Proposed Model to Assist Saudi Postgraduate Students in their English Academic Writing

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Abstract
This current research forms part of a broader investigation into the problems Saudi postgraduate students face in English academic writing. The study used the interpretive paradigm to investigate and interpret the perceptions of Saudi postgraduate students and their supervisors in relation to the difficulties they encountered regarding academic writing in English. Therefore, the study adopted a sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase of the research employed a questionnaire whereas the qualitative phase employed semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In total, 275 students completed the prepared questionnaire whilst 15 students, both male and female, and 9 supervisors participated in the semi-structured interviews. The research also used ten samples of written feedback students had received from their supervisors. SPSS descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data quantitatively, and MAXQDA software was used to analyse the data qualitatively. The study identified that Saudi postgraduates encounter a range of difficulties in their academic writing, which were due to several underlying causes. Therefore, to address this issue and to contribute to knowledge in the field, the author of this study devised a theoretical model to assist Saudi postgraduate students overcome their difficulties with English academic writing. The main focus of the current study is to explain this model in detail.
Key Words: academic writing, postgraduate students, writing difficulties

1. Introduction

A significant number of United Kingdom universities and colleges offer English for academic purpose programmes. Such programmes tend to offer two different types of credit-bearing courses. The first option is that of non-credit-bearing courses that students attend before the university term begins. The aim of these courses is to 'fine tune' students' proficiency before they begin to study at the university. Alternatively, they offer intensive programmes, the aim being to improve students' level of English to a standard sufficient for university admission. The second option is credit-bearing courses that are offered as part of the university curriculum. This current research has opted to focus on the non-credit courses that offer pre-university intensive EAP programmes. In addition, in EAP courses, rather than being viewed as an authority or as a source of knowledge, the teacher assumes the role of advisor or mentor (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 167).

2. Academic English courses

To assist students who have graduated from secondary schools to develop their English language skills in their academic courses while at university, some of the higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, for example, King Fahad University (KFU), King Saud University (KSU), and King Abdul Aziz University (KAU), provide intensive English courses for such students. The aim is to help them improve their English and so achieve better marks in their academic courses.

For instance, KFU uses English medium instruction (EMI). Thus, all of the courses are taught in English, as it is envisaged that the students will need a good level of English for their future employment (Alqahtani, 2011). Therefore, KFU offers the students an English language teaching programme before they enrol in their academic courses. The intention is to help the students to speak fluently and accurately in English. In order to achieve this, in 1975, KSU established a language centre to help students develop their proficiency in English before they begin their academic studies and to ensure they have the basic language skills they are going to need in their academic and professional lives. Currently, more than 2,000 students attend courses at the centre (Alqahtani, 2011).

In Saudi Arabia, it is possible to find many English courses that provide general English and English for specific purposes (ESP) and that aim to teach only a basic knowledge of the language system. This is in contrast to teaching specific courses, such as EAP courses. However, Saudi students have indicated their dissatisfaction with such courses, which neither satisfy their needs or capture their interest. Furthermore, these courses tend to use a teacher-centred approach instead of learner-centred methods (Alqahtani, 2011). In addition, it has been found that the teachers do not transfer to their students the best skills regarding the practice of teaching (Al-Ansari, 1995).

Hence, I argue that the EAP courses that are currently provided in Saudi Arabia do not give students any practical skills in real English-speaking environments. Nonetheless, it is not only the English language programme that is at fault. Instead, the students, the instructors, and the material that is taught must bear some responsibility for these programmes' lack of success (Alqahtani, 2011) , as each plays a specific role in the learning process.

3. The Preparatory year Programme

In 2007/2008, the MoHE developed what was called "the preparatory year programme". This is a new university system whereby once students have finished secondary school and before they enter university, they must be enrolled in this programme. They have to complete the requirements of the programme in a single academic year. The majority of Saudi universities aim to give their students who have enrolled in the programme an opportunity to achieve the following:

    to fill the gap between what students, learn in the state education system and what they need to flourish at university level.
    to prepare students for higher education
    to direct each student towards the college that would be most appropriate to his or her academic abilities and interests.
    to rationalize the use of the potential of the university
    to enhance the university's inputs and outputs
    to develop thinking and learning skills and develop scientific debates.
    to increase the number of students that enrol in the university.
    to ensure graduates leave university with the skills they need for the labour market and for development plans (MoHE, 2008)

4. The English Language Centre (ELC)

In the majority of universities, the MoHE has established a centre for teaching English, usually in the preparatory year. The aims of the English Language Centre (ELC) are as follows:
    to give all university students a preparatory general curriculum and provide them with ESP teaching services.
    to give university administrative staff and teaching assistants specialised courses and general English literacy.
    to offer customised courses for TOEFL and to provide local applicants with a scholarship for graduate studies.
    to provide language teaching services via the most up-do-date educational technologies, in particular, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and E-Learning (Mursal, 2005)

In addition, the MoHE gives the ELC the necessary support regarding building a language laboratory. employing faculty members from across the globe with the relevant qualifications, and signing contracts with English language teaching (ELT) publishers for devising book series.

Extensive efforts have been made by the Saudi government to improve the quality and provision of English language teaching and, to achieve this, has significantly increased the funding spent on education (Javid, Farooq & Gulzar, 2012). However, despite this, Saudi students still have a poor level of English proficiency; indeed, according to the Cambridge Examination Centre, Saudi Arabia ranks "39 out of the 40 nations participating in general and academic training tests" (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 45).

While the above programmes have many advantages, they have been criticised by a large proportion of students graduating from the public education system, who argue that not only are all the subjects are taught in English but also that they do not relate to disciplines that can help students determine their orientation (Al-Hussiani, 2012). Students have also raised concerns regarding the duration of the course as well as what they consider to be excessive amounts of homework. They argue that four hours of English every day is counterproductive, as they are unable to focus on and assimilate all the information they are given.

Having proficiency in written English and being able to master the other language skills (reading, listening, and speaking) would help Saudi students to succeed not only in their academic courses but also in their examinations, and to function at a much higher level within English-speaking societies. Therefore, the Saudi government made the decision to send students to study abroad. This was due to what was considered to be a need for well-educated people to participate in improving the Kingdom.

5. Problem of the Study

Given that I am very familiar with the system of higher education in Saudi, I can confirm that an extremely small number of universities offer courses that allow students to acquire the skills they will need to succeed at academic writing in L2 at not only the undergraduate but also the postgraduate stage. As a result of this lack of suitable courses, when postgraduate students begin to attend universities in the UK, they are faced with significant problems not only with their general academic skills but also when they have to use academic writing in L2 and even once they have finished the EAP course in the UK.

The reason for this is that the focus of such courses is more on general language skills, and little or no attention is paid to what students actually need in order to carry out their academic research; for example, in writing programmes, students lack knowledge regarding how to conduct a literature review; they have little or no experience of engaging critically with either the theories or the theoretical framework that they require for their postgraduate studies. The factors that have been identified as restricting the students' progress in these courses include the differences in the culture and the education systems between Saudi Arabia and the UK, and students' low level of proficiency in the English language (Alqahtani, 2011; Mostafa, 2006).

These problems are exacerbated by the poor communication from the EAP courses with regard to the previous knowledge and proficiency of students who travel abroad to study, as well as by the lack of any EAP courses in the KSA that could induct students sufficiently into how to learn in English (Alqahtani, 2011). Thus, the aim of the current study is to improve understanding of Saudi students' specific needs when they arrive in the UK, and so to help bridge the gap in the academic preparation programmes that are provided for postgraduate students from Saudi Arabia. This study attempted to answer the following question: What is the effect of the lack of EAP preparation in Saudi Arabia on Saudi postgraduate students' proficiency in academic writing?

6. Methodology

Given the nature of the research questions in this study, it was decided that an exploratory methodology would be used. This decision was supported by the assertion by Creswell (2009)

that an exploratory methodology "is useful for a researcher who wants to explore a phenomenon" (p. 212). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) also recommended the use of an exploratory methodology, as it permits the researcher to uncover the participants' cultures, values, and perceptions whilst aiming to reveal the true meaning of their participants' words and behaviours. Therefore, I felt that an exploratory methodology would give me a better understanding of the phenomenon I was researching.

7. Participants

Two types of sampling strategies were employed in this study: a probability and a non-probability sampling strategy. The former involved randomly selecting 275 postgraduate Saudi students from various UK universities. These participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. It was decided to administer the questionnaire to students online. This is because research has indicated that doing so "enables a wider and much larger population to be accessed" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 280). However, a type of non-probability sampling, namely, convenience sampling, was used to select 15 postgraduate Saudi students. To participate in the study, the students had to fulfil two criteria, namely, accessibility and purposiveness (Silverman, 2001). Therefore, those students who were considered as possibly belonging to the sample were both female and male students who were studying at universities in the UK in order to obtain either an MA, a PhD, or an EdD degree in a range of specialisations; the aim was to create a sample of Saudi postgraduate students that was as representative as possible. The students selected for the research had some common characteristics; these included their socio-cultural background and age, with most students being in the age range of late twenties to forties.

8. Data collection methods

The current research employs both quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data in order to answer the research questions. In the qualitative phase, both semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions in the questionnaires were used, while the structure of the questionnaire demonstrates the use of quantitative data collection measures. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data made it possible to broaden the understanding of the difficulties Saudi postgraduate students face regarding their academic writing when studying in the United Kingdom.

9. Data Analysis

In the quantitative phase of this investigation, SPSS descriptive statistical tests were used to analyse the results of the closed-ended questionnaire items. Percentages and frequency counts were calculated for each category in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the percentages of the five-point Likert scales (very difficult; difficult; neutral; easy; and very easy) are presented separately in tables.

Two items were analysed qualitatively, namely, the semi-structured interviews, and the answers to the open-ended questions included in the questionnaire. The analysis was performed in accordance with the procedures recommended by Creswell (2007).This form of data analysis is non-linear, and the researcher has to become involved in the several stages of the research and move back and forth between the original collected data and the coding process not only to create new codes but also to test the existing codes against the original data.

Therefore, MAXQDA software was used in the research; MAXQDA is a multifunctional software system that is used for managing and developing data. There were several advantages to using MAXQDA in the data analysis process. While reading the data, I could make codes, generate themes, devise categories, highlight segments, and add memos easily.

10. Results

Students were asked to indicate how frequently they had encountered a range of aspects during EAP courses in academic writing that they had attended in the UK before beginning their postgraduate studies. Students gave their answers by completing a questionnaire. There were (10) items representing a range of writing skills, planning and gathering ideas, writing critically, writing in a range of genres, summarising the text, paraphrasing the text, structuring assignments, using drafts, using instructions for self-assessment, using appropriate materials, and giving helpful feedback. The details of which are given in Table (10.1) The skill with which they had the most experience was "useful materials" (M=3.98), with nearly 74% having worked with that skill either often or very often. "Summarising" was the second aspect that was experienced frequently (M=3.89), as indicated by the high percentage of students (69%) that stated that they had encountered this aspect either often or very often. "Planning & collecting ideas" was the third aspect students rated as an additional aspect of EAP that they had experienced often or very often(M=3.86).These findings indicated the importance of the pre writing stage regarding the quality of students' writing; this is because to produce a coherent text, students need to demonstrate a complex mental process. Therefore, in Saudi education, when teaching writing, it is important to place a greater emphasis on the stages of composition and of rewriting rather than focusing on the final product of the text.

"Writing in various genres" and "writing critically" were the least frequently experienced aspects, with (M=3.37, 44%) and (M=3.15, 35%) respectively. This discrepancy could be because the majority of the English programmes in UK institutions take a general approach to teaching English skills. An example of this is in teaching writing, where the focus is on teaching students the best way to structure an essay and to organise their ideas. Another possible cause is that such courses use general topics when teaching writing, rather than focusing on topics related to students' actual requirements for academic writing.

Table. 1 *Descriptive Statistics for Items within EAP Usefulness Scale*

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often	Mean	Sd.	Rank
1. EAP in academic writing in UK: planning & collecting ideas	19 6.9	31 11.3	34 12.4	77 28.0	114 41.5	3.86	1.264	3
2. EAP in academic writing in UK: writing critically	42 15.3	21 7.6	115 41.8	48 17.5	49 17.8	3.15	1.248	10
3. EAP in academic writing in the UK:	22 8.0	24 8.7	108 39.3	73 26.5	48 17.5	3.37	1.114	9

						Mean	SD	Rank
writing in various genres								
4. EAP in academic writing in the UK: summarizing	19	33	33	65	125	3.89	1.292	2
	6.9	12.0	12.0	23.6	45.5			
5. EAP in academic writing in the UK: paraphrasing	16	39	22	125	73	3.73	1.169	5
	5.8	14.2	8.0	45.5	26.5			
6. EAP in academic writing in the UK: structuring assignment	12	63	20	140	40	3.48	1.125	8
	4.4	22.9	7.3	50.9	14.5			
7. EAP in academic writing in the UK: drafting	17	37	15	129	77	3.77	1.175	4
	6.2	13.5	5.5	46.9	28.0			
8. EAP in academic writing in the UK: using rubrics for self-assessment	47	13	61	36	118	3.60	1.492	6
	17.1	4.7	22.2	13.1	42.9			
9. EAP in academic writing in the UK: useful materials	20	23	29	73	130	3.98	1.254	1
	7.3	8.4	10.5	26.5	47.3			
10. EAP in academic writing in the UK: helpful feedback	12	62	19	119	63	3.58	1.192	7
	4.4	22.5	6.9	43.3	22.9			

Furthermore, the responses some students gave to the open–ended question and during the semi-structured interviews indicated that while the majority of students were happy with the EAP courses in the UK, these courses had certain limitations. One particular limitation was that in such courses, the writing elements are not linked to the students' areas of research. As Noura said:

From my experience, teaching writing in EAP is based on writing an essay about various topics, such as global warming or technology, which is not helpful. Furthermore, students in these courses are required to do many assignments, which makes them frustrated and does not improve their writing.

Furthermore, the responses of four students made clear that the methods used for teaching writing in the EAP courses do not correlate to the students' requirements. For example, Maha made the following comment:

The methods of teaching writing in the EAP [courses] are different from what the actual students need in their disciplines. Therefore, there should be a cooperation between the administrations or instructors in these courses and the departments of students' subjects, as some disciplines have different styles of writing. For example, writing in arts subjects is completely different from science topics. I think most EAP courses are mostly focused on the arts subjects.

In a similar vein, Karim stated that the EAP courses do not give international students the knowledge they require regarding the cultural and academic differences between the UK and their home country:

The EAP courses, I think, do not know the real needs of international students. For instance, the Saudi students need more time to adapt to the new culture and academic life. That means that the students need to be independent, which they are not used to in their country, and that is a challenge in itself.

Lina's comment also showed students experience significant levels of stress due to the requirements of English language tests, for example, the IELTS exam, and the requirements of the EAP course. These levels of stress prevent students from being able to concentrate on their studies:

Many students when they return to Saudi Arabia have weak language skills unless those students are proficient in English before they start their study…… In addition, the IELTS exam causes a lot of pressure for students during the EAP course, which affects their success in the courses. Students cannot find enough time to cope with the requirements of the course and the exam together.

Other students felt the EAP courses in the UK had several shortcomings; specifically, they are too general and do not take sufficient account of students' needs in their academic fields. Ahmed underlined this view with the following comment:

An EAP course mostly tends to be more general; they might do some work on academic writing, but even that is not discipline-specific. There are different conventions for different disciplines. Some disciplines depend on the methodological framework. Other disciplines would want the writing to be very much in the passive voice, would want no mention of the researcher in the thesis, and would want no subjectivity throughout the writing whereas other disciplines, for example, in many of the social sciences including in education, it would not be appropriate to erase the researcher from the research. So that it is something that is very discipline specific, and EAP courses can't be expected to address that.

Khalid also highlighted that EAP courses do not adequately prepare students regarding the need to demonstrate critical thinking in their writing:

I do not believe that the EAP courses are sufficient in terms of what I call critical thinking skills, and I think students struggle with their critical thinking skills for their PhDs; in

particular. They find it difficult to engage critically with facts, theories and the theoretical framework that they need for the PhD.

The Saudi government provides students with the chance to study language courses during their time in the UK for either one or two years irrespective of whether their major is TESOL or non-TESOL. Nonetheless, the students revealed in the interviews that irrespective of the length of their stay, they still did not feel adequately prepared for the academic requirements of studying for a postgraduate degree.

11. Discussion
This section considers the effect on Saudi students of their lack of academic preparation before they travel abroad to take up their postgraduate studies. In addition, the section explores how effective EAP courses in the UK are. For instance, in the current study, students commented on how a lack of academic preparation in Saudi Arabia means Saudi postgraduate students struggle with academic writing when they begin to will in the UK.

Therefore, a theoretical model has been devised as a contribution to knowledge in the field to help Saudi postgraduate students overcome their difficulties with their English academic writing. However, this theoretical model is considered only to be a guideline rather than a fixed line of action (Figure 1).
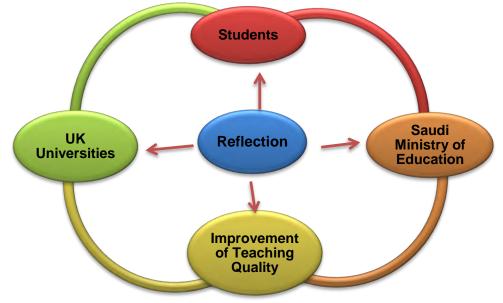

Figure 1. Proposed Model to Assist Saudi Postgraduate Students in their English Academic Writing

As seen in Figure 1, the proposed model has four main points of focus: the Saudi Ministry of Education, improvement of teaching quality (including lectures at university and pre-service English teacher education), UK universities, and students. An assessment of these factors demonstrated clearly that writing skills are concerned not only with language, but, in addition, they describe a process of several stages that the writing must pass through until the student reaches the final stage of composition. In this regard, Bukta (2013) states, "The ability to write is not […] innate. Compared to listening and speaking, people need to reach a certain level of

cognitive development before they can acquire writing skills' (p. 18). In particular, the ability to write academically is linked to the ability to develop a range of skills, for example, higher-order thinking skills; these include critical thinking, communication, and research skills (Scarcella, 2003). For this process to be successful, continual co-operation is needed between these elements to help students regarding their writing abilities. The next section gives the major elements of the proposed model in more detail.

11.1 Saudi Ministry of Education

Saudi postgraduate students who wish to study abroad should first experience academic preparation in the Kingdom; participants suggested that such preparation should last a minimum of one year. The content of such preparation should also include cultural aspects "to raise participants' awareness of cultural issues and social interactions in the target country" (Jin, 1992, p. 432). Moreover, for the preparation to be effective, the learning environment provided must be multifaceted. These aspects may include the following: interactive elements with clear objectives, a focus on independence, a range of assessment methods, and interaction between student and teacher; all of these can have a major influence on the outcomes (Lizzio et al., 2002).

It is important that highly qualified specialists are employed to present the academic preparation, as these will be able to cope with students' needs and weaknesses, and they will be able to "reconsider their different roles including the affective ones and shouldn't confine their roles solely to providing information" (Al-Zubaidi, 2012, p. 44). Based on the results of the study, overseas students can often find their academic success hindered by their lack of familiarity with the UK's academic environment. Therefore, before students travel abroad, lectures and workshops should be set up to help the students understand the differences between Saudi Arabia's academic culture and that of the UK. For instance, the organisers of these workshops could invite guest speakers, for example, experts in education, or researchers and/or professors to "discuss British academic culture" (Jin, 1992, p. 432). Furthermore, institutions could suggest that Saudi students who have already had the experience of studying abroad might come and discuss their time studying in the UK; in this way, other students would receive a first-hand account of how the teaching methods in the two cultures differ, and they could then compare what these students say with their own experiences and expectations.

Students should be encouraged to extend their reading to widen their knowledge, as in this way, they will be exposed to a range of ideas, and this will help them improve their writing skills. To assist them in their second language academic writing, students should also be exposed to a wide range of rich writing contexts in academic settings, and this will encourage them to gain writing practice in various academic genres (Atkinson, 1993).

To help students write academically and to improve their writing skills, the methods used for teaching need to move to a process-oriented approach that "provides effective instruction in what is often called the 'prewriting stage' of the composing process" (Leung, 2008, p. 24). In the prewriting stage, the activities are brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing (Yan, 2005). In this approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator to guide the students and provide them with feedback during these stages; however, they should not make 'correctness' a priority. Moreover, Leung (2008) claims that "students must be allowed to work independently and explore their

own interests, rather than being forced to write traditionally and with a high level of formality" (pp. 28-29) in order to maintain their attention and motivate them to produce their best work.

The results of the current study found academic preparation is essential to enable students to "be ready to meet the minimum requirements in dealing with the tasks for completing their Ph. D. without having language problems" (Son & Park, 2014, p. 9). Hence, while high quality learning and students' success are desired, it is not possible to achieve either without qualified teachers; therefore, it is essential to invest in teachers and recognise that they are one of the most important elements of any educational program (Khan, 2011). This investment in teacher quality "starts at the earliest stages of a teacher's career and continues throughout a professional lifetime" (Moir & Gless, 2001, p. 114).

11.2 Improvement of Teaching Quality
11.2.1 Lecturers at University
Providing university lecturers with effective training is crucial to give the pre-service teachers the skills they require; if a lecturer's teaching practice is developed, this can help to improve the quality of the teaching of pre-service teachers (Elghotmy, 2012). This training can be provided in several forms. For example, it could involve meetings between lecturers to share their views and experiences of teaching and thus "keep themselves updated about the latest development in language theories" (Leung, 2008, p. 182). Lecturers need to remain abreast of developments and innovations regarding strategies in feedback, as they ought to focus not only on the accuracy of the grammar but also on the meaning of their students' writing. Choosing alternative methods of delivering feedback, for instance, conferencing between teachers and students, is "an absolutely worthwhile investment in student motivation and hence engagement" (Leung, 2008, p. 184).

Moreover, lecturers in L2 writing are likely to benefit from creating collaborative learning environments to raise their students' confidence in their L2 writing. Indeed, Kamil (2011) notes that "in group work, students not only compose their own written texts but read and criticize texts written by their peers and interact with each other to elaborate better texts" (p. 219). Moreover, it is important that "adequate library resources and services, physical facilities and a supportive reading environment should be available to enhance students' intellectual, cultural, and technical development" (Ahmed, 2011, p. 245). In addition, by including L2 writing lectures when devising the curriculum plan and designing L2 writing courses, universities are given a valuable opportunity to improve their understanding of students' interests and to identify their needs.

In order for the above elements to function successfully in the training programme, it is crucial to administer a follow-up process; this would allow teachers the freedom to experiment with a range of approaches and to create a useful dynamic between the students and themselves. The process of examination followed by reassessment can be incredibly beneficial for teachers in helping them remain aware of their teaching environment and in helping them learn the best way to encourage their students to remain engaged and to find their own learning style (Leung, 2008). If the abovementioned training strategies are to fulfil the aim of improving the quality of the lecturers' teaching methods at universities, a pre-service programme must be developed.

Therefore, the next section offers a closer examination of pre-service English teacher education in Saudi Arabia.

11.2.2 Pre-Service English Teacher Education

In the proposed model, it is recommended that pre-service English teachers receive effective training in both the linguistic and the pedagogical aspects of writing. In this way, they will develop their teaching practice and, at the same time, meet their students' needs. For instance, teachers require training not only in translation and applied linguistics but also in methodological courses (Al-Seghayer, 2014). Furthermore, teachers should be trained in how best to use contemporary approaches, such as learner-centred approaches and research skills. Pre-service teachers also require training in "using contemporary test styles (e.g., open-book tests), how to assess students based on their research skills, and how to diversify student assessment methods" (Al-Mandhari, 2011, p. 286). They should also have knowledge about the theories of second language writing, as an improved understanding of these theories will help them become "critical and reflective practitioners, researchers of their own professional life, and agents of change" (Van Lier, 1994, p. 7).

Furthermore, it is important for English teachers in pre-service programmes to encourage the use of technology to enhance their pre-service learning. It is also helpful to assist English teachers to engage with the creation of cooperative and collaborative learning activities that enable them to share their knowledge, experiences, and ideas; this can then lead to "serious questioning and critical reflective thinking" (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2010, p. 58). Additionally, it is important for pre-service teachers to be exposed to critical pedagogy as a fundamental element of the pre-service programme for English language teachers in the KSA. Regarding this issue, Troudi (2005) highlights that "we need to develop a teacher education framework that prepares teachers not only in the technical knowledge of language and the various discourses of the related fields, but especially in the cultural and socio-political issues that come with teaching English" (pp. 118-119). Similarly, Habbash (2011) points out that it is important for teachers in the KSA to acknowledge political, economic, and social issues regarding the teaching processes and teacher/student interaction. Thus, these alterations in the pre-service training of English teachers can help stimulate teachers' professional development.

Taking this into account, the Ministry of Education has been considering how to develop the educational process in the KSA, thus showing an understanding of the importance to the country of having a well-educated workforce to contribute to the improvement of the Kingdom. Therefore, in 2005, "the King Abdullah Scholarship, Saudi Arabia ", a sponsorship scheme, was established by the government with the aim of assisting Saudi students who wanted to study abroad in English-speaking countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). However, it has been acknowledged that "studying overseas has always presented students with unique challenges as well as benefits, ranging from socio-economic and academic to individual "(Alzahrani, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, the next section gives an outline of the suggested orientation programmes in the UK to help international students cope with the difficulties they face in their academic studies in the UK.

11.3 Universities in the UK

The proposed model suggests, with regard to the support the universities in the UK offer to international students, that it would be beneficial for UK universities to provide orientation programmes for international students to assist them to overcome the difficulties they face in their academic studies in the UK; these difficulties include the challenges regarding students' academic writing. Kingston and Forland (2008) suggest the following:

> Students may gain insight into the expectations of the UK's education system and university's policies of learning and teaching before, or early on in their courses. It was suggested that this could be remedied by sending information to students before they came to the UK. (p. 216)

This is because currently, the orientation programmes in the UK do not give importance to cross-culture preparation. Instead, most of the focus is on the procedures of or introduction to the system, for example, healthcare, immigration rules, and police registration as well as what courses are available and what is expected from students. Therefore, the way these courses are structured has certain inherent limitations; in particular, postgraduate Saudi students are not given the opportunity to obtain information about and become familiar with the British system, even though undergraduate students can do this.

Thus, academic staff and supervisors need to give more consideration to cultural differences and previous learning experiences. In addition, to improve, international students need support and guidance as well as regular tutorial sessions and constructive feedback from their supervisors. Furthermore, to ensure that students and teachers are "aware of their own values, styles of communication, cognitive orientation, as well as emotional reactions" (Swanson & Watt, 2011, p. 22), knowledge regarding international students' culture is crucial. Therefore, an understanding of these issues can contribute towards the establishment of effective communication between international students and their supervisors.

Although such orientation programmes are needed to assist international students to adapt to the academic environment abroad, these programmes will be ineffective unless students are made aware of the potential challenges, and they must accept a certain degree of responsibility for making the necessary improvements themselves. The following section discusses this responsibility.

11.4 Students

The proposed model recommends that students play a major role in improving their academic writing and assume a degree of responsibility for their own problems. Strategies students can use to help themselves include making use of online resources and reading both the relevant literature and academic journals more frequently. Furthermore, they should search for the necessary information independently and so contribute to their sense of autonomy and not remain dependent on their teachers for all aspects of their education (Shukri, 2014). In addition, they can obtain access to exemplary pieces of academic writing to help them learn the best way to structure an academic paper, to present their ideas, to construct a logical and cogent argument, to organise paragraphs, and to make links between ideas. Students also need to take advantage of the facilities provided to them from abroad to improve their writing skills; these include

academic workshops, international student support centres, and personal tutors. In addition, students should not feel anxious about communicating regularly with their supervisors and asking for any clarification they might require. For students, "Taking ownership of the writing process can help them to understand that effective academic writing is a process which requires effort and commitment" (Pineteh, 2014, p. 20).

12. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that academic preparation is crucial for Saudi students. The data collected from both the semi-structured interviews and from the questionnaire indicated that most of the students who participated in the research felt that they had benefited from the EAP courses as their academic writing skills in L2 had improved. In addition, the study showed that it is essential to give students robust and appropriate academic preparation in Saudi Arabia to help them overcome problems with their academic skills in L2 when they go abroad to study. On the other hand, universities in the UK should consider the needs of both Saudi and international students regarding culture and language and the expectations of both the UK and the international education systems. It is recommended that further research be conducted to study academic preparation that targets other skills, for example, academic reading.

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