Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities Vol. 3(4) November 2014

Writing Problems and Strategies: An Investigative Study in the Omani School and University Context

Fawzia Al Seyabi[1], Victoria Tuzlukova[2]

[1] College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Al-Khodh,
, [2] Language Centre, Sultan Qaboos University,
Sultanate of OMAN.

[1] fawzia@squ.edu.om, [2] victoria@squ.edu.om

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to identify and investigate the gaps in English language teaching and learning that exist between post-basic schools and universities in the Sultanate of Oman. The gaps were examined in relation to the problems that school and university language learners encounter when writing in English and to the strategies they follow to overcome these problems. The examined problems concerned writing a correct English sentence; putting the ideas together in a coherent way; choosing the right vocabulary to express ideas and having ideas about the suggested topics and deciding how to start an essay/paragraph. Approaches to writing in the context of English as foreign language informed the study. The study involved a sample of randomly selected 1114 school students and 317 university students from Muscat, Batinah South and Dhakeleya regions of Oman. The results indicate that both groups of students acknowledge that they have problems when writing in English (mean score 3.78 and 3.85). Data regarding writing problems suggest that majority of school and university students struggle with lexical and content aspects of writing, however university students' perceptions of the kind of problems they encounter and of the strategies to address them are more assertive. The study recommends alignment of school and university writing curricula with emphasis on ideas' development, content knowledge, critical and creative thinking.

Keywords: language learners, writing problems, writing strategies, school and university students, Sultanate of Oman

INTRODUCTION

The transition from school to university can be challenging and overwhelming. Transition from school to the university is described as "traversing the chasm" (Wilson-Strydom, 2010) or the period of overcoming the gap or chasm between eligibility for university, in terms of meeting admission criteria, and being ready for demands of university level study (Conley, 2008). The transitional challenges are multiple (Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli, 2009; Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004; Wangeri & Mutweleli, 2012). First year students find themselves in a position where they need to acquire a wide range of skills to help them adapt to university life and become adjusted to new requirements of their academic courses. Wangery & Mutwelli (2012) contend that "university entry all over the world provides students the opportunity to define and advance careers opportunities. Depending on their home environment and setting, the physical and social environment of the university is new, overwhelming and intimidating to some students" (p.41). Omani post-basic school leavers joining public and private universities are not an exception. Transitional challenges of the Omani students include but are not limited to adjusting to new sociocultural and physical environment of learning (e.g., coeducation; multicultural teaching and academic community, etc.), new teaching methods and approaches (e.g., teacher-centered at school versus learner-centered at the university). Moreover, this "stressful social and psychological event" (Bernier,

Copyright © 2014

Larose, & Whipple, 2005) is added by the change of the medium of instruction (Arabic in basic and post-basic educational levels and English at the tertiary level), new requirements to linguistic competence and skills, and approaches to English language teaching and learning.

According to Goodliffe (2010), school graduates in Oman often come from a language learning background that has relied largely on memorization and recall of information rather than analyzing and reflecting on the learning process (p.85). Many of them struggle with using the English language effectively "throughout the range of social, personal, school and work situations" (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2011, p.1). To mitigate students' transfer, improve their English language proficiency and help them better prepare for their upcoming specialization courses, the General Foundation Programs (GFPs) were designed according to Oman Academic Standards and introduced in Oman's tertiary education institutions in 2010. These programs are viewed as pathways for Omani students into their future academic studies that are aimed at developing their literacy, numeracy, computing and learning skills (Carrol et al., 2009, p.10). Therefore, English teachers encourage students to maximize their benefit from the GFPs' courses and help them adjust to academic requirements, cope with challenges relating to their notions of social interaction, individual responsibility, time management and limited global awareness (Burns, 2013). They structure syllabi to meet the learning outcomes in the four macro skills and study skills; develop lessons to engage students and improve their skills; evaluate the effectiveness of their courses. However, they feel that students' skills should be better addressed, and enhancement of the writing skills is one of the articulated priorities and concerns (Al-Bulushi, 2012; Tuzlukova et al., 2014).

Omani students finish their secondary school education (post-basic education) with solid English scores that often range between C+ and A. Yet, they join higher education institutions with poor writing skills. Professors at universities and colleges regardless of discipline have certain expectations regarding the writing requirements of their courses. They expect students to be able to write at a higher level than they did in school: concise, coherent and well-reasoned writing assignments. However, these expectations are often not met. This observation has been reported in a number of studies not only in the context of English as a Foreign or Second Language (see, for example, Ahmed, 2010; Chin, 2007; Kim, 2005; Leki, 1992; Thuy, 2009, etc.) but also in universities and colleges where English is used as a first language. For example, in California State University, about 60% of freshmen students lack entry level proficiency in college level English assessments in spite of their good scores in the required college preparatory curriculum. Moreover, about 44% of university faculty members feel their students are not ready for the rigors of college level writing. Despite having the productive knowledge of vocabulary required at tertiary levels as well as their better fluency in grammar, L1 students still have problems with writing (Gridharan & Robson, 2011).

There is a lot of available literature on EFL writing. The topic has been explored intensively at the levels of theory, research, and pedagogy, and from different perspectives, e.g. problems and challenges, performance, assessment, teaching methods and learning strategies (Manchon, 2009). Most empirical studies indicate that writing continues to pose a challenge for EFL learners, and encompasses a wide array of psycholinguistic, textual-linguistic, socio-linguistic and educational dimensions, themes and aspects that exert their influence on students' learning and academic achievements (Cumming, 2009; Ortega, 2009; Nanwani, 2009). According to Nanwani (2009), in EFL writing instruction teachers cannot take lightly such topics as who our students are, where they come from, and what their cultural traditions, educational experiences and practice are. With the intention of contributing to the current state of knowledge in EFL writing in a particular EFL context, that is Sultanate of Oman, this study was prompted by 1) the dearth of studies that looked at the issue of student writing across two important educational levels: schools and universities, 2) the belief of the great importance of establishing a better understanding of the construction/dynamics of EFL writing at both levels, identify possible gaps between EFL writing in both contexts and suggest approaches to help bridge this gap. The present study focuses on two important interrelated issues pertinent to students' writing skills: a) Omani students' perceptions of the problems they encounter in EFL writing in both educational levels: in grades 11 and 12 of post-basic education and in GFPs at the universities and b) types and frequency of use of writing strategies across both instructional contexts.

OMANI STUDENTS' TRAINING IN WRITING

English is a very important language in Oman which is viewed as a way to globalize, modernize and internationalize its economy, health and educational system. Jayaraman (2013) postulates that "every level of learning must lead to the next level progressively and successively and the transition from the basic entry level to undergraduate courses, to the Intermediate level must be as smooth and easy as possible" (p.103). In Oman, English is taught as a foreign language in secondary schools both at basic and post-basic levels, and school curriculum deals with all English language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). However, the breadth and depth the secondary school address to English language skills is not always enough for the purposes of higher education in Oman (Burns, 2013) that has adopted English as its medium of instruction for almost all degree programs. Therefore, the General Foundation Programs have been introduced in Oman to meet the academic requirements of English-medium higher education providers, improve students' skills for further studies and develop their linguistic competency and cognitive skills (Goodliffe, 2010). The General Foundation Program curriculum consists of four main components: the English language, mathematics, computer skills, and study skills. The English language component of the program in Oman is aimed at further developing students' language and study skills and preparing them for their future academic studies in an English-medium academic environment.

Kroll (2001) observes that "almost every institution that offers ESL/EFL writing courses sets up a number of different classes at various levels that are meant to reflect skill levels of the students enrolled in a particular program" (p.221). At the foundation level writing is addressed as an extension for other language skills and sub skills, e.g., focus on the product, errors' correction, etc. Both product and process approaches are utilized at lower English language proficiency levels, encouraging students "to mimic" (Gabrielatos, 2002, p.5) model texts, organize ideas, practice highlighted features (Steel, 2004, p.1) and simultaneously engaging them "in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach … through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts" (Kroll, 2001, pp.220-221). These approaches are added by genre approach at upper language courses of the General Foundation Program that involves contexts of the students' future specialized disciplines and academic requirements (e.g., technical reports in English for Engineers courses). English foundation courses also implement the pattern-model-based writing, which is used to teach students various skills and forms of writing, e.g., the topic sentence and the rhetorical modes such as comparison/contrast and cause/effect in short paragraphs, in order to help them master the skill.

English foundation program curriculum places substantial effort on enhancing writing skills of the students, teaching them the skills of drafting, revising and editing their own writing, and offering various activities, tasks and resources "to develop students' sense of curiosity and interest in language" (Foundation Program Curricula, p.11). Writing components of the language courses focus on informal writing on general topics (lower levels) and on writing for academic purposes (higher levels), and also on familiarizing students with grammar structures relevant to their writing tasks and help them activate their passive grammar knowledge to fulfill the prescribed tasks. Integrated skill course books, in-house writing course-books and materials that incorporate writing components of the virtual courses, online writing tasks and activities on Moodle-based educational platform are used as teaching and learning resources.

One of the ways to ensure that the students' skills in writing develop and continue to improve throughout the foundation program is to encourage them to effectively use their time outside the classroom and seek further opportunities to improve their language skills. For example, foundation program students at Sultan Qaboos University can use the facilities and resources of the Student Resource Centre that features a library with a variety of supplementary language materials such as graded readers with Moodle-based activities, and computer labs equipped with computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs open for daily access. Additional support is also offered in the Writing Centre and the Tutorial Centre, where students can make individual appointments to get help with writing.

A university student, at the end of the foundation program, should be able to achieve the following 'learning outcome standards' in writing: a) writing texts of a minimum of 250 words exhibiting the ability to organize, and use appropriate structure, vocabulary and mechanics; and b) writing evidence based research report of a minimum length of 500 words. However, according to recent studies, English foundation program students face many problems achieving these standards. For example, Jabur, Maloyan & Smith (2013) report that "the relationship between learning grammar and speaking or writing more accurately is one that teachers take for granted" (p.70). According to them, some students may "simply enjoy learning about English grammar without taking the next step of using the new grammar to produce more accurate language" (p.70). The study by Ginosyan & Al Abdali (2013) at Sultan Qaboos University indicates that foundation program students consider the level of writing skills learning outcomes challenging for them.

Study

The study reported in this paper aims at examination of the problems that school and university language learners in Oman encounter when writing in English and of the strategies they follow to overcome these problems. The study represents a part of a large scale research project funded by Sultan Qaboos University with the aim to examine the teaching and learning of reading and writing at both secondary school and university levels in Oman. This focus will guide identifying similarities and differences in both contexts, creating the guidelines to mitigate differences, affording a smooth entry to the university for the Omani high school graduates and their further adjustment to the university life.

Instrument

The data was elicited with the help of a questionnaire that served as an instrument of the study that attempted to investigate and compare EFL writing practices as perceived by students and teachers with the general aim of suggesting specific approaches that can bring school and university people together and build strong channels of communication for a better alignment of teaching writing in both contexts. The reported data is based on two sections of this questionnaire that investigated among other things EFL writing in terms of attitudes towards it, problems encountered by students and strategies used to improve students' writing in two educational contexts: Omani post-basic schools (grades 11 and 12) and university foundation programs.

The section on writing problems in the questionnaire had seven items; the first two items were concerned with finding out to what extent students felt they had problems when writing in English and the degree they felt overwhelmed when writing. The five last items examined students' problems in five areas: how to start a writing piece, sentence structure, coherence, vocabulary, and content and development of ideas. The section on student problems adopted a five point forced-choice Lickert scale that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". As for the section on strategies, the Lickert scale was also used to investigate the frequency of use of a range of writing strategies. The scale ranged from "always′ to "never". The items examined in this section covered: the frequency of students' general use of strategies to help them improve their writing skill and whether teachers at school or university taught these strategies, a range of pre-writing strategies such as brainstorming, jotting down notes in Arabic and outlining; revising in terms of grammar and content; self-editing and peer editing; using dictionaries and using the services of the Writing Centres at students' own institutions.

Participants

Since the study aimed at investigating writing problems and strategies among EFL Omani school students and GFPs students in universities, the questionnaire was administered to students from both educational levels. A total of 1114 school students from three different Directorates of Education participated in the study: 229 students from Muscat, 271 students from Batinah South and 614 students from Dhakeleya. These were students doing either grade 11 or 12 of post-basic education. 317 students enrolled in three different foundation programs in Oman have also answered the questionnaire to participate in the study: 134 from Sultan Qaboos University, 96 from Sohar University and 87 from Nizwa University.

RESULTS

One of the main aims of the questionnaire was to try to identify the extent to which school and university students faced problems in writing. Five main types of writing problems were investigated: deciding how to start an essay/paragraph; not knowing how to write a correct English sentence; putting the ideas together in a coherent way; choosing the right vocabulary to express their ideas and not having enough ideas about the topics that their teachers ask them to write about. Students were asked to indicate whether they felt these areas constituted problems for them using a Lickert scale that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

According to the results of the study (see Table 1 for more information), both groups of students (post-basic students and foundation program students) acknowledged that they have problems when writing in English (3.78 and 3.85 respectively).

It was interesting to note that the mean score that represented foundation program students was a little higher, although the difference in mean was not at a significant level. This might point to university students' stronger perceptions of the kind of problems they encounter at a university setting and the possibility that they realize now that writing is both different and more demanding than it was at school.

As to the extent they encountered problems in the five problematic areas, results showed that overall there were significant differences between school students and foundation program students in their perceptions of the kind of problems they have at 0.05 level. However, when looking at differences between the individual items in this section, there were significant differences in two main areas out of five: having ideas to write about a topic and writing an English sentence that is grammatically correct.

Table 1. School and university students' problems with EFL writing

	Problems and Difficulties	*School*	*University*
1	I have some problems when writing in English.	3.78	3.85
2	I feel overwhelmed when writing: I don't know how to start, how to develop my ideas and how to conclude.	3.58	3.65
3	My biggest problem in writing is deciding how to start the essay/paragraph.	3.49	3.57
4	My biggest problem in writing is not knowing how to write a correct English sentence.	3.29	3.12
5	My biggest problem in writing is putting the ideas together in a coherent way.	3.37	3.39
6	My biggest problem in writing is choosing the right vocabulary to express my ideas.	3.48	3.51
7	My biggest problem in writing is not having enough ideas about the topics that my teacher asks us to write about.	3.46	3.66

In fact, the first area (not having enough ideas) was perceived to be the biggest problem for university students (mean = 3.66), compared with it being the third problem for school students. This result is not surprising since students know there are higher expectations from their GFP teachers to produce essays that show higher order of thinking and knowledge. It is also not surprising when students know that at least 50% or 60% of the writing grade goes to content and development of ideas. Similar results are reported in Hasan & Akhand (2010) who observed the strengths and weaknesses of product and process approach in Bangladeshi EFL writing class. According to the researchers, most of their students faced problems in extracting the important points necessary for the topic, brainstorming and organizing their ideas cohesively.

As for school students, results showed that deciding how to start the essay/ paragraph is their biggest problem. One possible explanation is that while most parts of a paragraph tend to be more formulaic and students normally follow a specific structure provided by their teachers, introductions need to be original and require more input from students. This same problem also seems to be a concern for university students. In fact, it came as the second biggest problem they face when writing.

The second biggest problem as indicated by school students' responses was choosing the right vocabulary. Literature has shown that this is a common source of difficulty among EFL students especially those whose linguistic repertoire falls short of their aspirations to express their ideas fully, and is not sufficiently ample in terms of vocabulary base and knowledge of grammatical and syntactic structures (Nanwani, 2009). Mahfoudhi (1999) in his investigation on the Tunisian students' writing challenges found that 42.5% of the students participating in his study felt vocabulary was either the first or second biggest problem they face when writing. It was also interesting to note that writing a correct English sentence came as the least problematic for both groups of students. In spite of this, the difference between them was still statistically significant with a higher mean for school students (mean= 3.29) than it was for university students (mean= 3.12). This low rank given to accuracy is a little surprising given the general claims expressed by teachers in both contexts about students' problems with grammar. However, while grammar still persists to be a problem for students in both contexts, it seems a less important concern for them than development and coherence of ideas.

Another less serious concern for both groups of students was organization and coherence. A lot of class material in writing lessons in both contexts seems to focus on the use of transition devices. Moreover, coherence and cohesion always occupy a prominent place in the writing units used in foundation programs. Overall, students in both contexts seemed to be more concerned with generating ideas than with organizing them.

Students' perceptions of the kind of problems they face when writing were also sought through an open-ended question in the questionnaire. This was addressed to both groups of students. Analysis of the students' written responses from both educational contexts showed that the majority reported "the lack of ability to find the right vocabulary to express ideas" as a serious challenge. Students have also mentioned other problems but the most prevailing ones are "lack of ability to produce sentences with the right structure", "shortage of ideas especially if topic is unfamiliar" and "spelling".

School and University Students' Writing Strategies

When examining the means of both groups of students, it became clear that both school and university students acknowledged the use of some strategies to help them improve their writing skill, with a relatively higher mean for university students. In spite of the fact that the difference in mean between the two groups was not statistically significant, the higher mean for the latter group might still indicate that they are more conscious of their use of these strategies (see Table 2 for more information).

Table 2. Writing strategies employed by school and university students

	Strategies	*School*	*University*
1	I often use some strategies to help me improve my writing skill.	3.57	3.68
2	My English teachers taught me some strategies that could help me with writing.	3.62	3.66
3	I brainstorm to get suitable ideas for the essay/paragraph I write.	3.38	3.89
4	I write some notes in Arabic before I start to write my essay/paragraph.	3.39	3.45
5	I prepare an outline before I write an essay/paragraph.	2.84	3.41
6	I revise what I write in terms of grammar, spelling and language in order to write an improved draft.	3.62	3.68
7	I revise what I write in terms of content and ideas in order to write an improved draft.	3.56	3.72
8	I can identify the weak areas in my writing and decide how to address them to improve my writing.	3.40	3.45
9	I use a dictionary during and after I write an essay/paragraph.	3.33	3.28
10	The teacher asks me to correct/edit what my classmates write.	2.34	2.86
11	I learn from correcting my classmates' writing errors.	3.09	3.44
12	I try to remember the feedback that my teacher gives me and use it in my future writing.	3.38	3.57
13	I visit the Writing Centre and other service centers to get help and suggestions on how to improve my English writing.	2.20	2.89

The mean representing university students was also higher for the second item in this section which asked about whether teachers teach these strategies to students. Again, this might indicate that there is more formal instruction on strategies and how to use them to enhance students' writing skills. As for the type and frequency of use of the list of strategies investigated in the study, data analysis showed that brainstorming to get suitable ideas for writing was the highest used strategy for university students. Quite interestingly, Alnufaie & Grenfell (2012) who investigated EFL students' writing strategies in a Saudi Arabia college, found that brainstorming (e.g. thinking about the purpose of what they write, thinking about the reader of their writing, relating ideas together and getting more new ideas, etc.) is one of the most frequently used strategies with their students. In fact, t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the means of both groups as far as this item is concerned. It is obvious that while university English teachers in the foundation program emphasize brainstorming and devote sufficient class time to it, school teachers do not have much time for brainstorming and they do not require it from students.

The second most commonly used strategy by university students was revision to improve content and ideas (mean= 3.72), followed by revising grammar, spelling and language to write an improved draft. As indicated earlier, students at this level of education have become more aware of the importance of idea development. Moreover, teachers normally require evidence of idea development between draft one and the final draft of student writing. It was also interesting to find that another highly used strategy by university students was writing some notes in Arabic. This seems to be a common pre-writing strategy that a lot of students feel comfortable with. In spite of the importance that the General Foundation Program places on students' having their own dictionaries and efforts exerted, for example, by the English foundation program at Sultan Qaboos University, to provide class sets of dictionaries in every classroom, using a dictionary during and after writing was not a highly used strategy. It also seemed that students were more confident about their ability to self-edit to identify the weak areas in their writing and deciding how to address them. This could be a direct positive result of the process approach to writing that is adopted in most foundation programs where students are required to revise and self-edit before producing a second and maybe third draft of their compositions. This result came in contrast to peer editing which does not seem to be practiced a lot in writing classes in foundation programs. Another resort that students can use but do very little is the Writing Centre or any other service center to get help and support on how to improve their writing. To exemplify, in spite of the noticeable increase in the number of students visiting the Writing Centre at Sultan Qaboos University, a substantial number of students still use it rarely.

When ordering the writing strategies used by school students in terms of frequency of use, they came in the following order: 1) revising grammar and structure, 2) revising content and ideas, 3) jotting down notes in Arabic before writing, 4) brainstorming, 5) using a dictionary during and after writing, 6) preparing an outline, 7) peer editing and 8) seeking help from Writing Centres or other writing facilities.

Since writing requirements at the school level are shorter in length and tend to be more formulaic, students do not have much room to work on development of ideas. This could also reflect teachers' overemphasis on grammar and structure at the expense of idea development. An important pre-writing strategy that school students seemed to use is jotting down notes in Arabic. This was in fact found to be the most frequently used pre-writing strategy compared to brainstorming and outlining. It was striking to find that outlining scored a very low mean, indicating that it is one of the least used strategies. This could basically mean that teachers did not require students to prepare an outline for their compositions.

Considering that problems with sentence structure were perceived to be the least problematic area for school students among the list of existing problems, finding that revising grammar and sentence structure was the most commonly used strategy is no surprise. Students perhaps feel a little more confident about revising grammar and correcting their grammar errors. Answers to questions concerning grammar can be more straightforward than knowing how to address a content issue. It would be interesting to compare this finding with views gathered from school teachers.

CONCLUSION

Both school and university students in Oman realize that they have problems in writing in English. Majority of students, representing both educational contexts struggle with lexical and content aspects of writing, however university students' perceptions of the kind of problems they encounter and of the strategies to address them are more assertive. To cope with their problems when writing in English university students make use of a wide range of conventional writing strategies with brainstorming being the most frequent; while school students mostly focus on revising grammar and structures. The data also indicate that there is more formal instruction on strategies and how to use them to enhance students' writing skills at the tertiary level than at the level of post-basic education. However, it is evident that both groups of students related to developing ideas, critically and creatively approaching their challenges and problems, and solving them. And here the foundation program can assist in going beyond using conventional strategies which are mostly concerned with learning the form of the English language (Awadh, 2003) and implying critical thinking skills when writing.

In both educational contexts more effort is needed to align the writing requirements with the other skill areas especially reading as lack of ideas and how to develop them seems a serious concern for both parties. School and university writing curricula also need alignment with the emphasis on ideas' development, content knowledge, critical and creative thinking based on the collaborative efforts of the educators from both contexts.

REFERENCES

[1] Abdullah, M. C., Elias, H., Mahyuddin, R., & Uli, J. (2009). Adjustment amongst first year students in a Malaysian university. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, *8*(3), 496-505.

[2] Ahmed, A. H. (2010). Students' problems with cohesion and coherence in EFL essay writing in Egypt: Different perspectives. *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal (LICEJ)*, *1*(4), 214-221. Retrieved June 23 from http://www.infonomics-society.org/LICEJ

[3] Al-Bulushi, Y. (2012). The transferability of learning: Writing strategies in an Omani EFL context. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, *5*(5), 187-200.

[4] Al-Issa, A., & Al-Bulushi, A. (2011). English language teaching reform in Sultanate of Oman: The case of theory and practice disparity. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 1-36. Retrieved July 25, 2014 from http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10671-011-9110-0#page-1.

[5] Alnufaie, M., & Grenfell, M. (2012). EFL students' writing strategies in Saudi Arabian ESP writing classes: Perspectives on learning strategies in self-access language learning. *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*, *3*(4), 407-422.

[6] Awadh, A. A. (2003). Language Learning Strategies of Omani Secondary School Graduates Enrolled in the First Year at Sultan Qaboos University. Master's thesis. Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

[7] Bernier, A., Larose, S., & Whipple, N. (2005). Leaving home for college: A potentially stressful event for adolescents with preoccupied attachment patterns. *Attachment and Human Development*, *7*(2), 171−185.

[8] Burns, S. (2013). The rest of the iceberg. In S. Al-Busaidi. & V. Tuzlukova (Eds.), *General Foundation Programmes in higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Experiences, challenges and considerations for the future* (pp. 29-39). Muscat: Mazoon Publishing House.

[9] Carroll, M., Razvi, S., Goodliffe, T., & Al Habsi, F. (2009) Progress in developing a National Quality Management System for higher education in Oman, *Quality in Higher Education*, *15*(1), 17-27.

[10] Chin, C. (2007). EFL learners' perceptions on English writing tasks and teacher feedback. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, *13*(1), 1-26.

[11] Conley, D. T. (2008). Rethinking college readiness. *New Directions for Higher Education, 144*(2008), 3-13.

[12] Cumming, A. (2009). The contribution of studies of foreign language writing to research, theories and policies. In R. Manchon (Ed.) *Writing in foreign language contexts: Learning, teaching, and research. Second language acquisition*, 43, (pp. 209-232). Multilingual Matters.

[13] Foundation Program Curricula. Retrieved May 25, 2013 from http://www.squ.edu.om/Portals/28/CDU/FPEL%20Curriculum%20Document%202012-2013.pdf.

[14] Gabrielatos, C. (2002). EFL writing: product and process. Retrieved July 25, 2014 from http:// www.gabrielatos.com/Writing.pdf.

[15] Ginosyan, H., & Al Abdali, A. (2013). Supplementing the curriculum: Teacher perspective and practices. In: Al-Busaidi, S. & Tuzlukova, V. (2013). *General Foundation Programmes in higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Experiences, challenges and considerations for the future*. (pp. 202-238). Muscat: Mazoon Press & Publishing.

[16] Giridharan, B., & Robson, A. (2011). Identifying Gaps in Academic Writing of ESL students, *Enhancing Learning: Teaching & Learning International Conference*, Nov 24-26 2011. Miri, Sarawak: Curtin University. Retrieved July 24, 2014 from http://www.curtin.edu.my/tl2011/download/papers/refereed/Identifying%20gaps%20in%20academic%20writing%20of%20ESL%20students.pdf.

[17] Goodliffe, T. (2010). Developing National Standards for Foundation Programs in Oman. In: R. Al-Mahrooqi & V. Tuzlukova (Eds.) *The Omani ELT Symphony: Maintaining Linguistic and Socio-Cultural Equilibrium*. (pp.379-390). Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University Printing Press.

[18] Hasan, M. K., & Akhand M. M. (2010). Approaches to writing in EFL/ESL context: Balancing product and process in writing class at tertiary level. *Journal of NELTA*, 15(1-2), 77-88. Retrieved July 26, 2014 from http://www.nepjol.info/index.php/NELTA/article/view/4612.

[19] Jabur, Z., Maloyan, A. & Smith, R. (2013). Studying the approaches to grammar in the Foundation Programme of Sultan Qaboos University. In: Al-Busaidi, S. & Tuzlukova, V. (2013). General Foundation Programmes in higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Experiences, challenges and considerations for the future. (pp. 65-91). Muscat: Mazoon Press & Publishing.

[20] Jayaraman, S. (2013). Articulating speech sounds - Teaching English pronunciation. In: Al-Busaidi, S. & Tuzlukova, V. (2013). *General Foundation Programmes in higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Experiences, challenges and considerations for the future*. (pp.103-118). Muscat: Mazoon Press & Publishing.

[21] Kim, J. (2005). EFL writing problems in the Korean students. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, *8*, 180-189.

[22] Kroll, B. (2001). Considerations for teaching an ESL/EFL writing course. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. (pp.219-232). Heinle and Heinle.

[23] Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding ESL writers: A guide for teachers*. NH: Boynton/Cook.

[24] Mahfoudhi, A. (1999). Teaching EFL writing: Students' hidden agenda. Retrieved June 26, 2014 from http://artsites.uottawa.ca/clo-opl/doc/Teaching-EFL-Writing-Students-Hidden-Agenda.pdf

[25] Manchon, R. (2009). Writing in foreign language contexts: Learning, teaching, and research. *Second Language Acquisition*, 43. Multilingual Matters.

[26] Nanwani, S. (January-December 2009). Linguistic challenges lived by university students in Bogotá in the development of academic literacy. Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal, 11. Retrieved July 29, 2014, from http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?pid=S0123-46412009000100011&script=sci_arttext

[27] Ortega, L. (2009). Studying writing across EFL contexts: Looking back and moving forward. In R. Manchon (Ed.) *Writing in foreign language contexts: Learning, teaching, and research. Second language acquisition*, 43 (pp. 232-256). Multilingual Matters.

[28] Parker, J. D. A., Summerfeldt, L. J., Hogan, M. J., & Majeski, S. A. (2004). Emotional intelligence and academic success: examining the transition from high school to university. *Personality and Individual Differences, 36*(1), 163-173, Publishers, Inc.

[29] Steele, V. (2004). Product and process writing. Retrieved July 24, 2014 from http://www.englishonline.org.cn/en/teachers/workshops/teaching-writing/teaching-tips/product-process.

[30] Thuy, N. H. H. (2009) Teaching EFL writing in Vietnam: Problems and solutions - a discussion from the outlook of applied linguistics. *VNU Journal of Science, Foreign Languages 25*, 61-66

[31] Tuzlukova, V., Al-Seyabi, F., Al-Rawahi, A. & Al-Owasi, A. (2014). Reading in the English Foundation Programme Class: Omani students' attitudes, thoughts and self-perceived practices. In: Emery, H. & Moore, N. (Eds). Teaching, learning and researching reading in EFL. TESOL Arabia Publications, 70-87.

[32] Wangeri, T., & Mutweleli, S. M. (2012). Transitional challenges facing university first year students in Kenyan public universities: A case of Kenyatta University. *Interdisciplinary Review of Economics and Management*, *2*(1), 42-50.

[33] Wilson-Strydom, M. (2010). Traversing the chasm from school to university in South Africa: student perspective. *Tertiary Education and Management, 16*(4), 313-325.