

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

English is considered an international language (Jung, Norton, & Tollefson, 2002; McKay, 2002). It is a global language that achieves genuinely global status (Crystal, 2003). According to Phillipson (1992), the English language has been established universally as a necessary tool for social, economic, and political activities. In special disciplines, English appears to be the universal language of communication (Crystal, 2003), as it is used for international communication more than any other language in the world (Liou, 2010). In the globalised higher education sector, English has become even more important (Sidek, 2012). The global status of English and English language education (David Nunan, 2003a) is due to its use as the language of business, technology, science, the Internet, popular entertainment, and even sports (Crystal, 2003). Researchers have related the importance of the English language in teaching and learning to the role of English in international and computer communications (Jung et al., 2002), knowledge transfer (Welch & Welch, 2008),

economics (Tsui, Shum, Wong, Tse, & Ki, 1999), and business (Neeley, 2012). In the academic research context (David Nunan, 2003a), English is the undisputed language of science and technology, and is used in scientific journals and other research activities.

Among English language skills, writing is one of the most important methods of communication (Reigstad, 2008). Banat (2007) stated that writing proficiency is invaluable to help students communicate and understand how the parts of language go together. According to Hasbollah (2010), effective writing reinforces grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary, provides opportunities for students to go beyond what they have learnt, and develops language skills in terms of fluency, accuracy and appropriateness.

Writing has always been considered an important skill in teaching and learning. According to Ahmed (2010), writing is significant in the learning process since it facilitates students' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for understanding a topic and expressing their own words. In addition to the importance of writing competence to help students improve their academic performance and outcomes, it also enables them to research successfully.

In the higher education context, language proficiency is an important factor for those aspiring toward academic success and achievement (Stoynoff, 1997; Songy, 2007). A study by Songy (2007) revealed that the level of English language proficiency may predict students' success in academic achievement at the tertiary level. In particular, effective writing skills are essential for success in higher education learning (Ahmed, 2010; Hasbollah, 2010), work (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007; Prior, 2012), and society (Prior, 2012).

According to Stoyhoff (1997) and Kellogg and Raulerson (2007), writing skills are important for academic and work performance. In education, writing is a way by which students communicate professionally with instructors and peers, and it facilitates the conduct of a set of teaching and learning activities (Reigstad, 2008). The importance of writing lies in its extensive use in education and in the workplace. In education, writing is a means by which students can communicate professionally with instructors and peers, facilitating the conduct of a set of teaching and learning activities (Reigstad, 2008). In the workplace, college graduates should have effective communication and writing skills so that they are able to manage daily operations, make decisions, as well as document and report large amounts of complex information (Jones, Hoffman, & Statistics, 1995).

Reigstad (2008) described writing as one of the most important methods of communicating, since it is invaluable to help students communicate and understand how the parts of a language go together (Banat, 2007). Furthermore, Hasbollah (2010) stated that effective writing helps students to reinforce their knowledge of grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary, provides opportunities for students to go beyond what they have learnt, and develops language skills in terms of fluency, accuracy and appropriateness.

In order for students studying at the university level to succeed and find their academic path, it is essential for them to acquire a good level of academic writing and communication. Writing is one of the foundations of academic engagement (Badenhorst, 2008). Students need to write, to learn, to take notes, and to study. They also need to write and think, to process their ideas, and to integrate new ones in order to be assessed and evaluated.

Of all English language skills, writing remains the most important (Reigstad, 2008) yet difficult skill (Gabrielatos, 2002) for those in the process of acquiring a language. This is due to the fact that learners are required to possess a certain degree of pre-existing awareness of the language they are learning such as vocabulary, accurate word and phrase usage, and rhetorical technique with which to persuasively convey information to the reader (Tangpermpoon, 2008). Myles (2002) argued that writing is a complex language skill learned through a process of instruction. Writing requires formal learning through sets of practices in formal instructional settings. First, it is necessary to master the written code as well as certain structures common to the language format. Thus, understanding how to teach writing is more important. Writing instruction implies teaching the students to communicate through this means as effectively as possible since writing is in essence an individual activity which needs to maintain a channel of communication and interpretation on its own.

The technique of writing is considered to be a challenge for EFL students as part of the larger process of learning a language, as asserted by (Richards & Nunan, 1990), regarding the opinions of (Richards & Renandya, 2002) whose challenges exist in; 1) the creation and ordering of concepts through the correct word use, and (2) putting such ideas into intelligible text.

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill. It is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings (Yahya, Ishak, Zainal, & Faghat, 2012). Writing is an important skill that all language learners need to develop as it is not only a means to reinforce grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary, but also allows for communication through a different medium requiring the appropriate use of linguistic skills (Emig, 1978). Suleiman

(2000) asserted, “Writing is a central element of language”. According to Taghizadeh, Abidin, Naseri, and Hosseini (2013), academic writing is very important for English students as it is a major criteria towards better academic position and greater educational success.

With regards to competency, the ability to create a cogent, flowing segment of extended text is one of the most demanding skills one may develop in learning a language, and it remains something that even most native speakers never truly master (Nunan, 1999; Rababah, 2002). For Second Language (L2) learners in particular, learning to write successfully in English can be an overwhelming task due to the fact that they are required to realise the changes from their native tongue, as well as the L2 as a result of speaking two languages.

Nunan (2003c) argued that creating a cogent piece of writing is an exertion for all English learners, including those who speak English as a mother-tongue. White and. The authors explained that, “individuals writing in their first language, despite the fact that they may possess a larger cache of linguistic techniques, often are faced with similar challenges as those writing in their second or third language.” If writing coherently and clearly is a skill that native speakers find difficult, L2 learners—who have less experience in English and its many idiosyncrasies and conventions—will certainly find it a difficult task, and one that takes time and considerable effort.

Teaching students effective communication skills including writing has become an even more important responsibility of higher education (Prior, 2012).

According to Kuriloff (2004), producing students who can write effectively is a core

function of higher education. Moreover, the professional writing skills of graduates can be used as a judgment of the university's prestige (Davies, Swinburne, & Williams, 2006). If graduates cannot write well, the university risks damaging its prestige (Davies et al., 2006).

Despite the importance of writing in higher education learning for professional communication, academic performance, and students' achievement and success, it has been reported that writing in English is one of the biggest challenges faced by students at the university level (Kim, Mendenhall, & Johnson, 2010). Results by Al-Khasawneh and Maher (2010) revealed that students appear to have many problems in organising their ideas in written communication. This study was conducted to investigate the academic writing problems of the Arab students in University Utara Malaysia. The data was collected via face-to-face interviews with Arab university students and the finding of this study showed that the students faced writing problems including the organisation of ideas in writing, vocabulary, and spelling. In addition, the results stated that the students attributed their problems in English to their weak foundation, and methods of teaching English in their countries. According to Campbell, Smith, and Brooker (1998), deficits arise from the inability of students to apply basic writing skills to produce coherent and well-reasoned essays and papers, to develop extended arguments and to provide supportive evidence for their arguments.

For those attending further education in English as a Second Language (ESL) as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the ability to write academic text effectively incorporates one of the most significant abilities required. In Yemen and other Arab countries, English is taught as a foreign language at schools and

universities (Al-Husseini, 2009). The problem of proficiency in written English becomes even more complicated as a result. Many studies have been conducted in the context of EFL to investigate the different aspects of teaching and learning English as a foreign language, with several of these studies reporting that learners face a range of problems in acquiring English language skills (Abbad, 1988; Rabab'ah, 2005; Zughoul & Taminian, 1984). The results of one study by Al-Khasawneh & Maher (2010) revealed that Arab learners faced many problems in acquiring English when they studied at the university level.

With regards to communication skills, either verbal or written, Zughoul and Taminian (1984) found that, "Jordanian EFL students commit serious errors while communicating in English" one of the error made by Jordanian EFL students in writing English passage that are not grammatically correct, properly punctuated and effectively organised. In a study in Saudi Arabia, Nazim and Ahmad (2012) found that learners struggled in their writing and faced problems especially in relation to conventions, punctuation, capitalisation, spelling, and some of the basics of language use. This was supported by Rabab'ah (2005) who found that Arab learners of the English language encountered problems in both speaking and writing.

Most writing problems seem to be associated with deficits in teaching and learning at the secondary school level which lead to many students having difficulties adapting to the academic writing requirements at the university level (Jakobs, Ruhmann, & Kruse, 1999; Kim et al., 2010). According to Weshah and Tomok (2011), the vast majority of university students have graduated from secondary schools with low levels of communicative ability in English, particularly in written communication skills. Previous studies have revealed that EFL students at

the university level in many EFL countries appear to have many difficulties despite the lengthy duration of preparation at the secondary school level. For example, in Korea, students receive EFL preparation for 10 years at elementary and secondary school levels (Ahn, 2003). However, most of them are unable to speak or read English at the university level (Dickey, 2004).

In another study focusing on the Middle East, results indicated that many students at the university level were poor speakers and writers despite the six years of preparation in primary and secondary schools (Abbad, 1988; Shamsan, 2003). Abbad (1988) concluded that the major problem for students was inadequate learning methods and environments in secondary schools. According to Abdullah and Patil (2012), there are many challenges facing English learners in all stages of educational system. These challenges are extension of the weakness of secondary schools in Yemen in all English skills.

Despite the importance of writing in higher educational learning for the purpose of professional communication, academic performance, and student achievement and success, previous literature shows that writing in English is one of the biggest challenges faced by students at the university level (Kim et al., 2010; Mendenhall, & Johnson, 2010). To investigate this problem, several studies (e.g. Shamsan, 2003; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Weshah & Tomok, 2011) undertaken in an EFL context revealed a direct relation between the students' performance at the secondary school and university levels. The findings of these studies suggest that a lack of proficiency in writing skills among university students is negatively influenced by the EFL writing curriculum in secondary schools.

Most writing problems seem to be associated with deficits in teaching and learning at the secondary school level, something which led to many students having difficulties adapting to the academic writing requirements at a university level (Jakobs et al., 1999; Al-Mansoori, 2008). According to Weshah and Tomok (2011), the vast majority of university students have graduated from secondary schools with low levels of communicative English, particularly in the case of written communication skills. Previous studies have revealed that EFL students at the university level in many EFL countries appear to face many difficulties despite the lengthy duration of preparation during their secondary school education. Consequently, this study asserts that in improving English academic literacy at the higher education level, an evaluation for the preparation process at the secondary level must come first. To help students prepare for the required skills at the university level, a systematic investigation of EFL approaches is required, as are principles of designing the EFL curriculum and the EFL teaching and learning methods. Curriculum is the backbone of any teaching and learning environment. Without a proper curriculum it is difficult to gauge where students are heading (Wallin, 2011).

In recent years, the interest in curriculum evaluation has seemed to increase markedly (Lund & Tannehill, 2014). Curriculum evaluation is an essential process in teaching and learning. Through evaluation, the faculty can discover whether a curriculum is fulfilling its purpose and whether students are actually learning (DiFlorio, Martin, Middlemiss, & Duncan, 1989). Curriculum evaluation helps in improving the quality of education through the construction and implementation of scientific and specific curriculum evaluating procedures (Tang, Bai, Liu, Wang, & Chen, 2012).

The discussion of curriculum evaluation is related to examining the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving the objectives of the curriculum and other evaluation criteria. However, this thesis proposes an analytical framework for the evaluation of the secondary curriculum, particularly the writing curriculum based on the revision of the model of Richards and Rodgers (2001).

1.2 RATIONALE OF CHOOSING TO STUDY THE YEMENI SETTING

In recent years, there has been an important realisation of the global importance of English. Yemen now recognises its importance for advancements in science and technology, trade, business, politics, research, law, and translation (Lauder, 2008; Nunan, 2003b). This awareness is not peculiar to Yemen but has been duly recognised in most non-English developing countries including Algeria, India, Turkey, Malaysia, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and the Middle East, all of which continue to promote English education at all levels, especially at the tertiary level. In the Arab world, English is used for various purposes. Zughoul (2003) rightly emphasised that English is needed to engage with the rest of the world in all fields. He argued that English proficiency was central to success in any international endeavour, especially when dealing with foreign partners. This emphasises the importance of reading, writing, and speaking abilities. In view of this global agreement of the importance of English in professional and non-professional contexts, the question arises as to efficacy of Yemen's preparation of its learners.

The Yemeni setting was chosen for several reasons. First, there are ongoing efforts towards greater internationalisation, which naturally underscores the

importance of English as a global medium of communication (Al-Tamimi, 2009; Musavi, 2001). At the secondary school level, there is greater public awareness as to the importance of teaching EFL and as such English is taught as a compulsory subject in all Yemeni schools (Al-Shuaibi, 2009; Al-Tamimi, 2009).

Second, there is a growing awareness of using English as a medium of instruction in most public and private universities in Yemen (Al-Tamimi, 2009). Moreover, the expansion of higher education in Yemen stimulates many international universities to open undergraduate and postgraduate programs in different academic fields, which in turn requires high level of proficiency in English.

Third, it is also important to study the Yemeni setting because of the similarities between the status of EFL learning in Yemen and other EFL countries in the Arab world (Modhish, 2012; Qaddumi, 1995; Rabab'ah, 2005; Nazim and Ahmad, 2012). Therefore, the results of this study will have implications for other EFL countries.

Fourth, the study framework may be used for further exploration and evaluation studies of problems of a similar nature in those countries. As in other EFL countries, Yemen has many students who lack the EFL literacy skills necessary to cope with rigorous academic demands at the university level. The results of previous EFL literacy studies in Yemen indicate that university students are facing problems in EFL, which consequently affect their academic performance and achievement (Shamsan, 2003). Students in Yemen receive six years of EFL instruction. However, students still face comprehension problems in speaking and writing in English at the university level (Ghassan, 2009). As a result, "it is questionable whether these students have been provided with appropriate EFL literacy at the school level to meet the rigorous challenges in the world of academia" (Sidek, 2010).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the importance of English writing skill for students' communication, success, and achievement in higher education level (Stoynoff, 1997; Songy, 2007; Reigstad, 2008; Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007), the literature shows that the majority of students are facing many difficulties and challenges to acquire effective academic writing skills. At the university level, writing in English is a major challenge (Kim et al., 2010) as the students appear to have many problems in organising their ideas (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010), preparing coherent and well-reasoned writing content, developing extended arguments, and providing supportive evidence for their arguments (Campbell et al., 1998). According to Tang (2012), EFL writing challenges have been reported over the years by the researchers, such as textual analysis, linguistic difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction.

In the Arab context, Arab learners face enormous challenges of English writing (Ahmed, 2010; Rabab'ah, 2005; Nazim & Ahmad, 2012). A study of Arab students' written texts revealed that repetition, sentence length, lack of variation and misuse of certain cohesive devices were major sources of incoherence and textual deviation (Qaddumi, 1995). In the Yemeni context, there is a general dissatisfaction regarding students' level of proficiency in English writing (Shamsan, 2003; Al-Mansoori, 2008a). Previous studies found that the vast majority of university students have difficulties adapting to the academic writing requirements, which in turn affect their academic performance and achievement.

Abbad (1988) indicated that Yemeni students have some weaknesses in terms of coherence and cohesion, as manifested in the students' written texts. Abbad found a low level of English proficiency among Yemeni learners at university level in

English language faculties and departments. Nofal (2011) noted that students' English language proficiency at the university level was not satisfactory, nor the teachers' qualifications and competencies.

According to Abdullah and Patil (2012), poor English proficiency in Yemen is probably due to the limited and often sub-standard abilities of instructors, weak student preparation, and poor syllabus design. Some researchers argue that the lack of proficiency among students in higher education might be related to deficiencies in the preparation process at the secondary school level. Jakobs et al. (1999) and Weshah and Tomok (2011) argue that most writing problems seem to be associated with teaching and learning at the secondary school level which led to many students having difficulties adapting to the academic writing requirements at the university level. Abbad (1988) and Weshah and Tomok (2011) stated that although writing plays a vital role in the four basic language skills, it has long been ignored in Yemeni secondary schools. Weshah and Tomok (2011) reported that the majority of university graduate from secondary schools with low levels of communicative ability in English, particularly in written communication skills. In addition, compared to the other three skills, writing is considered too complicated to teach. As such, teachers steer away from designing writing tasks or getting students to write more than just grammatical exercises (Ghassan, 2009).

Shaman (2003) argued that the problem of English proficiency in the Yemeni EFL context is related to the EFL writing curriculum, which does not seem to effectively prepare students for the higher education. Although the EFL Yemeni curriculum was designed based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Teacher book6), which is well suited for EFL teaching and learning

English, the linguistic performance of students in Yemen is still poor and unsatisfactory (Al-Sohbani, 2013). According to Al-Mushriquee (2003), the attainment of Yemeni students in learning English is quite poor. This is shown when they face real-life situations in which they have to communicate and interact. A number of researchers have reported that students do not have enough knowledge of how to communicate by using appropriate social language (Al-Mushriquee, 2003; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Shamsan, 2003).

Another possible reason for the lack of English proficiency among students relates to the instruction methods. The way English is taught in Yemeni schools today is responsible, to a great extent, for the low levels of English language proficiency in the country. Haithem (2004) revealed that there are real problems faced by teachers and students in teaching and learning English at the secondary school level in Yemen. The most significant problem was the irrelevance of the content to students' real-life situations. In another study, Ghassan (2009) reported that the problem of declining English proficiency levels is due to the failure to take the aims of English language skills into consideration and apply them in a way that corresponds to the learners' cultural, social, and cognitive needs. This may be due to the absence of a systematic approach of evaluating the secondary curriculum and instruction in Yemeni schools leading to a gap between the curriculum and the techniques used in teaching the communicative approach. Therefore, investigating the instruction methods used and the alignment between the teaching and learning strategies adopted in the classroom with the CLT approach is recommended. The many difficulties and challenges that affect English language teaching in secondary schools in Yemen, in turn, negatively affect the teaching and learning of the English language at the university level.

The overall results of the previous studies of EFL writing in the Yemeni context suggest that the curriculum as well as the instruction is responsible to a great extent for the low levels of English language proficiency at university levels. As a result, this research raised important questions regarding the extent to which the preparation process in the secondary level is aligned with CLT, and whether or not the secondary curriculum prepares student for the required academic writing skills at the university level. However, previous research have provided general discussions and there has been no systematic analytical procedures in relation to the preparation process and to what extent the Yemeni secondary EFL writing curriculum prepares students for the required English writing skills at the university level. Hence, this study examined the 12th grade secondary school EFL writing curriculum in Yemen and the related instructional approaches using a systematic analytical process. Analysing the EFL writing curriculum of the 12th grade Yemeni secondary school using clearly defined criteria will assist educational institutions, curriculum designers, and educators in their efforts to develop the EFL writing curriculum for secondary schools, as well as promote effective teaching and learning strategies that equip learners with the writing skills needed at the higher education level.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Academic writing is perhaps the most important skill required in higher educational settings for the purposes of academic communication, academic performance, as well as academic achievement and success. However, the results of many studies in the EFL context confirmed that students are facing difficulties in mastering the required academic writing skills, particularly at the higher education

level. The purposes of the current study were to find out the overarching approaches to EFL writing and how the Yemeni secondary EFL writing curriculum prepares students for the required university-level EFL writing skills. The study aimed to examine the secondary EFL writing curriculum in Yemen by reviewing the English curriculum teacher book, workbook and English language textbook used in the last grade in secondary school (grade 12) as well as via classroom observation in terms of: (a) the SLA and L2 theories and approaches to writing in EFL, (b) types of writing tasks reflected in the curriculum, (c) types of learner roles reflected in the EFL writing curriculum, (d) types of teacher roles reflected in the EFL writing curriculum, and (e) the cognitive level of writing tasks in the 12th grade Yemeni EFL writing curriculum.

In response to the EFL writing problems in the Yemeni setting, this research aims to determine how the EFL writing curriculum equips students in Yemeni secondary schools with the EFL writing skills required to meet academic needs at the higher education level. Although a number of studies have suggested the direct relation between secondary school learning and the level of writing skills at the university level, there is a lack of studies that analyse the relation by evaluating the EFL writing curriculum in secondary schools in relations to preparation for academic writing at the university level. This study focuses on examining the theoretical grounding alignment of the curriculum with regards to its communicative label as well as investigating how the Yemeni EFL writing curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demands in higher education learning with regards to EFL writing skills.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study examined the overarching EFL writing approaches to second language writing instruction reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum in order to find out the alignment of the curriculum with its communicative label. The study did not evaluate the communicative approach but examined the theoretical grounding alignment to trace its coherency at the approach level. It also determined how well the curriculum prepares students with the required English academic writing skills at the university level.

The study is divided into two parts. The first part consist of the analysis of the alignment of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and second language writing approaches with their related instructional approaches, the learner roles, and the teacher roles with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The first part comprises research questions one through to four. The second part of this study analyses how well the curriculum prepares students for English academic writing at the university level. The second part comprises research questions five through to seven.

PART I: To examine the overarching instructional approaches and alignment of the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The following research questions were pursued for part I of the study:-

Research Question 1: What Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories and instructional approaches are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

Research Question 2: What second language (L2) writing instructional approaches are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

Research Question 3: What types of learner roles are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

Research Question 4: What types of teacher roles are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

PART II: To examine how well the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demand of EFL writing skills at the university level. The following research questions are pursued for part II of the study:

Research Question 5: What types of writing tasks are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

Research Question 6: What is the level of cognitive demand in the writing tasks in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

Research Question 7: How frequently is the writing skill used as the primary means to achieve the listed learning outcomes in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the research are to analyse the EFL secondary writing curriculum in terms of the alignment of its theoretical grounding with regards to its communicative label and how the curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demands at the university level. This can be achieved by fulfilling the following sub-objectives:

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES FOR PART I:

Examine the theoretical grounding alignment of the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction with the communicative approach.

Research Objective 1: To investigate the SLA theories and related instructional approaches reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

Research Objective 2: To investigate the L2 writing instructional approaches reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

Research Objective 3: To identify the learner roles reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

Research Objective 4: To identify the teacher roles reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES FOR PART II:

To investigate how the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demand of EFL writing skills at the university level.

Research Objective 5: To identify the types of writing tasks reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

Research Objective 6: To analyse the cognitive demand of the writing tasks reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction.

Research Objective 7: To evaluate the use of writing skills as the primary means to achieve the listed learning outcomes in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL writing curriculum.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study is to determine the main approaches to second language (L2) writing instruction reflected in the 12th grade EFL secondary writing curriculum as well as determining how well this curriculum prepares students for EFL writing skills required at the university level. The method of analysing the Yemeni 12th grade EFL secondary writing curriculum in this study has been influenced by the model of linguistic education devised by Richards and Rodgers (2001), as shown in Figure 1-1.

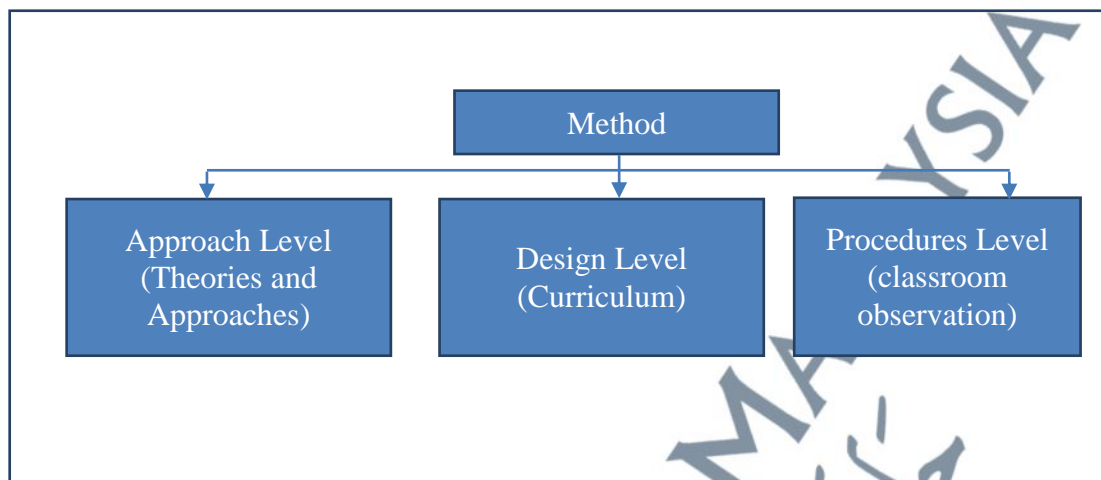


Figure 1-1: Richards and Rodgers' Model (2001)

This model suggests that language teaching methodology links between theory and practice through instructional design features in which the analysis of the language instruction can be done with regards to the approach (theories of language and learning); design (e.g., selected language skills, types of learning tasks, roles of teachers, roles of learners); as well as the procedure, such as learning techniques and procedures, teaching process, classroom observation, and teacher interviews. A summary of the three aspects of the original model of Richards and Rodgers (2001) is presented in Table 1-1.

As this study investigated the overarching approaches to L2 writing instruction that are reflected in the Yemeni 12th grade EFL secondary writing curriculum, the three levels in Richards and Rodgers (2001) language instruction conceptual framework are applicable. First, the approach level provides principle for the analysis of the Yemeni 12th grade secondary EFL writing curriculum in terms of SLA theories as well as L2 writing related instructional approaches.

Table 1-1: Summary of the three aspects of the model of Richards and Rodgers (2001)

Aspect	Description
Approach	Represents the assumptions about the theory of second language acquisition and language learning.
Design	Refers to linguistic content, a specification for the selection and organisation of content, and a description of the role of teacher, learner, and instructional materials.
Procedure	Is concerned with techniques and practices takes place in classroom and can be analysed through teacher interview, observation for classroom activities, materials used, and feedback provided.

Second, in the design level, certain elements can be used to analyse the EFL writing skills used as a primary means to achieve the stipulated learning outcomes in the 12th grade EFL secondary writing curriculum, the types of writing tasks as well as the roles of learners and the roles of the teachers within the curriculum. Third, at Richards and Rodgers's (2001) procedure level, which is related to the activities employed by the teacher and learners, observations of EFL writing lessons were conducted to analyse the SLA theories, L2 writing approaches, types of writing tasks, roles of learners, and the roles of teachers.

In addition, this study adds to Richards and Rodgers's model an analysis at the design level as well as the procedure level. The levels of cognitive demands of EFL writing tasks were adopted from Sidek's (2010) model, however, with revision. The inclusion of this element is due the importance of analysing the cognitive levels of language skills as a result of its crucial role as a factor in linguistics proficiency (e.g., (Lee & Sawaki, 2009; Sidek, 2010). The theoretical framework for the current study is presented in Figure 1-2

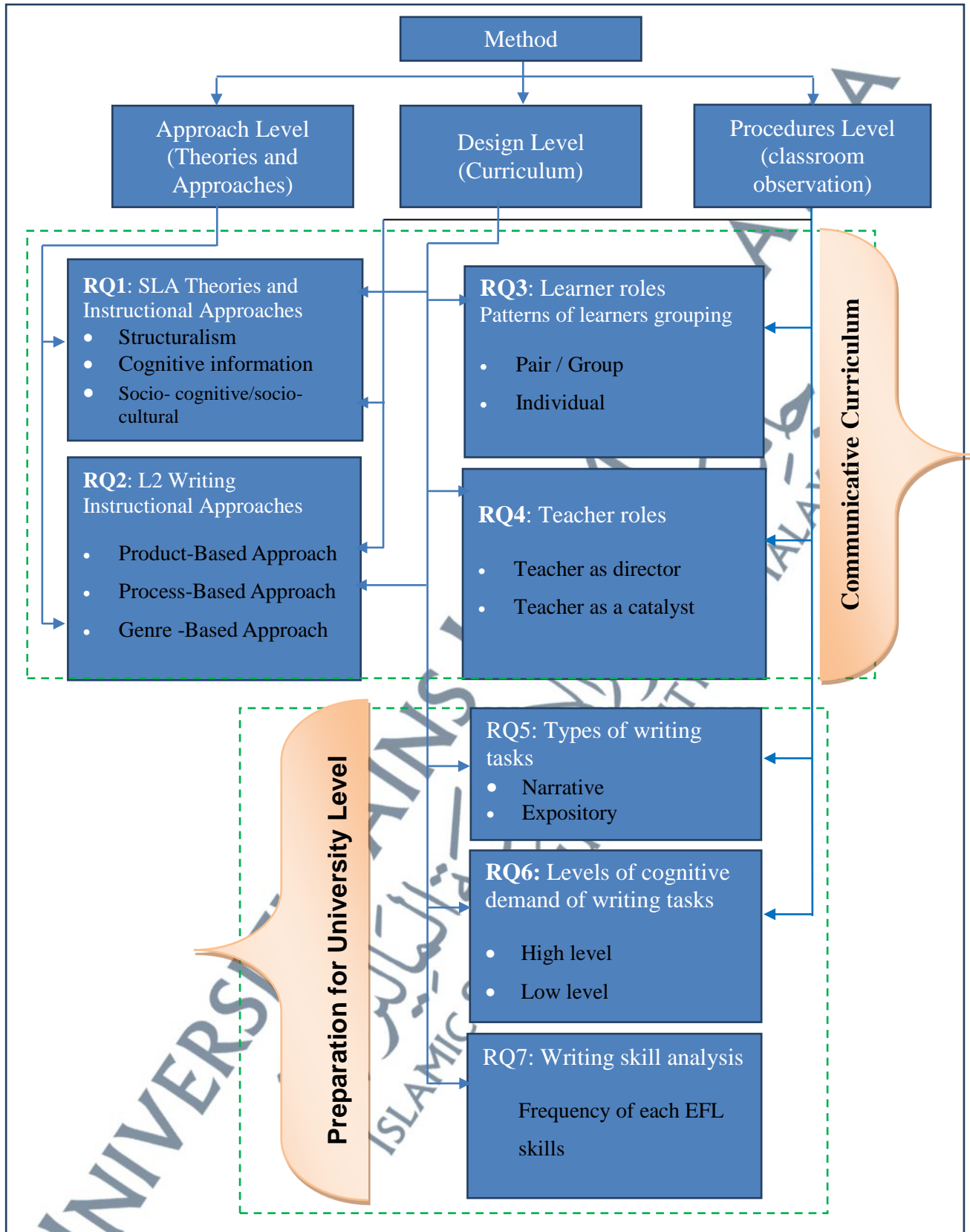


Figure 1-2: Theoretical framework of the study

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The application of effective academic writing is one of the most important skills students are required to possess for higher education learning and overall academic achievement and success therein (Reigstad, 2008; Stoyhoff, 1997; Songy, 2007). However, it remains a major challenge for students in an EFL learning context. Students' achievement at the university level is evaluated in the form of written assessments such as projects, proposal and reports, and short response essays (Badiozaman, 2014). Nonetheless, English writing for Yemeni learners at the university level is still reported to be unsatisfactory (Abdullah & Patil, 2012; Shamsan, 2003). Therefore, revisiting the process of preparation at a secondary level is a recommended approach for improving the language and academic literacy at a university level. The aim of the study was to evaluate the EFL writing curriculum and instruction in the last grade of Yemeni secondary level, which is the most important stage for students to move to higher education and has a direct impact on their performance at the university level. Thus, the analytical reflection on the final grade of the secondary level has provided further insights and comprehensive recommendations for improving writing in the secondary level as well as in the higher education level.

To guide the evaluation processes of curriculum, an analytical framework was proposed and the proposed evaluative steps were utilised in demonstrating a practical evaluation study regarding the investigation of how well the EFL writing curriculum prepares students with the required academic writing skills for university. The analytical framework seeks to be a helpful tool and provide guidelines for English curriculum evaluation and development studies in the educational field from

two perspectives. First, the alignment of the EFL writing curriculum in secondary schools with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Second, the analyses of how well the secondary curriculum prepare students for English academic writing at the university level.

This study is significant because it provides systematic analytical procedures for examining the preparation processes in the secondary level, including analysing the curriculum and the related instruction. This would provide data on the alignment between curriculum and instruction and will help the researcher to offer suggestions and recommendation on how the Yemeni education system could prepare secondary students to be equipped with required writing skills at the university level. In addition, the study examines how the secondary students are prepared to handle different types of writing tasks with various levels of cognitive demands. It is essential to train secondary students on how to write expository texts and to handle writing activities that require high level of cognitive demand as such training is required to prepare students for the language literacy demands they will encounter at the university level.

The results and findings of this study could also provide English language teachers at the secondary school level and offer policymakers insights into the importance of congruity between EFL writing preparation at the secondary level and the writing skills that students are expected to possess at the university level. Furthermore, this study will serve as a guideline for future researchers to conduct analytical studies for the English writing curriculum and for the English language secondary curriculum for other grades which study can be replicated by researchers in other EFL settings. Future researchers will benefit from this study because it

provides them the analytical tools needed to conduct their studies on other EFL skills by analysing the theoretical foundations of a language skill, roles of the teacher and learners, the emphasis on the activities for certain language skill, types of the activities, as well as the cognitive demand level of language tasks. Overall, this study provides a systematic empirical approach on how the EFL secondary writing curriculum prepares students for subsequent levels of higher educational studies. Knowing this, the higher education institutions, curriculum designers, educators, and researchers can plan for improvements in English language skills.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

1.9.1 EFL: English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to situations in which English is taught to non-native speakers. In the EFL context, English is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life (Broughton, Brumfit, Pincas, & Wilde, 2002).

1.9.2 SLA: Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to learning and acquisition of a second language in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue (Ellis, 1997).

1.9.3 ESL: English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages who live in a country where English is an official or important language (online Cambridge dictionary). In a second language situation, English is the language of the mass media, official institutions, local and central

government, large commercial and industrial organisations, and education (Broughton et al., 2002).

1.9.4 EFL Secondary Curriculum: The term EFL Curriculum in this thesis refers to the Crescent English Course curriculum as mandated by the Yemeni Ministry of Education to the secondary school. The EFL Curriculum includes the course book, the workbook, and the teacher's book.

1.9.5 EFL Writing Curriculum: In this thesis, it refers to writing skill materials included in the Yemeni grade 12 EFL textbook and EFL workbook.

1.9.6 Grade 12: The last grade in the secondary school in Yemen.

1.9.7 EFL textbook: In this thesis, it refers to the Crescent English Course, Book 6 of grade 12 EFL Curriculum in Yemeni secondary schools.

1.9.8 EFL workbook: Refers to Workbook 6 of grade 12 EFL curriculum in Yemeni secondary schools. Workbook 6 was designed to help students with their revision and contains further practice activities that help consolidate the work initiated in the EFL textbook.

1.9.9 EFL Teacher Book: Refers to the teacher book 6 of grade 12 secondary curriculum. It contains the unit teaching notes, unit content summaries, unit lists of new vocabularies, the script of the cassette sections, and a glossary of teaching instructions.

1.9.10 Curriculum Analysis: In this thesis, it refers to a research method in education. Through curriculum analysis, educators systematically analyse features of

interest in the curriculum and reflect how it contributes to English proficiency in a practical sense (Porter, 2004).

1.9.11 Writing Tasks: This term refers to the writing related statements found in the EFL workbook, EFL textbook, and writing classroom instruction. Through these statements, the writing skills of grade 12 EFL writing curriculum in Yemeni secondary are examined.

1.9.12 Writing Skills: Throughout this thesis, the term writing skills refers to basic and general skills such as writing fluency, comprehensibility, and creativity writing skills (Graham & Perin, 2007).

1.9.13 Instructional Approaches: Throughout this work, the term instructional approaches refer to the teachers' beliefs and practices on teaching writing skills in writing classes. Teaching approaches can represent the grammar translation method, the audio-lingual method, the content based instructional method ...etc.

1.9.14 EFL in Yemen: The term EFL is most effective to represent the situation in Yemen as the English language is being taught as a foreign language. Moreover, the SLA and L2 writing approaches were examined due to the absence of any theories for EFL writing. According to Ellis (1997), SLA refers to learning and acquisition of a second language in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue. Thus throughout this work the term SLA is also applicable in the Yemeni EFL context.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine the main approaches to second language (L2) writing instruction reflected in the 12th grade EFL secondary writing curriculum as well as determining how well this curriculum prepares students for EFL writing skills required at the university level. While the research has reached its aims, there are some unavoidable limitations. First, the study focused on analysing only the EFL writing curriculum and instruction in the last grade of Yemeni secondary level, which is the most important stage for students to move to higher education and has a direct impact on their performance at the university level. However, restricting this study to the 12th grade EFL writing curriculum can be considered one of the limitations. Therefore, the aim of this study might be best achieved by analysing the EFL writing curriculum for grades 10, 11, and 12 of the Yemeni secondary level.

The second limitation is related to the data collection protocol. Due to political instability in Yemen, the data were collected from only seven secondary schools in two governorates in Yemen to observe the writing classroom instructions. Although the data were collected from 14 classroom observations in seven Schools in two governorates, collecting data from a broader number of schools in Yemen would embody more authentic settings of the EFL 12th grade writing instructions in the Yemeni context.

1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is structured in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background to the study, justifies the research problem, significance of the study, research questions and objectives of the study, theoretical framework, definition of terms and the limitations of the present study. Chapter 2 presents a critical review of the literature in the fields of knowledge relevant to this study. Research on SLA and L2 writing approaches are presented and discussed. Description of the Yemeni EFL context and related EFL writing issues in secondary and higher education levels are also discussed and supported by relevant literature. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the research design and procedures, as well as the rationale for choosing the case study research design. It describes in detail the research setting, and details the methods of data collection and the instrumentation and data analysis techniques used in the study. The reliability procedures as well as ethical considerations relevant to the study are then discussed. Chapter 4 starts with a description of the case study conducted in this research. It addresses the specific research questions of the alignment of EFL writing secondary writing curriculum with regards to its communicative label, and how the curriculum prepares students to meet the academic demands in the university level. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the systematic analysis of curriculum as well as classroom instruction in regard to the research questions and scope. The chapter ends with the implications of the findings towards more effective EFL writing teaching and learning in EFL context. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, and some possible directions for future research are proposed.