



AWEJ Vol.3 No.2 June 2012

pp. 48 – 75

Investigating Teaching and Learning Practices of Second Language ESP Writing at Tertiary Level in Yemen

Dr. Hussein Taha Assaggaf

Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Al-Ahgaff University, Yemen
saggaf11@yahoo.com

Asso. Prof. Dr. Siti Hamin Stapa

School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
sitihami@ukm.my

Dr. Jamilah Mustafa

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University Selangor
drjamilah@unisel.edu.my

Abstract

The teaching and learning of writing in L2 contexts is a complicated process that needs to be carefully investigated in order to obtain better outcomes. This study examines the teaching and learning in a writing course for students in the Yemeni context. In particular, the study deals with a writing course intended for preparing ESP students for writing final project reports at the tertiary level. Using three qualitative techniques of observations, interviews, and document analysis, the study investigated the current practices of the major participants involved in the writing course. The sample included students attending the writing course, course instructors and administrators. For trustworthiness of the data gathered, two techniques were employed: triangulation and member checking. The findings of the study unfolded a number of practices which were classified into three categories namely: administrative practices, instructional practices and student writing practices. The study concluded by proposing useful suggestions for improving the teaching and learning of writing in the ESP tertiary level in Yemen based on the findings of the present study.

Keywords: Second language (L2) writing, Foreign language (FL) writing, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Writing, Writing instruction, English at the tertiary level

Introduction

Writing in the first language (L1) is considered a highly intricate task and learning to write therefore is seen as a complicated experience. Nonetheless, learning to write in a second language (L2) is considered even more complicated. This is because in a second language the complexity of learning to write is "compounded both by the difficulties inherent in learning a second language and by the way in which the first language literacy skills may transfer to or detract from the acquisition of second language skills" (Kroll, 1990, p. 2).

The complexity in L2 writing initiated much interest as research in this area has come to gain more attention in the last few decades (Leki et al., 2006; Matsuda et al., 2003). The literature is basically crammed with plenty of studies conducted on L2 writing which are concerned with learners in English speaking communities (e.g. Braine, 1989; Horowitz, 1986; Jenkins et al., 1993; Leki & Carson, 1994; Raimes, 1985). On the contrary, L2 writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) environments has scarcely been addressed (Cimasko et al., 2009; Lee, 2003; Manchon & de Haan, 2008; Ortega, 2004; Polio, 2003). This study therefore intends to provide insights into L2 writing in an EFL situation by explicitly focusing on academic ESP (English for specific purposes) contexts in an attempt to enrich and diversify research in this particular area.

In particular, the purpose of this study is to identify the current practices of the major stakeholders in a writing course in which English is used as the medium of instruction. The course, entitled Technical Report Writing (henceforth TRW), is offered for the degree program in the Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering (hereafter FCSE) of Al-Ahgaff University in Yemen.

Before attending the TRW, students at FCSE need to pass through four English language courses which have been designed and conducted by the English language Unit (ELU). These include two intensive proficiency courses and two ESP courses relevant to

computers and IT. TRW is dedicated for teaching writing with the purpose of preparing students to write the final project reports (PRs) needed at the end of the study program. By offering this course and making it focused towards reports, it is hoped that the students would basically develop their writing abilities in a way that would enable them to produce better project reports. However, the majority of students showed little improvement in writing in general and writing PRs in particular. The researcher has observed that in spite of all the efforts done in order to qualify these students for writing PRs, they are still far from displaying satisfactory ones. Moreover, the researcher has noticed that the English language instructors and supervisors of PRs are discontented with students' writing in general and writing PRs in particular.

Investigating current practices on the teaching and learning of writing in the Yemeni ESP context is absolutely significant. This is because understanding the current practices of the major stakeholders will entail knowing the limitations of what is being done in the teaching and learning process so that better actions and procedures can be taken to improve the situation.

Literature Review

Second language writing

Although second language writing has witnessed extended developments in the last 20 years (Leki et al., 2006), it still "lacks a tidy corpus of conclusive theory and research on which to base a straightforward introduction to processes of learning and teaching" (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005, p. 3). In fact most of theoretical frameworks can be traced to advances in four other disciplines including the first language, rhetoric and composition research, applied linguistics and TESOL (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, 1997; Leki, 2000; Matsuda, 1998,1999, 2003a, 2003b; Raimes, 1991, 1998). Silva (1990) points out that "there is no doubt that developments in ESL composition have been influenced by and, to some extent, are parallel to developments in the teaching of writing to native speakers of

English" (Silva, 1990: 11). Johns (1990) asserts this fact and adds that "there has yet been little discussion of the development of coherent and complete theories of ESL composition as allied to - or separate from – the various theories of L1 composition" (Johns, 1990, p. 24).

Indeed, teaching writing has taken various forms starting with product- based, process-based, content-based and genre based. Silva (1990) is among the first scholars to review the different approaches in L2 writing. His review included controlled composition, current-traditional rhetoric, the process approach and English for academic writing. In a widely quoted article, Raimes (1991) presented an historical perspective review for the different approaches in the area of L2 writing since the sixties. According to her, these approaches include focus on form, which started in 1966; focus on the writer, which first appeared in 1976; focus on content, which started in 1986; and focus on the reader, which first appeared in 1986.

A more recent detailed review of theories of writing is made by Hyland (2002). His review is based on three major classifications: the text, the writer, and the reader. Text-oriented traditions of teaching writing involved two views: the first regard texts as autonomous objects. It looks at the text as an ideal form that can be analysed independently of real time uses. The second tradition looks at text as discourse "attempts to communicate with readers" (Hyland, 2002, p. 10). The writer-oriented traditions look at writing in three different views: writing as personal expression, writing as a cognitive process and writing as a situated act. The reader-oriented approaches encompass three major traditions: writing as social interaction, writing as social construction and writing as power and ideology.

Related studies

The literature reveals that studies that deal with the teaching and learning of writing at the tertiary level are of two major types: studies conducted in ESL contexts and studies conducted in EFL contexts. For instance, Raimes (1985) investigated the writing of unskilled ESL students at the tertiary level. Horowitz (1986) and Braine (1989) studied students' writing tasks at the undergraduate level by examining the actual writing assignment handouts and essay examinations of the students. In the EFL contexts particularly in the Arab world, there are two relevant studies: Bacha (2002) which aimed to help less proficient EFL Lebanese learners in improving their writing abilities through a practical research task, and Faqeeh (2003) which explored Saudi students' beliefs regarding writing difficulties and factors relating to these difficulties.

In terms of ESP writing at the tertiary level a number of studies have been identified in both ESL and EFL contexts (Leki & Carson, 1994; Vifansi, 2002; Osman, 2004; Momtazur Rahman et al., 2009; and Bacha & Bahous, 2008). Leki & Carson (1994) identified ESL students' perceptions of the writing instruction in two US institutions. Vifansi (2002) intended to identify the academic writing needs at a community college in Columbia. Osman (2004) explored the use of genre-based instruction to teaching writing for specific purposes in a Malaysian university. Momtazur Rahman et al. (2009) is also another study in ESP writing at the university level which was conducted in Malaysia. It aimed at proposing an ESP writing course framework for teaching foreign postgraduate students in the fields of science and technology. The study of Bacha & Bahous (2008) was conducted in an Arab EFL context (Lebanon). This study aimed to find out the writing needs and language proficiency levels of students majoring in business at the Lebanese American University.

In the Yemeni context in which the present study was undertaken studies in ESP writing and L2 are scarce. There are only two studies (Al-Ghrafy, 1999 and Naif, 2003) which are found relevant. Al-Ghrafy (1999) was intended to assess the effectiveness of prewriting and writing strategy instruction in developing writing abilities and performance of college EFL students as compared to college regular writing instruction. Naif (2003) looked at the composition strategies and skills among college students majoring in the English language in Yemen.

The studies above helped the researchers develop the present study by focusing on investigating the current practices in the ESP tertiary level context. The studies have confirmed the importance of teaching writing at the tertiary level especially in the ESP contexts where English is used as the means of instruction. Besides, reviewing these studies has demonstrated that research in the teaching and learning of writing in the Yemeni universities has not received enough attention. Only two studies (Al-Ghrafy, 1999 and Naif, 2003) were found in this particular area. The present study, therefore, is to the best of the researchers' knowledge, the first to be conducted on the teaching and learning of writing in ESP tertiary level contexts in Yemen.

Methodology

In the present study, in order to obtain data for the current practices three qualitative techniques were utilised. These are oral interviews, observations, and document analysis. The design of this study made it necessary to get into the real setting in which the teaching and learning took place. Basically, the qualitative methods proposed for this part of the study attempt to conform to Silverman's (1993) call for the need to utilise a "natural" setting. The study, therefore, adopted a naturalistic enquiry approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which depended heavily on natural resources to collect data that allow obtaining valid descriptions of the situation being studied.

For data collection, two types of one-on-one interviews were conducted before the end of the TRW course. These were three in-depth interviews with the current course instructor, head of English Language Unit and dean of FCSE. The other type is semi-structured interviews which were conducted with three students and two previous course instructors. The open-ended questions used considered several issues including participants' experience and acquaintance with TRW, students' performance and qualification, and their views in the identified practices. The in-depth interviews lasted 30- 50 minutes whereas the semi-structured ones lasted 15-20 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to secure "an accurate and detailed record of actual language data" (McDonough & McDonough, 1997, p. 186).

As for classroom observations, one of the researchers attended the TRW classes for a period of three months. This yielded much data in a form of field notes which provided a thorough description of the issues in the writing course. Data collection involved also gathering documents relevant to the course such as course outlines, handouts, and tests and examinations. Samples of students' written work including answer sheets and reports presented in the current course were also collected.

Participants

This study involves two groups of participants. The first group is third year students at FCSE, Al-Ahgaff University. While the second group comprises instructors and administrators at both ELU and FCSE including the current course instructor, previous course instructors, head of ELU, and dean of FCSE. The selection of this purposeful sample (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is intended to provide "the insight and articulateness needed to attain the desired richness of data" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 209).

Data analysis and verification

Data gathered using observations, interviews and documents were analysed manually. The analysis of these data started as soon as the first piece was collected. Lincoln & Guba (1985) assert that qualitative data analysis should start the first day of arriving in the setting. Maxwell also warns that "One of the most common problems in qualitative studies is letting your unanalyzed field notes and transcripts pile up, making the task of final analysis more difficult and discouraging" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 95). Starting analysis early helped the researcher get more related data and ask more questions.

For validity purposes, two techniques were used namely, triangulation and member checking. Data gathered from the three techniques were triangulated and cross-checked. Also, the findings of the study were taken back to the field and discussed with the major participants in the course particularly the course instructor and the administrators.

Findings

The analysis of findings uncovered three categories of practices in teaching ESP writing shown in figure 1 below. These are administrative practices, instructional practices and student writing practices. Under each category, more specific practices are nested.

Administrative practices

These are the practices with regard to administration at both the faculty and the language unit. There are four practices:

Inadequate preparation of students

Students attending the current TRW did not receive adequate preparation for taking the TRW course. Before students take TRW, it has been found that the procedures employed by the administration at the University do not seem to suffice in preparing students for taking the course. This includes procedures for admission and preparation for writing in the English language courses prior to TRW.

In admission, for instance, students are enrolled in FCSE with no special language requirements. Students were not required to show any evidence of their legibility in English other than the certificate of the secondary school. They were not even required to enter any proficiency test, nor to attend any pre-sessional courses to ensure better qualification for doing their study program in English.

In addition to admission, preparation for writing in the English language courses which were offered prior to TRW was also found inadequate. Data showed that the four courses offered in the first and second years gave less attention to the teaching and practice of writing. Indeed, this lack of preparation in writing would not qualify the students to undertake the TRW course, which is not a simple course.

Lack of collaboration between ELU and FCSE

ELU is the department which is accountable for designing and implementing the TRW course. In the meantime, students doing the course are fundamentally from FCSE. In addition to that, TRW is a course that is intended to prepare students for writing PRs, which are required for completing the program at FCSE. It is essential, therefore, that the course instructor as well as students be well informed on the link between the course and the specific PRs genre in order to be able to achieve that objective.

On the contrary, data showed that the two departments of ELU and FCSE did not have any collaboration with regard to TRW. During the fieldwork period, the researcher did not observe any evident collaboration between the two parties with regard to TRW such as scheduled meetings or even unofficial sessions. Indeed, the TRW was conducted without exchanging any feedback, follow-up or doing any means of collaboration between the two sides. Furthermore, the current course instructor confirmed that he did not have any official or non-official communication with the faculty and he only needed to deal with the administration at ELU [field notes].

Lack of adequate documentation and monitoring of syllabus

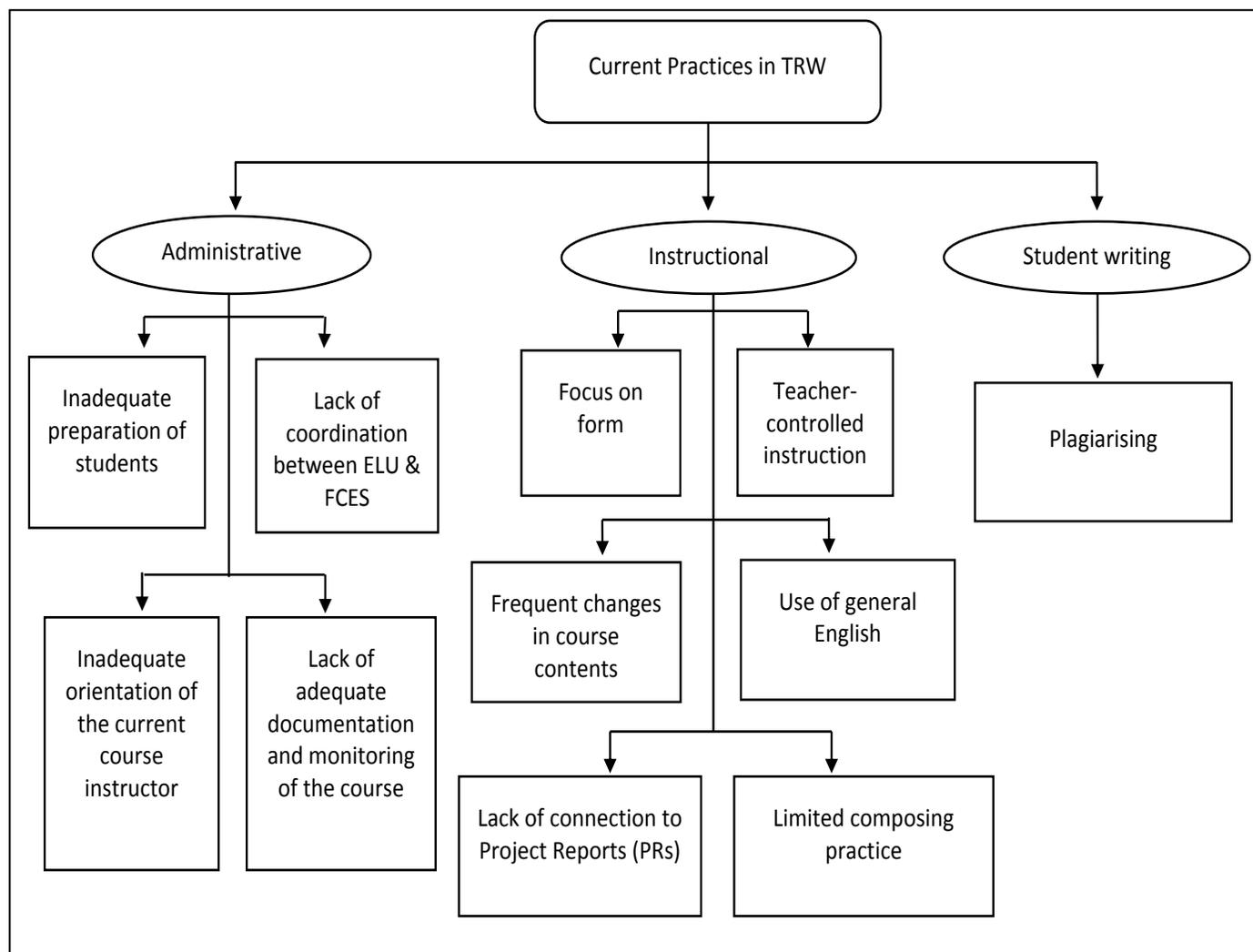
It has been found that ELU lacked adequate documentation of the courses offered including TRW. The researcher could hardly find any document that provides comprehensive information about the course. There was only one document entitled “Courses’ Outline” which stated some information about the course but in a concise and brief manner. This included the course’s general aim, its headline topics, assessment procedures and references. Other than that, the researcher could not find any other document that gives detailed descriptions of the lessons and the procedures to be followed in the implementation. In fact, ELU lacked a course file to contain all relevant documents, as it is customarily used in most academic institutions.

Inadequate orientation of course instructor

It has been found that when the course instructor was assigned to teach TRW, he was not made acquainted enough with issues in the context at both ELU and FCSE. In addition to unfamiliarity with the peculiarities of the course, the current course instructor was not sufficiently informed with the course's basic information such as the number of tests required in the semester. The course instructor basically belongs to another university and was hired to teach at ELU on a part time basis. It was therefore the first time for him to teach TRW, though he had previously taught the second year’s English language courses in the year before.

Instructional practices

These are the practices employed inside the classroom. Most data used here were primarily obtained from observations. For validity purposes, these data were then cross-checked with the data gained from both interviews and documents. The practices identified under this category are six:

Figure 1: Current practices identified**Focus on form**

When analysing data taken from inside the classroom, it has been found that the major focus of the course was basically taken towards grammar and structure. This, however, affected the main job improving writing. The writing lessons and issues were largely minimised as a result.

Focus on form in the current TRW has been observed in four aspects namely: instruction, error feedback, course materials and examinations. In most classes observed there was a prime interest on discussing issues relating to structure and grammar with very little on writing processes and organisation. In addition, Class discussions dedicated for discussing students' work and teacher-student individual sessions focused primarily on structural issues. This involved both class exercises and course reports which were prepared towards the end of the course. Also, the handouts and lessons used in the course focused mainly on topics relating to grammar and structure.

An obvious depiction of focus on form was apparently observed on course tests and examinations. It has been found that 65% of the course marks were given to the mid-term test and the final examination with 15% for the mid-term test and 50% for the final examination. The remaining marks were given to oral presentations (15%) and course reports (20%). This focus on form has affected the teaching and direction of the course, as both the instructor and students gave it their utmost attention and concern.

Teacher-controlled instruction

It has been noted from the classes observed that the teacher was the centre of the class in all class activities. Most talk in the classroom was either instructor- student or student-instructor. Student-student exchanges were limited and group and pair work activities were seldom employed. Students, as a result, played passive roles inside the classroom, as the instructor predominantly explained the lessons, raised the questions and was the only one to comment on responses.

Frequent changes in course contents

The course contents of the current TRW were in a state of frequent change throughout the course implementation. This has evidently been observed and was repeatedly confirmed by different participants including the current course instructor, head of ELU and

students. Owing to that, students used to come to classes without knowing the topic that would be tackled in the particular class.

Lack of connection to PRs

The major objective of TRW is to prepare students for writing the PRs of the final year. However, data gathered showed that the current course was rarely connected to these reports. It has been observed that there were hardly any treatments of writing reports in the classroom. The teaching of report writing in general was not significant in the classes attended even though some of these classes involved discussions of students' course reports.

Moreover, it has been found that PRs were not specifically targeted in any topic of the course. None of the lessons observed reflected any connection to these particular reports. Students also confirmed that they were not aware of these reports while taking the course and no reference was made in the course. The CCI confirmed that his major emphasis was on improving the students' general writing abilities by focusing most on form and grammar.

Use of General English

It has been clearly observed that the current TRW depended mainly on general English in both instruction and content. Throughout observation period it was apparently obvious that the language used in classroom discussions was general as examples discussed in the classroom mostly contained general form of English. Likewise, most handouts distributed in the classroom were of the general form including the ones tackling organisation and process issues.

Limited composing practice

Data showed that the writing tasks provided in the course were short and less demanding with regard to writing and composing. The major writing tasks in the current course were making selections, forming sentences using certain grammatical rules or changing

sentence structures to fit with the grammatical items discussed. Such tasks did not seem to have provided sufficient opportunities for students to compose more complicated texts in order for them to experience writing reports needed in the final year. As a result, students were rarely observed engaged in composing activities, as they were either listening to the instructor or doing the exercises which were not demanding as far as writing is concerned.

Student writing practices

Under this category one practice was identified, which is plagiarising. This practice was basically identified when analysing data from documents, but these data were also compared to those obtained from interviews as well. This practice was responsively confirmed by the course instructor in the member-checking stage.

Plagiarising

It has been found that the students in the current TRW did not do their composing tasks on their own particularly the course reports which were required at the end of the course. Instead, it has been found that the majority of them copied (plagiarised) their reports from other resources such as the internet websites, books, software manuals and magazines. This fact was openly acknowledged by the student participants.

This has also apparently been seen in the work of the students. When studying samples of students' reports prepared at the end of the course, it has been found that in most cases the language used did not appear to be that of students in this context as it contained well-composed sentences and was divided into well-crafted paragraphs. In some positions in the reports we came across some sentences which appeared to be written by the students themselves. These sentences showed a typical EFL students' writing which lacks in areas such as spelling, grammar, word choice and style. These are normally found in subsections such as the abstract, the first sentences in the introduction and the conclusion.

It was obvious that the students copied the material from other resources and used it as their own.

It has been found also that the practice of plagiarising has been noticed by the administration at ELU and the current course instructor. Both head of ELU and the course instructor admitted the practice but there were no procedures to stop it. For the head of ELU, the practice was considered harmful to students' learning but the instructor considered it as a way of exposure to other's writing that would help learners improve their writing.

Discussion of findings

The findings above which were obtained by triangulating data from three techniques of data collection, and which were later shown to main participants for member-checking raised a number of issues in the teaching and learning of ESP writing in Yemen. The discussion of findings here can be divided into five major issues presented below.

The writing genre

As discussed in the above section, though TRW is dedicated for preparing students for writing PRs, the findings from current practices unfolded that the current course was conducted without any link to project reports (PRs). This undeniably reveals a contradiction between the course objectives and its implementation. It is important therefore that the course be linked to its specific genre in a way that helps achieve the objectives. This should be done by allotting plenty of time for discussing and understanding the particular genre needed at FCSE.

The teaching of writing

The findings revealed that most instruction was form-focused. It has been found that focus on form prevailed in different aspects including instruction, course materials, error feedback and even tests and examinations. These findings are in agreement with the findings obtained by Naif (2003) who found that the traditional writing instruction which primarily focuses on the finished product was prevalent in the teaching of writing at the College of Languages in the University of Sana'a, Yemen.

The focus on form in the present study has dramatically affected the teaching and learning of writing in the current course. It has been found that, as a result of focus on form, explicit instruction and practice of writing were minimised to a great extent that they appeared to have made the course deviate from its actual objective of improving writing. These findings show that the teaching of writing in the Yemeni context is still product-focused which could not allow much writing to be done in the classroom. A writing course is expected to allow ample time for the practice of writing rather than other issues because “[c]rowding the curriculum with subjects other than writing limits the amount of time students and teachers can devote to writing, which is, after all, the focus of a writing course” (David et al., 1995, p. 526).

Furthermore, it has been found that the instruction of the TRW course was for the most part teacher-focused. The findings showed that the instructor played most roles in the classroom activities and as a result students' roles were reduced. This again shows a tendency to adapt the traditional methods of teaching in which teachers are considered as most knowledgeable and the students are seen as less informative, accordingly. It is important therefore that students are allowed to be involved more in the writing classroom so that they become much vigorous in practising writing which will definitely result in better performance. As stated by David et al. (1995, p. 526), “students must be authentic participants, not passive receivers, if they are to become writers”. This should

be done by allowing students more opportunities “to practice making writing decisions and then to reflect upon those decisions and their consequences” (David et al., 1995, p. 526).

Teachers on their part need to be well-exposed to the latest techniques in teaching writing to be more influential in the teaching process. Zen (2005) holds that “[l]anguage teachers need to be informed of the current research and research-supported approaches to second/foreign language writing so that they will be better prepared to teach writing” (Zen, 2005, p. 3). Hence, they need to take more “flexible and complex” roles in which they “must posture themselves as responsive observers and listeners urging, supporting, and challenging writers to grapple with increasingly complex problems in their writing” (David et al., 1995, p. 526). Such roles will absolutely provide more constructive learning environments for the learners which will absolutely produce far better outcomes.

Quality of writing

The findings demonstrated that student writing in the current course was basically inadequate. Most activities which were done inside and outside the classroom required limited composing abilities. This indicates that although TRW was a writing course, the course lacked proper composing activities such as writing long or multiple paragraphs.

On the other hand, the findings showed that students’ writing in the current course used much plagiarism. Students’ work on course reports was principally copied from other sources particularly the internet. This finding reveals that the outcome of writing from this course does not seem to show improvement in student writing. Instead of writing grounding on their own abilities and skills, which should have been developed in the writing course, students at FCSE resorted to copying others’ writing and use it as their own.

This certainly shows a big deficiency in the teaching and learning of the current writing course at FCSE. When students get away from experiencing the process of writing in a writing course, it is not unusual that they fail to do proper writing when they need to do that in their study or future career. In such cases, students resort to harmful strategies such as plagiarising. However, as stated by Silva, teaching writing should primarily involve “developing an efficient and effective composition process” (Silva, 1990, p. 16). Hence, it is important for the teaching of writing to guarantee that the learners go through the hardships of writing processes and composing while doing the writing course so that it becomes easier for them to do well when they need that in future. Absolutely, the more practice they do in the writing course, the easier and more appropriate their writing in future becomes.

Technical English

The findings showed that the course was primarily conducted in the general form of English. This however does not seem to be helpful for the students in such an ESP situation where only specific language is used in their content courses. In such ESP situations, using specific language in teaching is believed to be highly effective (Basturkmen, 2006). In this regard, Huckin points out that in ESP contexts “teaching should be based on subject-matter content that is recognisably part of the student’s own discipline” (Huckin, 2003, p. 3). Likewise, Dudley-Evans & St. John holds “ESP teaching is more motivating for learners than General English” (1998, p. 10). This is attributed to the fact that “the focused nature of the teaching, its relevance and cost-effectiveness ensure that its aims are widely accepted by learners” (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 10). Hence, it is important that course designers and instructors in ESP contexts ensure that they use more relevant materials so as the courses be more motivating.

Grammar

It has been clearly obtained that form has been given priority over writing issues in this course. The final examination which was supposed to project the salient topics in a course showed this excessive tendency towards form. A writing course would probably give writing issues more emphasis so as both students and instructors devote their time to writing, “which is, after all, the focus of a writing course” (David et al., 1995, p.526)

On the other hand, involving grammar in a writing course was considered questionable. According to Ferris & Hedgcock “L2 scholars and teachers have questioned the efficiency of grammar instruction” (2005, p. 272). It has been found that “the return of grammar instruction is often disappointing. Teachers find that even when a grammatical feature has been covered or practiced, students may not use it accurately in their own writing” (Frodesen & Holten, 2003, p. 142). Involving much form in the TRW should, then, be reconsidered.

Conclusion

This study was intended to identify the current practices in the teaching and learning of writing in an ESP course at the tertiary level in Yemen. The findings uncovered a number of practices that have been employed by the major participants particularly administrators, instructors and students.

From the findings obtained above a number of suggestions can be summarized below:

- ***English Language entry requirement***

The position of English as the medium of instruction at FCSE gives it exceptional significance in the teaching and learning process. It is important therefore that the English language be given more roles in determining the admission of the candidates. The faculty should ensure that students who join the program are adequately qualified to undertake the requirements of the English language. This would be maintained through more

involvement of English as a requirement in the admission procedures. This would absolutely require the administration to consider making a decision on a standard level of English required from the candidates to undertake the study program in English. In addition, it is essential to ensure as far as possible that the students in the classroom have similar proficiency level in English in general and writing in particular to help them advance together in their writing development.

- ***Preparation for writing***

An intermediate course such as TRW would require a carefully designed curriculum of the English language program. The curriculum should take into consideration steps for qualifying students in writing in other English language courses prior to the writing course. These components should move gradually in their treatment of writing so that they complement one another in a way that contributes to preparing students for taking the especially dedicated writing course.

- ***Collaboration between relevant departments***

As the major goal of the TRW course is to prepare students for writing PRs which are required for success in their study at FCSE, collaboration between FCSE and ELU is considered highly significant. In order to achieve the goal of preparing students for writing PRs, English language instructors need to understand the nature of these PRs and other relevant issues such as the views of administrators and supervisors. Likewise, the administration and the instructors at FCSE would certainly need to ensure that their students are provided with the proper learning of English that qualifies them for doing their tasks in the best ways. It is essential therefore that the two departments open a dialogue with regard to the course so that more rewarding outcomes can be reached.

- ***Writing instructors***

As TRW is an ESP course it is vital for the administration at ELU to be careful in choosing appropriate instructors for the course. For that purpose, course instructors

should have enough experience and qualifications in teaching writing in ESP contexts. Even though English language teachers would perhaps do well in teaching this course, more specific experience and qualifications of the course would enable him/her to implement the course in the best way.

- ***Roles of instructors and students in the classroom***

In any classroom constant collaboration between both students and instructors is highly essential. The traditional approach of teacher-centeredness which has been applied in the current TRW should be replaced with the more recent approach of student-centeredness which gives the learner more space and freedom in the teaching and learning of languages. The instructor should enable students to be more vigorous in the classroom by allowing them to play roles other than the classical ones. This includes responding to each other's work and exchanging views and ideas regarding various issues raised inside the classroom. In addition to that, group work and pair work should also be employed to make it easier for the students to interact with one another unreservedly.

- ***Plagiarism***

The findings uncovered a major practice of plagiarism in writing course reports in the TRW course at FCSE. TRW therefore, should venture much endeavour on the threat of plagiarism for student writing and their learning as a whole. The major risks of plagiarism lie in destroying creativity and interest and making students dependent on others' writing.

In short, this study aimed at identifying the current practices of the major stakeholders in a writing course at an ESP context. The practices identified showed that the teaching and learning of writing in the Yemeni tertiary level need to be reconsidered so that it becomes more effective. This should involve different aspects and stakeholders in the teaching environment.

About the authors

Hussein Taha Assaggaf is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at the department of English, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Al-Ahgaff University in Yemen. He obtained his MA from the University of Leeds, UK and his doctorate from the National University of Malaysia. His current research interests are second language writing, needs analysis and English for specific purposes.

Siti Hamin Stapa is an Associate Professor at the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She has been teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the area of ELS for about 21 years. Her research interests are written literacy, genre analysis and contrastive rhetoric.

Jamilah Mustafa is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, University Selangor (UNISEL), Malaysia. She has a PhD from the University of Exeter, UK. She teaches Educational Enquiry at the EDD level and Principles of Language Learning and Teaching at the undergraduate level. Her research interests cover the areas of language, culture and literacy. Currently she is involved in a project on environmental literacy for primary school children.

References

- Al-Ghrafy, M. G. (1999). Prewriting and rewriting strategy instruction at college level (EFL classes in Yemen). (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Deccan College, Postgraduate & Research Institute, India.
- Bacha, N. (2002). Developing learners' academic writing skills in higher education: a study for educational reform. *Language and Education*, 16, 3, 161-177.
- Bacha, N. & Bahous, R. (2008). Contrasting views of business students' writing needs in an EFL environment. *English for Specific Purposes*, 27, 74-93.
- Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and Options in English for Specific Purposes*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Braine, G. (1989). Writing in science and technology: an analysis of assignments from ten undergraduate courses. *English for Specific Purposes*, 8, 3-15.
- Cimasko, T., Reichelt, M., Im, J., & Arik, B. T. (2009). Principles and practices in foreign language writing instruction The 2008 Symposium on Second Language Writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 18, 3, 209-213.
- David, D., Gordon, B., & Pollard, R. (1995). Seeking common ground: guiding assumption for writing courses. *College Composition and Communication*, 46, 4, 522-532.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Faqeeh, A. I. (2003). Saudi students' beliefs regarding their English writing difficulties. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA.
- Ferris D. R. & Hedgcock, J. S. (2005) *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process and Practice*. (2nd ed.) Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Frodesen, J., & Holten, C. (2003). Grammar and the ESL writing class. In B.Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*. pp. 141-161. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gay, L.R. & Airasian, P. (2000). *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.
- Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. (1996). *Theory and Practice of Writing*. London: Longman.
- Grabe, W., & Kaplan, R. (1997). The writing course. In K. Bardovi-Harlig & B. Hartford (Eds.), *Beyond Methods: Components of Second Language Teacher Education*. pp. 172-197. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Horowitz, D.H. (1986). What professors actually require: Academic tasks for the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20, 3, 445-462.
- Huckin, T. (2003). Specificity in LSP. *IBÉRICA*, 5, 3-17.
- Hyland, K. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Writing*. London: Pearson Education.
- Jenkins, S., Jordan, M. K., and Weiland, P. O. (1993). The role of writing in graduate engineering education: a survey of faculty beliefs and practices. *English for Specific Purposes*, 12, 1, 51-67.

- Johns, A. M. (1990). L1 composition theories: implications for developing theories of L2 composition. In B. Kroll (Ed.) *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom*. pp. 24-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kroll, B. (1990). *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, A. (2003). Teaching EFL writing in the university: related issues, insights and implications. *Journal of National Taipei Teacher College*, 16, 1, 111-136. Retrieved 22 March 2009 from: <http://academic.ntue.edu.tw/public/journal/vol16-/A06%E6%9D%8E%E6%80%9D%E7%A9%8E.doc>
- Leki, I., Cumming, A. & Silva, T. (2006). Second-language composition teaching and learning. In Smagorinsky, P. (ed.) *Research on Composition Multiple Perspectives on Two Decades of Change*. pp. 141-169. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Leki, I. (2000). Writing, literacy, and applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 99-115.
- Leki, I. and Carson, J. G (1994). Student's perception of EAP writing instruction and writing needs across the disciplines. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 1, 81-101.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. California: Sage Publications.
- Manchon, R. M., & de Haan, P. (2008). Writing in foreign language contexts: an introduction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 17, 1-6.

- McDonough, J. & McDonough, S. (1997). *Research Methods for English Language Teachers*. London: Arnold.
- Matsuda, P. K. (1998). Situating ESL writing in a cross-disciplinary context. *Written Communication, 15*, 99-121.
- Matsuda, P. K. (1999). Composition studies and ESL writing: a disciplinary division of labour. *CCC, 50, 4*, 699-721.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2003a). Process and post process. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12*, 65-83.
- Matsuda, P. K. (2003b). Second language writing in the twentieth century: a situated historical perspective. In B. Kroll (ed.). *Exploring the Dynamics of Second Language Writing*, pp. 15-34. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Matsuda, P. K., Canagarajah, A. S., Harklau, L., Hyland, K., & Warschauer, M. (2003). Changing currents in second language writing: A colloquium. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 12, 2*, 151-179.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative Research Design an Interactive Approach*. (2nd ed.) London: Sage Publications.
- Momtazur Rahman, M., Thang Siew Ming, Mohd Sallehudin Abdul Aziz & Norizan Abdul Razak. (2009). Needs analysis for developing an ESP Writing course for foreign postgraduates in science and technology at National University of Malaysia. *Asian ESP Journal, 5, 2*, 34-59.

- Naif, M. O. (2003). A study of Yemeni EFL student writer's composition strategies and skills. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sana'a, Yemen.
- Ortega, L. (2004). L2 writing research in EFL contexts: some challenges and opportunities for EFL researchers [Featured article]. ALAK [Applied Linguistic Association of Korea] Newsletter. Retrieved March 12, 2008 from:
http://www.alak.or.kr/2_public/2004_spring/document/feature_article_200403.pdf.
- Osman, H. (2004) Genre-based instruction for ESP. *The English Teacher*. Retrieved 28 November 2011 from:
<http://www.melta.org.my/The-English-Teacher-004/q?cid=64&doit=showclass>
- Polio, C. (2003). Research on second language writing : an overview of what we investigate and how. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring Dynamics in Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raimes, A. (1985). What unskilled ESL students do as they write: a classroom study of composing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 2, 229-258.
- Raimes, A. (1991). Out of the woods: emerging traditions in teaching writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25, 3, 407-430.
- Raimes, A. (1998). Teaching writing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 18, 142-167.

Silva, T. (1990). Second language composition instruction: developments, issues, and directions in ESL. In B. Kroll (Ed.) *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* (pp. 11-23). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage.

Vifansi, E. A. (2002). Academic writing needs: an exploratory study of the writing needs of ESL students. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Purdue University, USA.

Zen, D. (2005). Teaching ESL/EFL writing beyond language skills. Paper presented at the 3rd International Annual LATEFL China Conference, Tonghua, China.