulties ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$) in the first regression model, and in second model ($\beta = -.09, p < .05$). English writing strategies also emerged as a significant predictor of English writing difficulties ($\beta = -.32, -.34; p < .001$), but L1 writing strategies was not a significant predictor ($p > .05$). Finally, the affective components were also a significant predictors of English writing difficulties ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = -.12, \beta_{\text{Anxiety}} = .25; p < .001$).

Table 18

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses: the TM, LS, and AC dimensions as predictors of the EWD (N = 600).

Variable	B	SE	B	T
Step 1	$R=.18, R^2=.033, F(1, 598) = 20.47^*$			
TP	-.20	.04	-.18	-4.52*
Step 2	$R=.37, R^2=.137, F(3, 596) = 31.45^*$			
TP	-.11	.04	-.09	-2.41**
EWS	-.87	.10	-.34	-8.34*
L1WS	.10	.09	.04	1.10
Step 3	$R=.46, R^2=.214, F(5, 594) = 32.40^*$			
TP	-.05	.04	-.05	-1.24
EWS	-.82	.10	-.32	-8.22*
L1WS	.04	.09	.02	.48
M	-.20	.06	-.12	-3.24*
A	.36	.05	.25	6.86*

Note. $*p < .01$, $**p < .05$; TP – Teaching Practices; EWS – English Writing Strategies; L1WS – L1 Writing Strategies; M – Motivation; A – Anxiety

In the present study, a questionnaire for the measurement of English Writing Difficulties was employed, and the proposed component structure was verified with EFA and CFA. Several research questions were proposed as follows:

- The first question (proposing that there is a significant association between Teaching Practices and English Writing Difficulties) was confirmed, given that the negative Pearson's correlation between these constructs was significant.
- The second question (suggesting that there is a significant association between English Writing Strategies and English Writing Difficulties) was also confirmed, given that the negative correlation between these constructs was significant.

- The third question (proposing that there is a significant association between L1 Writing Strategies and English Writing Difficulties) was *not* confirmed, since the results revealed no significant correlation between these two constructs.
- The fourth question (suggesting that there is a significant association between Motivation and English Writing Difficulties) was also confirmed, since the negative correlation between the constructs was significant.
- The fifth question (that there is a significant association between Anxiety and English Writing Difficulties) was confirmed, since the positive correlation between the constructs was significant.

The following sections will explore how these proposed questions can be further understood through the qualitative data.

5.3 Exploring the Proposed Questions Through Qualitative Data

5.3.1 Teaching practices.

The findings of the quantitative data revealed that teaching methodology is negatively correlated with students' difficulty in English writing. All the students in the focus groups clearly indicated that the way they are taught constitutes one of the major factors contributing to students' problems in their English writing.

5.3.1.1 Teaching language function. Specifically, all the students in the focus groups claimed that the un-engaging nature of their teachers' teaching practices is one reason for their problems in grammar and vocabulary. They maintained that their teachers usually do not encourage them to correctly apply the grammatical rules and vocabulary in different contexts.

The following statements demonstrate how grammar is taught and learned:

Teachers do not teach us how to use the grammatical rules. We just know the rules and how to answer them in the exam. We don't apply the rules. We just know that if you are faced with this, then that is what you put. For

example, if you find the word “now”, you choose or put the verb with “ing”. [3rd year level female student]

We learn the grammar separately from writing. They do not teach us how to use the grammatical rules we have learned in written composition. Therefore, we face problems in using the verbs correctly especially the irregular ones. [2nd year level male student 1]

In support of the students’ views about teaching practices, one of the teachers admitted that he was to blame for his students’ difficulties in English writing. When he was asked why his students couldn’t use irregular verbs correctly, he stated:

I think it is because of the teacher. We haven’t asked them to memorise these verbs and apply them in sentences. [Male teacher 2]

Another teacher openly attributed her students’ difficulties in grammar to her own teaching methods, and the fact that she did not encourage them to apply the rules:

Although they learn most of the grammatical rules before, they still do not know how to use them correctly. I think it is because we do not encourage them to practise the rules in different contexts. For example, they studied the rule of “if” conditional sentence last year, it seems that they have not learned them. [Female teacher 1]

In addition to the lack of learning English grammar functionally, all students agreed that their teachers usually introduce new words in a list on the board, indicating that this way of teaching prevented them from improving their English vocabulary. They explained that although they usually memorise the words, they cannot use them in different contexts:

He [the teacher] usually writes the words in a list and then he asks us whether we know it. Then he translates it. Sometimes he specifies the most important words in the reading passage by asking us to underline them and then he tells us what they mean. The problem is that we do not know how to use the words correctly in sentences. [1st year level male student]

Our problem is not in recognising the meaning of the words. Rather, it is how to use the words correctly in different functions. For example, we took a new word today. It is the word “material”. I think all of us know its meaning but if you ask us to use it in a sentence, we would not know how.
[1st year level female level]

In line with these observations, the teachers indicated that they introduce the words on the board in a list, sometimes ask students to underline the new words in a passage. One teacher explained how he teaches English vocabulary:

I ask them to underline the strange words. Then I write them in a list on the board, and then ask some good students to read them. And then I ask them to guess their meanings. Then if they don't know I tell them what they mean and they write it down. *[Male teacher 1]*

Two teachers noted they sometimes use pictures and flashcards to introduce the meaning of words. One commented:

I show them the pictures, flash cards, some materials and use body language to introduce the new words. They like my way of teaching vocab and they like guessing the meaning until they get the right meaning. They say the meaning in Arabic and then write the words and their meanings in their notebook. *[Female teacher 1]*

These two statements reflect the emphasis on vocabulary recognition and memorisation of meaning. The first is positioned within a text, the “strange” words and their meanings are highlighted. The second teacher mentions using visual stimuli and gestures to introduce vocabulary. Both teachers encourage students to make guesses. It seems that these practices are engaging in themselves. Not unexpectedly, both students and teachers indicated that the capacity of students to apply their vocabulary knowledge by using it in writing is a more active use of vocabulary, distinct from vocabulary recognition.

5.3.1.2 Memorisation. As far as teaching vocabulary and grammar is concerned, all students blamed their teachers for mainly encouraging them to memorise and translate the rules of grammar and the new words without using them in different contexts. Memorisation appears to be the main method for learning vocabulary. According to two students:

We just memorise "by heart" the words specified by the teacher and then translate them. We do not know how to use them. When the teacher just changes a word, we ask her "Where is the word?" We cannot answer the question because she changed the question. We memorised, for example, a true and false question. If she changes a word, we do not know whether it is true or false. [2nd year level female student 1]

Teachers just want us to memorise. Learning English is based on memorisation. Since we started learning English in the elementary school, we just memorise the grammatical rules and vocabulary without practicing. [2nd year level male student 3]

These comments show that some teachers use a straightforward substitution pattern drill, replacing one word with another that they expect the students to have already memorised. Using this way of teaching vocabulary would indicate that students have not been encouraged to generate their own sentences.

The interviewed teachers justified their method of teaching vocabulary by stating that they expected their students to memorise the new words in isolation because the education system is largely based on multiple-choice tests. However, one teacher expressed her frustration with students' lack of engagement with memorisation. She said that:

I ask them to memorise the words and their meanings for the final exam rather than to master the language. A student who would like to master the language would be able to memorise the words without being told how to do so. [Female teacher 2]

As indicated above, memorisation seems to be the main strategy for learning grammar and vocabulary which, without the complementary process of original production of writing or

speaking, would inhibit students from constructing their own sentences. Therefore, all students in the focus groups reported that the difficulties they encountered in creating their own written English sentences were attributable to their teachers' practices. One student described the process in this way:

We do not know how to create our own sentences because the teacher did not encourage us to do that. We just copy and paste. [*1st male year level student 2*]

In support of the students' assertions, the teachers indicated that they did not give the students an opportunity to form their own written English sentences. However, they gave two reasons for this. Firstly, the teachers perceived that the curriculum did not encourage students to form their own sentences. Secondly, they stated that they lacked sufficient time to develop this skill in their students and give them feedback on what they write, due to large class sizes. This lack of feedback, as discussed below in the section on motivation, was perceived by students as having a negative influence on their English writing skills. One student stated:

We always copy and paste without understanding and knowing that there is a mistake in grammar or spelling. What makes it difficult is that the teacher does not check whether we write correctly or not. If he checks, he just walks around and gives us a mark for completing the homework or collects our notebooks and then just signs it without reading what we wrote and giving feedback on it. [*2nd year male level student 3*]

5.3.1.3 Focusing on exams. Furthermore, the students criticised their teachers for merely focusing on exam preparation. One of the students contended:

I think our problem in learning English is that we just study to pass the exam. The knowledge we have is always forgotten after finishing the final exam. [*3rd year level female student 2*]

All teachers agreed they do in fact teach mostly for the final examinations. They justified this on the grounds that the education system is test-driven. Teachers also blamed the

students as well, stating that the students themselves did not want to take their English learning further. One teacher commented:

I feel they [students] are careless and I have a feeling that most of them don't want to learn. They just want to pass the exam. [*Male teacher 3*]

Another teacher mentioned:

The students just focus on the exam because our system focuses on the exam. They always ask me this question: is this lesson or question important for the final exam? [*Female teacher 1*]

The above comments reveal that the education system in Saudi Arabia appears to be test-driven. This may indicate that teachers concentrate on teaching the students how to give the right answer in the exam, so that the teacher would do most of the answer preparation for the students. This has implications for the role of students in their learning processes. Students just care about the right answer to be able to use it in the exam and may simply memorise these as a learning strategy. This also raises the question of whether students have an active role where they reflect on what they learn or just passively listen to the teacher and focus on the right answers for the final exam. The data analysis supports the latter.

5.3.1.4 Passive role. The students criticised their teachers' way of teaching them English in general, and writing in particular. However, some students did question the nature of their own role in their learning process. One student stated:

I am wondering what our roles are although we always hear that the student is the central aspect of learning. [*3rd year level male student 2*]

Essentially, the students claimed that they lacked an active role in their own learning process, blaming the teachers for this. One student asserted:

The teacher explains everything. We do nothing and we don't practise. The teacher does not give us the chance to participate, to create our own examples by writing them on the board. [*1st year level male student 1*]

Similar comments were made by the 3rd year level female students:

Student 3: The problem lies in the teacher unfortunately. She does everything.

Student 1: She explains the grammatical rules and simply gives examples.

Student 2: We just listen and try to understand. For example, we just correct the verb.

Student 3: We just add “ing” or change the verb from passive to active or from past to present or make a tag question.

The teachers concurred that they rarely give their students the chance to have an active role, stating that the curriculum does not encourage this process, for instance by forming their own sentences or using the new words in their own examples. As stated earlier, they believed that the education system mainly focuses on examinations and student final marks. Teachers blamed this shortcoming on school principals and the superintendents of English teachers, because they instruct the teachers to cover all matters as indicated in the curriculum.

5.3.2 Discussion: Teaching practices.

The findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between the teaching practices and the difficulties experienced by students. This suggests that teaching practices have an impact on the perceptions students have of their difficulties in writing English. These findings are in agreement with the research findings, although most studies mainly focus on the relationship between teaching practices and students’ achievement. The present study is in line with a number of existing studies, such as Baghaei and Riasati (2013) and Haider & Hussain (2014). Similarly, in some respects, the present study concurs with Bijami et al. (2016), who found evidence to support a correlation between student performance and the written feedback delivered by the teacher.

The quantitative findings of this study were supported by the qualitative data obtained from the focus groups and teacher interviews. All of the students in the focus groups cited their teachers as the main reason for their problems. They argued that teachers did not give adequate opportunities to practise English communicatively in different real life situations and only

encouraged memorisation of grammatical rules and isolated vocabulary. They also highlighted that teachers are only focussed on exams and students have passive roles in the class. These findings suggest that the teaching is teacher-centred, with teachers controlling the classroom and directing all of the activities whilst students passively memorise and copy what the teacher writes on the board. This explanation is supported by a number of indications. Firstly, teachers seem to mainly focus on the final product and the linguistic issues. In other words, they consciously focus on teaching students to have a correct text in a final correct product which is free of grammatical and mechanical mistakes, such as spelling and punctuation. This demonstrates that teachers do not encourage the students to use language communicatively or fluently. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the teachers encourage students to memorise, copy and imitate the texts to make sure that they have a correct final product. This focus on memorisation and imitation seems to be for preparing the students for the final exam. The students and their teachers agreed that the focus of learning and teaching English is on preparing the students for the final exam. This indicates that the education system is systemically test-driven. It appears that teachers are forced to allocate particular time to teaching test-taking skills and training learners on multiple choice questions. As a result, students will likely to be less motivated for communicative competence and will want merely to pass the final exam.

These findings are consistent with the literature in the field that cite teacher-centered learning as a reason for EFL learners being unable to speak fluently in English or compose original texts (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Mousavi & Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011). Teacher-centred classrooms do not encourage students to develop a voice in their additional language and often focus on language form as opposed to rhetorical elements of writing (Brown, 2007; Halimah, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Naghdipour, 2016; Nunan, 1999; Zhang and Liu, 2014). Specific research

in the Saudi context highlights teaching styles as a key factor in the difficulties associated with Saudi students developing effective vocabularies (Al-Hazmi, 2006; Elyas & Picard, 2010).

Interestingly, the findings of this study revealed that the teachers admitted that they use teacher-centred styles and are not happy with what they are doing. However, they justified these practices on the basis of having an education system which focuses on exams. They also blamed the superintendents of English teachers and the principals of schools who only care about covering the syllabus. The teachers reported that it is hard for them to cover the entire syllabus if the students are given the chance to practise their English. This is supported by the findings of the qualitative data which indicated most of the schools have large class sizes containing 40-45 students. Therefore, teachers believe that using teacher-centred styles help them finish the syllabus and satisfy their superintendents and principals. This explanation is echoed in the work of others in the field that highlight that the teaching of English in an EFL context primarily focuses on grammar translation methods (GTM) and teacher-centred pedagogies (Nunan, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nunan, 1999). Scheffler (2013) argues that translation alone cannot help EFL learners mastering English writing. However, Harmer (2007) points out that teachers tend to use GTM because some textbooks and tests are in the format of GTM. Graves (2000) states that many EFL teachers are forced to follow the textbooks and they have no freedom to introduce activities that could better meet students' needs.

However, some researchers such as Brown (2007) point out that some EFL teachers tend to use GTM because they may lack the ability to use communicative teaching approaches due to their own weakness in English and the lack of training. The findings of the present study support this assertion as students emphasised that most teachers use their L1 in most of the class time, and they suggested that teachers should improve their teaching practices and get language instruction training. Interestingly, all the teachers advocated for having more training sessions especially in teaching writing.

Although the textbooks and the teaching practices, as related by teachers and students, concentrates on grammar students still face difficulties in using grammar correctly. This seems to be attributed to the lack of using the grammatical rules functionally. Williams (2005) and Hyland (2003) argue that knowledge about grammar is not enough to enable learners to use their English communicatively.

As indicated above, teaching practices contribute to the perceived writing difficulties. Teaching practices focus on teaching linguistic issues such as grammar and spelling, and also a teacher's role is to control the classroom activities where students passively memorise, translate and imitate a written model. These writing strategies, such as memorisation and imitation, are perceived, by students and teachers, to be another source of the difficulties in English writing. The findings and discussions of these writing strategies will be presented below.

5.3.3 English writing strategies.

As indicated earlier, the statistical results revealed that English writing strategies were negatively correlated with English writing difficulties. The qualitative findings supported the quantitative results. The major themes emerging from the qualitative data were planning, drafting and revising, memorisation, imitation and translation.

5.3.3.1 Planning. About 62% of the students in the questionnaire perceived they never plan when they write. Consistently, the students in the focus groups reported that they never plan what they write because they do not create their own paragraphs. They just copy and paste predetermined texts. One student remarked:

I start writing without planning and without thinking about the topic sentence. I just imitate the written model without understanding what and why to write. [*3rd year level male student 1*]

All teachers indicated that they do not ask their students to plan their writing task before they commence. One teacher commented:

There is no need for strategies such as planning and brainstorming because students do not create their ideas. [*Female teacher 3*]

The comments above indicate that students mostly never plan for their ideas. This is not surprising as the students only copy and paste written models. However, although the students interviewed for the present study perceived they never plan, they indicated that they sometimes draft twice (i.e. they edit the first draft to correct errors). Although drafting can be considered a part of planning (Hyland, 2003), the students' focus, in this study, was not on ideas but on checking grammar and spelling mistakes.

5.3.3.2 Drafting and revising. The findings indicate that 11 out of 18 (61%) students stated they draft their work twice, revising their writings to reduce mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Two students explained how they drafted and revised their work as described here:

I write the paragraph on a separate sheet of paper and make sure there are no spelling errors. Then, I copy it into the notebook to be corrected by the teacher. I drafted my writing to make sure there are no errors so that I can memorise them for the final exam. [*1st year level male student 1*]

We revise our writings so that we can make sure we have the right version to be memorised for the final exam. We focus on spelling, grammar, punctuation, capital letters and indentation. [*3rd year level female student 2*]

These comments demonstrate that students focus the final product by revising the linguistic issues such as grammar and spelling when they write in English. Generally, the teachers required students to draft their work in two versions. All stated they always remind their students to copy correctly and revise it so that they can answer the composition question

in the final exam. This could be an opportunity for students to reflect on their progress and engage more fully with the learning process, but statements from the interviews reveal that these opportunities are rarely taken up. According to two teachers:

They have two drafts. After I correct the first one they rewrite the final one to be ready for the final exam. [*Male teacher 1*]

Some students care about the errors in their writing so that they revise their writing. They care because of the final exam. [*Male teacher 2*]

However, some students were accustomed to copying and pasting and did not see the need for having a draft:

We do not write. I mean we do not create our own ideas and sentences. We just imitate copy and paste, and there is no need for drafting. [*2nd year female student 3*]

This student simply reproduced a text without thinking about it. The following example indicates how students reproduce a well memorised and correct passage, by redrafting it, rather than an original redrafted text. Little reflection takes place.

The teacher always asks us to copy what he has written correctly. Therefore, I copy the paragraph in the notebook using the pencils because if I make mistakes in spelling or grammar I can correct them. After that, I use the pen to highlight what I have written by the pencil. [*2nd year level female student 3*]

The last comment may indicate that students do not have confidence in what they write so that they copy and revise what they copied. This is supported by teachers who perceive that although students copy from the board, they make mistakes in grammar and spelling. One teacher commented:

I never allow them to write because they spend much time in writing and make many mistakes in spelling. This takes time and wastes class time. This is why I have to write it myself and then they copy it. I just let them speak and answer the questions. [*Female teacher 1*]

However, one student pointed out that in addition to focusing on the linguistic and mechanical issues, she concentrated on the organisation of the paragraph she writes.

I revise my writing by concentrating on indentation, spelling, grammar, and the order of sentences that we create by answering specific questions.

[2nd year female student]

In accordance with this focus on paragraph organisation, one teacher mentioned that she structures the sequence of sentences in the paragraph by setting some writing tasks that require students to answer some specific questions:

I ask the students to focus on the order of the questions. They answer the questions orally. Then I write the answers to these questions in a paragraph on the board. Then the students copy them in their notebooks. *[Female teacher 2]*

This comment indicated that although some students focus on paragraph organisation when writing in English, it seems this focus is not on the development of ideas. Rather, it is on the order of the answers of the questions to make a paragraph so that it could be memorised for the final exam.

Collectively, the student focus groups and teacher interviews revealed that the aim of drafting and revising was always to refine the written version, so that it could be memorised for the final exam. In doing this, the focus seems to be on imitation and memorisation, two other common strategies for students, which are explained in more detail below.

5.3.3.3 Imitation. Both students and teachers agreed that the students' role in writing is simply to imitate a written model, although all students commented they do not like it because it does not improve their writing, two female students from the 1st year level described why they prefer production and creation:

The problem is in writing, because we do not practise. We never create our own compositions like in the third year in the intermediate school. We created our composition about our friend. The teacher gave us helping words but we had to write them ourselves. It was very good because we

practised and did not have to memorise as we do in the secondary stage.
[Student 1]

I think our problem in learning English is that we just study to pass the exam. Our job is to imitate a model and copy it without understanding what we write. [Student 2]

When students were asked about how their teacher teaches paragraph writing, one remarked:

We read it and he explains what it means and then if some new words appear he asks about the meaning. Then he asks us to write it as a homework task. [3rd year level male student]

Although teachers suggested a more effective strategy, which is discussed below, all teachers consistently indicated that imitation is not an effective strategy to help students improve their English writing. However, they explained that the curriculum and the teacher's guidebook require them to do so:

There is one model in each writing lesson. I explain how the paragraph is composed from the table which has helping words and some phrases. Students are asked to write another one on another topic by using the same techniques. The student's role is just to copy and paste, and change some words such as numbers, names, etc. [Female teacher 3]

5.3.3.4 Memorisation of passages. Similar to imitation, memorisation was another strategy used by students when writing in English. Al-Mohanna (2010), states that Saudi students learn receptively by memorisation and translation. The results of the student questionnaires revealed that around 68% (407 out of 600) of the students perceived that they always or often memorise the predetermined topics discussed in the textbooks. In support of the quantitative findings, the student focus groups and teacher interviews indicated that the main strategy students deploy in their writing is memorisation. Below is an example of a conversation between the 1st male students in their focus group on this issue:

Student 3: We memorise it [the text] and how to answer it in the exam.

Student 2: The English subject mostly depends on memorisation rather than understanding or creation. We have been taught to memorise.

Student 1: We memorise some things without understanding them. The teacher herself encourages us to memorise the grammatical rules.

The students agreed that memorisation is not an effective strategy for learning English generally, and neither will it improve their writing:

The reason for our problems is we unfortunately just memorise the paragraphs which are already specified by the teacher. She told us to memorise this and this. One of them will be in the exam. So, we memorise without understanding and we just want to pass the exam. [*2nd year level female student 2*]

The teachers agreed that they encourage their students to memorise predetermined texts on specific topics. The teachers also claimed that memorising in this way will not help students improve their English writing. However, they follow the prescribed methods so students get good grades. One teacher explained:

I know specifying some topics and encouraging students to memorise them is wrong. I always say that to my colleagues that what we do is wrong and we destroy their English but what can we do? We cannot destroy their future. They need to pass and get high grades. If we assume that we could let them compose their own paragraphs, they would get low grades. This would affect my performance because the principal of the school and the supervisor would ask me why the students get low grades. This is why I specify some paragraphs and words for the girls so that they are able to pass the exam, get high grades, and I avoid any criticism from the principal and supervisor. Also, the girls are mostly good in maths and physics, etc., but they face many difficulties in English. This is why I do not want English to affect their GPA negatively. [*Female teacher 3*]

When students were asked whether they can create their own sentences in the exam if they do not memorise or forget what they have memorised, one answered:

Impossible, we have not practised that and it is very difficult. We are not required to create our own sentences. We just do what our teacher asks us to do. *[3rd year level female student 1]*

All the teachers believed that their students could not create their compositions themselves because it is too difficult for them, whereas all teachers perceived memorisation as easy for students. One teacher commented:

The students have not been taught to create their sentences. They did not practise writing on their own. If they cannot create a sentence correctly, how would they create a composition in English? *[Male teacher 3]*

Consistent with these teachers' views, one student did show an interest in the memorisation strategy. He commented:

I like memorisation because it is easier for me. I do not think memorisation will improve my writing. If we create our own sentences, we will make many mistakes because we are not sure about the words we use. *[3rd year level male student 3]*

However, while this statement indicates that the students memorise predetermined passages to avoid mistakes in class rather than improve their skills in English writing, this strategy was not as easy for all students as teachers perceived. One student commented:

I just put the word "and" between the helping verbs given by the teacher when answering the composition question. I have no choices as it is hard to memorise all the paragraphs. *[2nd year level male student 3]*

Three students said they do not memorise the predetermined passages because the composition question in the exam is a paragraph with missing words and multiple choices are provided to fill the blanks:

We don't memorise all the paragraphs. We just memorise specific things in the paragraph because we will not write it in the exam. It is multiple choice question. *[2nd year level male student 1]*

All in all, there is an association between the lack of employing effective L2 strategic processes in writing and English writing difficulties among Saudi students. Both students and teachers concur about the shortcomings of using strategies such as imitation and memorisation during the learning and teaching process. The students blame the teacher and the teachers blame the curriculum and its assessment method.

5.3.4 Discussion: English writing strategies.

The present study showed that there was a negative correlation between perceived English writing strategies and perceived English writing difficulties. In other words, the more students use 'effective' English writing strategies, the fewer difficulties the students will have in their English writing. This seems to be consistent with the results of a number of studies such as Hammad (2013) and Rao (2007). Using questionnaires and interviews, Hammad, (2013) found a strong correlation between writing strategies and writing performance. The quantitative results in this study were supported by the findings from the students' focus groups and teachers' interviews in which both students and teachers agreed that the students lack using effective English writing strategies. Rao (2007) found brainstorming was an effective strategy in helping EFL Chinese students in terms of creating ideas, organising a text coherently and increasing interaction among students. However, as indicated in the literature review, Alkubaidi (2014) and Khalil (2005), found no significant correlations between the use of English writing strategic processes and student's writing performance, yet the authors state that participants tended to use more 'before writing strategies' (drafting and revising) than 'during writing' strategies and 'reviewing writing' strategies', which concurs with the findings for this study and contributes to the ongoing debate concerning this issue.

As mentioned above, teaching English in Saudi Arabian secondary schools is mostly teacher-centred where students have passive roles which involve only memorising, translating, copying and imitating. This is the traditional method of teaching EFL in which grammar rules

are studied in detail and the learning of vocabulary is through memorisation. The sentence is used as a basis for the high achievement in translation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As shown in this study, teacher-centred styles combined with grammar translation methods are unlikely to result in students being able to communicate in English effectively.

In this study, passive learning was perceived by most of the students and teachers as ineffective because it does not encourage students to learn the target language communicatively. Moreover, this approach does not facilitate students' productivity and creativity in their writing. Consistently, although the data revealed that students revise and draft, the focus of their revising and drafting was on the linguistic issues and the final product rather than on the content, coherence and the functions of the written text. This supports the assertion that the strategies used were only for mastering the language form rather than communicating the language in different real life contexts. This agrees with the findings of Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) who underline that even if revision techniques incorporated linguistic features and procedural knowledge, students tended to only concentrate on revising grammar and spelling.

Another key contributing factor highlighted by the students was that teachers do not provide them with learning strategies, such as in spelling and learning vocabulary. The students mentioned that in addition to the lack of practising, their teachers do not provide them with English learning strategies to learn the target language, especially writing skills. A possible explanation why teachers do not provide their students with writing strategies can be attributed to the way teachers teach English writing. As indicated above, students' roles are passive and they are required only to imitate written models. Therefore, students are unlikely to be provided with learning strategies when there is little or no room for productivity and creativity. This explanation is supported by one teacher's argument that there is no need for writing strategies because the students do not create their ideas and do not construct their own compositions. Al-

Mohanna (2010) highlights that this problem is often compounded when the class teacher is not confident in their own English skills and thus only focuses on grammar. This is observed in a study by Yook and Lee (2016) who indicate that their EFL Korean participating secondary school teachers were worried about their low English and they asked for in-service training to improve their English and their teaching methods.

Thus, it is clear that lack of English writing strategies is a perceived contributing factor to students' English writing difficulties. Will the writing strategies used by the students, such as memorisation and imitation, motivate them to learn the target language? This question will be answered below in a discussion of whether motivation is perceived as a contributing factor to students' English writing. Within the literature, it has been suggested that an overreliance on rote learning and memorisation in conjunction with the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and poorly planned lessons are key factors in why students become unmotivated (Dörnyei, 2001). To put this in another way, Al-Seghayer (2014) and Al-Zuhairi (2008) argue that the focus of the English textbooks in Saudi Arabian secondary schools is on grammar, vocabulary and reading passages, and, as stated in the literature review, focuses little on communicative functions that help students express their own ideas in different real-life situations. In a discussion pertaining to other EFL contexts, Harmer (2004) makes a similar point, suggesting that EFL students are rarely taught communicative functions. Williams (2005) points out that EFL students face challenges in writing meaningful compositions. According to Hyland (2003), many EFL students mainly focus on sentence-level features.

5.3.5 Motivation.

Both students and teachers perceived motivation as a contributing factor to the students' difficulties in English writing. As mentioned above, the quantitative data revealed that motivation is negatively correlated with the difficulties in English writing. This means that the

more students are motivated, the less difficulties students face in their English writing. The qualitative findings supported the statistical results. One student commented:

I think one of the main reasons for our problems in English and writing is lack of motivation. We are not motivated to learn English. [*1st year level male student 1*]

Another student said:

I feel de-motivated because I see no benefits in learning English because I cannot learn it very well. [*2nd year level male student*]

The students elaborated on why they felt such a lack of motivation: the teaching techniques, classroom environment and curriculum. These issues are explained in more detail below.

5.3.5.1 Teaching techniques. All focus-group students indicated that they feel de-motivated to learn English and improve their English writing because of their teachers' unvarying teaching techniques, lack of teachers' feedback, encouraging students to imitate and memorise words and/or written texts, and lack of teachers' motivation to teach.

All students indicated that their teachers do not vary their teaching techniques and this makes students feel bored in the classroom. According to one student:

The teacher repeats the same teaching techniques in all the lessons. I feel de-motivated and cannot focus on the lesson with the teacher doing this. [*1st year level male student 3*]

Another student said:

I feel bored because the teacher does not change the way she teaches. She does not use games and audio or video aids to introduce lessons. [*2nd year level female student 1*]

The last comment shows that the classroom lesson seems to be de-motivating because technology and games, which could reinforce some aspects of the English language, are not

being employed. Consistently, all teachers backed up this view and justified their unvarying teaching techniques by relating it to the lack of teaching aids. One teacher stated:

The lack of teaching aids and the lack of English labs de-motivate me to teach and de-motivate students to learn so that students feel bored in English class. Without teaching aids, I am like a bird without wings. I need an English lab that is equipped with facilities. [*Male teacher 2*]

Another issue was lack of feedback from teachers. Two examples are given below:

In the intermediate school, the teacher put on a smiling face but now in the secondary school there are no smiling faces. [*3rd year level female student 2*]

We do not know where our mistakes are. We are not motivated to correct our mistakes because we do not know them and the teacher does not care about our work. [*3rd year level female student 1*]

It appears that lack of teachers' feedback discourages students from improving their English writing and reducing their writing difficulties. However, teachers mentioned (see Section 6.2.7.2.1 for more information) that they believed that there is no benefit in giving feedback because students are required to imitate and memorise a written model, and do not construct their own sentences. This way of teaching raises concerns about whether imitation and memorisation strategies de-motivate students to learn English writing.

As indicated above, memorisation and imitation were felt by most of the participating students and teachers to be ineffective strategies for improving English writing. Memorisation and imitation also were perceived as de-motivating strategies. The findings of the student focus groups revealed that 17 out of 18 students indicated they feel less motivated when their teacher asks them to memorise the words or the predetermined topics in the textbooks. To understand the factors involved in de-motivation, two female students explained it this way.

I feel less motivated to memorise the words in a list without using them in different contexts. I memorised many words but I have not been able to

use them. Therefore, I feel de-motivated because I see no benefits in memorising them without using them. [*3rd year level female student 1*]

This student suggests what that context might be:

We like the way we were taught writing in the third year level in the intermediate school because we practise and do not have to memorise as we do in the secondary stage. Memorisation written models is very boring. We prefer to create our own compositions. [*1st year level female student 3*]

However, one student revealed that she liked memorisation. She commented:

I like memorising the words even without putting them in sentences but putting them in sentences is better. Knowing their meaning helps me learn English and increase my vocabulary. [*3rd year level female student 3*]

Consistently, all teachers, as indicated earlier, agreed that memorising the predetermined texts in the book is not an effective way to learn English writing. However, there was disagreement among the teachers regarding memorising vocabulary items. Three teachers perceived that memorising vocabulary without putting them in sentences is a de-motivating strategy for their students. One teacher commented:

Students do not want to learn vocabulary because they feel de-motivated to memorise them. I think students should learn how to use their words rather than memorise them. [*Male teacher 2*]

Yet, the other three teachers felt that memorisation is important and it is not a de-motivating way to learn English. One teacher commented:

I think students should memorise the words they learn. If they memorise them, they will understand English and this would encourage them to keep learning. [*Male teacher 3*]

Generally, as perceived by most students and teachers, memorisation and imitation strategies are de-motivating strategies because they do not encourage students to engage

actively with learning tasks such as creating their own compositions. The participating teachers, as mentioned earlier, indicated that the curriculum does not motivate students to produce and create their own compositions. Would passive and disengaged students help English teachers to be motivated to teach?

5.3.5.2 Teachers' motivation to teach. Besides teachers' practices and lack of teachers' feedback, the students generally agreed that their teachers lack motivation to teach English. The students indicated that their teachers only care about completing the English language lessons according to what the curriculum stipulates:

We do not feel motivated because I think the teacher just wants to finish the curriculum. We don't feel that he likes teaching English. I think he is not enthusiastic to teach. He just wants to finish the lesson and get past the required 45 minutes. [*2nd year level male student 3*]

The fact that the curriculum focuses on the delivering the curriculum rather than outcomes is an important theme in this study. Teachers themselves have said that they lack motivation because students are de-motivated by a curriculum that demands that teachers teach using the traditional grammar translation method. As was demonstrated in the literature review, Gardner (2010) and Harmer (2004) both assert that to be motivated, students need to see a relevance to what they are asked to write and what they actually face in real life situations. They suggest that more student-centered methods of teaching should be used, such as playing games and asking students to write about their real lives and what interests them. Instead, teachers tend to stick to curriculum teaching which is heavily prescribed as being a grammar translation method. Consistently, all the teachers indicated that they feel de-motivated to teach English, blaming their students' weak previous learning experiences. According to one teacher:

Some students do not know all the letters and some know some capital letters but not the small ones. These students make me distracted and not

motivated because I need to teach them the letters and teach them the basics. [*Female teacher 1*]

Another teacher said this:

Teachers come to each class and lecture them. They rarely give them the chance to participate. They just listen. They do nothing. This is why they feel de-motivated. And I admit I feel de-motivated because of the education system and the classroom environment. [*Male teacher 2*]

Thus it is clear that students are de-motivated when learning to write in English. A contributor factor to de-motivation and grammar translation methods was the class-room environment itself. A fuller explanation is set out below.

5.3.5.3 Classroom Environment. All students agreed that the class environment does not motivate them to learn. Class makes it less attractive:

The classroom environment de-motivates me. I hate to come to school because the class is small and the school day is very long. [*1st year level male student*]

Consistently, all the teachers complained about the classroom environment such as size and teachers' motivation to teach. One teacher stated:

The class time, the class size and the number of students are not suitable for learning. Even as teachers, we are frustrated because the building is not suitable for teaching and learning. [*Male teacher 3*]

When another teacher was asked about the classroom environment, he went into extensive detail:

It is very, very, very boring. I am a human being. I am affected by the students and vice versa. Many of the students are silent and waiting for me to finish the class. Then I ask them, "Do you understand" and they say "yes" although they don't. They just want me to finish because they want to get back to sleep because some of them did not sleep enough or did not sleep at all last night. Or some want me to finish because they want to do their homework for other subjects. It is complicated. I think most of them don't have the desire to learn English specifically and the other subjects generally. [*Male teacher 2*]

At first glance, the above comments appear to have little to do with teaching practices and the curriculum, but rather relate to the classroom environment. Both teachers and students agreed that the classroom environment is boring. However, analysis of the findings suggests that the two are related. An evaluation of the responses of male teachers [2] demonstrates implicitly how the curriculum is actually presented to students. He speaks, they listen. They are passive learners. Thus, a classroom environment that is uncomfortable and lacks visual interest is exacerbated by the rigid teaching methods. Dörnyei (2001) argued that the classroom environment may help or hinder students' motivation to learn. According to Gardner (2010) and Hannah (2013), teacher motivation is a significant factor for enhancing the classroom environment. Put another way, if teachers could make classrooms more active as learning spaces, and therefore make learning more relevant students will see their classrooms are exciting places to learn rather than small boring places in which to pass the time. Within this poor environment, the curriculum de-motivates the students further. This is explained more fully in the next section.

5.3.5.4 Curriculum. The relevance of discussing the curriculum is noted above, in that it is built around the traditional GTM. A major issue which emerges from the interviews is that students are bored by with this type of teaching. This in turn makes EFL teachers bored too, as students are not interested. One issue dominates the interviews: that of the irrelevancy of topics that are chosen by EFL teachers who are following the curriculum. One student talks of having to write about a rhinoceros, even though she has never seen one. Another student said that when pictures are used they are often old ones and do not hold any interest. The response of one teacher supports this view. She said:

Introducing the information is not attractive. There are no attractive pictures. Also, most of the topics are not related to the students' lives. Let me give you an example, the topic about animals in Africa and the ozone layer. These topics are boring because they are not related to their lives. [*Female teacher 1*].

All the teachers agreed that the topics in the curriculum do not motivate students to learn. Consequently, the teachers are not motivated to teach them. When one teacher was asked how his students feel about the topics in the textbook, he stated:

Very boring and not related to their lives. I can say there are one or two which are related such as talk about yourself. *[Male teacher 1]*

The teachers added that two further issues assist in making students less motivated to learn English and improve their written English: students' beliefs about learning English and computer-assisted passing of exams.

5.3.5.5 Students' beliefs about learning English. All the teachers agreed that they feel many of their students are less motivated due to their preconceptions that learning English is difficult. This results in students having a negative attitude even before they start learning the language, as one teacher asserted:

Many students are de-motivated because they have a feeling that learning English is difficult. They have heard from their friends or families that English is difficult. For this reason, they make an attempt at learning the language with a crippling attitude from the beginning. *[Male teacher 1]*

The comment displays how outside influences may have an impact on students regarding their English learning ability and indeed success. Another teacher described this preconception as a misconception, also calling it "English phobia":

I think many girls [students] have a misconception that learning English is difficult. Or let's call it English phobia. I think this is one of the main reasons that de-motivates them to learn English. As a teacher, I suffer a lot from this misconception which students have. I spend much time and effort to convince them that learning English is easy but needs desire and work. *[Female teacher 1]*

5.3.6 Discussion: Motivation.

The findings of this study revealed that there is a significantly statistical association between motivation and English writing difficulties. In other words, the less students are motivated, the more the students have problems in English writing. Similarly, other studies have found such a significant relationship between motivation and English writing performance (Djigunović, 2006; Fazel & Ahmadi, 2011; Hashemian & Heidarib, 2013; Zhang & Guo, 2013). However, this present study contrasts with the results of some studies in the field which found no statistically significant associations between motivation and English written performance (Binalet & Guerra, 2014; Jeon et al., 2013; Matsumoto, 2011). Despite these discrepancies, much of the literature supports the findings for this study. One relevant difference is that the present study is about perception, while most existing research is on performance.

The quantitative findings were supported by the qualitative data obtained from the students' focus groups and teacher interviews. Students indicated that they lack motivation because of a number of issues. Firstly, teaching techniques were perceived as one of the main issues relating to low motivation. The majority of the students blamed their teachers for not varying their teaching techniques and thus this repetitive teaching routine de-motivated them. This is supported by the work of Dörnyei (2001), Brown (2007) and Lee et al. (2017) who posit that utilising teaching methods that cater to different learning preferences and interests is key to maintaining student motivation.

A context-specific example of repetitive teaching is students being instructed to memorise and imitate written models or vocabulary in isolated terms. Although memorisation and imitation are perceived to be easy for many students, this teaching technique does not give any motivation to improve their English writing. The students clearly want to have the chance to create their own sentences and compositions rather than to imitate and memorise. This also

correlates with the findings of Dörnyei (2001) and Hyland (2003), who underline the findings that many students feel less motivated when they are not encouraged to generate their own ideas and sentences. Al-Seghayer (2011) and Al-Mohanna (2010) explain that Saudi secondary school students are encouraged by teachers to write about pre-decided subjects highlighted in their textbooks. Al-Mohanna (2010) argues that this limits the potential opportunities for students to produce original creative work.

In addition, focusing on encouraging students to memorise and imitate may make the students feel that their teachers themselves are less motivated to teach. This view supports the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1997), who argues that a teacher who lacks passion has the potential to de-motivate students, who may perceive the subject as not worth studying. Similar findings were obtained in the current study where students report that their teachers just want to finish the lessons and are not enthused about teaching.

However, although the participating teachers admitted their lack of motivation, they blamed their students for being less motivated to learn. The teachers attributed their lack of motivation to the classroom environment such as the large number of students and to students' poor previous learning experiences. Similar findings are present in the work of Dörnyei (2001) who iterates that classroom environments are a key factor in the motivation of students, and teacher motivation is integral to a positive classroom environment (Hannah, 2013; Tomlinson and Dat, 2004).

In addition to unvarying teaching techniques and memorisation strategies, the curriculum was perceived to play a role in students' motivation to learn to write in English. Specifically, both students and teachers agreed that the topics students write about are predetermined and are not related to the students' lives. Thus, it seems that writing about such topics make students less motivated to write. This is similar to the work of Elliot (1999), who argues that students are de-motivated by irrelevant topics. The qualitative data collected

includes many examples of students advocating for doing classwork on topics relevant to their lives and interests, such as sports and fashion. Bonyadi (2014) suggests that giving the students the opportunities to select their topics to write about is a useful way in making the students engaged and motivated.

The participating teachers reported that one of the reasons behind the students' lack of motivation to write in English is that many students already hold beliefs that learning English is difficult. It appears that "many" students have a negative attitude towards learning English despite the students understanding the importance of learning it. This may indicate that students lack confidence in English as a subject. Al-Seghayer (2014) points out that many Saudi school students have low motivation, which could negatively affect their beliefs about learning English. It appears that the systemic problems related to teaching-styles have made learning English difficult and thus students have developed negative beliefs about the subject.

To conclude, lack of motivation is perceived as a contributing factor to students' English writing difficulties. Several possible reasons exist for the lack of motivation, such as teaching practices, memorisation and imitation strategies, the curriculum and students' beliefs about learning English. Anxiety is another affective factor that cannot be ignored. As discussed in Chapter Two, anxiety is considered by many scholars to be a contributing factor to students' English writing difficulties (Abdel Latif, 2007; Horwitz et al., 1986). The next section will present the results and discussions of anxiety as a contributing factor to students' English writing problems.

5.3.7 Anxiety.

The quantitative findings revealed that anxiety is positively correlated with difficulty in English writing among students. The statistical results revealed that students' anxiety is positively correlated with English writing difficulties. Moreover, the student focus groups data

presented two situations where students feel anxious about their writing: when they write a composition in the final exam and when they write their homework.

5.3.7.1 Exam anxiety. The focus group results showed that 67% (12 out of 18) of students feel anxious when they answer the composition question in the final exam. This was caused by fear of losing marks which implied they are concerned about writing error-free paragraphs. One student said:

I feel very much anxious about spelling, grammar and punctuation because I don't want to lose any marks. When I feel anxious, I sometimes change some words or sentences although I was sure it was right. [*3rd year level male student 1*]

I think I reach the highest level of anxiety. I get sweaty because I am afraid of exams. I feel very anxious because I do not want to lose any marks. [*2nd year female student 1*]

This anxiety, according to Male teacher 2, led them into forcing students to memorise the paragraph to ensure that they would reproduce it correctly on the exam.

However, 33% (6 out of 18) of students were not required to compose a paragraph for the exam so they did not experience any anxiety. Instead, they were provided with a written paragraph with multiple choice options to help them to complete the written paragraphs and all they were required to do was select the right word(s). Those students who were given multiple choice options appeared to be more relaxed about the summative stage of learning to write in English.

5.3.7.2 Homework. The results showed that students were not anxious in a non-exam environment. Around 72% (13 out of 18) of students, from the focus groups, felt no anxiety when writing a paragraph in the classroom or doing homework because their work is usually unchecked by teachers and, if checked, the work is not assessed. Thus, there is a distinct difference in how some students perceived teaching methods. Tests cause them anxiety;

formative work like homework does not. Whilst this could be a usual response for all students regardless of the subjects they may be taking in their own language or a foreign language, the comments of some students indicate that the lack anxiety could mean a lack of interest. For example, some students wondered how or why they would get anxious when all they needed to do in writing was merely to imitate a model.

For me, I have never ever felt anxious because I do nothing. I just copy and paste. [*1st year female student 3*]

We never ever feel anxious when we write the homework because we are sure that he will not check it. [*2nd year level male student 3*]

Supporting the students' opinion, three teachers reported that their students do not get anxious when doing their homework because they simply copy down the written model. One teacher stated:

I do not think the students feel anxious when writing a paragraph because they just copy from the board. [*Male teacher 3*]

Another teacher clarified that:

They don't feel anxious when writing because it is not marked. [*Male teacher 2*]

However, the above perceptions were not mirrored by all respondents. Within the student focus group, 28% (5 out of 18) of students perceived that writing a composition in the classroom or at home makes them anxious. One student commented:

I feel anxious because I just write it once. We need to practise continually more and more to remove our anxiety. And there is more anxiety during the exam. [*2nd year female student 3*]

This particular response is important because the student raises the issue of not enough time spent on practising. Mostly the students have indicated that they find

the lessons boring and that teachers do not engage them in interesting activities. However, the student above perceives that not enough time is given for continual practice in class. What emerges from this and similar claims regarding anxiety is that perceptions vary, as do levels of anxiety. This could mean that typical teaching styles are not varied enough to suit all learning styles. This concurs with Graves (2003), who suggests that a variety of tasks can increase students' motivation.

Two teachers gave completely different perceptions of why they thought students were anxious. One suggested that students fear negative judgments and feedback from their teacher.

I think holding the pen is scary to students. They are afraid of writing. They have great anxiety. They don't have the confidence to write. They are afraid of their classmates' comments or teachers' comments. They are afraid that the teacher may have a bad impression of their writing. [*Male teacher 1*]

When one teacher was asked about the reasons behind his students' problems in spelling, she saw the problem as stemming from a basic lack of ability:

I think it is because of the anxiety, fear and lack of confidence. They are afraid of holding the pen to write. One of the students wrote to me that he wanted to talk with me. When I met him, he begged me not to ask him to write, he gets embarrassed and afraid of writing. Some of them - let's say about 25% of students - do not know all the letters of the alphabet. [*Female teacher 1*]

This is interesting because having evaluated the responses made by students and teachers regarding anxiety, it is clear that anxiety is perceived for a number of reasons, such as lack of practice and being unprepared. What is interesting is that the teachers acknowledge their students are anxious but give different reasons for it. The students, overall, admit that unless they can cut and paste, they know they

are not competent enough to do well in exams. Teachers perceive this as lack of confidence, rather than lack of interest.

5.3.8 Discussion: Anxiety.

The findings of the quantitative part of the study reveal that there is a significant relationship between students' anxiety to learn writing in English and difficulties in English writing itself. The more students get anxious, the more difficulties they have in their English writing. This seems to correlate with the results of other studies in the field reporting writing achievement to have a negative correlation with writing anxiety (Jebreil et al., 2015; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; Susoy & Tanyer, 2013). However, the findings of the present study differ from the results of Choi's investigation (2013), in which no negative associations between writing anxiety and writing performance were found. Choi points out that his study focused on free writing, a relatively low-stress form of writing assignment, and that there was a lack of detail in the rubrics that were used to score writing assignments. The present study does not focus on the link between anxiety and achievement, but rather on anxiety and students' perceptions of English writing difficulties.

As indicated above, the qualitative data obtained from the student focus groups presented two situations where students are anxious about writing: homework and exam writing. Regarding exam-provoked anxiety, it seems that students tend to get anxious because they do not want to lose any marks by making errors in linguistic issues such as grammar and spelling. This is in line with research findings where it is suggested that the focus on the linguistics features would create anxious students (Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010; Lee & Krashen, 2002). Another possible reason for students' anxiety is due to test anxiety. This is in line with Salehi and Marefat (2014), who found correlations between test anxiety and test performance for EFL students. It seems that the anxiety surrounding tests is related to the assessments of students' exams. This is supported by the findings of this current study, where students exhibit

anxiety about homework when it is assessed. Consistently, the students indicated that they have no anxiety when their homework is unassessed.

In evaluating interviewees' remarks concerning anxiety, it should be noted that whilst anxiety is a natural occurrence in a variety of learning situations, its importance should not be overlooked as a factor in understanding how students perceive the challenges of learning a new language. It can be suggested here that students are only anxious if their work is assessed, particularly when they are required to compose original writing as opposed to less challenging cut and paste exercises. This reveals that students have little faith in their English skills, and this can be linked to motivation and preconceived ideas of English being difficult. The lack of anxiety when asked to do cut and paste exercises suggests lack of motivation to do well in formative un-assessed tests.

As indicated above, both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed four perceived factors that contribute to students' difficulties in their English writing. These factors were teaching methods, L2 strategic processes, motivation and anxiety. However, the analysis of the qualitative data revealed two additional themes: curriculum and previous learning experiences. These are expanded below.

5.3.9 Curriculum.

All students criticised the curriculum and relate it to their problems in English writing. They agreed that the curriculum does not concentrate on writing skill. One student pointed out:

Writing is neglected. The curriculum just focuses on grammar. [3rd year male student]

The comment also demonstrates that the curriculum focuses on the form of the language. Students agreed that the curriculum does not require them to use their English communicatively. One student commented:

I think the curriculum is not good. It does not teach us how to use our English. For example, there is a clothing shop in which all the staff speak English; we would love to buy there but we cannot communicate with them in English. [*3rd year female student 1*]

The teachers unanimously claimed that the curriculum is a major contributing factor to students' problems in English generally and writing specifically. It was a consistent topic of agreement among the teachers and students that the curriculum does not focus on actual writing skills.

When teachers were asked why their students face difficulties in applying the rules, one teacher commented:

To be honest, I blame the curriculum because it doesn't require the students to apply the rules and create their own writing. For example, students don't feel that this unit talks about the past and the writing lesson is to write a paragraph using the simple past tense. [*Female teacher 1*]

When teachers were asked why their students do not have the opportunity to create their own sentences, one teacher remarked:

Because this is what we are required to do. It is to follow the instructions of the curriculum. It is mandatory. This is not to say I am not mistaken. But I face problems preventing me from giving the students the chance to create their own sentences. We - as the saying goes - "abide by the rules". [*Male teacher 2*]

Another teacher stated:

The curriculum leads us to teach the students to copy and paste and how to pass the exam. We don't encourage the students to create their own sentences or paragraphs. We are anxious because the supervisor and the principal focus on finishing explaining the curriculum and we are guided by it. [*Female teacher 2*]

One teacher perceived the curriculum is in this way. He believed that the lessons follow an unsuitable sequence and that the curriculum is not organised very well. For example, the tag questions are repeated several times:

We do not introduce the tag questions, which have different conditions, in one unit in a disorganised way. This kind of disorganised teaching confuses the students who are barely trying to master a foreign language. [*Female teacher 3*]

It is very clear that the curriculum is perceived as an important reason why English is found to be challenging by students. However, an important issue came to light when one teacher said:

It is very bad. I studied it and am now teaching it without improvement. I hope it is changed and focuses on writing because I think writing it is the most difficult to learn and is the most neglected skill in the curriculum and as teachers we don't focus on it. [*Male teacher 2*]

Here, whilst discussing curriculum issues, the teacher unintentionally highlighted an important factor: that he does not feel qualified to teach EFL. It was not expected that teachers would perceive their own inabilities as being a contributory factor. It is not within the scope of this current study to assess the abilities of EFL teachers; however, it offers opportunities for further study.

5.3.10 Discussion: Curriculum.

The qualitative findings showed that the curriculum/textbook was perceived by both students and teachers as a contributing factor to students' challenges in writing in English. This finding is echoed in other studies where Saudi students' low achievement in English is explained by the low quality textbooks used in the classroom (Al-Zuhairi, 2008). A number of issues related to the curriculum have been raised and agreed on by participating students and teachers. One issue is that the curriculum pays relatively little attention to writing skills and focuses on grammar. Negative student perceptions of their language classes could be due to students wanting to practise writing through original compositions rather than prescribed writing topics. This implies that students should be listened to see what their interests are. This explanation is supported by Leung and Andrews, (2012) who indicate that their EFL Korean

secondary school teachers perceived that curriculum designers should design the tasks and materials based on the needs of the students with diverse abilities. Continuing with curriculum issues, Shumaimeri (2003) highlights the dangers of poorly designed textbooks on student's achievement. In addition, Al-Mudibry and Ezza (2014) maintain that the current writing syllabus is not conducive for improving learner outcomes highlighting that the focus on grammar has superseded everything else.

Another issue related to the curriculum is that the teachers reported that the sequencing of topics is not suitable for students. For example, one teacher highlighted the repetitions of introducing some grammar lessons confuse the students. This may indicate that students do not learn new grammatical rules that they can use in their English writing. It is expected that repeating the grammatical rules in many lessons in the different year levels will help students master those grammatical rules. Despite repeating the grammar lessons, the results indicated that the students have difficulties in replicating the grammar in different settings. This may indicate that repeating the grammar lessons without organising them, for example, from easy to difficult, or from one year to another, may contribute to the difficulties students have in mastering English grammar. Research on effective language acquisitions suggests that syllabuses should be constructed so students approach language on a continuum from easy to difficult, where knowledge is built upon (Muller et al., 2008; Nunan, 1989; Pienemann, 1985). Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013), researching in the Saudi context, go as far as to argue that "the outcome of teaching of English fails to satisfy different bodies of English language teaching and learning" (p.15). The findings of this study may indicate that the curriculum designers did not consider the students' needs and their proficiency levels when creating the syllabus.

5.3.11 Previous experiences in learning English.

While the inherent flaws in existing curriculums are a significant problem, students are also hindered in progressing through the curriculum due to their poor previous learning

experiences. The next part of this thesis will report the results and discussion related to previous experiences in learning English. Around 83% (15 out of 18) of students agreed that many students reached the secondary school stage without having learnt much English; their foundation seems to be therefore weak. An example from the conversation between the 2nd year level students reflects this view:

Student 1: The cause of our problems in English is that we did not learn it very well in the elementary and intermediate schools.

Student 2: They passed us without us understanding and practising English.

Student 3: English was a subject like any other subject. The most important thing was to pass but the teachers did not care if we learned it very well.

Another example on the students' foundation is from the 3rd year level female students:

Student 3: I think the previous learning in intermediate school was bad. We did not learn the basics. We learned in the elementary school the letters but in the intermediate this was bad.

Student 1: Sometimes the teacher says OK, I think you all know the letters but most of them did not. They didn't learn it in the elementary school.

Student 3: I think the teacher in the intermediate school was not enthusiastic about teaching English. What he was doing was putting the CD on and then falling asleep.

Clearly, a number of issues have emerged in these interviews. Firstly, the students perceived the teaching to be of poor quality. Secondly, it appears that students perceive that their teachers lack adequate teaching skills in preparing them to further their studies. They suggested that passing students was purely an exercise which did not take into consideration whether students actually understood how to write English or not. The students were perceptive enough to realise that classes in English Language did not have the same rigor as other subjects. This would lead students to become de-motivated very quickly. Thirdly, it can be suggested that teachers are not enthused at the prospect of teaching English Language which is a compulsory subject. This could lead to the assumption that they lack adequate training in this subject. This links to a previous comment by a teacher who doubted his own abilities in

teaching English language. It can be suggested that inadequate teacher training is a contributory factor creating unenthusiastic teachers. What has emerged from these interviews is that students' previous experiences of English language lessons influence how they perceive English classes at Secondary school. When students were asked about the reasons for their problems in learning grammar well, they attributed it to weak teaching methods and lack of enthusiasm on the part of the teachers.

The weak foundation in learning the basics of English affected many students negatively. Some students did not care about learning English when they were in the elementary school. It was evaluated without exams so they did not care. They were sure that they would pass English because there were no exams. *[2nd year level female student 3]*

Consistently, all the teachers indicated that many of their students enrol in secondary school with weak foundations in the basics of learning English such as recognising and understanding the alphabet. One teacher said:

They do not know how to make a sentence because their foundations in intermediate schools were poor. Students did not learn how to make a simple sentence by focusing on the main parts of making a sentence. *[Male teacher 3]*

Another teacher remarked:

I think they often face difficulty in grammar. I don't blame them because they have weak foundations. *[Female teacher 2]*

Another teacher mentioned:

I feel frustrated because of their base or foundation. I get distracted between teaching them the foundation in spelling, grammar and writing sentences, and explaining the curriculum. *[Male teacher 2]*

Interestingly not all students agreed that their poor past experiences contributed to them becoming de-motivated. Some students offered similar views to those of the teachers', blaming the curriculum which requires prescribed teaching methods. One student said:

I think it was good [previous learning] and did not affect my writing negatively. The problem in writing in secondary school is that we just copy and paste. We learned some words and we know how to write the letters. We just need to practise writing our own sentences. [*1st year level female student 1*]

5.3.12 Discussion: Previous experiences in learning English

An evaluation of these interviews reveals students' previous learning experiences impact negatively on their current experience of learning to write in English. This is consistent with analogous literature in the field that suggests poor previous learning experiences have profound effects on students learning (Al Badi, 2015; Alotaibi et al., 2014; Ansari, 2012; Sawir, 2005; Seyyedrezaie and Barani, 2013; Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). To exemplify this, some students in this study had reached the third year level without being able to recognise all the alphabetical letters, leaving them unable to progress. This is supported by the teachers who clarified their frustrations indicating that they get distracted between teaching the students the content of the curriculum and going over the basic principles. Other research in the Saudi context found that many Saudi university students lacked the knowledge of basic English (Ansari, 2012). The occurrence of students without even the fundamentals of English within this study may be explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, teaching practices may not encourage students to practise their English and improve their writing skills. This is supported by the previous findings in which students blamed their teachers for passing them in exams without having taught them the basics. The system is test-driven and the most important thing for many teachers and students is that students pass the exam. Perhaps most importantly, it seems that the assessment of learning English in Saudi schools is not based on mastering the English language skills and improving the proficiency levels of students, rather, it is based on what score the students get in the exam which is mainly, as indicated earlier, a multiple choice and grammar based test. Ironically, most of the teachers prepare the students for the exams and specify pages from the textbooks which include very similar questions to those in the exam.

This would therefore suggest that the students memorise the answers of some expected questions. The findings confirm that examinations do not assess all of the students' skills, notably writing skills. This was confirmed by both students and teachers. Therefore, although the students move from one year to another, their success is not based on mastering the English language skills such as writing skills, rather it is based on the grades in the exam.

Without adequate opportunities to practise English in different situations, learning becomes based solely on rote-learning and imitation. Previous learning experiences therefore ill-prepare students to excel in learning English. In a similar context to Saudi, Al Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) researching with Omani students, highlight that poor learning environments in secondary school contribute to students facing problems trying to use English at university. It seems that a weak English language learning background in the early stages of education is a major factor in the challenges EFL students face in later stages of education (Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

This section has highlighted that the factors contributing to the difficulties Saudi students face in acquiring English as a second language are multifaceted. Moreover, poor previous learning experiences exacerbate the failings of the system and compound rote-learning as the only strategy for learning English.

5.3.13 L1 writing strategies.

The findings of this study revealed that L1 writing proficiency is not a contributing factor to the difficulties experienced by Saudi secondary school students when writing in English. Specifically, the quantitative data revealed that there was no correlation between L1 writing strategies and the English writing difficulties (see Section 5.2.2.4 for details). These findings seem to be consistent with those found by several researchers (Abu-Akel, 1997; Carson, et. al, 1990; Pennington and So, 1993). Although it seems there is consistency between

the findings of those studies and the present study, different instruments were used for those studies and the present study. This study measured students' perceptions, while those previous studies measured actual writing samples.

However, the results of this study do not corroborate previous research findings (Alhaisoni, 2012; Arndt, 1987; Cumming, 1989; Dweik & Abu Al Hommos, 2007; Jones & Tetroe, 1987; Kim & Yoon, 2014; Pae, 2018; Wang and Wen, 2002) that found a positive correlation between L1 writing proficiency and L2 writing production. A possible reason for this difference might be related to the different instruments that were used to measure L2 writing production or difficulties in those studies and the present study. The above mentioned studies measured the L2 writing production via writing tests or samples, while the present study elicited students' perceptions of writing in English.

Also, the differences can be attributed to the challenging nature of L2 English learning as a native Arabic speaker. Arabic is extremely different from Indo-European languages in that it is Semitic; belonging to a different family of languages makes its grammar very different to English. Therefore, learning to write in English presents students with a different set of language acquisition challenges (Cumming, 1989; Schoonen et al., 2011).

Another possible reason for the inconsistency between the findings of those studies and the present study is the lack of the use of English writing strategies. All of the students indicated that they did not apply strategic processes in their English writing because they only imitate written models, and copy and paste written texts. Although the students confirmed that they use L1 (Arabic) writing strategic processes, such as planning, drafting and revising the content and the form of their writings, it seems that these strategic processes do not transfer when they write in their L2 (English). This raises the question of how L1 writing expertise relates to the L2 writing ability. In other words, because the students do not create their own compositions in L2 (English) and do not use strategic processes when writing in English, it is expected that

they will not transfer the strategic process they use in L1 into L2 writing. This possible explanation can be supported by what the students and their teachers agreed on in the student focus groups and teacher interviews. When the students were asked about their writing in Arabic, all of them mentioned they do planning, drafting and revising ‘everything’ in terms of linguistics issues, the ideas, the content and the coherence of the text. Do they transfer these strategic processes when writing in English? All of the students have the same answer. One student exemplifies their answers:

We don’t transfer them [L1 strategic processes] because we don’t write. I mean we do not create our own ideas and sentences. We just imitate copy paste, so, no need for planning or drafting. [*2nd year level male student 1*]

The comment may indicate the students consider what they do in English is not writing because they do not produce their own writings. Therefore, they see no need to transfer the strategic processes in L1 into L2.

One teacher indicated:

I believe in the feasibility of transferring the skills and expertise in L1 into L2. I think strategies such as planning drafting, and revising the content are common strategies across all the languages. However, our students do not construct their own ideas and compositions in English. [*Male teacher 2*]

As far as transferring the expertise (writing strategies) in L1 is concerned, analysis of the responses in the questionnaire show that about 33% of the students believed that they always or often transfer their writing strategies from Arabic into English when writing in English. However, this transfer could be just the focus on revising linguistic issues as they focus on them in their L1. This explanation can be supported by the previous findings which, revealed that 55% of the students revise the linguistic issues such as spelling and grammar when writing in English. Therefore, it can be expected that the strategy students most commonly transfer from L1 into L2 is revising the linguistic issues.

To sum up, the quantitative data analysis showed that there was no relationship between the perceived L1 proficiency and perceived English writing difficulties. This was supported by the qualitative data, where both students and teachers indicated that students apply strategic processes in their L1 but they do not transfer them into their L2. They believed that L1 writing proficiency cannot affect English writing difficulties because students do not use the strategic processes in their L2. One possible reason for this is attributed to the lack of creating their own English written compositions. Thus, they are not given the opportunity to transfer their L1 writing strategies and proficiency into L2 writing, much less expected to do so.

5.4 Conclusion

It can be concluded that there are several key factors leading to Saudi secondary school students experiencing difficulties in their English writing. One significant factor concerns the teaching practices. The students mostly disagree with the way in which they are taught and the teachers also agreed with them on this. Other important factors were affective ones, namely motivation and environment. Finally, other critical emerging themes are the curriculum and previous learning experiences. The curriculum has been designed in such a way that it does not permit or encourage effective learning strategies, for example inhibiting students from being active participants in the classroom.

Difficulties in students' learning how to write in English are linked to a lack of motivation, for which the students blame the teachers, who in turn cite the curriculum and an unsupportive learning environment. As indicated by the statements of teachers and students, the right motivational environment would reduce anxiety for the students.

Chapter Six: Results and Discussion of Suggested Solutions to English Writing Difficulties

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to consider in more depth the perceptions of students and teachers on how the difficulties Saudi secondary school students experience in English writing can be addressed. Open-ended questions from student questionnaires, student focus groups and teacher interviews were used to address the third research question: *what are students' and teachers' perceptions of the appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?* This chapter will explore how the learning experiences of Saudi secondary school students can be improved, as perceived by the students and teachers. Specifically, of the two open-ended questions in the questionnaire, one was about students' suggestions for addressing their difficulties at the sentence level; the other concerned students' suggestions for addressing paragraph-level issues. Of the 600 students, 537 answered the first open ended question and 451 answered the second open ended question. However, students' answers were very brief. They did not provide detailed suggestions for either. In other words, these two open-ended questions in the questionnaire mainly elicited general suggestions for coping with problems in English writing. Using thematic analysis, the findings of the data from all three instruments, open-ended questions (in the questionnaire) with students, student focus groups and teacher interviews, revealed a number of suggestions. These were classified into seven specific themes as iterated below.

6.2 Suggested Solutions to Students' English Writing Difficulties

6.2.1 Language function.

From the analysis of the student's comments, the consistent message is that students want to use their English functionally. Special emphasis was put on using grammar and

vocabulary to generate original writing. The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire showed that about 33% (or 179 out of 537) of the students expressed a desire to use their vocabulary and grammar communicatively:

We do not know how to use grammar. We don't use our sentences. We do not use the words in complete sentences. We just know the rules and how to answer the grammar questions in the exam. We should be taught how to use English in our daily lives. [*3rd year level male student*]

This is a typical comment, and evidence that teachers do not go beyond instructing the learners on the basics outlined in the curriculum for exam preparation. The fact that a third of the students brought this up as a key problem suggests many view it as a major issue. These sentiments were echoed by several students with an emphasis on the need to avoid direct translation of vocabulary in their writing. This was also corroborated by the findings related to inadequate vocabulary and the wrong use of words, as described earlier (see Section 4.5.1.7 above). All students in the focus groups stressed the importance of using the grammatical rules and vocabulary in different real life situations. Similarly, Agudo's (2012) study revealed that EFL Spanish secondary school students want more chances to incorporate communicative practice into their learning. In this present thesis, one student commented:

Teachers should teach us how to use the words correctly in different communicative situations. For example, we have learned a new word today which is "material". We know the meaning in Arabic but we do not know how to use it correctly in different contexts in English writing. [*2nd year level female student 2*]

This comment shows that the range of one word's applicability in English can cause confusion. This could explain why students want to use the grammatical rules and vocabulary in different meaningful situations. The analysis of the questionnaire, as indicated earlier in section 4.3.2, revealed that teachers teach vocabulary in isolation and put more emphasis on students' production of texts that are free of grammatical mistakes, spelling and punctuation

errors. It seems that there is no focus on creative and original language use in functional contexts or for communicative purposes. The students' views on this aspect were supported by the teachers who suggested that students can improve their English if they are given the chance to use it for different communicative functions. When one teacher was asked about her suggestions for students' problems in grammar, she answered:

Most of them [students] often know the rules but do not know how to use them. When I ask them about the present continuous, for example, they tell me we add -ing to the verb but when I ask them to use it they do not know how. Students should be taught how to use the rules functionally rather than memorising the rules without knowing how to use them. [*Female teacher 2*]

Another teacher added:

Unfortunately, students just learn English to pass the exam. I think students need to learn how to use English for communication. [*Male teacher 2*].

Interestingly, students point to teachers as the source of the problem, rather than taking ownership of their learning themselves. Whilst this may seem surprising considering the level of technology available to them, even on their phones, for unpacking and practising vocabulary and grammar through good quality internet sites. What is overlooked in these particular comments is that many students are de-motivated by poor teaching methods, as discussed above. Thus, some of the comments revealed conflicting perceptions between teachers and students, with some teachers suggesting many students are only interested in passing the exam, rather than learning English with any motivation. Contrastingly, some students blame the problems with the system on the curriculum rather than the students. They complain that they have no freedom to introduce generative communicative language practice in their classes which students suggest would be more motivating.

The findings revealed that both students and teachers agreed that using the target language functionally in different real life situations can be one of the solutions to students' problems in English writing. This suggestion is congruent with Brandl (2008) who points out

that in order to speak fluently in a language, a person must have functional use of language. Specifically, the results suggest, from the participants' perspectives, learning vocabulary in isolated terms does not help them use these words communicatively, thus, vocabulary should be taught in context. A word may have different meanings which entails mastering how to use them in different real settings. This is in line with the work of Harmer (2007) and Krashen (1982) who argue that in order to gain lexical capability one must grasp the functional aspects of language, particularly as this enables L2 learning to replicate words in different contexts. Also, the results of this study agree with Nation (2001) who argues that EFL learners should learn to use vocabulary productively, not only receptively. However, teachers point to the curriculum and appear not to have the freedom to introduce generative communicative language practice in their classes.

The next section will report the findings and discussion of curriculum since it is one of the issues needing to be improved for reducing student' problems in English.

6.2.2 Improvements in the curriculum.

Predominantly, the comments made by students and teachers indicate the existing curriculum needed to be revised to improve students' ability to write in English. The findings of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire showed that the word 'curriculum' was mentioned by 95 students. The statement most frequently mentioned was "the curriculum should be improved or changed". Some students introduced ideas without detailed information such as "supporting the curriculum with pictures", "specific lessons for writing", "reducing the amount of grammar lessons", "providing topics related to our lives" and "the curriculum should be suitable to our proficiency levels". In the student focus groups and teacher interviews, the students and their teachers elaborated on these issues as explained in the sections below.

6.2.2.1 Relevance of the curriculum to students' lives.

Student interviews revealed that the curriculum is de-motivating and how it can be improved, but along with this, most students expressed the view that the tasks presented to them were not relevant. For example, as stated earlier, some of the teaching resources are old-fashioned and do not relate to how the students live their daily lives. Students' views in the focus group were consistent with their responses in the questionnaire. All students agreed that topics introduced in the English curriculum generally, and the writing lessons especially, are not relevant to their daily lives. They suggested that the curriculum should be updated by including such relevant topics.

The following comment made by a student indicates the sentiments of many others:

The curriculum should include topics that help us learn how to use our English at the airport, coffee shops and whilst shopping. [*1st year level male student 1*]

The clear theme in the above comments is that first steps toward communicative writing require familiarity with the subject matter, and, for motivational purposes, relevance to students' daily lives is important. In a similar vein, the students asserted that they need to write about topics reflecting their own interests, such as "fashion styles, make up and favourite sports". In practice, they and their teachers admit to frequently resorting to the copy and paste method to get results with writing.

Whilst some teachers have suggested that fault lies with the students who can't be bothered to take ownership of their learning, most teachers supported these students' views.

One teacher claimed that:

The curriculum is killing me. I do not know how to teach students about abstract things such as writing about early traders and oil. Students need to write about something they can see in their lives such as their favourite sport. [*Male teacher 2*]

6.2.2.2 Curriculum sequence. All students in the focus groups expressed their concern that the curriculum should be suitable for students' level of understanding. In other words, the responses showed that students face problems in understanding the content of the curriculum, largely due to its not being appropriate for their proficiency levels. Some students believed that they were being given advanced grammar lessons before they had learnt the basic ones. Typical of their observations were the following statements made:

Different types of verb tenses should be taught systematically. For example, we learn the past in the elementary, the present in the intermediate and the future in the secondary school. When we graduate from the secondary school, we can differentiate between the different verb tenses. *[2nd year female student 3]*

The curriculum should be made suitable for our age and proficiency levels. Some information is repetitive since the intermediate school so that we do not get benefits from the curriculum. *[3rd year female student 3]*

One student suggested a sequential strategy to learn writing, and the following comment reflects the opinions of other participants:

The curriculum should introduce writing lessons gradually. I suggest we learn how to write simple sentences in the elementary school, the compound sentences and write guided paragraphs in the intermediate school, and then in the secondary school we should learn how to write a paragraph freely. *[2nd year male student 1]*

All teachers reported the curriculum should present lessons from easy to difficult and should not be repetitive. However, the curriculum is based on topics rather than sequenced learning. These views are represented in the comments below:

I think the curriculum designers need to simplify the rules and give examples ranging from easy to difficult. For example, give students examples on regular verbs then irregular ones. *[Male teacher 3]*

I suggest that the curriculum should be arranged in an easy way and it should be appropriate for students' proficiency levels. The existing curriculum is confusing. The curriculum introduces the tag question in each lesson. I think the curriculum should present the past tense with all its forms such as past

simple, [past continuous and past perfect]. Then, it should introduce the present with all its forms. [*Male teacher 1*]

Although there are no specific lessons in the curriculum for dictation or spelling, I give extra lessons. The focus on spelling is in the third year level which is the last stage in secondary school. I think the curriculum designers need to change the curriculums and focus on spelling in the intermediate school. [*Female teacher 2*]

I think the topics are repetitive, especially in grammar. The students study them in both the 1st and 2nd year levels...Also, the same applies to yes/no types of questions; it is repeated over and over again. [*Female teacher 3*]

6.2.2.3 Interesting curriculum. Another prominent issue is that all students in the focus groups suggested the curriculum should be interesting and motivating. They maintained that currently the curriculum is “very old” and “very boring”, indicating that it should be supported with “pictures, audio and video aids”. The following comment by one student reflects the view expressed by several others:

You should change the curriculum and design the lessons based on what we like; please, make it more attractive by supporting it with pictures and videos. [*1st year level male student 3*]

Consistently, all teachers felt that the curriculum should be more attractive and motivating for students and should be updated regularly. The following comments made by two teachers also echo the sentiments of their colleagues:

I feel frustrated because the curriculum is so very old that my students always feel frustrated. My students always ask me why it is old, the pictures are old; the topics are not related to our lives directly and are not attractive. [*Female teacher 1*]

I was taught this curriculum when I was a student and I have been teaching the same thing for 10 years. I cannot believe that curriculum designers think it does not need an improvement. The generations and technology have changed but the curriculum has not. [*Male teacher 3*]

The clear theme in the above comments is that first steps toward communicative writing require familiarity with the subject matter, and, for motivational purposes, relevance to students' daily lives is important. In a similar vein, the students asserted that they need to write about topics reflecting their own interests, such as "fashion styles, make up and favourite sports." These comments are supported by multiple studies undertaken in the field highlighting the importance of authentic and contemporary materials in textbooks in order to afford students exposure to real world language. Moreover, this exposure also motivates students through encouraging relevant usable communication (Al-Shumaimeri & Alzyadi, 2015; Dantas-Whitney & Rilling, 2009; Mishan, 2005). In practice the students and their teachers, in this study, admit to frequently resorting to the copy and paste method to complete the writing task. It is evidenced in this study that students want to produce their own compositions about topics relevant to their lives and interests rather than imitating written models. However, these perceptions show that the students have some needs for improving their English language skills including writing; those needs should be taken into consideration. Azizifar and Baghelani (2014) and Tok (2010) posit that textbooks offering teachers the ability to set up differentiated levels of communication scenarios are particularly useful teaching tools.

Having evaluated the above statements, it can be concluded that it is not just the curriculum itself that drive the teaching of English Language but rather it is test-driven. There is a subtle difference here. Evidence from the interviews reveals very few indications that teachers are creative in the way they use the curriculum. Only the response of one female teacher revealed any creative departure from the curriculum. She said: "Old pictures can be replaced by new pictures. Listening to CD's can be replaced by learning games and kinaesthetic activities."

Another issue revealed from the findings was that both students and teachers agreed that the content of the curriculum should be suitable for students' proficiency levels.

Specifically, they suggested that the lessons should be sequenced from simple to complex. Both students and teachers went further and gave some examples, as mentioned above, on how to sequence the lessons or grammatical rules. The sequencing of a language curriculum is vital if students are to progress effectively (Graves, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Pienemann, 1985). Critically, structures should be designed on a continuum beginning with the basic foundations and then gradually increasing in difficulty enabling students to build upon and compound existing knowledge (Graves, 2003; Nunan, 1999).

In short, the findings of this study provide insights into the need for making the existing curriculum motivating and relevant. The students and teachers also indicated that the curriculum needs to be meaningful and interesting through the engagement with peers and address relevant issues affecting learners' lives as well as the community. In addition, they suggested the curriculum should be suitable for students' proficiency levels and the lessons should be sequenced from easy to difficult, claiming too much revision and repetition exists in the current curriculum. It is also evident from the comments that the Saudi curriculum is quite specific, teachers do not have much scope to choose materials, and that these are provided by prescribed texts for particular year levels, mainly for examination preparation. This may indicate that students have little or no room to generate their own sentences, let alone creating their own written compositions. The next section will highlight the issue of "creativity" and its relationship to English writing.

6.2.3 Creativity.

Creativity was one of the most frequent themes to emerge from the analysis, referred to by 63 students in the open-ended questions from the questionnaire. Consistently, the findings of the student focus groups showed that students considered their writing performance would improve significantly if they created their own English compositions. The following statements from three students at different levels reveal this preference:

We need to compose our paragraphs and create our sentences instead of copying and pasting. [3rd year female student 1]

The English subject mostly depends on memorisation rather than understanding. I think being creative would help us learn English very well. [2nd year level male student 1]

We should create our sentences. We just copy and paste or we just use the right answer if the question is a multiple choice. We do nothing. [3rd year level female student 2]

These responses imply that students want to create their own writings. They consider that an overemphasis on memorisation contributed to their problems in English writing and believe that it does not help them to use their English skills communicatively. More specifically, they do not want to just imitate a model with no original input of their own; rather, they stressed the importance of producing and creating their own sentences, ideas and compositions. This is consistent with the aim of writing for communication (Hyland, 2003). Therefore, students want to communicate their ideas through generating their own compositions. Their emphasis on given the chance to create their own writings was supported by their complaint about memorisation strategies and how they contributed to their difficulties in English writing, and made students, as indicated earlier, feel less motivated to learn English writing. Benson (2011) argues that if students do not have some autonomy to create original compositions then boredom is a real threat. Suggestions from the students including the opportunity to generate their own ideas and construct sentences indicates that the students, to some extent, want to be autonomous - that is, to be responsible for their own learning. Consequently, autonomy will likely help motivate students' desires to learn English writing and hopefully improve their writing skills (Dörnyei, 2001). This explanation for the desire of the students to be autonomous can be supported by their views regarding their mistakes. Many students suggested that they should produce their own written work even if they do make mistakes. Two students stated:

We want to create our own writing and make mistakes. We can learn from our mistakes. We need to use our own examples and sentences. We need to try and try until we learn. *[1st year level female student 3]*

We memorise the determined topics. We do nothing when we write. We are like a machine. We just copy and paste without understanding why, how, and what we write. We need to create our own compositions. *[2nd year level male student 1]*

Students were willing to take the risk of making mistakes in learning so that their efforts to construct sentences and write compositions can be improved through learning from them. This is in line with Scrivener (2005) who stressed the importance of students learning from their mistakes which help them think and try to find solutions for their own problems. Consistently, Larsen-freeman (2000) indicates that making mistakes can be considered a beneficial and natural output of growing communication skills.

Also, in this study, students want to be creative through producing their own sentences and compositions when writing in English, not just in the secondary school but in the earlier grades. This is reflected in the following views:

We need to learn how to create our own sentences in the elementary schools to be able to create our own compositions in the secondary schools. *[3rd year level male student 2]*

To improve our writing, we need to write about topics interesting to us. We can write about it at home and create our own ideas and sentences. *[2nd year level female student 1]*

We should be taught how to create our own ideas and how to write meaningfully, not just spelling and grammar without knowing anything...I really want to learn and create my own sentences but unfortunately the teachers always force us to copy and paste. *[1st year level male student 3]*

We need to write a real letter to a real friend instead of copying and pasting. *[3rd year level male student 1]*

These comments suggest that students believe that creating sentences by themselves will reduce their difficulties in English writing. They believe that learning English writing should focus on learning how to use the language fluently and creatively in different contexts. This view was not dissimilar to that of the teachers who seemed to agree that creativity would help students to use the English language effectively so that their writing problems would be reduced. Typical of their remarks was the following statement:

For reducing students' difficulties in English writing, I suggest that students should write freely and create their own sentences and paragraphs. Teachers need to set up writing competitions for students to create their own compositions. [*Female teacher 2*]

Importantly, although students' and teachers' views were similar regarding the importance of creation and production in writing to improve it, it was evident that some teachers did not agree that students actually wanted to create and produce their own writing. This view is expressed by one teacher:

They [students] want us to do everything. They should create their own sentences. They should create their own paragraphs. The curriculum does not help us to encourage them to create their own. [*Male teacher 1*]

This implies that some students are passive learners and need to be directed; they do not want to produce their own sentences and ideas. Two teachers suggested that advanced students wished to make their own compositions:

To be honest, some good students want to create their own works and they ask me if there is a problem with that. I always encourage them. I think some students do not want to imitate or copy but our way of teaching and the curriculum instruction forces them to imitate and copy and paste. [*Male teacher 2*]

If I find good students who want to improve their writing, I encourage them to create their own. [*Male teacher 3*]

Critically, one teacher explained that he wanted to help students to create their own sentences and compositions but he faced obstacles:

I am not required as a teacher to give them the chance to put the words in sentences on their own. I think it is a good idea to let them create their own sentences and compositions and I think if they get accustomed to creating their own, they will do a great job, but I think I will face a problem with the class in relation to time and size. I will not be able to give feedback because of the heavy work load. *[Male teacher 2]*

This suggests that while the teachers felt the need to encourage creativity in students' writing to develop English proficiency, the teachers were constrained by mandatory curriculum, class sizes and available instruction time that hindered creativity in the classroom.

6.2.4 Extra English classes.

The introduction of extra English courses was suggested by both students and teachers as a method to address Saudi secondary school students' English writing difficulties. From the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, students' attitudes were evident in phrases such as "extra English class", "extra English lessons" and "English courses". In the focus groups, all students suggested the need for extra English classes for their English writing. The following comments are indicative of those made by many others:

I suggest two English classes a day to reduce the difficulties we have in English writing. *[1st year level female student 2]*

Just four classes a week is not enough for learning a second language. We just learn here. We need to have more classes. There should be specific classes for writing and reading, etc. *[1st year level male student 3]*

We need special classes for writing as it is neglected and we rarely practise writing. Even in the exam we do nothing. *[2nd year level male student 1]*

I think one class a day is not enough. We need at least two classes to have the chance learn and use English. Also, the size of the classroom is small but the

number of students is high. We need extra English classes. [*2nd year level female student 2*]

These statements reveal that currently the number of English classes does not meet many students' needs and may not help them in acquiring better English writing skills.

Teachers also share similar views about extra English lessons. Three teachers argued that:

A forty-five-minute class is not enough for students to learn English. I suggest increasing the number of English classes and some of them should be arranged in an English lab for practising their English. [*Female teacher 1*]

We don't have enough time to give feedback. Students need to have extra English classes so that we can follow them and give feedback. This would help lessen their problems in English writing. [*Male teacher 1*]

There is a need for increasing the number of English classes, because four classes a week would not help them to learn English very well. [*Male teacher 2*]

Overall, the findings suggest more exposure to English classes would alleviate difficulties with writing. Accordingly, increasing the number of English classes while providing targeted writing feedback and some language laboratory sessions, could help students improve their English language skills, and writing in particular. This is in line with Craddock (2014), who found the extra English classes (one-on-one interactions) beneficial in improving the quality of the students' writing. Also, the findings of this study seem to be consistent with those results found by Hamid, Sussex & Khan (2009), who relate a positive quantitative relationship between students' participation in additional extra-curricular learning and performance on proficiency tests. The more students get extra classes, the more their writing improves.

Possible reasons why the students suggest extra classes can be attributed to prescribed teaching practices in regular classes, class size, and their desire to practise their English. As

indicated earlier, the students blamed their teachers for using boring teaching methods and some of them considered teachers as the main source of their English writing problems. As stated earlier the scope of this study does not allow for an evaluation of teachers' capabilities so no conclusions can be made about ability. However, it can be assumed from the results of the interviews that students may want extra classes to learn with teachers who they perceive as being better able cater to their learning needs (Bashiri and Shahrokhi, 2016). Class size could be another reason. As found earlier, both students and teachers complained about the large class sizes. In addition, the desire for practice is a key motivator. This is evidenced through the findings of this study that students want to practise what they learn either inside or outside of school. This is supported in the emerging theme which will be presented and discussed in the section below. Practice is one solution suggested by both students and teachers to help reduce students' English writing problems.

6.2.5 Practice.

Another frequently mentioned theme was "practice". The findings show that students needed to practise both general and specific English skills. Typical comments include the need to "practise their English inside and outside the classroom", "practise using the new vocabulary and the grammatical rules they had learnt in different contexts", "practise spelling", "practise writing free paragraphs", "practise English inside the class" and that they "needed to practise writing on a continuous level".

Students expanded on this theme in the focus group as the following comments illustrate:

We need to practise what we have learnt. We need to speak English in the class at least once a week. I suggest that we can call it English day. [*1st year level male student 2*]

We need special classes for writing as it is neglected and we rarely practise writing even in the exam we do nothing. [*2nd year level male student 1*]

If we don't practise writing ourselves, we would learn nothing. [*3rd year level female student 2*]

The above comments clearly indicate that students believed practice is an important predictor of their ability to write well in English. This is consistent with Harmer (2004) and Hyland (2003) who argue that practicing the target language is one of the most effective ways to improve learning the language skills. This is congruent with Scrivener (2005) who argues that students learn from their mistakes, and that errors are a sign of progress in terms of taking risks and trying to communicate. The students' suggestion for practicing their English is underlined by the students' desire for extra classes. It is clear from the data collected that lessons within the current curriculum offer little freedom for students to practise their language skills. The importance of offering students opportunities to practise newly acquired language is underlined by Brown (2007) who points out that the most important factor in learning the target language is meaningful practice. In other words, practice means to be engaged in communicative meaningful activities rather than in activities such as slot-and-filler drills that do not require students to understand meaning and communicate their language and therefore, do not involve students in practice (Williams, 2005). In short, practice, as suggested by the students, means using language communicatively, rather than repetitively memorising and imitating written models. Students' opinions were consistently supported by the teachers who agreed that when students practised in English, their writing problems tended to decrease. Two teachers expressed this view:

I try to encourage students to practise spelling although the textbook does not have exercises about spelling because I believe learning needs practising. [*Male teacher 3*]

I think practising is a fundamental factor for learning English. Practising helps students to express their ideas. I believe that practising is the most effective way to help students decrease their difficulties in all the four skills. [*Female teacher 1*]

However, teachers complained that their current heavy workload prevented better writing practice. Furthermore, they were in fact critical of the present curriculum as it did not adequately focus on practice as a means to develop better English language performance. Two teachers stressed that:

Students can practise writing in their free time but the problem is how I can give them feedback. We are not able to give feedback. The ability to give feedback depends on the class size and the number of students in the class.

[Male teacher 1]

We know that learning a second language needs practice. I believe that some students are smart and love English but they need to practise using their English outside the classroom. For writing, they should practise writing more and more. But the curriculum which is being implemented does not encourage students to practise writing by themselves. *[Male teacher 3]*

From the responses, it is clear that teachers understood the importance of encouraging students to use their own time outside the classroom to practise free writing. However, it seems that the teachers did not actively motivate the students to do so as this would mean that they would have to access this work and give feedback, which they perceived would take up much of their unpaid time. This conclusion is supported by Lee (2004) who points out that giving feedback is time-consuming and teachers should be trained for giving feedback effectively. Also, these responses, in the current thesis, revealed that although some teachers may intend to give the students the opportunity to practise writing freely in English, the existing curriculum does not encourage students to do so. This is in line with Al-Hazmi (2006), Al-Seghayer (2011) and Elyas and Picard (2010), who articulate the limitations of the Saudi curriculum in terms of focusing mostly on memorisation and imitation. Such insights may have implications for curriculum developers and policy-makers who may develop suitable strategies to facilitate students to practise more.

6.2.6 Previous English learning experiences.

A number of students expressed the view that one solution for their English writing difficulties was having a strong foundation in previous English learning in elementary and intermediate schools. For this, students suggested that they needed to learn English as early as possible. This view was endorsed by 73 students in their open-ended questions. Some remarked that they should “learn English from early childhood,” while others mentioned that they should “learn from the third year level in the elementary school.”

It should be emphasised that most open-ended questionnaire responses did not specifically provide adequate explanations about why strong foundations in English skills are required to alleviate students’ problems with writing. However, their importance is reflected in these two statements:

It depends on the foundation. We have learned nothing in the intermediate school. It is expected we learn English from the first year level in elementary school. If we did, we would be great in English. *[2nd year level male student 2]*

Sometimes the teachers believe that all students know the letters but most of them do not. They didn't learn them very well in the elementary school. *[3rd year level male student 3]*

In the student focus groups, students did reveal many more details. All students agreed that learning English should begin in elementary schools. Students associated their difficulties in writing English to a weak foundation. One student pointed out:

The foundation is very weak. It should be strong. We cannot learn how to write a paragraph before knowing how to write a complete sentence. We will not be able to learn English very well unless we learn it at first year level in the elementary school. *[3rd year level male student 1]*

This implies that students without a strong foundation will likely face challenges in meeting the requirements of English at the secondary school level where they are expected to write a paragraph, yet this study would suggest many students are incapable of writing a

complete sentence correctly. Perhaps this is why some students suggested learning the basics as early as possible. This can be supported by some experts in the field who suggest that acquiring a second language in early childhood sets children up for success later on (Ellis, 1997). Also, learning English in the early years would provide learners with more opportunities to practise their English. Many researchers, as indicated in the literature review chapter above, believe language proficiency correlates directly with the number of hours a student has practised (Bashiri & Shahrokhi, 2016; Graham & Perin, 2007; Hyland, 2004; Seyyedrezaie and Barani, 2013; Yang, 1999).

However, the reality is that some secondary students are not conversant with all the English letters, let alone writing complete sentences correctly. Several students wondered how meaningful learning in English is possible if students did not have a solid foundation. According to one:

If the foundation is strong, English would be easy to learn. It is very difficult because we as Arabs do not speak English widely. Also, we do not have a good foundation at the 6th year level in elementary school. The teacher did not teach us very well. He made us pass without being competent enough in English. There are some students who did not learn the English letters very well when they were in the intermediate school level. [*1st year level female student 1*]

Teacher comments reveal some intuitive responses to when students should learn a foreign language.

One teacher commented:

Students have a lot of problems in grammar because of their weak foundation. To reduce these problems, students should learn basic skills early in elementary schools. [*Female teacher 2*]

Another teacher wondered how she could teach students more advanced skills when they had difficulties in mastering the English alphabet. She pointed out:

Students need to have strong foundation from childhood as some of them attend secondary schools without recognising all the English letters. In these cases, it

is very, very difficult for students to advance their English skills. This is why I advocate that students learn the basic from a very early age. [*Female teacher 3*]

The above comments clearly highlight the challenges faced by teachers. These challenges seem enormous because of many students' weak foundation. In these cases, students fail to meet their teachers' expectations. Arguably, obtaining a strong foundation from an early age would most certainly facilitate the teaching of more advanced English skills in the secondary school. This problem could be aggravated, as indicated by the students, by the skill level of some of the teachers. Coupled with this is the weak preparation of teachers, as indicated by the students below (see Section 6.2.7.1).

Linked to the issue of a weak foundation is the design and implementation of new curriculum to address the issues that English teachers face. Several teachers signalled that while successful English learning relies on skills and processes, it is imperative that Saudi Arabian educational policy-makers consider the issue of a strong foundation when designing the curriculum. The importance of this is noted in the comments below:

I feel frustrated because of their base or foundation. I get distracted between teaching them the foundational rules in spelling, grammar and writing sentences and in teaching them the current curriculum that has more complicated grammatical rules. I think that learning English from the third or fourth level in the elementary school would make students better in English so that their future difficulties would be lessened. [*Male teacher 2*]

I believe that if students learn English very well when they are very young, a lot of their challenges in English writing will be reduced. [*Male teacher 1*]

Thus, the comments echoed by both students and teachers above clearly indicate the importance of having a solid and early foundation in basic English skills, especially complete mastery of both forms of the alphabet and essential spelling and grammar. This would also serve to mitigate against future difficulties students encounter in their English writing.

6.2.7 Teacher-related issues.

Both students and teachers suggested a number of possibilities to improve teachers and their teaching practices. Specifically, the data analysis below reveals two major teacher-related themes, namely *teacher training* and *improved teaching techniques*. In the following discussion, teacher training refers to the training English language teachers receive. For improved teaching techniques, two issues are explored, namely *feedback* and *varying teaching techniques*.

6.2.7.1 Teacher training. Students believed that teachers needed training in teaching English. This training should be of an acceptable level that would lead to improvements in students' English proficiency. The responses to the open-ended questions included the suggestion "train teachers how to teach English" but the suggestion was not substantiated with details; rather, students offered general reasons for the need for teacher training in English.

With regard to the student focus groups, students agreed that teachers need to be trained in how to teach English generally and writing specifically. All students claimed that teachers' training may have a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. Students pointed out that teachers should be trained in how to use "effective teaching methods". One student commented:

Teachers should undertake some courses in how to teach English and how to use effective teaching methods. Hopefully, teacher training will allow us the chance to be responsible for our own learning by creating sentences and writing our paragraphs by ourselves instead of copying and pasting. Teaching training in English is crucial for teachers if they want to improve their students' English skills. [2nd year level male student 1]

This comment highlights the view that students perceive teachers' training as pivotal in promoting their learning. Literature reviewed for this study highlighted this concern and is consistent with the work of Al-Seghayer (2016), Gibbs and Coffey (2004), and Harris and Sass

(2011), who suggest that it is crucial that teacher training should be carried out to improve teaching strategies. Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) also posit that training teachers to effectively teach writing is critical for learners' success. They also maintain that many EFL Saudi teachers often have no classroom experience and have no professional training (Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013).

Participating students suggested that teachers should be trained in how to employ "effective teaching methods" in terms of giving students the opportunity to be autonomous and creative rather than passive, reproductive and imitative when writing in English. Whilst students valued the teachers' role in promoting students' learning, they were in favour of teachers educating students in certain ways that would foster communicative and interactive situations. It can be seen from the analysis of the comments made in interviews that students want their learning to be student-centred learning rather than teacher-centred learning.

Some students contended that improving teaching skills is more important than improving other factors, such as the curriculum. One commented:

The teachers should be trained and improved before improving the curriculum. [*1st year level male student 2*]

Evidently, the general consensus among students was that priority should be given to teacher training. Although improving the curriculum was perceived by some students and all teachers to be very important, students deemed improving teachers' skills to be more important, as will be discussed below. Overall, it can be concluded from the findings that students think their teachers' performance and training will affect their learning outcomes. The call for better teacher training to address students' challenges in English writing is not only emphasised by students but also by their teachers.

Interestingly, all teachers did concur that they need training in teaching English generally and writing specifically. Although all of the interviewed teachers have no less than

five years of teaching experience, they perceived that they needed English teaching training programs. One teacher pointed out:

I attended four courses in teaching generally such as classroom management. To be honest, I did not benefit from those courses. We just attended and got certificates. Specifically, it is like a lecture where we listen to the presenter and then we sign off for attending. We have never been trained in how to teach writing. Therefore, I suggest that we need training sessions on how to teach English and how to teach writing specifically. *[Male teacher 1]*

It is evident from this comment that such training was impractical. Teachers were passive listeners themselves. Although classroom management is one of the issues related to teaching and learning, teachers suggested the training courses should be relevant to teaching the four main skills of language learning, especially writing. Teachers in fact value the benefit of being trained to teach English:

The ministry just trains us how to manage the classroom; how to introduce the information or the lessons in a simple way; how to use a portfolio for you as a teacher; or to assess the questions of the final exam from the previous year. We need training courses in teaching English specifically not just in teaching generally. *[Female teacher 2]*

Four teachers suggested they wanted training courses to concentrate on teaching English, especially the main four skills, while two mentioned they had never received any English teacher training. One of these commented:

We need to learn how to teach English in a professional way. Unfortunately, even in the university, we haven't been trained to teach the four skills. We haven't been taught how to become an English teacher. *[Male teacher 3]*

This comment shows the teachers' desire for pre-service teacher training to prepare them for educating students in English and in a way that improves their teaching practice.

To sum up, the findings revealed that teachers acknowledge that English language teacher training will help them improve their teaching practice so that students could improve their English writing. This is supported by Yook and Lee (2016) who indicated that their

participating EFL Korean secondary teachers perceived that in-service training was useful as it helped them to improve their teaching techniques. However, the participants, in this present study, suggested some teaching techniques that can be implemented when teachers receive their training. These teaching techniques are explained below.

6.2.7.2 Improved teaching techniques. As stated above, the participants suggested some teaching techniques that can be taken into consideration when teachers undergo training. In the open-ended questions on the questionnaire, the perceived suggested techniques were such as “giving feedback” (20 respondents) and “varying teaching techniques” (70 respondents). Unlike student focus groups and teacher interviews, only a few students gave some details explaining their suggestions in the open-ended responses in the questionnaires.

6.2.7.2.1 Feedback. Feedback refers to teachers commenting on students’ written work. Students believed this would help them solve some of their problems in English writing. Most of the 20 responses, in the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, did not provide details as to why and how teachers should provide this feedback. These are typical of the more extended remarks:

Teachers should give feedback rather than just have a look at whether we complete the written work or not. [*1st year level female student 2*]

The teacher should give feedback rather than just sign off on the written work without any comments to improve writing. [*2nd year level female student 2*]

These viewpoints may imply that some teachers were only concerned with students completing the written tasks and not providing the necessary written feedback. The students in the focus groups reported that they were particularly keen to receive detailed feedback which would help them to develop their writing prowess and also highlight how the errors can be corrected.

Unlike the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, students in the focus group provided detailed suggestions about teachers’ feedback. All students concurred that teachers

should give students feedback on their written work so that mistakes could be identified and corrected which could assist students in developing their ability to use the English language.

One student queried how students could develop their written English in the absence of feedback:

Feedback is important. How can we improve our writing if there is no feedback? How can I know my mistakes? I want the teacher to read what I have written and comment on my work. After that, I can correct the mistakes I have made and then return my written work to her in order to check it again. [*3rd year level female student 3*]

It would appear that some students value the role of feedback in order to improve his or her English writing. In addition, the responses pertaining to feedback suggest that some students did not concentrate solely on their grades. Instead, they wanted to know how to rectify their mistakes.

Furthermore, some students actually suggested ways in which teachers could provide feedback:

We want the teacher to motivate us when we write correctly by providing comments such as “Well done, good or excellent”. When we do mistakes, we don't want her to embarrass us or yell at us. We need the teacher to comment in a nice way. For example, “If you do this, it will be better” or “There is a mistake here, you should write this and this”. [*3rd year level female student 2*]

The above statement clearly reveals students’ preferences for constructive positive feedback. Positive feedback will help to motivate and enhance students’ learning. Negative feedback, whether verbal or written, may undermine students’ motivation and self-confidence.

Although some students indicated their desire to receive feedback, one student indicated that it could be difficult for some teachers to give feedback to 30 students in one class. A range of comments from 2nd year level female students’ focus group are represented below:

Student1: I think the teacher does not concentrate on what we write. The most important thing is to write in the notebook. She walks around and signs without checking what we have written.

Students 3: Even the homework we are given has no feedback because we just copy and paste.

Students 2: Maybe it is difficult to check the work of 30 students.

Student 1: I don't know but she should be concerned about what we write and give feedback to reduce our problems and improve our writing.

Supporting the views of some students, the teachers agreed that providing feedback was important for promoting students' learning and helping students reduce their problems with English writing. However, within the constraints of the current workload this is not possible. One teacher was of the opinion that:

I believe that one of the possible solutions to reduce students' challenges in writing is to give them feedback on their written work. However, the Ministry should reduce the number of students in classes and reduce teachers' workload. I teach 24 classes a week. It is too much. [*Male teacher 3*]

The number of students in classrooms and the number of classes teachers have are real obstacles to writing feedback. One teacher did not endorse the importance of giving feedback, because of her teaching strategy:

I do not give feedback because students always copy from the board and they do not make mistakes. They do not make mistakes in spelling because they copied the words from the board. [*Female teacher 2*]

What emerges from this particular response is that feedback is unlikely to occur when students are merely asked to cut and paste. This situation inhibits the teacher's ability to provide meaningful feedback that students can learn from. Feedback is a crucial part of the learning process to help students improve their writing (Ferris, 2003; Hyland, 2003). If students continually cut and paste, they are unlikely to receive constructive feedback. Some teachers agreed that there are no benefits in giving feedback when students choose to cut and paste. In

these classes the major focus in the teaching of English writing is the rote teaching of spelling and grammar. English language learning here is about reproducing set slabs of texts rather than using the language in itself.

In summary, the responses showed a high level of consistency between both teachers and students regarding the significance of feedback. Teachers and students indicated that providing students with feedback on their written work plays a crucial role not only in addressing the difficulties students face in English writing but also in motivating them to improve their English writing.

It appears through student comments that most students value the role of feedback to improve their own English writing. This is in line with a study by Ferris (2003) who posits that feedback has the potential to be the most noteworthy element in refining students' writing skills. In addition, the student responses on feedback suggest that some students did not concentrate solely on their grades. Instead, they wanted to know how to rectify their mistakes. This supports the view of Hyland (2003) who notes that feedback enables students to progress and learn from their own mistakes. These comments are also congruent with the view of Scrivener (2005) who argues that students improve on the basis of their mistakes and make progress when mistakes occur. In addition, in the present study, the students want to assess their writing skills through feedback. This is consistent with Hyland and Hyland (2006) who indicate that feedback would assist in helping students to identify their strengths.

It is evident throughout this study that most of the classes have large numbers of students. Therefore, as iterated by both students and teachers, the number of students in classrooms and the number of classes teachers have are real obstacles to writing feedback. This is supported by Scrivener (2005) who points out that large class sizes are one of the main constraints for giving sufficient feedback. Analogous research indicated that teachers perceived heavy workloads as barriers for giving feedback (Lee, 2004; Seliem & Ahmed, 2009; Zaman

& Azad, 2012). Zaman & Azad (2012) point out that heavy workloads become barriers to feedback because they reduce the amount of time the teacher can allocate to checking students' work and follow up on corrections and suggestions. Due to the increased amount of marking and teachers' heavy workloads, feedback is often being provided too slowly, and lacks the necessary quality to be effective (Seliem & Ahmed, 2009). However, Nation (2001) suggests that peer feedback and self-assessment may be a solution in reducing teachers' workload.

6.2.7.2.2 Varying teaching techniques. The most commonly suggested ways for teachers to motivate students to improve their English writing was to vary teaching techniques. As indicated above, 70 respondents stated in the open-ended question of the questionnaire, that teachers should "vary their teaching techniques". However, students did not elaborate as to why and how this should happen. In the student focus groups, the students did justify varying teaching techniques. Three typical responses are:

We need our teachers to motivate us by using different teaching techniques. We get bored when teachers use the same method of teaching during every lesson.
[3rd year level male student 1]

Please, instruct teachers to vary their teaching techniques to motivate the students to learn instead of disliking the English subject. *[1st year level female student 3]*

The teacher should vary her teaching techniques to make the lessons interesting to us. Our problem is that the teachers repeat the same grammatical rules year in, year out. For example, we are taught every year in the same way that the pronouns "he", "she" and "it" take the verb "is". What I am saying is that we do not want to learn the grammatical rules like machines. We need variations in teaching techniques. *[2nd year level female student 3]*

The above comments indicate that using the same routine of teaching English could demotivate students. Students stressed that teachers should get them to create their own sentences using the grammatical rules they were taught, as described earlier. This may indicate that

varying teaching techniques would assist students to become proactive in the English learning process.

A similar view on varying teaching techniques was given by another student:
We need the teacher to change her teaching techniques. Half of the girls get bored and sleep especially when she teaches via the use of a projector. She turns the iChat off and starts showing slides quickly and we just listen until we fall asleep. [*2nd year level female student 1*]

In most instances, students believed that unvarying standard ways of teaching instil a degree of passiveness in students because they have no opportunity to contribute or develop their own ideas and opinions. On the other hand, varying teaching techniques, including the use of creative learning and interactive approaches, could maximise students' participation and engagement:

We feel bored in the class because the teachers teach the lessons in the same way every time. I think if she changes her teaching techniques, many students will participate and get involved. [*1st year level female student 2*]

Another suggestion for varying teaching techniques was:
We like group work. It is easier for all the students to learn when we work in a group. A student who understands nothing will understand when his partners help him. It is a way of changing the boring class atmosphere. We can help each other. It is very motivating when we help each other and we share ideas. [*1st year level male student 2*]

This comment suggests that group work or working in pairs could help to motivate students. Most of the interviewed students indicated that they preferred group work where they could interact, discuss and exchange ideas. Moreover, group work and/or working in pairs promote cooperation that would assist in creating a more relaxed classroom environment (Harmer, 2007). Promoting interaction and cooperation will likely motivate students to learn the target language (Dörnyei, 2001). However, some participating students acknowledged that whilst some students preferred group work and/or working in pairs, others might prefer working individually. One student disagreed with the other two students in the same focus group saying:

I think group work is not beneficial. It is because there are some careless students who do not want to learn. They are silent and do nothing. This is why it [group work] is a waste of time. [*1st year level male student 3*]

It was also suggested that using a variety of media would enhance motivation:

Teachers should use videos, audios, computers, projectors to motivate us. [*3rd year level male student 2*]

Overall, the findings indicate that employing a variety of teaching techniques and materials will motivate students, cater to individual learning needs and inspire students to learn English more effectively. This is synonymous with other research in the field that suggests demotivation may occur when students are presented with repetitive writing lessons that do not cater to student preference (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2001). The student participants suggested different ways of learning such as group work, pair work and individual work and utilising technology to improve motivation and learning.

The comment on using technology such as “videos audios, computers” is suggestive of an overall preference for technology which appeared throughout the students’ responses. In the open-ended questionnaire responses, as a way of varying teaching techniques, a number of students suggested using technology to enhance motivation in the English lessons. However, once again, they did not generally expand on how teachers could use modern technology to enhance their teaching.

Focus group students pointed out that greater use of technology in lessons would most certainly boost their motivation. One student emphasised this by remarking:

I hope our teacher uses modern technology such as videos, computers and projectors to make the lesson interesting. I hope our teacher uses technology to demonstrate “real” conversations between two people to motivate us. By doing so we can listen to these conversations and learn new vocabulary. [*3rd year level male student 3*]

This opinion suggests that students want to learn from authentic everyday resources via technology because it is motivating. Also, this implies students prefer listening and/or watching a “real conversation” between people rather than reading it. When students “see” the real world outside the classroom brought inside it via technology, it is expected that their motivation to learn English will improve (Dörnyei, 2001). Similar views are presented below:

Teachers should change the topics so that they are related to what we like and make it more attractive by supporting it with pictures and videos. In essence, they should use more technology in their lessons. This is sure to motivate most students. *[2nd year level male student 2]*

We need labs with modern technology like English institutes have in order to motivate us to learn. *[2nd year level female student 3]*

In addition, students also stressed the importance of using the Internet in the classroom. Several students criticised the lack of Internet access as a teaching aid in Saudi schools and two students elaborated on this fact by stating:

Why don't our teachers use the Internet to make the lesson motivating? We can reach the world via the Internet. *[3rd year level female student 3]*

I spend most of the day browsing the Internet and playing games on PlayStation. I sometimes browse Google by writing English words. I search for something in English. I chat with some people in English. I chat with games players in English. *[1st year level male student 1]*

Evidently, students believe in the importance of using the Internet to help enhance their motivation to learn English. These comments show that students tend to learn English when using chat rooms, playing games and contacting native English speakers who are also game players. This supports the view of Hyland (2003) who indicates that many Internet sites provide English language learners with language learning materials, such as puzzles, and grammar activities. These sites mostly motivate students when there are attractive interfaces, a variety of activities and a number of choices for learning. These comments also support the view of

Harmer (2007), Hyland (2003) and Fidaoui et al. (2010) who point out that implementing new technology based pedagogies would increase collaboration and interaction inside and outside the classroom. Thus, promoting interaction and cooperation through the use of technology in classes will likely motivate students to improve the target language skills including writing skills. The findings of this study also demonstrate that authentically communicating online with English speakers will encourage students to interact with others and motivate them to practise their English. This is supported by Brown (2007) and Harmer (2004) who argue that authentic resources would help learners make connections between what they learn in the classroom and their own lives. Using the same reasoning it is also argued that students who write about irrelevant topics face the most de-motivation (Dörnyei, 2001). Thus, the use of authentic sources will likely increase students' motivation (Nunan, 1999). Technology would also assist, to some degree, in improving their English language vocabulary, spelling and writing. For example, language learners are expected to learn new vocabulary and may put them in meaningful contexts when texting in online chatting and playing games online (Fidaoui, et al., 2010; Williams, 2005).

When asked how learning could be improved, students also often referred to “games”, for example “effective use of on-line games to stimulate learning” as a way of improving their motivation to learn. However, students did not clarify how using games would be implemented. In the focus groups, all students agreed that games would help motivate them and improve their command of the language. This view was expressed by two students and their comments are indicative of the sentiments of the others:

We need the teacher to give us games to motivate us and I will learn English very well. [*1st year level female student 3*]

We need games, competitions or something similar to motivate us to practise writing and use our English. [*2nd year level female student 3*]

These observations indicate that students related their proficiency in learning English to their motivation which can be raised through playing games. This may indicate that students are eager to learn but they need a motivating environment. In addition, some students provided examples of how some games help increase motivational levels:

...By explaining in an interesting and practical way. For example, the teachers give us games for rearranging sentences and creating our own personal sentences. *[2nd year level female student 2]*

I like games. In the English institutes, there are computer games. For example, you choose the right answer. If you do not choose the right answer, you can try and try until you choose the right answer. I like this because it motivates me to learn. *[2nd year level male student 1]*

These statements show that students believe games would help keep them engaged and actively learning. This is in line with the existing literature review which suggests that using games can aid in the promotion of communicative skills in language learning and enhance students' engagement (Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi, 2017). Being active and engaged in learning would increase learners' motivation for improving their English language. When students maintain engagement in activities, they tend to stay motivated and can focus for longer (Blake, 2016). Games can help in creating a relaxing and non-stressful atmosphere, thus students' motivation will likely increase. Language games are very useful because students find them enjoyable and they require them to practise communicatively in a meaningful situation (Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi, 2017; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Similarly, students in the focus groups indicated that when games are challenging, learning becomes more motivating. It is also evident that some students appeared not to care about making mistakes, when playing challenging games as they were more focused on the game than on grammatical errors. Again, the comparison between language teaching practices in Saudi secondary schools and those in English language institutes has been made, with the secondary schools coming off a clear

second best. Some students also pointed out that, current teaching techniques bored them and they wanted their teachers to use games to make the learning environment more enjoyable:

Providing us with games would make the lesson enjoyable. Unfortunately, most of the girls fall asleep in the English class because of boredom. [*3rd year level female student 3*]

The above response demonstrates that using games as a teaching strategy would keep students engaged. However, the curriculum as it stands does not factor in a communicative approach in which students can place real meaning to their learning. For example, games, particularly interactive games require students to be in the present and communicating with their peers and with their teachers in real time. Wright et al. (2006) believe that games play an important role in providing meaning in learning to write in English.

It could be stated that games do indeed motivate students to learn English and that there are a wide range of possibilities available through using the Internet. For example, by conversing with other on-line game players, Saudi students can learn new vocabulary and spelling in an authentic context, thereby providing the motivation to learn English in terms of writing, communicating, spelling, and vocabulary. Games are recommended as effective teaching strategies, particularly for acquiring new vocabulary (Casanave, 2002; Ebrahimzadeh and Alavi, 2017; Huyen & Nga, 2003; Rinvolutri & Davis, 1995). Other participating students refer to games and activities for specific aspects of language practice itself, such as grammar games with one right answer, or content based activities providing information, both of which can be used to lead to effective writing. It is consistent with the notion that the aim for having educational games in the classroom is not primarily having fun but rather for learning outcomes (Wright et al., 2006). Students acquire language subconsciously without focusing on the fact that they are learning (Schultz, 1988).

To sum up, the findings revealed that improving learners' motivation to learn English language writing skills better has not been given much attention by curriculum designers,

policy-makers and teachers. Most students feel that teachers should apply various teaching techniques so that rich learning experiences are offered and delivered. The findings also suggest that until now little attention has been given to integrating modern technology, including information and multimedia technology, such as videos, audios, computers, projectors and games to motivate student learning. Students have formed the opinion that improving their motivation is an essential aspect of helping them solve their English language problems, and they consider actively engaging with technology for language practice is highly motivating.

6.3 Conclusion for Chapter six

When discussing the results and recommendations offered in the above analysis it is clear that teachers should be encouraged to teach English in a more communicative manner. The analysis showed that the students are interested generally in learning English as more than just a means to pass exams. They want to know the language and be able to use it correctly and effectively outside the classroom. However, the teachers seem to hold a different view. They are more concerned with getting the students to complete the curriculum by making them memorise and imitate aspects of grammar, punctuation, letters, etc., without really knowing how these functions and even what meaning they convey. Both teachers and students indicated that the school curriculum in Saudi Arabia needs to be modified so that learning English reflects real-life events of the students at their proficiency levels. Essentially, it should be made interesting. Additionally, creativity, extra English classes, and communicative practice could be introduced into the system. The students reported that they would like to be more involved in their English writing by creating their own compositions; they would like extra lessons and practice in the language as well. Moreover, the analysis revealed that learning English should be introduced earlier on in the students' schooling. There are also teacher-related issues which must be addressed: English language teacher training and improved teaching techniques. The

students believe that their teachers are lacking in adequate training on how to teach English writing and there must also be improvements on how teaching practices are executed. The implications for policy-makers also extend to adjusting teachers' workloads so that effective and meaningful feedback can be provided for students' writing.

6.4 Conclusion for Chapters four, five and six.

No single factor can be said to be the cause of the problems faced by Saudi students in learning writing skills in English. Rather, the problems they face are multifaceted with some problems paving the way for others, particularly in the case of previous poor language learning experience. Teachers are not initially well trained in creative teaching methods and identifying students specific learning needs, nor are they well equipped through continuing professional development to significantly alter their teaching practice.

Teachers perpetually use teaching methods that the students perceive as boring, and when the students consider it boring they become passive and de-motivated. Importantly, the syllabus currently has no room for creativity, and the students rely on memorising and imitation. An invigorated syllabus offering opportunities to practise as well as authentic learning experiences relevant to the students' lives is a key solution to improving the outcomes of second language learners. The right tools need to be given to the teachers in order for them to implement long lasting change. Developing a curriculum that enables the students to build on existing knowledge and gradually increases in difficulty over the years is vital if the current situation is to be improved.

Overall the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived factors affecting Saudi secondary students in acquiring English writing skills. Specifically, this thesis addressed three key questions:

- What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?

- What are the contributing factors perceived by students and teachers regarding the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?
- What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?

In addition to these central research questions, five subsidiary questions were also explored concerning the associations between teaching practices and English writing difficulties; the association between L2 English writing strategies and English writing difficulties; the association between motivation and English writing difficulties; the association between anxiety and English writing difficulties and finally the association between L1 Arabic writing strategies and L2 English writing ability.

In addressing the initial research question, the analysis focused on the different problems students faced at sentence level writing and paragraph level writing in English. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to effectively explore these issues. It was particularly interesting to note that the students and teachers' perceptions did not fully match up with the evidence obtained from asking the students to undertake a simple writing task. However, due to too many students refusing to participate in the writing task and some answers not meeting the criteria, the written exercises cannot be said to be fully representative of the sample. Vocabulary was a key issue highlighted both by students' and teachers' responses as well as the written task. The students reported that grammar, particularly verb conjugation, was a real challenge, however this was not reflected in the written task, although this is likely due to the fact that the written task only required verbs to be conjugated in the present tense. Interestingly capitalisation and punctuation appeared to pose some difficulty in the writing task; however, students themselves reported no challenge in this area. It is likely that this is due to the lack of opportunities for free practice and the heavy focus on replicating existing writing.

The second research question investigated what factors the students believe contributes to the difficulties they face with regard to writing in English. The lack of opportunity within the curriculum for students to practise functional language was seen as a severe limiting factor. The focus on teacher-centred rote learning was cited as one of the most significant barriers to learning. The authoritative role of the teacher within the classroom cemented the students' role as passive and was seen as a de-motivating factor. In addition, the students also cited the limited opportunities to practice as a barrier to learning along with the lack of informative feedback. This was a particular issue for the teachers as large class sizes and heavy workloads meant feedback was difficult to prioritise. Previous poor learning experiences along with test anxiety created a challenging learning environment and all stakeholders agreed it was hard to flourish. The final research question focused on solutions that aim to reduce student de-motivation and anxiety and improve learning outcomes. Particularly important was a focus on providing effective continuing professional development in order to effectively support the teachers to implement long term positive change in their classrooms, becoming less authoritarian and more student-focused. Emphasis was also placed on the importance on creative learning with vocabulary games and technology suggested as key transformative practices for improving the learning environment and reducing anxiety. Extra classes and a change in curriculum enabling autonomous learning and the inclusion of authentic and contemporary material were posited as effective mechanisms through which the quality of teaching and learning of English writing could be improved. Through analysing both the qualitative and quantitative data it was clear that the students and teachers proposed useful, achievable and practical solutions that were directly relevant to the barriers to learning identified through the second research question. Given the opportunity to implement some of these positive changes, it is likely that the learning experience for Saudi students in the context of English writing could be greatly improved.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications

7.1 Introduction

This thesis began by highlighting the need for research into the difficulties Saudi Arabian secondary school students face when learning to write in English. Chapter Two presented a comprehensive review of literature, providing a theoretical basis for understanding the perceived difficulties EFL students face when learning to write in English. It also revealed a very small body of research specifically related to Saudi Arabian student and teacher perceptions on the difficulties of writing in English at secondary school. Chapter Three presented the rationale for a mixed methods approach to the study, provided an overview of the research design, described the research site and the participants, and explained the validation strategies and methods used for the analysis of data. Chapters Four, Five, and Six presented the findings of each of the following research questions:

- What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?
- What are the contributing factors perceived by students and teachers regarding the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?
- What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the appropriate solutions to the difficulties faced by Saudi secondary school students with writing in English?

In this final chapter, a summary of this study is presented along with the conclusions that could inform best teaching practices for both the researcher and secondary school teachers in Saudi Arabia.

7.2 Summary of Main Findings

The literature used for this study provided a framework for understanding the difficulties that students face when learning to write English. Within the literature, there is a widespread agreement on the contributory factors that make it difficult for students to write in English. These factors generally include lack of L2 writing strategies, low motivation, writing anxiety and flawed teaching methods. The widespread nature of these problems suggests that the curriculum is out of touch with current needs. Al-Seghayer (2016) argues that students and teachers should be allowed to voice their perceptions of the English Language curriculum. The findings of this study suggest a similar conclusion. Comments from students and teachers from this study reveal that the voices of both groups are seldom listened to.

While many studies have been conducted on the difficulties students face with writing, there has been little work done on students' and teachers' perceptions of the English writing challenges. Studies tend to concentrate on the end product, such as writing samples, in order to judge how well students write English. There is little work on how students and teachers perceive the learning experience. There is also a dearth of information on Saudi secondary school students. This study attempted to remedy that lack of information. It collected data through student questionnaires, student focus groups and teacher interviews. Also, writing samples were collected for making comparisons between the perceived difficulties and the actual written errors. This conclusion will continue with an in-depth discussion of the main findings obtained.

7.2.1 English writing difficulties.

Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that Saudi secondary school students perceive themselves to have difficulties in both sentence and paragraph level issues when writing in English. Most respondents in this study perceived vocabulary, verbs, articles, prepositions, spelling, and paragraph organisation and coherence to pose particular difficulty

for EFL Saudi secondary school students. This is in accordance with a number of previous studies, including Alhaisoni et al. (2015), Sawalmeh (2013), and Shukri (2008).

The findings of this study, based on students' perceptions and their actual writings, showed that the most problematic area in sentence level issues was to use vocabulary correctly in different contexts. This is supported by existing literature; many researchers in the literature review see vocabulary as particularly difficult (Al-Seghayer, 2015; Brown, 2007; Harmer, 2007; Nation, 2001; Nunan, 1999; Thornbury, 2009).

A major point of concurrence between this study and existing literature is with regard to the challenges students face when learning and using grammar. This is a common theme in recent research; for instance, Darus and Subramanian (2009) suggest that students find it difficult to make use of grammar rules when communicating in writing, and Al-Khairi (2013) notes that verbs are particularly difficult for L1 Arabic learners of English due to the grammatical challenges presented by tense and irregular verbs. The findings for this present study agree, with 61% of students always or often having difficulty in grammar, and 23% sometimes having difficulty.

Concerning the difficulties in sentence-level writing, the findings of this study showed that the students perceive no difficulties in using punctuation and capitalisation in written English; however, analysis of their writing samples revealed that this participants in general have substantial difficulties in these areas. Analysis of the writing samples for this study revealed no such disparity for vocabulary and spelling, but a contradiction between perceptions and reality when using verbs.

The contrast between the students' perceived difficulties and their actual writing performance are noteworthy. They may be associated with the instructional methodology used to teach them English-language writing. Literature used in this study supports this view, with Hasan and Akhand (2010) stating that students lack the ability to organise their compositions

and indeed their study indicates that instructional teaching practices contribute to this. However, this study throws new light on the possible reasons for these difficulties. The perception of students and some teachers is that students are not allowed to write about subjects related to their own lives so they lack the incentive to write about topics that do not interest them. The study indicated that too much time was spent on learning vocabulary, which was often not contextualised. The findings for this study revealed that teaching practices were perceived by students as a significant contributory factor in the challenges facing them when writing in English. This issue highlights the gap in research concerning teacher practices in Saudi Secondary schools. This study addresses this gap by providing current research into student experiences of writing in English in Saudi secondary schools.

Caution should be used when comparing the literature to the results in this study. As stated many times in the study, most of the previous research has been focused on university students, who may have pre-determined ideas from secondary school about their competency. In other words, because they did not do so well in secondary school their beliefs may have followed them to university. This study shows that students at secondary school do not have the opportunity to practise spelling, verbs and tense through practice and experimentation, instead they are taught only what they need to know for exams. Thus, they may pass exams without really understanding how English grammar works and how it can be applied to different scenarios. These findings also concur with Elyas and Picard (2010), who found that EFL Saudi students were not fully capable of applying grammar rules because they were only taught within a specific context: that of taking exams.

7.2.2 Teaching practices.

Both students and teachers suggested teaching practices in general should be improved. Teachers rarely gave feedback, which made the students unaware of their mistakes and of strategies to improve their writing. Specifically, all the participating students suggested that if

teachers gave them more feedback on what they write, mistakes could be recognised and amended, and this could help them to improve their writing. Set in the broader context of the Saudi school system, this suggests that students do not receive the quality of feedback on their English writing necessary to recognise their strengths and weaknesses. Abdel Latif (2007) argues that lack of teacher feedback can result in poor performance and anxiety. Moreover, teachers only taught students to be prepared for the final exam, and consequently, students perceived that they are not able to use their grammar and vocabulary correctly in different real life situations. The fact that the curriculum is test-driven and just prepares students for exams comes up time and time again in the interviews for this study. Whilst the literature is in line with these findings, Elyas and Picard's (2011) study revealed that teachers rely on memorisation and imitation in their teaching to get students through exams and tests. The interviews in this current study clearly indicate that the test-driven curriculum which teachers in general teach to, impacts on students' motivation, makes them less prepared to study, and makes them anxious because they feel they are not prepared for exams.

The participating students and teachers suggested that students should be given opportunities to create their own sentences and compositions. Respondents stressed that students should construct their own written products. Studies made by Al-Seghayer (2011) and Al-Mohanna (2010) support this. The writers argue that rigid teaching strategies that oblige students to write about pre-decided topics circumscribes both teachers and students in the range of topics they could introduce in class and also limits the ways in which students can be creative in their writing. The findings for this study support the view of Benson (2011), who states that when students are allowed to compose their own texts, they become active, rather than passive learners. This study concludes that students desire to be active learners with respondents perceiving extra classes, inside and outside of school as providing opportunities to learn to write more creatively. This is consistent with Hyland (2003) who argues that practice is the

most effective way to learn something new. Respondents in this study said they were rarely given opportunities in class to practise. Homework was instructional, so many students cut and pasted information, an activity that is not the same as practicing and experimenting with vocabulary and grammar. The latter is one of the effective ways to improve learning the language skills. This is congruent with Scrivener (2005) who asserts that by practicing students learn from their mistakes, and that errors are a sign of progress in terms of taking risks and trying to communicate. The importance of offering students opportunities to practise newly acquired language is underlined by Brown (2007) who points out that if students are given opportunities to be creative they are more likely to practise because the activity becomes meaningful rather than just a task. Williams (2005) argues that the most important factor in learning the target language is meaningfulness practice which means to be engaged in meaningful communicative activities rather than in activities such as slot-and-filler drills that do not require students to understand meaning and communicate their language and therefore, do not involve students in practice. All of these suggestions may help Saudi secondary school students improve their English writing skills.

7.2.3 English writing strategies.

English writing is a recursive process: writers need to practise strategies such as planning, drafting, editing and proof-reading to achieve competency (Harmer, 2004). Findings for this study indicate that very little time is spent on this process with students, merely cutting and pasting information for both assessed and unassessed work. The students perceived the school-based English writing strategies as a contributing factor to their difficulties in English writing. The quantitative findings revealed that the English writing strategies taught to students were perceived to be significantly correlated with English writing difficulties. This is in line with Hammad (2013) and Mohseniasl (2014), who found a significant correlation between using English writing strategies and English writing proficiency. Qualitative data supported the

quantitative results. Specifically, the data showed that the students never use planning because they do not create their own compositions during the instructional process. The findings also showed that students were not taught procedural knowledge (i.e. paragraph-level issues). This suggests that students need to learn how to use a paragraph with a topic sentence followed by supporting sentences, paragraph organisation and coherence. The students' lack of planning, revising, organisation, and developing coherence as part of their writing strategy was not surprising because the main strategies are oriented on the final product rather than the processes of writing.

This is supported by the literature where Al-Hazmi and Scholfield (2007) argue that faced with test-orientated teaching strategies students tend to concentrate on grammar and spelling. Whilst evidence in this study indicates that students do not use autonomy when writing but follow teacher-led instructions, there are some writers who suggest that there is no clear evidence to support this hypothesis. Alkubadi (2014) and Khalil (2005) argue that English writing strategies do not correlate with English writing proficiency. This study hopefully contributes to the debate concerning this particular issue. For example, it underlines the fact that even if revision techniques incorporated linguistic features and procedural knowledge, students tended to only concentrate on revising grammar and spelling. This is in line with a number of studies that indicate that there is a significant correlation between using English writing strategies and English writing proficiency (Chen, 2011; Hammad, 2013; Mohseniasl, 2014; Troia & Graham, 2002). Other studies argue that English writing strategies are not significantly correlated to English writing proficiency (Alkubaidi, 2014; Khalil, 2005).

This study has identified a lack of implementation concerning essay instruction. It can be argued that revising instructional practices in general may help to improve student outcomes with the personnel and resources that are already in place. According to the participants, the product-oriented approach tended to de-motivate the students. Once more, the lack of

motivation and anxiety were perceived as major contributing factor to the difficulties faced by students in their English writing.

7.2.4 Motivation and anxiety.

One of the most important findings to emerge in this study is how motivation, or lack of it, impacts on how well students meet the challenges of learning to write in English. Hashemian & Heidari (2013) found a significant association between EFL writing performance and motivation. On the other hand, Dörnyei (2001) found that motivation rested upon other issues, such as being able to write about real life situations, pre-conceived ideas about difficulties when learning English, the classroom environment and autonomy. These issues were all discussed in the focus groups, interviews and questionnaires presented in this study.

The extent to which students and teachers are motivated in teaching and learning English writing has emerged as a significant issue in this study. Findings in this study revealed that the teacher's instructional practices contributed to the students feeling less motivated. The students stressed that their teachers should do more to help motivate them to learn English and improve their writing. For example, they suggested that teachers could help to improve student motivation by varying their instructional techniques, using multiple types of media, and implementing student activities (e.g. group work) to cater to different learning styles. Other suggested examples were to use instructional technology, the Internet, and games to help motivate them to improve their English language skills, including writing.

The participating teachers contributed another element related to students' motivation, which was students' preconceptions about learning English. Many students, as perceived by the teachers, are less motivated due to their preconceptions that learning English is difficult. The effectiveness of an instructional program can be either diminished or enhanced by student motivation to learn and willingness to fully engage with instruction. Literature supports these findings. Bacha (2000) also emphasises that motivation is a significant factor when learning to

write in English compared to other factors, such as learning styles, classroom practice and assessment strategies. However, the findings of this study suggest the importance of the classroom environment, learning styles, and significantly, assessment strategies as factors in de-motivation. Whilst some teachers blamed students for not taking ownership of their learning, it is clear from students' comments that test-driven, teaching methods and stifling classroom environments contribute greatly to their feelings of boredom and passivity. Hajizadeh and Salahshour (2012) support this view, suggesting that teachers who address student motivation are more likely to teach creatively. Researchers such as Arikan (2010), Hajizadeh & Salahshour (2012), and Shishavan & Sadeghi (2009) believe that inspirational teaching strategies impact on student motivation. It may be that teachers would benefit from more training in how to incorporate specific instructional methods and student activities.

Anxiety, a more complex issue, was found to be another affective factor in writing difficulties. The quantitative data revealed that anxiety is significantly positively correlated with English writing difficulties. The qualitative data supported these results. This finding is partly congruent with literature (Jebreil et al., 2015; Negari & Rezaabadi, 2012; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; Susoy & Tanyer, 2013; Zhang, 2011). However, this study departs from the literature in that the literature focuses on the links between writing achievement (the end product) and writing anxiety involved in this achievement. This study analyses perceptions of anxiety: for example, how students feel and what teachers believe causes student anxiety.

It is important to note that the results of this study indicate that anxiety and lack of motivation can be linked. The comments indicate that students are de-motivated because they are not challenged enough. This suggests that students are passive learners. This would indicate that students would not be anxious about any of their English language studies. However, many respondents said they get anxious when exams come up, which might suggest they do care about their studies and are motivated to pass their exams. Closer analysis of the qualitative

research shows that although the students do not create their ideas and their own compositions, they still feel anxious because they do not want to lose any marks. This perception is brought about by the disproportionate emphasis on the final written product and was criticised by both students and teachers. Thus, the culture within the classroom is based on getting through the final exam, which creates anxiety for students who believe they are not learning enough to achieve their goals. This is consistent with studies by Abu Shawish and Atea (2010) and Lee and Krashen (2002). These studies indicate that many students experience test anxiety, which may be related to lower student performance on exams. This is supported by Salehi and Marefat (2014), who found that students benefit from writing activities that are more engaging but lower-stakes. Such assignments let students practise their writing with less anxiety about receiving poor grades. Students will also benefit from teacher feedback without the punitive measures of receiving low grades on writing assignments.

7.2.5 Curriculum.

The research results reveal a general dissatisfaction among both teachers and students with the current curriculum and associated textbooks. Both students and teachers agreed that the curriculum does not pay sufficient attention to writing skills. Rather, it primarily focuses on reading and grammar. They claimed that most of the topics in the textbook are not suitable for the students because they are not relevant to their daily lives. Moreover, they indicated that the lessons follow an inappropriate sequence, including the repeated introduction of certain grammar lessons. Because the English language curriculum is standard throughout the larger school system, deficiencies in its current state have far-reaching effects on student outcomes. Instruction that prioritises mimicry of written models over the process of developing authentic written products may undermine the efforts of the Saudi education system to prepare students for post-secondary education where English proficiency is required.

An inherent lack of relevancy to the student population may result in student disengagement from English language learning in general, and writing in particular. Both students and teachers suggested that students should learn to write functionally in English. Specifically, students should apply the grammatical rules and vocabulary in different real life situations. This agrees with Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Nation (2001), who argued that lexical competence is crucial because it allows students to gain skills in applying their writing to a variety of different contexts. Both students and teachers suggested that the English language curriculum should use topics related to students' daily lives and interests, lessons should be sequenced from easy to difficult, audio and video aids should be provided and more interesting and relevant text books should be provided. The literature review indicates that these suggestions have already been identified as important factors in motivating students to achieve their writing aims. Writers such as Azizifar and Baghelani (2014), Graves (2000) and Tok (2010), all agree that textbooks should provide students with the opportunity to explore different real life scenarios whilst also appealing to different learning styles.

7.2.6 Previous Learning Experiences.

Another factor that emerged from the qualitative data was the importance of students' previous learning experiences. Both students and teachers agreed that the students' limited prior experiences with the English language contributed to problems they encountered with English writing. This suggests that Saudi children in the broader context are not engaging in English language experiences prior to school, and that early-level instruction and curricula do not sufficiently address such deficits in fundamental knowledge and skills. The existing disconnect between necessary fundamental knowledge and expectations of the formal instructional programs places students at a disadvantage, ultimately hindering their ability to successfully navigate the English language curriculum. Al Badi (2015) and Sourivavongsa et al. (2013) agree with these findings, suggesting that there can be far-reaching negative effects

when students experience poor previous learning. This is supported by Ansari (2012), who points out that Saudi university students have problems with their English academic writing because they have very little knowledge of basic English.

The participants suggested that students should develop a solid English-language foundation in early childhood, during elementary and intermediate school. It may also be helpful for students to begin writing paragraphs in intermediate school. At that level, students would not be expected to construct well-written paragraphs, but would focus on spelling and sentence structure. This would help develop the foundation necessary to prepare them for writing in that format in secondary school. To help students who have begun to fall behind their grade levels, it may be beneficial to align English writing instruction provided in the curriculum with student learning styles and levels. Where feasible, it could be beneficial to make remedial classes available to help students practise the skills taught during instruction.

7.3 Contributions of this study

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on Saudi students and teacher's perspectives on challenges with writing in English, contributing factors, and the perceived solutions. This is perhaps the first study to investigate Saudi secondary school teachers and students' perceptions on this topic making this study unique among other research that has sought to give a voice to Saudi teachers and students. The mixed methodology used in this study provides both statistical validity and contextual evidence to support the researcher's conclusions. Such a framework may be useful for further research in this area.

7.4 Implications of this Study

The findings of this study have implications that impact on the way students learn to write in English and whether or not teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia is successful or not. The following discussion will emphasise five areas of teaching and learning that

demonstrate why challenges need to be addressed if English writing goals are to be achieved. The implications have been categorised into the following sections: teaching training, updating delivery to make them relevant to student interests, incorporating feedback mechanisms in the curriculum, contextualising language in teaching and revising policy.

7.4.1 Teacher training.

Based on the perceptions of teachers interviewed for this study, the findings highlight a lack of EFL teacher-training in Saudi Arabian schools. One teacher explained that rather than being trained to teach students how to write in English, the training offered by the Ministry is mostly about classroom management and how to prepare students for examinations. Another teacher said that he had been teaching English writing for five years and had received no training in this subject. Students also perceived that teachers lack training. One student said that the teacher did not teach them very well and “made us pass without being competent enough in English”.

The implications of this lack of training can have a profound effect on how well students learn to write English. Students interviewed for this study perceived that teachers need to be trained in ‘effective teaching methods’ which provide varied opportunities for students to write effectively. Instead students felt that they may pass their examinations, but are still unable to write competently. Some teachers interviewed agreed with these perceptions saying that teachers need to be trained in teaching the four skills: writing, listening, reading and speaking if students are to succeed. These implications are in line with the work of other scholars used in this study. For example, Al-Seghayer (2016) explains that lack of teacher training in Saudi Arabian schools leaves teachers ill-prepared to optimize modern teaching methods, such as computer learning because they are not aware of its potential. Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) argues that in many cases teachers are completely without teaching experience which effectively denies students’ success in learning to write English effectively.

7.4.2 Updating delivery to make it relevant to student interests.

One of the main perceptions of teachers and students interviewed for this study is that the content of the curriculum is not always relevant to their lives. For example, one teacher said that technologies and generations have changed but the curriculum has not. Most of the teachers do not believe that the current curriculum is relevant to their students' lives. For example, they indicated that many of the pictures used in class are old and outdated and students find them boring. Student in focus groups agreed with this perception saying that the curriculum should be made more interesting and relevant, perhaps with modern topics such as fashion and sports. Teachers agreed with this. One teacher suggested that learning games and kinaesthetic activities could replace passive learning activities such as listening to CDs.

The implications of these findings is that an inherent lack of relevancy may result in student disengagement from English language learning in general, and writing in particular. Thus, the motivation to learn from out-dated material is considerably reduced. The notion that students will not be motivated to learn from irrelevant materials fits neatly into scholastic findings used in this study. Al-Shumaimeri and Alzyadi (2015) stress the importance of using contemporary materials because they provide students with the opportunity to engage in 'real world' language. Dörnyei (2001) also noted the inadequacies of old-dated materials pointing out that materials should be linked to the students' experiences, background, and their lives to enhance their motivation to learn English. In other words, relevant tasks to students' lives, interests and abilities could bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practice.

7.4.3 Incorporating feedback mechanisms in the curriculum

The results of this study suggest that the participating students and teachers perceived that effective feedback about how students' writing might improve their performance is rarely given. One teacher's perceptions about feedback mirrors what many of students and teachers experienced. She said that she did not feel the need to give feedback because students copy

from the board and therefore do not make mistakes. This strategy can contribute to why students feel they have no problems. Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) point out that “this ignorance of their mistakes makes them [students] further move on the path of committing errors” (p, 113). Other teachers perceived that the curriculum was not geared up for supporting feedback mechanisms because the work load was too heavy. However, most students said that they value feedback because it helps them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The students indicated that when teachers do give them feedback, the focus is on issues such as spelling and punctuation, therefore feedback becomes a negative mechanism rather than an encouraging one.

The implications of not receiving appropriate feedback are that students are not able to identify mistakes when they make them and just as importantly, they are unable to identify when they are achieving well. Ferris (2003) and Hyland (2003) stress the importance of feedback saying it is crucial that students can identify where they are making mistakes and how to improve their work. The authors suggest that teachers should provide their students with informative feedback on all of their written work. The perceptions of students interviewed on this issue are important and the subject deserves the attention of scholars.

7.4.4 Contextualising language in teaching.

The findings of the study indicate that students perceived that they have difficulty in using their English communicatively in different settings. Also, students perceived that teachers tend not to focus on teaching paragraph organisation, coherence and expression of ideas in different contexts, rather they focus on teaching linguistic issues and the end product. However, the goal of teaching writing in Saudi secondary school is for students to be able to write an original piece of work and to apply their writing skills in any writing context (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In practice, this goal has been neglected in favour of a focus on memorisation and imitation. For instance, students said that they memorise the meaning of particular words,

such as the word “material”, but they did not know how to use it communicatively in different settings. The findings of this study show that students would value more contextualised writing.

Clearly, contextualising language is an important part of the learning process. The implications of not doing so can result in students not being able to apply what they have learned in different settings. The perceptions of the students in this study contributes to the on-going research on teaching strategies. Harmer (2004) asserts that once students learn to write their own content, they can focus on the actual mechanics of grammar and language. In an EFL student-centred environment, students are given a chance to express their opinion, create their own tasks and make choices. Students are encouraged to use the target language outside the classroom thereby raising their awareness of their own responsibility for learning English (Nunan, 1999).

7.4.5 Revising policy.

It has been suggested that a revised curriculum should be based on students’ needs, learning goals, backgrounds, and abilities (Hyland, 2003). In order to better understand the perspectives of the classroom, teachers and students, curriculum designers should elicit feedback from teachers and students throughout the curriculum design process (Graves, 2000). Both students and teachers said they had never been asked to give their opinions regarding the curriculum.

The perceptions of both students and teachers for this study is that lessons follow an illogical sequence including the repetitious introduction of certain grammar lessons. The implication of this findings is that curriculum designers need to take into consideration the views of teachers and students regarding the sequence of the lessons. For example, both students and teachers suggested that lessons should be sequenced from simple to complex. This point agrees with Graves (2000) and Nunan (1999) who point out that students learn best if

basic concepts are presented prior to difficult ones so that students can build upon and compound existing knowledge.

Students also perceived that the curriculum needs to be revised to take advantage of modern technology. As a student indicated, modern technology is used every day to play games and chat on social media. Students perceive the curriculum as being boring. Many students thought that the curriculum needs to incorporate technology such as T.V, radio, the internet, and even smart phones, As the findings have indicated, none of these teaching strategies are included in the curriculum.

The implications of this lack of curriculum revision is that students are not encouraged to use modern sophisticated software programmes such as ‘concordance’ software which can help students to learn how vocabulary and grammatical rules can be used in different communicative functions. Curriculum revision is the subject of much discussion in the work of authors such as Alshumaimeri (2015) who argues that the curriculum should reflect real life purposes. A revised curriculum should include the use of authentic materials that students can relate to. The perceptions of students and teachers in this study are significant in that they reflect the on-going debates addressed by the literature used in this thesis

7.4.6 Conclusion

This study has highlighted how current teaching strategies have profound implications for students wishing to write in English. Teaching strategies that rely on ‘cut and paste’ and memorisation result in students not being able to contextualise their writing. Whilst students may pass examinations, they are unable to use this knowledge in different contexts. Teachers and students interviewed for this study perceived a lack of teacher training in writing English. Teachers said they had very little training, if any at all. This study has revealed that students perceived this lack of training when being taught to write in English in the classroom. Teachers

and students recognised that there needs to be revisions made to the curriculum which encourages the use of relevant materials and embraces modern technology.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Results of this study reveal that teachers and students alike perceive significant student challenges with written English. The data also indicate a strong perception that current curriculum design and instructional strategies fail to adequately prepare Saudi students for English language fluency in general and written English in particular. The following are recommendations for future research on this topic:

- Expanding research to include schools throughout Saudi Arabia could be beneficial in examining the relative influence of regional culture and identity and the impact of local economics on students' perceived challenges learning English writing.
- Conducting a longitudinal study on the current participants to measure their perceptions over time may be useful for identifying subtler factors impacting perceived challenges to learning English writing.
- Experimental research designed to measure the impacts of various instructional approaches on student perceptions of challenges with English writing and actual student performance on written samples may help to clarify which instructional approaches are most effective with this population of students.

Finally, research on the impact of early childhood exposure to English language on written English in school could contribute useful knowledge concerning effective strategies for preparing early learning for English language writing in school.

This study has contributed evidence-based knowledge and suggestions as to how the perceptions of Saudi secondary teachers and students can contribute to best teaching practices to better prepare students for EFL writing in tertiary institutions and in the workplace. This research also revealed that the current teacher-led instructional approach used for English

instruction is considered to be a major barrier to students learning to write in English. As discussed, this strategy denies students the opportunity to actively participate in their own learning process. The data suggests that a learner-centred instructional approach may help to motivate students and engage them in critical thinking around the English language. Changes to the curriculum as well as enhanced teacher training could be used to create a classroom environment that is more beneficial to students. Such a contemporary approach to teaching would enable the development of Saudi students as active learners and critical thinkers ready for further study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Student questionnaire (English version)

Questionnaire Cover Letter

I am Mr. Majid Alharthi, a PHD candidate in the School of Humanities at Flinders University, Australia. I am undertaking research on the subject of *Factors Affecting Saudi Secondary School Students' English Writing in Saudi Arabia*. This study aims to investigate the difficulties Saudi secondary school students face when writing in English, the causes of these writing difficulties, and how these writing difficulties can be effectively addressed.

difficulties, and how these writing difficulties can be effectively addressed.

This questionnaire is designed to get your perceptions about the abovementioned issues. It has both close-ended and open-ended questions. It will approximately take no more than one hour. Please be assured the questionnaire does not seek right or wrong answer, rather, it seeks your perceptions about the above mentioned issues. Please, response to the statements carefully and honestly.

Please be assured that any information provided by you will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting publications. You are also free to discontinue participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

What you need to do

1- Read each statement carefully and decide how you perceive about it.

- If you answer *never*, circle 1
- If you answer *rarely*, circle 2
- If you answer *sometimes*, circle 3
- If you answer *often*, circle 4
- If you answer *always*, circle 5

2- Also, answer the open-ended questions by writing your own opinion.

Section 1- Demographics *Appendix A*

Choose:

1- Sex: male female

2- My secondary school level is:

1st 2nd 3rd

3- My father has

Diploma Bachelor Master Phd Other

4- My mother has

Diploma Bachelor Master Phd Other

5- I study extra English lessons (e.g. an English language institute)

Yes No

Section 2 (Part 1) *Appendix A*

No.	The statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I find difficulty in using the English grammatical rules correctly in different contexts.	5	4	3	2	1
2	My teacher asks me to memorise the grammatical rules introduced in the textbooks.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I find difficulty in using different verb tenses correctly in different contexts.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I find difficulty in using punctuation such as comma and semicolon correctly in my writing.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I find difficulty in using English articles (a, an, the) correctly in my writing.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I find difficulty in using English prepositions correctly in different contexts.	5	4	3	2	1
7	I find difficulty in spelling English words correctly.	5	4	3	2	1
8	I find difficulty in using the appropriate words correctly in different contexts when writing in English.	5	4	3	2	1

In your point of view, could you explain how these difficulties (in grammar, vocabulary and spelling) could be effectively addressed?

.....

.....

.....

Section 2 (Part2) *Appendix A*

No.	The statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I find difficulty in writing the topic sentence which introduces the main idea of the paragraph	5	4	3	2	1
2	I face difficulty in paragraph organisation which mainly has a topic sentence, supporting sentences and a concluding sentence	5	4	3	2	1
3	I face difficulty in writing supporting sentences for developing main idea(s) presented in the topic sentence when writing in English	5	4	3	2	1
4	I find difficulty in paragraph coherence which means ideas flow smoothly and one sentence lead to another easily and logically.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I find difficulty in using the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or , however, therefore) correctly when writing a composition in English.	5	4	3	2	1
6	My teacher teaches me how to introduce the topic sentence in a paragraph.	5	4	3	2	1
7	My teacher teaches me how to write an organised paragraph.	5	4	3	2	1
8	My teacher teaches me how to develop the main idea(s) introduced in the topic sentence by presenting supporting sentences.	5	4	3	2	1
9	My teacher teaches me how write a coherent paragraph.	5	4	3	2	1
10	My teacher teaches me how to correctly use the cohesive devices (e.g. but, or , however, therefore) when writing a composition in English.	5	4	3	2	1

In your point of view, could you explain how could these difficulties in (introducing the topic sentence, organisation, coherence and cohesive devices) in English writing be effectively addressed?

.....

Section 3: (Sub-section 1) *Appendix A*

No.	The statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	My teacher asks me to memorise the grammatical rules introduced in the textbooks.	5	4	3	2	1
2	My teacher teaches lists of vocabulary items in isolated terms rather than in different contexts.	5	4	3	2	1
3	My teacher gives me feedback on my written assignments.	5	4	3	2	1
4	My teacher corrects my assignments without giving feedback.	5	4	3	2	1
5	My teacher encourages me to generate my own sentences when I write in English.	5	4	3	2	1
6	My teacher varies his/her teaching techniques in teaching writing.	5	4	3	2	1
7	My teacher asks me to memorise the texts, discussed in the textbooks, for answering the composition question in the final exam.	5	4	3	2	1
8	My teacher explains the objectives of the writing lessons at the beginning of the semester.	5	4	3	2	1
9	My teacher encourages me to practise writing in English outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: (Sub-section 2) *Appendix A*

No.	The statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I plan (brainstorming and writing outlines and main ideas) before I write in English.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I write some drafts before submitting the final version when I write in English.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I mainly revise the spelling and grammar of my written composition.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I mainly revise the organisation, unity, development of ideas and coherence of my written compositions in English.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I memorise the predetermined topics in the textbook to answer the English composition question in the final exam.	5	4	3	2	1
6	I can answer the English composition question in the final exam.	5	4	3	2	1
7	I transfer the process (planning, drafting and revising) used when I write my Arabic to when I write in English.	5	4	3	2	1
8	When I write an English composition, I write and/or think in the sentence in Arabic and then translate it into English.	5	4	3	2	1
9	I practise writing in English outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
10	I feel confident to write a paragraph correctly.	5	4	3	2	1


Section 3: (Sub-section 3) *Appendix A*

	The statement	Extremely motivating not motivating at all							
		←—————→							
1	Writing about irrelevant topics to my life is.....	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2	When the objectives of the writing lessons are not clear, it is....	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
3	Using the same routine of teaching techniques in teaching writing is ...	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
4	Writing a composition without being given an opportunity to generate my own sentences is...	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
5	Writing about predetermined topics rather than about topics of my choice	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: (Sub-section 4) *Appendix A*

	The statement	Extremely anxious not anxious at all							
		←—————→							
1	The thought of having my writing (in English) evaluated makes me feel..	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2	Focusing on writing an English composition free of spelling and grammar mistakes makes me feel..	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
3	Focusing on writing an organized, united and coherent composition in English makes me feel..	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
4	Answering the English composition question in the final exam makes me feel...	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: (Sub-section 5) *Appendix A*

	The statement	Extremely difficult not difficult at all							
									
1	Writing in English is	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
2	Writing in Arabic is	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: (Sub-section 6) *Appendix A*

No.	Statement	Always	Often	sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I plan before I write in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1
2	I write some drafts before submitting the final version of my writing in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I generate my own sentences when I write in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1
3	I mainly focus on grammar and spelling when I write in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1
4	I mainly focus on developing ideas and conveying a meaningful message when I write in Arabic.	5	4	3	2	1
5	I practise writing in Arabic outside the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1

Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix B: Student questionnaire (Arabic version)

استبانة عن مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية

تحتوي هذه الإستبانة على عبارات قصيرة أمامها خيارات متعددة، وسؤالان مقالان يحتاج منك الكتابة عنها بالتفصيل .
تذكّر/ي أنه لا يوجد إجابة صحيحة أو إجابة خطأ، وإنما تجيب/ي حسب رأيك الشخصي المحترم. الرجاء الإجابة بكل صدق
وأمانة.

الرجاء منك تكريماً قراءة كل عبارة بتأني والإجابة عليها.

- إذا أردت أن تجيب بكلمة (دائماً) اختر رقم 1
إذا أردت أن تجيب بكلمة (غالباً) اختر رقم 2
إذا أردت أن تجيب بكلمة (أحياناً) اختر رقم 3
إذا أردت أن تجيب بكلمة (نادراً) اختر رقم 4
إذا أردت أن تجيب بكلمة (أبداً والتي تعني " نهائياً لا") اختر رقم 5
2- الرجاء الإجابة على السؤالين المقالين موضحاً فيهما وجهة نظرك الشخصية.

القسم الأول:

معلومات عامة:

فضلاً اختر/ اختاري الإجابة المناسبة:

- 1- الجنس: ذكر أنثى
- 2- السنة الدراسية أول ثانوي ثاني ثانوي ثالث ثانوي
- 3- المؤهل العلمي للأب
ثانوية جامعة ماجستير دكتوراه أخرى
- 4- المؤهل العلمي للأم
ثانوية ماجستير إراره أخرى
- 5- هل تتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية خارج المدرسة (مثلاً في معهد لغة إنجليزية أو تأخذ دروس خصوصية)
نعم لا

Appendix B القسم الثاني (الجزء الأول):

أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبارة	
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في استخدام القواعد النحوية بشكل صحيح في سياقات نصية مختلفة (جملٍ وعباراتٍ مفيدة).	1
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في استخدام أزمنة الأفعال (ماضي, حاضر, مستقبل, ماضي مستمر, مضارع تام, الخ) بشكل صحيح في جملٍ وعباراتٍ مفيدة.	3
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في استخدام علامات الترقيم (مثل الفاصلة والفاصلة المنقوطة) بشكلٍ صحيح.	4
1	2	3	4	5	بشكلٍ (a, an, the) أجد صعوبة في استخدام أدوات التعريف/التنكير صحيح.	5
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في استخدام حروف الجر الانجليزية (مثل from, in, on, at) بشكلٍ صحيح.	6
1	2	3	4	5	بشكلٍ صحيح (spelling) أجد صعوبة في كتابة الكلمات "الإملاء" ()	7
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في استخدام الكلمات بشكلٍ صحيح عندما أكتب نصاً (مثل رسالة أو تعبير).	9

ماذا تقترح/ين من حلول للصعوبات المذكورة آنفاً (في القواعد, الإملاء, علامات الترقيم, استخدام الكلمات بشكلٍ صحيح)؟

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Appendix B القسم الثاني

أبدأ	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبرة	
1	2	3	4	5	(وهي التي the topic sentence أجد صعوبة في كتابة الجملة الرئيسية) تتضمن فكرة واحدة أساسية للمقطع الكتابي.	1
1	2	3	4	5	المقطع الكتابي الذي يتكون من organisation)أجد صعوبة في تنظيم) مقدمة ثم مناقشة ثم جملة ختامية تنهي بها المقطع الكتابي.	2
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في مناقشة الفكرة الرئيسية وتطويرها بأفكار مساندة وامثلة داعمه.	3
1	2	3	4	5	أجد صعوبة في المحافظة على سلاسة الأفكار وترابطها مع بعض بشكل في المقطع الكتابي. coherence)منطقي (4
1	2	3	4	5	(مثل: بالإضافة إلى أجد صعوبة في استخدام أدوات ربط مناسبة , من أجل ذلك however, على أية حال but , لكن Moreover بين جملتين او اكثر او بين فكرتين او اكثر Therefore)	5
1	2	3	4	5	شرح/ت لي معلمي/تي أن المقطع الكتابي يحتوي على جملة رئيسية واحدة)the topic sentence.(6
1	2	3	4	5	المقطع الكتابي. organisation)شرح/ت لي معلمي/تي كيفية تنظيم)	7
1	2	3	4	5	topic sentence (شرح/ت لي معلمي/تي كيف أناقش الجملة الرئيسية) وتطويرها بأفكار مساندة وامثلة داعمه.	8
1	2	3	4	5	شرح/ت لي معلمي/تي كيف أحافظ على سلاسة الأفكار وترابطها مع بعض) coherence.(بشكل منطقي)	9
1	2	3	4	5	شرح/ت معلمي/تي كيف استخدام أدوات ربط مناسبة بين جملتين أو أكثر أو فكرتين أو أكثر.	10

إذا كنت تواجه صعوبات في ما ذكر من فقرة 1- 5 , ماذا تقترح/ين من حلول لتلك الصعوبات؟

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Appendix B القسم الثالث (الجزء الأول)

الرقم	العبارة	دائماً	غالباً	أحياناً	نادراً	أبداً
1	ي/تطلب مني معلمي/معلمتي أن أحفظ القواعد النحوية المقررة في منهج اللغة الإنجليزية.	5	4	3	2	1
2	ي/تشرح معلمي/تي المفردات على شكل كلمات منفردة (مثلًا مكتوبة على الصبورة في شكل قائمة) دون وضعها في جمل مفيدة.	5	4	3	2	1
3	ي/توضح معلمي/تي أخطائي في الكتابة ويعلق عليها ليساعدني/لتساعدني على تصحيحها بنفسني وتطويع كتابتي.	5	4	3	2	1
4	ي/تصحح معلمي/تي ما أكتبه في اللغة الإنجليزية دون أن ي/تعطيني ملاحظات او تعليقات لتصحيح و تحسين كتابتي.	5	4	3	2	1
5	عندما أكتب نصاً (مثل تعبير أو رسالة) ي/تشجعني معلمي/تي أن أنشئ جُملاً من تلقاء نفسي (دون تقليد أو نسخ).	5	4	3	2	1
6	يشرح المعلم دروس الكتابة بطرق مختلفة ومتنوعة.	5	4	3	2	1
7	يطلب مني معلمي/تي أن أحفظ النصوص الكتابية (التعبير والرسالة) المقررة في المنهج من أجل الإختبار النهائي.	5	4	3	2	1
8	يوضح المعلم/ه أهداف دروس الكتابة بداية الفصل الدراسي أو السنة الدراسية.	5	4	3	2	1
9	ي/تشجعني معلمي/تي على ممارسة الكتابة خارج المدرسة.	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix B القسم الثالث (الجزء الثاني)


أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبرة	
1	2	3	4	5	أخطط (مثل كتابة الأفكار الرئيسية) قبل البدء في ما أكتبه (مثل تعبير أو رسالة).	1
1	2	3	4	5	أكتب عدة مسودات قبل تسليم الصيغة النهائية لما أكتبه.	2
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أراجع ما أكتبه، أركز بشكل أساسي على الأخطاء النحوية (spelling) والإملائية (grammar).	3
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أراجع ما أكتبه، أركز بشكل أساسي على تنظيم المقطع الكتابي (ووحدة الموضوع وایضاح المعنى وترابط الجمل منطقياً. paragraph)	4
1	2	3	4	5	أحفظ مقاطع الكتابة (الرسالة أو التعبير) المقررة في المنهج الدراسي من أجل الاختبار النهائي.	5
1	2	3	4	5	أستطيع إجابة سؤال الكتابة (التعبير أو الرسالة) بشكل صحيح في الاختبار النهائي.	6
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب في الإنجليزية، أستخدم الخطوات التي أستخدمها في الكتابة في اللغة العربية. (مثل كتابة الأفكار الرئيسية، ومراجعة الأخطاء).	7
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب نصاً (مثل: رسالة أو تعبير) أفكر في الجملة باللغة العربية ثم أترجمها للغة الإنجليزية.	8
1	2	3	4	5	أمارس الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية خارج المدرسة.	9
1	2	3	4	5	أشعر بالثقة في قدراتي أن أكتب نصاً (مثل: تعبير أو رسالة) في اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل صحيح.	10

Appendix B القسم الثالث (الجزء الثالث)

<p>أشعر بدافعية (تحفيز) شديدة للتعلم</p>  <p>لا أشعر بالدافعية (التحفيز) للتعلم نهائياً</p>								الرقم	
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	العبارة	
								حينما أكتب في مواضيع ليس لها علاقة بحياتي اليومية	1
								حينما لا تكون أهداف دروس الكتابة المقررة في المنهج محددة وواضحة	2
								حينما ي/تشرح معلمي/تي دروس الكتابة بطريقة واحدة متكررة.	3
								حينما (أقرأ أو أنسخ) نصاً مكتوباً (مثل تعبير أو رسالة) دون أن أنشيء جُملاً وعباراتٍ من تلقاء نفسي.	4
								حينما أكتب في موضوعات محددة مسبقاً وليست من اختياري	5

Appendix B القسم الثالث (الجزء الرابع)

<p>لا أشعر بالقلق (التوتر) نهائياً ← → أشعر بقلق (توتر) شديد</p>								الرقم	العبارة
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
								1	عندما يتم تقييم وتصحيح ماأكتبه (مثل الواجبات والاختبارات).
								2	عندما أركز على كتابة نصاً (مثل تعبير أو رسالة) خالياً من الأخطاء النحوية والإملائية.
								3	عندما أركز على كتابة نصاً (مثل تعبير أو رسالة) خالياً من الأخطاء في ترابط الأفكار منطقياً وإيصال المعنى بوضوح.
								4	عند إجابة سؤال التعبير في الاختبار النهائي.

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> صعبة جداً  ليست صعبة إطلاقاً </div>								الرقم		
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		العبرة	
									1	الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية.
									2	الكتابة في اللغة العربية.

Appendix B القسم الثالث (الجزء السادس)

أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبرة	
1	2	3	4	5	أخطت (مثل كتابة الأفكار الرئيسية) قبل البدء في ما أكتبه في اللغة العربية.	1
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب نصاً في اللغة العربية أكتب عدة مسودات (تجريبية) قبل تسليم الصيغة النهائية	2
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب نصاً في اللغة العربية أكون جملأً وعباراتٍ من تلقاء نفسي.	3
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب نصاً في اللغة العربية أركز بشكل أساسي على الجانب اللغوي (القواعد والإملاء).	4
1	2	3	4	5	عندما أكتب في اللغة العربية أركز بشكل أساسي على الجانب المعنوي (إيصال المعنى بوضوح وترابط الأفكار منطقياً).	5
1	2	3	4	5	أمارس الكتابة في اللغة العربية خارج المدرسة.	6

شكراً جزيلاً على مشاركتك في هذا الاستبيان

Appendix C: Focus group questions guide for students (English version)

- Does anyone of your family speak English? If yes, do they help you? how?
- Have you travelled abroad to English speaking countries?
- Do you take courses outside the school? If yes, Have the courses improved your English?
- Do you think learning English is important? Why?
- Do you think learning English is difficult? Why? What about learning English writing? Explain
- What are the difficulties you face in learning English writing? why/why not
- Do you face difficulties in learning grammar (such as verbs, prepositions and articles) when writing in English? why/why not?
- How does your teacher teach grammar?
- Does your teacher ask you to use the grammatical rules, you have learned, in different contexts?
- What is your role as a student when your teacher is teaching grammar?
- What are the reasons for the problems you have with grammar?
- What do you suggest for reducing your problems in grammar?
- Do you find problems in using grammar in Arabic writing? Why? (I have to ask him?)
- Do you face problems in using the tenses in Arabic? Clarify.
- Do you face problems in using punctuation, capitalisation, spelling? Why/why not?
- Does your teacher encourage you to practise spelling outside the classroom? How?

Appendix C

- Do you face problems in using the words correctly in different situations? Explain.
- How do you learn the words? What are your strategies to learn the new words?
- How does your teacher teach the new vocabulary?
- Does the teacher ask you to memorise the words?
- Can you write an English composition? why/why not?
- Do you understand what and why you are writing these sentences?
- Do you face problems in introducing the topic sentence? What do you mean by it?
- Do you face problems in introducing the organization/ cohesive devices?
- How does the teacher teach the paragraph?
- Do you like English classes?
- How do you feel when you copy a composition without creating your own sentences/compositions? Explain.
- Does your teacher encourage you to write about free topics? Explain.
- Does your teacher talk about the importance of learning English?
- Does your teacher clarify the goals of learning English and the objectives of the lessons including writing lessons? Explain.
- How do you feel when the objectives are not clear? Why?
- Does the teacher vary his/her teaching techniques in writing? Explain
- Do you think your teacher is motivated to teach English?
- Do you feel anxious when writing a paragraph?
- What about anxiety when writing homework?
- What are the strategies you use when writing a composition?

Appendix C

- Do you use strategies such as planning, drafting and revising when writing a composition? How?
- Do you practise writing outside the classroom? Explain.
- What do you think about the class time? Explain
- What about the classroom environment? Clarify.
- What do you think of the curriculum? What does it focus on?
- What do you think of the topics you write about? Explain.
- In the textbook, are there clear instructions on how to write? Explain.
- What are the teaching aides used by teacher in the classroom? Explain.
- How does the teacher evaluate your writing?
- How do you want your teacher to evaluate your writing?
- Does the teacher encourage you to practice writing outside the classroom?,
- Do you think writing in Arabic is important? Why? Why not?
- What about writing in Arabic? Do you have difficulties? Why?Why not?
- What do you think of the topics you write in Arabic?
- What are the strategies you use when writing a composition in Arabic?
- Do you use the same strategy you use in Arabic when writing in English?
- How does your teacher teach Arabic writing?
- What are the contributing factors to your problems in English writing generally?
- What do you suggest for reducing your problems in writing?
- Would you like to add any further comments or questions?

Appendix D: Focus group questions guide for students (Arabic version)

- هل هناك أحد من عائلتك يتكلم اللغة الانجليزية؟ إذا كانت الاجابة نعم، هل يساعدك او تتحدث معه/معها؟ وضح
- هل سبق أن سافرت الى احدى الدول التي يتحدث أهلها اللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل تدرس اللغة الانجليزية خارج إطار المدرسة؟ إذا كانت الاجابة نعم، هل استفدت من هذه الدروس؟ وضح
- هل تعتقد ان تعلم اللغة الانجليزية مهم؟ ولماذا؟
- ما رأيك في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية؟ سهلة او صعبة؟ لماذا؟
- هل تعتقد ان الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية مهمة ولماذا؟
- ماهي الصعوبات التي تواجهها عند تعلم الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل تواجه صعوبة في استخدام القواعد عند الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟ (مثل: الأفعال، حروف الجر، أدوات التعريف والتنكير)
- كيف يعلمك استاذك درس القواعد؟
- هل يطلب منك ان تستخدم القاعدة التي تعلمتها بوضعها في جملة من انشائك؟ وضح
- هل تواجه صعوبة في القواعد عند الكتابة بالعربية؟ ولماذا؟
- هل تعتقد ان هناك ارتباط بين القواعد العربية والانجليزية عند الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح؟
- ما هو دورك كطالب عندما يشرح الاستاذ القواعد؟
- ماهي أسباب صعوبة تعلم القواعد الانجليزية؟
- ماذا تقترح لمعالجة تلك الصعوبات في تعلم القواعد الانجليزية؟
- هل تواجه مشاكل في الاملاء، أدوات الترفيم؟ لماذا؟
- هل يشجعك المعلم على ممارسة الهجاء (الاملاء) للمفردات؟ وضح
- هل تواجه صعوبة في استخدام المفردات الصحيحة في المكان او الوقت المناسب؟ وضح
- كيف تتعلم درس المفردات؟ ماهي استراتيجياتك لتعلم الكلمات الجديدة؟
- كيف يدرسك استاذك درس المفردات؟
- هل يطلب منك المعلم حفظ المفردات الجديدة و هل يطلب منك وضعها في جمل جديدة؟ وضح بالتفصيل
- هل تستطيع ان تكتب نصاً (تعبيراً) باللغة الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟
- هل تفهم ما تكتبه؟ لماذا؟
- هل تواجه مشكله عند كتابة الجملة الرئيسية في التعبير؟ وضح
- هل تواجه صعوبة في صياغة النص الكتابي (التعبير) وتنظيمه وحيكته؟ وضح
- كيف يشرح المعلم دروس "الكتابة" في اللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل تحب حصص اللغة الإنجليزية؟ لماذا؟
- كيف تشعر عندما تنسخ نصا كتابيا ليس من صياغتك؟ اشرح
- هل يطلب منك المعلم الكتابة عن مواضيع حرة؟ وضح.
- هل يبين المعلم مدى اهمية تعلم اللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل يوضح المعلم اهداف تعلم الإنجليزية واهداف تعلم الدرس؟ وضح
- ماذا تشعر عندما تكون اهداف الدرس غير واضحة؟ وضح
- هل ينوع المعلم خلال تدريسه الكتابة باستخدام استراتيجيات متنوعة؟ وضح
- هل تشعر ان المعلم متحمس لتدريسك مادة اللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح
- هل تشعر بالقلق عند كتابة مقطع كتابي باللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح
- هل تشعر بالقلق عند حل او كتابة واجبك المدرسي؟ وضح
- ماهي الطرق والاستراتيجيات التي تستخدمها لتساعدك على كتابة نصا تعبيريا؟

Appendix D

- هل تستخدم استراتيجيات معينة مثل التخطيط قبل أن تكتب وكتابة عدة مسودات ثم مراجعة ما تكتبه؟ وضح
- هل تمارس الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية خارج المدرسة؟ وضح
- هل تعتقد وقت زمن الحصة مناسباً للمنهج؟ لماذا؟ وضح
- ماذا عن بيئة الفصل؟ هل هي مناسبة أم لا؟ ولماذا؟ وضح
- ما رأيك في المنهج المدرسي بشكل عام؟ على ماذا يركز منهج اللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح
- ما رأيك في مواضيع المنهج خصوصاً التي يتطلب منك الكتابة عنها؟ وضح
- هل الكتاب المدرسي فيه تعليمات واضحة عن كيفية الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح
- ماهي الادوات التي يستخدمها معلمك لتدريس الكتابة؟
- كيف يقيم المعلم كتابتك الانجليزية؟
- كيف تريد معلمك ان يقيم كتابتك الانجليزية؟
- هل يشجعك المعلم على الكتابة خارج إطار المدرسة؟
- هل تعتقد الكتابة في اللغة العربية مهمة؟ ولماذا؟
- ماذا عن الكتابة باللغة العربية هل تواجه فيها صعوبة؟ لماذا؟
- ما رأيك في المواضيع التي تكتب عنها باللغة العربية؟
- كيف تكتب باللغة العربية؟ ماهي الاستراتيجيات التي تستخدمها؟
- هل تستخدم نفس استراتيجيات الكتابة العربية عند الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟
- كيف يشرح معلمك دروس الكتابة في اللغة العربية؟
- بشكل عام، ماهي أسباب الصعوبات التي تواجهها في تعلم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية؟
- ماذا تقترح للحد من هذه المشاكل خصوصاً عند الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل لديك تعليقات او ملاحظات إضافية؟
- هل لديك أي استفسار أو سؤال تريد اضافته؟

Appendix E: Interview questions guide for teachers (English version)

- How long have you been teaching English?
- What do you think about learning English? Why/why not?
- What about writing skill? Is it important? Why/why not?
- Have you ever taken training courses in teaching English generally and writing specifically? Why/why not? Explain.
- What about in the university before graduation, did you learn how to teach English? Did you learn how to teach writing skills? Why/why not?
- In your opinion, what are the difficulties faced by your students in English writing?
- What about grammar? Do your students face difficulty in grammar (e.g. verbs, prepositions and articles)? Why/why not?
- How do you teach grammar? Explain please.
- Do you encourage your students to apply the rules they have learned in different contexts? Explain.
- What do you think of the grammar lessons in the textbook? Are they appropriate for your students' proficiency level? Explain
- What are the contributing factors to the difficulties faced by your students in grammar?
- What do you suggest to reduce the difficulties faced by your students in grammar?
- Do you think your students encounter challenges in spelling/punctuation/capitalisation? Why/why not? Explain please.
- How do you teach spelling/punctuation/capitalisation?
- Do you encourage your students to practice spelling words inside and outside the classroom? Why/why not?
- What do you suggest to reduce the difficulties faced by your students in spelling/punctuation/capitalisation?
- Do you think that your students face problems in using the vocabulary correctly in different contexts? Why/why not?
- How do you teach vocabulary?
- Do you give them some strategies to learn the vocabulary? If so, What are they?
- How do you teach the students how to write a composition in English?
- Do you think your students have challenges in the paragraph level issues such as the topic sentences, paragraph organisation and development of ideas? Why/why not? Explain please.
- How do you give feedback?
- Do you think giving feedback helps students improve their English writing? Why/why not?
- Do you discuss with your students the importance of learning English skills including the writing skills? Explain please.
- What are the teaching aids you use in the classroom? Explain.

Appendix E

- Do you use a variety of teaching techniques? Explain.
- Do you clarify the goals of teaching English and the objectives of the writing lessons to your students? Explain please
- Do u feel motivated to teaching English? Why/ why not?
- What are the main challenges you face in teaching English writing?
- Please describe how your students write a composition in English? What are the processes they follow?
- Do your students plan, draft and revise what they write? Why/why not?
- Do they answer the composition question in the final exam? Why/why not?
- When they write a composition, do they think in Arabic and write in English?
- Do you think your students have the confidence to write English compositions?
- Do you think your students transfer the strategies they use in Arabic into their English writing?
- Have you asked your students to write outside the classroom? Why/why not?
- Do you think that the L1 writing proficiency has an effect on L2 writing? Explain.
- What about your students' motivation to learn English generally and writing specifically? why/why not?
- What do you think of the topics that your students writing about? Explain.
- Do you think your students are motivated to write about the predetermined topics? Why/why not?
- Can you tell me about the classroom environment? Explain.
- What are the factors that affect students' motivation to learn English writing?
- What do you suggest to raise the students' motivation to learn English writing?
- Do you feel that the students have anxiety when writing in English? Why/why not?
- What do you think are the contributing factors to the difficulties faced by students when learning English writing?
- What do you suggest for reducing students' problems in English writing?
- Do you have any question to raise?

Appendix F: Interview questions guide for teachers (Arabic version)

- كم امضيت في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل تعتقد ان تعلم اللغة الانجليزية مهم؟ لماذا؟
- رأيك في مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟ ما
- هل حصلت على دورات تدريبية في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية بشكل عام ومهارات الكتابة بشكل خاص؟ لماذا؟ وضح
- ومهارات الكتابة بشكل خاص؟ هل تعلمت في الجامعة كيف تدرس اللغة الانجليزية
- برأيك، ماهي أبرز الصعوبات التي تواجه طلابك في تعلم الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية؟ اشرح
- هل تعتقد ان طلابك يواجهون صعوبة في استخدام القواعد (مثل : الأفعال، حروف الجر وأدوات التنكير والتعريف) بشكل صحيح؟ اشرح \ وضح؟
- كيف تشرح القواعد النحوية؟ وضح بالتفصيل؟
- هل تطلب منهم ان يستخدموا القواعد التي تعلموها في سياقات نصية مختلفة؟ اشرح
- ما رأيك في القواعد المقررة في المنهج؟ هل هي ملائمة لمستوى طلابك؟ وضح
- ماهي اسباب الصعوبات في نظرك؟
- هل تقترح حلول تسهل عليهم كتابه نص صحيح من الاخطاء في القواعد النحوية؟
- هل يواجهون صعوبة في الإملاء، علامات الترقيم؟ لماذا؟ وضح.
- كيف تدرس الإملاء وعلامات الترقيم؟
- هل تزودهم باستراتيجيات معينة في الاملاء؟ وضح؟
- ما لحلول التي تقترحها للتخفيف او تجنب مشاكل الاملاء وعلامات الترقيم؟
- هل تعتقد أن طلابك يواجهون صعوبة في استخدام الكلمات بشكل صحيح في عدة سياقات نصية مختلفة؟ لماذا؟
- كيف تشرح لهم الكلمات؟ وضح؟
- هل يتم تزويدهم باستراتيجيات معينة لتعلم الكلمات؟ وضح؟
- كيف تشرح كتابة التعبير والرسالة؟
- هل تعتقد أن طلابك يواجهون صعوبة في كتابة واستخدام الجملة الرئيسية، تنظيم النص الكتابي، مناقشة الفكرة الرئيسية وتطويرها بأفكار مساندة وأمثلة داعمة؟ لماذا؟ وضح
- ما لحلول التي تقترحها؟ كيف؟ وضح
- كيف تعطي تغذية راجعة على ما يكتبه طلابك؟
- هل تتوقع ان إعطاء التغذية الراجعة يساهم في تطوير كتابتهم؟ لماذا؟ كيف؟ وضح؟
- هل تحدثهم عن أهمية تعليم اللغة الانجليزية؟ أهمية تعليم الكتابة؟ وضح
- ماهي الأدوات التي تستخدمها لتدريس الكتابة؟ وضح
- هل تشرح الدروس بطرق مختلفة ومتنوعة؟ كيف؟
- وكيف يشعر الطلاب عندما تشرح دروس الكتابة؟ وضح
- هل توضح لهم اهداف تعلم اللغة الانجليزية؟ هل توضح اهداف دروس الكتابة؟ وضح
- هل تشعر أنك متحمس لتدريسهم ومستعد لذلك؟ لماذا؟
- ماهي اهم الصعوبات التي تواجهك كمعلم لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية؟
- صف لي المراحل التي يتبعها الطلاب عندما يكتبون في اللغة الانجليزية
- هل يخطون ويكتبون عدة مسودات عندما يكتبون نصا في اللغة الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟ لماذا لا؟ هل تطلب منهم ذلك؟ لماذا؟ وضح؟

Appendix F

- هل يجيبون على سؤال التعبير او الرسالة في الاختبار النهائي؟ لماذا؟
- عندما يكتبون تعبيراً او رسالة؟ هل يفكرون في الجملة باللغة العربية ثم يترجمونها للغة الانجليزية؟ لماذا؟
- هل تعتقد ان لدى طلابك الثقة في قدراتهم لكتابة تعبيراً او رسالة من انفسهم؟ لماذا/ لماذا لا؟
- هل تعتقد انهم يستخدمون نفس تراكيب اللغة العربية في النحو مثلاً؟ يعني تركيب الجملة بالعربي تطبق نفسه باللغة الانجليزية؟ ايضاً الكلمات تفكر فيها بالعربي ثم تكتبها باللغة الانجليزية ترجمة حرفية؟ ايضاً هل يستخدمون اسلوب تنظيم المقطع في العربي في تنظيم المقطع الكتابي في اللغة الانجليزية؟
- هل تطلب من طلابك ممارسة الكتابة في اللغة الانجليزية خارج المدرسة؟ لماذا؟
- هل تعتقد ان الكتابة في العربية لها تأثير على اللغة الانجليزية؟ وضح
- ماذا عن الدافعية لدى طلابك لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بشكل عام ومهارة الكتابة بشكل خاص؟
- ما رأيك في المواضيع التي يكتب عنها الطلاب؟ وضح؟
- هل تعتقد ان طلابك لديهم الدافعية ل يكتبوا عن مواضيع محددة مسبقاً وليست من اختيارهم؟ لماذا؟
- هلا حدثتني عن بيئة التعلم والجو العام داخل الصف الدراسي؟ اشرح.
- برأيك ماهي الأمور التي تؤثر على عدم دافعية الطلاب لتعلم اللغة الانجليزية بشكل عام والكتابة بشكل خاص؟
- ماهي الحلول المقترحة لرفع الدافعية لدى الطلاب؟
- هل تعتقد ان طلابك ينتابهم حالة من القلق عندما يكتبون في اللغة الإنجليزي؟ لماذا؟
- برأيك، ماهي اهم أسباب الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في تعلم مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- ماذا تقترح من حلول لمعالجة الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في تعلم مهارات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية؟
- هل لديك أي استفسار أو سؤال تريد اضافته؟



**Appendix G: student consent form for questionnaire (English version)
Assent form for participation in research
(by questionnaire)**

I

being under the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Letter of Introduction for the research project on the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students in English writing in Saudi Arabia.

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Letter of Introduction and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
 - I will not be identified by my name and position in the findings of the study.

Participant’s signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation in the questionnaire.

Researcher’s name.....

Researcher’s signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 6, as appropriate.

I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

**Participant’s
signature.....Date.....**

Appendix H student consent form questionnaire (Arabic version)

موافقة خطية للمشاركة في البحث
(إجراء استبانة)

أنا الطالب

عمري أقل من 18 عاماً, أوافق على المشاركة في البحث والذي عنوانه " العوامل المؤثرة على طلاب وطالبات المرحلة الثانوية في مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية"

- قرأت كل المعلومات المقدمة سابقاً
- تم توضيح تفاصيل وإجراءات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
- أستطيع أن أحتفظ بنسخة من هذه الموافقة الخطية
- أدرك تماماً أنه:
 - ربما لا أنتفع مباشرة من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
 - لدي كامل الحرية أن انسحب من المشاركة في أي وقت , وكذلك أستطيع أن أتجنب
 - أرغب في الإجابة عنه إجابة اي سؤال لا
 - أستطيع أن انسحب من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة بدون أي عقوبات تترتب على ذلك

- لن يتم ذكر اسمي الشخصي في نتائج هذه الدراسة

اسم الطالب توقيع التاريخ

.....

لقد تم توضيح اجراءات وتفاصيل المشاركة في الدراسة, وأن هذه المشاركة تطوعيه حسب رغبة المشارك.

اسم الباحث توقيع التاريخ

.....



**Appendix I : Student consent form for focus group (English version)
Assent form for participation in research
(by focus group)**

I

being under the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Letter of Introduction for the research project on the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students in English writing in Saudi Arabia.

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Letter of Introduction and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
 - I will not be identified by my name and position in the findings of the study.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation in the focus group.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 6, as appropriate.

I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....



Appendix J: Student consent form for focus group (Arabic version)

موافقة خطية للمشاركة في البحث
(إجراء مقابلة)

الطالبة/أنا الطالب

عمري أقل من 18 عاماً, أوافق على المشاركة في البحث والذي عنوانه " العوامل المؤثرة على طلاب وطالبات المرحلة الثانوية في مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية"

- قرأت كل المعلومات المقدمة سابقاً
- تم توضيح تفاصيل وإجراءات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
- أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة مع الباحث صوتياً
- أستطيع أن احتفظ بنسخة من هذه الموافقة الخطية
- أدرك تماماً أنه:
 - ربما لا أنتفع مباشرة من هذه المشاركة في الدراسة
 - لدي كامل الحرية أن انسحب من المشاركة في أي وقت, وكذلك أستطيع أن أتجنب اجابة اي سؤال لأرغب في الإجابة عنه
 - أستطيع أن أطلب إيقاف التسجيل في أي وقت, وقد انسحب من المشاركة دون أي عقوبات تترتب على ذلك

- لن يتم ذكر اسمي الشخصي في نتائج هذه الدراسة

اسم الطالبة توقيع التاريخ

.....

لقد تم توضيح اجراءات وتفاصيل المشاركة في الدراسة, وأن هذه المشاركة تطوعيه حسب رغبة المشارك.

اسم الباحث توقيع التاريخ

.....



**Appendix K: Consent form for participation in the research by interview for teachers
(English Version)**

I

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the Letter of Introduction for the research project on the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students in English writing in Saudi Arabia.

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Letter of Introduction and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
 - I will not be identified by my name and position in the findings of the study.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 6, as appropriate.

- I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....



Appendix L : Consent form for participation in the research by interview for teachers (Arabic version)

موافقة خطية للمشاركة في البحث
(اجراء مقابلة)

أنا المعلم/المعلمة
أوافق على المشاركة في البحث والذي عنوانه " العوامل المؤثرة على طلاب وطالبات المرحلة الثانوية في مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية"

- قرأت كل المعلومات المقدمة سابقاً
- تم توضيح تفاصيل واجراءات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
- أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة مع الباحث صوتياً
- أستطيع أن احتفظ بنسخة من هذه الموافقة الخطية
- أدرك تماماً أنه:
 - ربما لا أنتفع مباشرة من هذه المشاركة في الدراسة
 - لدي كامل الحرية أن انسحب من المشاركة في أي وقت , وكذلك أستطيع أن أتجنب اجابة اي سؤال لأرغب في الإجابة عنه
 - أستطيع أن أطلب إيقاف التسجيل في أي وقت , وقد انسحب من المشاركة بدون اي عقوبات تترتب على ذلك
 - لن يتم ذكر اسمي الشخصي في نتائج هذه الدراسة

اسم المشارك/ه توقيع التاريخ

لقد قمت بتوضيح اجراءات وتفاصيل الدراسة للمشاركين في هذا البحث, وأن هذه المشاركة تطوعيه حسب رغبة المشارك/ المشاركة
اسم الباحث توقيع التاريخ

لقد قرأت اجاباتي في هذه المشاركة وأوافق على استخدامها في الدراسة حسب ماتم شرحه وتوضيحه لي
اسم المشارك/ه توقيع التاريخ



**Appendix M: Parental consent form for child participation in research
(by questionnaire)**

I
being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to my child
participating, as requested, in the for the research
project on

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - My child may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time and is free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, my child will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to him/her.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on his/her progress in his/her course of study, or results gained.
 - My child may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and he/she may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

6. I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....



Appendix N: Parental consent form for participation of child in the research by focus group interviews

I
being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to my child
participating, as requested, in the for the research
project on

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I agree to audio/video recording of my child's information and participation.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - My child may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time and is free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, my child will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to him/her.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on his/her progress in his/her course of study, or results gained.
 - My child may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and he/she may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

Appendix N

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....**Date**.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.

I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....

9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....



Appendix O: Parental consent form for participation of child in the research by focus group interviews

I
being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to my child
participating, as requested, in the for the research
project on

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I agree to audio/video recording of my child's information and participation.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
- I understand that:
 - My child may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time and is free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, my child will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to him/her.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on his/her progress in his/her course of study, or results gained.
 - My child may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and he/she may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

Appendix O

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature.....Date.....



Appendix P: Parental consent form for participation of child in the research by focus group interviews (Arabic version)

موافقة خطية لولي أمر الطالب/ه للمشاركة في البحث

(إجراء مقابلة)

أنا.....
عمري أكبر من 18 عاماً أوافق على مشاركة ابني/تي..... في
البحث والذي عنوانه " العوامل المؤثرة على طلاب وطالبات المرحلة الثانوية في مهارة الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية"

- قرأت كل المعلومات المقدمة سابقاً
- تم توضيح تفاصيل وإجراءات المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
- أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً بين ابني مع الباحث أو ابنتي مع مساعدة الباحث
- أستطيع أن احتفظ بنسخة من هذه الموافقة الخطية
- أدرك تماماً أنه:
 - ربما لا ينتفع/تنتفع ابني/ابنتي مباشرة من هذه المشاركة في الدراسة
 - لدى ابني/ابنتي كامل الحرية أن انسحب من المشاركة في أي وقت , وكذلك يستطيع/تستطيع عدم اجابة اي سؤال لا يرغب/ترغب في الإجابة عنه
 - أستطيع أن أطلب إيقاف التسجيل في أي وقت , وقد انسحب من المشاركة بدون اي عقوبات (دراسية او غيرها) تترتب على ذلك
 - لن يتم ذكر اسم ابني/بنتي الشخصي في نتائج هذه الدراسة, ولن يطلع أحد (غير الباحث ومساعدة الباحث) على المعلومات المقدمة من ابني/ابنتي.

اسم المشارك/ه التوقيع التاريخ

.....

لقد تم توضيح إجراءات وتفاصيل المشاركة في هذه الدراسة, وأن هذه المشاركة تطوعيه حسب رغبة المشارك/ه.

اسم الباحث التوقيع التاريخ

.....

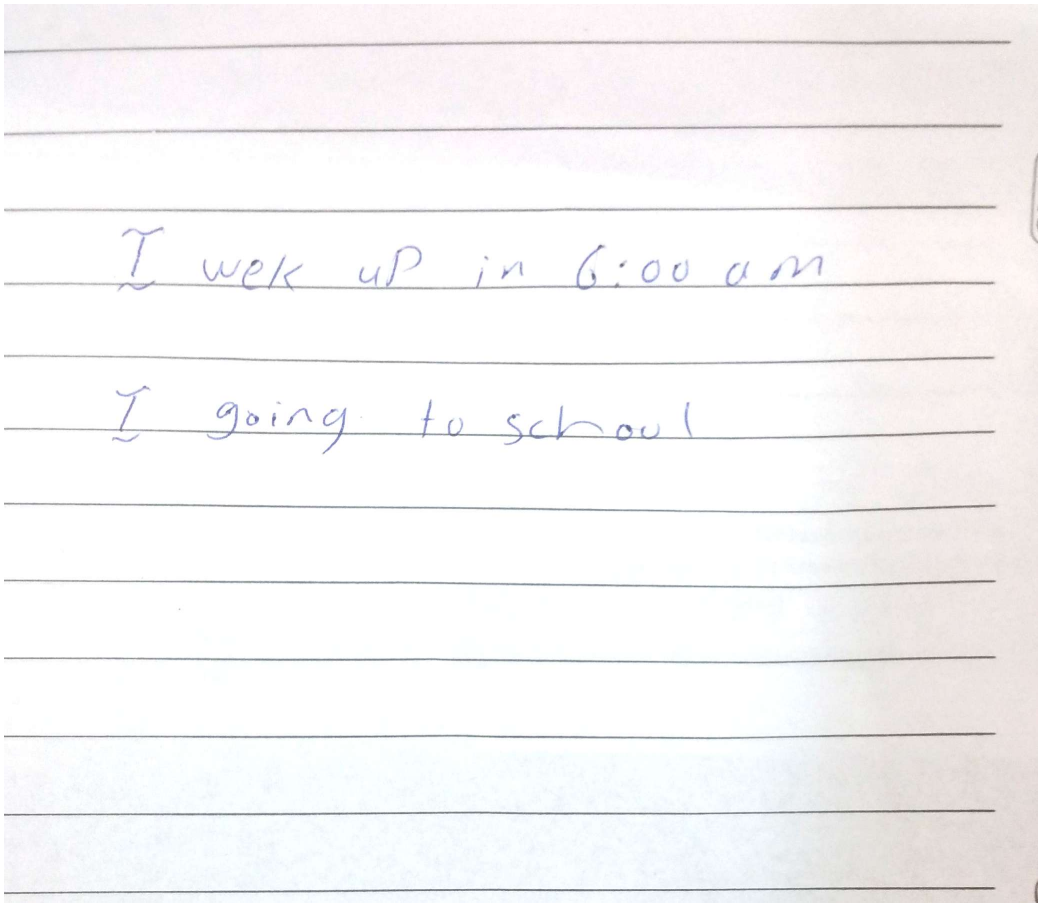
Appendix Q: A student's writing sample

14 / 1 / التاريخ اليوم عنوان الدرس

Q: What is your daily routine?

awake up 11 morning
and going to school
after school back home
And eating lunch with myself
And after sleep just
7 o'clock and awake
start the studying math
and after finish it
see the television
eating any sweet
play with Blackberry
And sleeping
(the end)

Appendix R: A student's writing sample



I wak up in 6:00 am
I going to school

Appendix S: A student's writing sample

