

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents a discussion of the results derived from a comprehensive analysis of the curriculum as well as classroom instruction with regard to the research questions. The chapter concludes with the implications of the findings focused on more effective EFL writing, teaching, and learning in an EFL context, including theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed and potential directions for future research are proposed.

#### **5.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of this study was to examine predominant approaches to second language (L2) writing instruction as reflected in the Yemeni English as Foreign Language

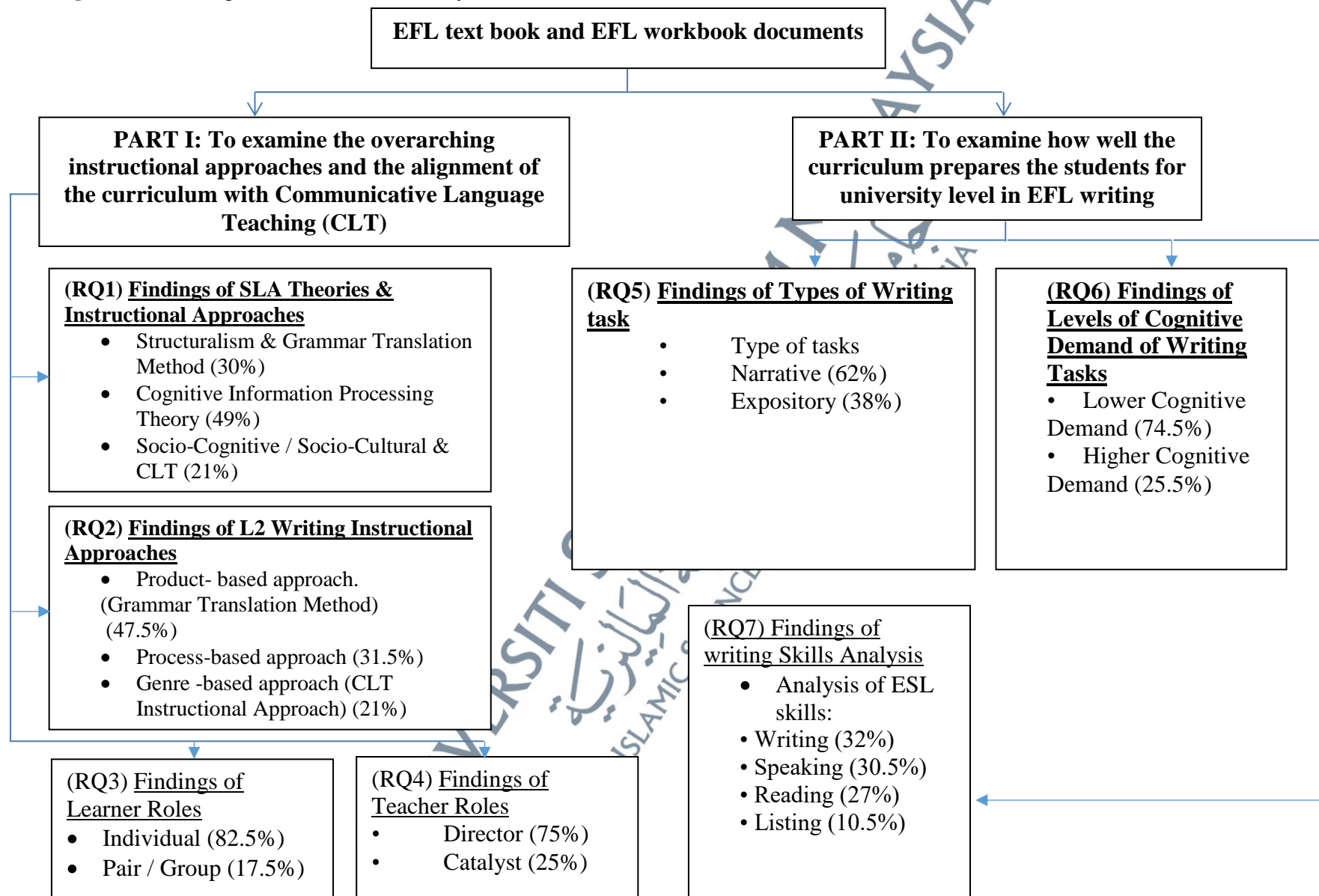
(EFL) secondary writing curriculum and how satisfactorily this curriculum prepares students for university level EFL writing.

To provide the context for this study, there is a growing need for using English in different areas of education and business along with the importance of academic writing competence for students' professional communication, achievement and success in higher education. The results of previous studies showed that writing in English is one of the biggest challenges faced by Yemeni students at university level. As the current studies did not provide adequate insight into the current lack of proficiency in writing skills among university students, this study raised the question relating to the preparation process at secondary education level and investigates the problem comprehensively using case study, curriculum documents review, and classroom observations. This research argues that a primary goal of assessing EFL teaching in secondary schools must be completed prior to drawing conclusions on literacy competency at university.

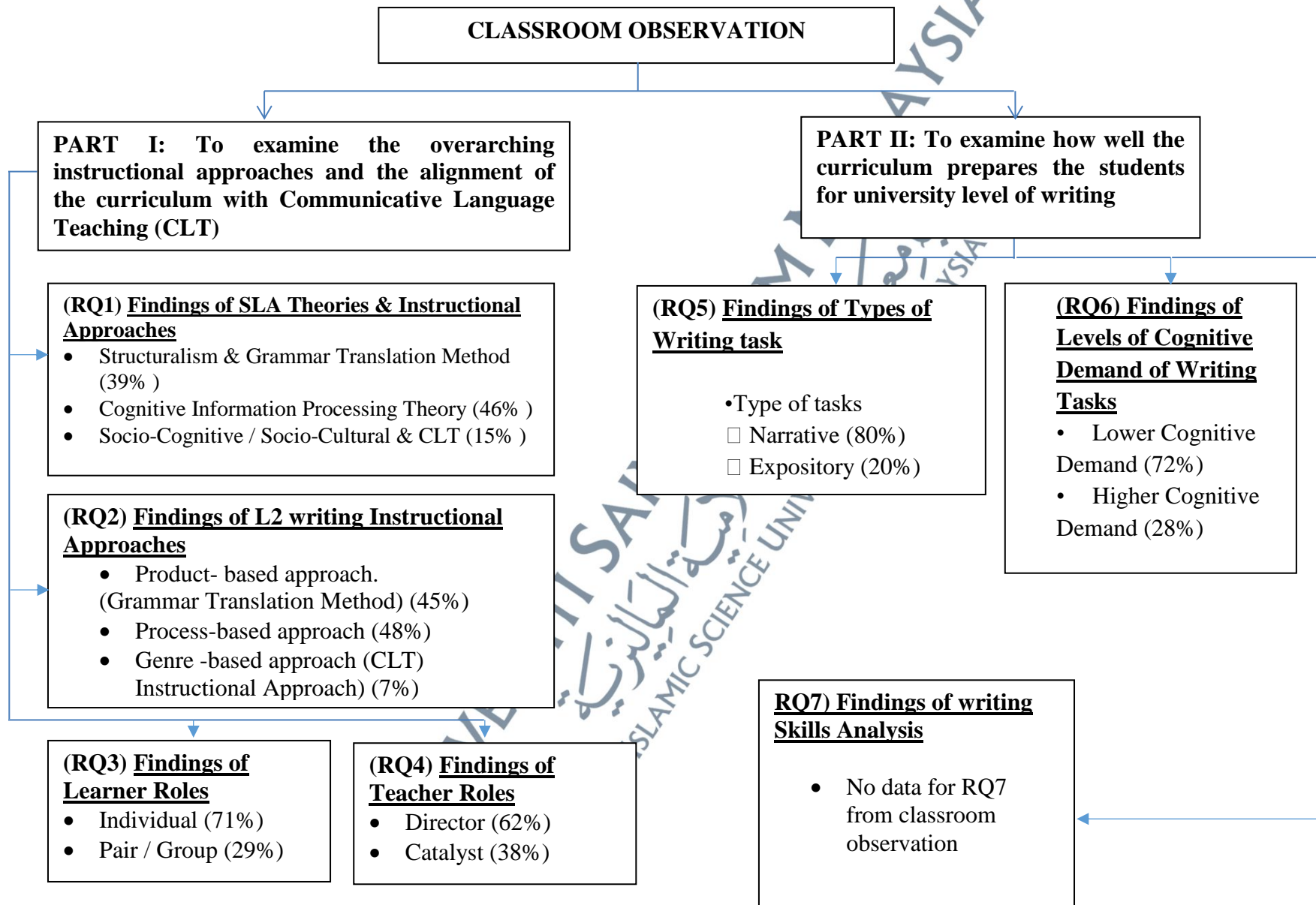
Since the Yemeni EFL secondary curriculum in its entirety is labelled as a communicative curriculum, this suggests that EFL textbooks, EFL workbooks, and classroom instruction should also adopt the communicative approach. The communicative instructional approach was chosen as the foundation of Yemeni 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL writing curriculum based on the finding of studies demonstrating this approach to be effective in assisting learners to process information from various written sources (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Ozsevik, 2010). However, the findings in this study suggest that the EFL textbook and EFL workbook writing curriculum do not seem to fully reflect the features of the communicative instructional approach.

Discussion of the findings of this study is divided into two parts. Part I discusses the alignment of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches in the Yemeni EFL writing curriculum as reflected in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, Second Language (L2) writing approaches and their corresponding instructional approaches, and teacher role and learner role. Part II discusses the findings of the study with respect to how comprehensively the 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL writing curriculum prepares secondary students for writing in English during secondary education with implications to writing in the English language at tertiary level. Figure 5.1 describes the findings of studying text contained in the EFL textbook and the EFL workbook, whilst Figure 5.2 displays the summary of findings from English language writing classroom observation.

**Figure 5.1** Findings from Document Analysis



**Figure 5.2** Findings from Classroom Observation



Figures 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrate the overall findings of all research questions of the present study. The findings show that the Yemeni EFL writing curriculum is not in alignment with the communicative approach, despite being labelled as such. The analysis of SLA theories and relating instructional approaches provide evidence that the curriculum is founded on the principles of cognitive theory of information processing and structural linguistic/behaviourism theory rather than the socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theories which comprise the crux of the communicative approach. With regard to L2 writing instructional approaches, the findings provided evidence that the curriculum is based on the principles of product-based approach theory of information processing which is in turn based on grammar translation methods, instead of the genre-based approach which is the foundation of the communicative. Furthermore, the findings on learner roles also convey an emphasis on individual writing activities rather than pair and group activities, which would foster a meaningful interaction in the learning process. The observation that EFL teachers predominantly performed the role of directors working to a traditional mode of instructing writing skills further supports the assertion that the EFL textbook and the EFL workbook curriculum is not in alignment with the communicative approach.

In terms of how comprehensively the curriculum prepares secondary students in writing in English at university level with implications for also writing in English at tertiary level, the findings indicated that the EFL secondary writing curriculum places more emphasis on writing skills, in preference to other macro language skills, as the method of realising learning outcomes in the EFL secondary writing curriculum. However, the findings also suggest despite writing being the major skill used to achieve the learning outcomes, writing tasks developing major writing skills such as expository tasks were limited. Furthermore, EFL secondary writing

curriculum documents and English language writing classroom instruction were not in alignment. The findings on cognitive demand indicate that high cognitive demand thinking skills are not significantly and sufficiently emphasised in the EFL textbook, the EFL workbook and also in English language writing classroom instruction. Addressed collectively, the EFL secondary writing curriculum appears not to prepare secondary students comprehensively in writing in English at university level.

### **5.3 PART I - THE ALIGNMENT OF THE EFL SECONDARY WRITING CURRICULUM WITH THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH.**

#### **5.3.1 Discussion on second language acquisition theories, second language writing approaches and their corresponding instructional approaches, and learner and teacher roles.**

This section discusses the findings of research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4, which examine whether the main aspects of the CLT features are reflected in the Yemeni EFL secondary writing curriculum. The CLT features were examined based on the SLA theories and L2 writing approaches. As the Yemeni EFL 12th grade secondary school curriculum was developed based on CLT, the findings should similarly be a reflection of the socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theory of SLA and the genre-based approach L2 writing of information processing, along with related instructional approaches such as the CBI approach and the TBI approach. Correspondingly, the learner role and the teacher role should also be reflected in learner-centred classrooms.

With regard to SLA theories and L2 writing approaches, the findings of the study as summarised in figure 5.1 stated only 21% of the writing-related statements in the Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school course book, workbook of writing instruction reflected the socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theory, and 49% of the data did reflect cognitive information processing theory and 30% behaviourism/structuralism theory. In contrast to the claim that the Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum is fundamentally a communicative based curriculum, the conclusions of this research infer that the curriculum centres on the learner as an individual information processor, and therefore is actually working in the cognitive information processing theory.

Additionally, the prevailing understanding that the teaching of English in Yemeni secondary schools has transferred from a non-communicative instructional approach to a communicative instructional approach can be deemed inaccurate, with the non-communicative approach still comprising a significant amount of English language teaching. The findings as presented in Table 4-2 show that the non-communicative approach can still be found in the EFL textbook (28%), EFL workbook (32%) and in classroom activities (39%), with the communicative approach only represented 22% in the EFL textbook, 20% in the EFL workbook, and 15% in classroom activities (39%).

The findings from classroom observations as shown in figure 5-2 make possible the conclusion that teaching of Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing instructional implementation adheres to the cognitive theory of SLA (46%) rather than the socio-cultural / socio-cognitive theory of SLA (15%). Writing tasks in the classrooms frequently reflected the product-based approach (45%) and process-based approach

(48%) with little reflection of the genre-based approach (7%). Al-Ahdal (2010) and Thabit (2002) noted the emphasis placed on acquiring English grammar in a non-communicative manner when English is taught in Yemeni secondary schools, an argument cogent with the findings of this study. Furthermore, as stated by Ghassan (2009), Yemeni teachers of English frequently avoid designing writing tasks or getting students to write more than just grammatical exercises. Again, this research supports this study's findings garnered from observing the operations of a classroom in which the non-communicative method was prevalent. However, as reported in the literature, cognitive theory is related to transforming text ideas into coherent sentences to help learners analyse meaning beyond the sentence level (Storch, 1998).

As seen in figure 5-2, the analysis of teacher roles in classroom instruction revealed that Yemeni EFL teachers principally performed the role of director (62%) in teaching writing, which is indicative of the structuralism behaviourism theory of SLA and the product-based approach. Such a finding is an indication of misalignment in the theoretical grounding of the curriculum with regards to its label as a communicative curriculum. If the curriculum was grounded in the CLT approach, the socio-cognitive/socio-cultural theory, L2 writing genre-based approach would be significantly evidenced at the writing instructional implementation level. These findings of non-communicative instructional practices in the Yemeni EFL writing classrooms resulted in making students less effective in using writing in real life situations. Additionally, the results provided a plausible explanation for what has been reported in the Yemeni EFL settings, namely that most students are quite poor at English, as is demonstrated when faced with real life situations in which they have to communicate and interact (Abbad, 1988; Shamsan, 2003; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Al-Mushriquee, 2003). Similarly, Bataineh, Bataineh, and Thabet (2011) reported,

“Yemeni teachers are more inclined towards structure-based principles than those of CLT” (p. 865). Moreover, the results of Liao (2003), conducted in another EFL context, indicate that teachers follow formal-based instruction in order to help their learners pass exams.

The process-based approach is defined by O’Brien (2004) as an activity in which teachers encourage students to see writing not in terms of grammatical exercises, but in terms of meaning and discovering ideas, is found by this study to be integral to the beliefs and practices of Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school teachers.

Na’ama (2011) and Al-Ahdal (2010) believe that the teaching of English in Yemen omits the communicative approach in any practicable way, a viewpoint supported by the findings of this study. Thus, overt manifestations of structuralism theory and cognitive information processing theory of SLA and their corresponding L2 writing approaches were significantly observed in almost all L2 writing classes. Some examples of the observed data that were thought to be relevant to structuralism behaviourism and cognitive information processing theories can be mentioned with regard to employing L1 as the only means of clarifying the meaning of vocabulary and sentences in writing. The majority of classroom instructional time in writing was allocated for teaching students de-contextualized vocabulary via translating them into the mother tongue. This technique was found to be in opposition to socio cognitive / socio cultural theories of SLA and genre-based approaches, and L2 writing instruction that focuses on using sentence structure to clarify the grammatical components of a sentence.

Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrated a misalignment between the EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum designation as a communicative curriculum and what the curriculum in practice implements in the teaching of EFL writing. Despite this practice being in opposition to features of CLT, the research of Al-Fatimi (2009), Al-Mansoori (2008), and Al-Refa'ai (2001) has drawn attention to the situating of the teacher at the epicentre of Yemeni classrooms. Additionally, Alsofi (2009) raised the question of whether teachers in Yemen employed to teach English are capable of teaching using a communicative approach. If teachers are not deemed able, then this provides a reason behind the problems of English language acquisition in Yemen.

Collectively, the conclusions of the SLA theories and L2 writing approaches analyses showed that the Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum was not forged on socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theory, in which can be found the basic grounding principles of the communicative approach. Thus it can be asserted that in not practicing teaching methods cohering to socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theories of SLA and L2 writing approaches, the findings of the present study support those of Murshed (2002). As a result, EST teachers in Yemeni classrooms continue to teach writing in a non-communicative manner, which is in alignment with the non-communicative approach presented in the curriculum. As a result of employing the non-communicative approach, students favouring an active role in learning are under stimulated and forced to adopt the role of passive learners.

In terms of the teacher and learners' role, the findings also described how the EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school writing curriculum is not designed based on the CLT approach, as labelled. In order to be implementing CLT strategies, writing tasks need to be designed as pair / group work, from which learners process the text information

via communicative interaction and language functions as a facilitating tool (Vygotsky, 1975). Based on the findings of classroom observation, the writing classroom at secondary school level in Yemen is foremost a teacher-centred setting. The findings presented here are echoed in the earlier work by Azzan (2001) and detailed how Yemeni teachers place importance on learning grammar, syntax and sentence construction with translation into Arabic as well as English.

The Yemeni EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school writing curriculum self-identifies as a communicative curriculum overall; yet in practice it allows for both the non-communicative and communicative instructional approaches (Teacher's Book, p.4). From the findings collected in classroom observation at the instructional implementation level, it is possible to state that teachers use the non-communicative instructional approach more frequently than the communicative approach. Given that the curriculum is labelled as communicative, writing instruction should be communicative in nature. However, as presented in Figure 5-1 only 17.5% of the writing tasks in the EFL textbook and EFL workbook are designed to be conducted in pairs or groups, while 82.5% of the writing tasks are designed to be completed individually. As seen in the Table 4-4, the EFL writing instruction only calls for 29% of the classroom activities to be in the form of pair or group work.

**FIGURE 5.3:** Extract 1 from Teacher's Book on the Teacher Role

- Introduce and discuss the topic.  
They either ask the pupils to think of ideas and write notes OR elicit ideas from a pupil and write notes on the board. Tell the pupils which pages in the textbooks to use for reference.
- Pupils write while the teacher circulates and gives guidance. Close attention should be paid to connectors and reference pronouns, as well as grammatical accuracy. The teacher should indicate what needs amending without necessarily telling a pupil exactly how to amend it. Consultation between partners can be encouraged here. Pupils can also refer to dictionaries.

Source: Teacher's Book (p.)

As shown in Figure 5-2, the teacher's book designates the teachers' role as a catalyst most of time yet, the findings from writing classroom observation shows that teachers frequently play a director role (62%). As noted by Mohammed (2012), the teacher's book privileges the communicative over the non-communicative, but this is not reflected in the working practices of teachers. Indeed, the writing instruction provided by EST teachers, with its focus on grammar translation, holds more in common with the structuralism theory of SLA.

Furthermore, the number of students in writing classrooms may also create challenges preventing the writing teacher from applying the CLT instructional approach. It is common to have 40-100 students in one classroom and this, coupled with limited class duration leads to the Yemeni school system suffering for want of, "an ideal class and an ideal period of time" (Mohammed, 2012). Abdullah and Patil (2012) developed this further by recording that teachers in Yemen felt that they lacked time, had too many pupils to work with and felt inundated with work. The researchers stated that these three factors restricted the implementation of different teaching methods.

According to the educational philosophy of the Republic of Yemen, which all trainee teachers are taught to use, the role of the learner and societal needs are paramount. This is contingent with CLT, yet the findings of this study found the reality to be at odds with the rhetoric. In order for the 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL writing curriculum to be implementing CLT strategies, learners would have to be granted increased emphasis on their place in the microcosmic society of school.

Despite the 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum was entitled as a communicative approach with the goal of equipped students with the required writing skills, the findings presented here detail how communication was solely emphasised in a minimal number of writing activities. This ultimately suggests that the learner was not granted the status it holds in CLT approaches. To this end we see a basic discrepancy between the written content of the curriculum which does understand the importance of communicative approaches, and the day-to-day mechanisations of the classroom, even though writing tasks were being taken directly from printed course materials. One example of this discrepancy can be found in the lack of exercises involving working in pairs or in a group, despite activities of this ilk being detailed in the curriculum. Instead, the teacher remained the focal point of the classroom.

In a curriculum forged on the CLT instructional approach, writing tasks should ideally be performed frequently using the communicative approach. This is assuming that the curriculum has considered content-based instructional method, task-based instructional method, and language instructional approach. However, the writing tasks elicited from the EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school writing curriculum were in nature individual tasks based on a teacher-centred classroom, in which the teacher plays the role of director.

To summarise the findings of PART I, which is comprised of the SLA theories and its corresponding instructional approaches, L2 writing approaches, learner roles and teacher roles, it can be concluded that the curriculum is not in alignment with the communicative approach as it claims to be. In other words, the findings generated by this study indicate that the curriculum as it is currently taught does not fully complement or adhere to the communicative approach. Therefore, the

findings generated in Part one demonstrate that the EFL writing curriculum, as it is currently taught in Yemeni secondary schools, does not adhere to the principles of the communicative writing approach as the emphasis is placed upon the product-based approach and cognitive theory when the communicative approach advocates for the prioritisation of the communicative theory. Furthermore, the styles of classroom instruction observed in this study adopt primarily structural and cognitive theories.

#### **5. 4 PART TWO: THE PREPARATION OF THE YEMENI EFL 12<sup>th</sup> GRADE SECONDARY LEARNERS FOR WRITING IN ENGLISH AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL**

Research questions 5, 6, and 7 studied a variety of writing tasks undertaken by students along with the cognitive demands of writing tasks needed to achieve the necessary level of competence in English at university level. The findings of these questions are discussed in this section, along with consideration of the frequency of written English tasks also undertaken by students.

##### **5.4.1 TYPES OF WRITING TASKS**

In related to the types of writing tasks, the two major writing task types, narrative and expository were reflected in EFL 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum. Thus, to prepare students for EFL writing at the university level, writing instruction that exposes students to expository writing tasks must assist them to equip with the required writing skill at the university level.

The narrative writing tasks were labelled as writing tasks assigned for describing personal experiences or observations of immediate objects or events, providing factual descriptions, summarising ideas and/or information contained in a text, narrating events or reporting facts. This is the main type of writing task completed by 12<sup>th</sup> grade secondary level students in language training as they are instructed in how to discuss personal experiences or observations in a narrative style. However, this type of writing task focuses on the ability to summarise findings and report on the facts and does not teach a student how to critically assess written material or to synthesise information derived from multiple sources. On the other hand, the second type of writing tasks, referred to as expository writing tasks, focus on exposition and academic argument in critically analysing or synthesising information from several academic sources. The distinction between these two types of writing tasks is important as second level students must be encouraged to undertake expository writing tasks if they intend to pursue a higher education level where the ability to think and write critically is imperative. As such, the types of writing tasks undertaken by students in this study as they complete their secondary level education may determine their ability to meet the demands of EFL writing skills at a university level.

The results of this study showed that the Yemeni curriculum focuses mainly on narrative tasks as less attention is paid to expository tasks. As mentioned above, this may prove detrimental in preparing EFL students for the demands of writing at a university level as they have only been taught how to write in a narrative as opposed to expository style. As displayed in Table 4.6, 61% and 63% of writing tasks in the EFL Textbook and the EFL Workbook respectively focus on narrative tasks while only 39% and 37% respectively focus on expository tasks. This indicates that the

current Yemeni EFL curriculum does not place enough emphasis on the importance of expository tasks and is thus not preparing students adequately for the requirements of university level academic writing. Further still, observation of EFL teaching in practice indicates an even greater disparity between the levels of emphasis placed on each type of writing task as 80% of tasks were found to be narrative while only 20% were expository in nature. This is a worrying outcome as it indicates that narrative tasks are prioritised in the curriculum and even more so in teaching practices, which may cause students to encounter difficulty in adopting an effective expository writing style once they enter higher education studies.

The writing tasks that focus on describing personalized experiences or perceptions of instant objects or occurrences, and that providing factual descriptions through the summarising of ideas still considered narrative, while critical analysing, or the synthesis of information from several sources to be considered as expository (Pugh et al., 2000). In higher level education, expository tasks become more important than narrative tasks as students move beyond simply describing experiences, events or facts in writing and begin acquiring a more critical and analytical perspective. More specifically, as the nature of educational activities at this level requires a more advanced level of thinking, it is crucial that students learn how to critically analyse information and to develop the cognitive ability to form an objective opinion independently based on their interpretation of the information. According to Pugh et al. (2000), students need to be prepared to read and write texts that are primarily expository at the university level. As such, it is clear that the narrative style will be ineffective in this context as it does not allow a student to express their own opinions or critical insight into a concept, event, or phenomenon.

In fact, the narrative style facilitates the summation of received information and the

reiteration of facts and is not conducive to the critical analysis of data and the synthesis of knowledge gleaned from a diverse range of sources.

Based on these findings, it is clear that the writing curriculum in secondary level EFL classrooms should include or focus on expository writing tasks in order to help students acquire the academic writing skills required for a higher level education. This increased focus on expository writing tasks will enable students to think more critically about information and to express their ideas or opinions on synthesised data effectively in an academic expository style. Thus, it is crucial that the EFL curriculum in Yemen be modified to include more tasks in expository instruction so that students are not immediately placed at a disadvantage when they enter university on account of their lack of familiarity with expository composition. The current disparity between the level of attention placed on narrative tasks at the expense of expository tasks may prove detrimental to the linguistic proficiency of EFL students in Yemen and may compromise their potential in the higher education level as, despite the importance of this type of writing activities, students have not been adequately taught how to express themselves in the expository style that is required at the university level for overall academic achievement and success.

#### **5.4.2 COGNITIVE LEVEL OF WRITING TASKS**

To analyse the level of cognitive demand in the writing tasks in the Yemeni 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL writing curriculum and classroom instruction, in order to investigate the cognitive levels of the writing tasks, a coding scheme was developed based on the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domain level. To apply this coding scheme to the EFL writing tasks undertaken by 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL students as per

the curriculum and classroom instruction, each exercise was codified based on the six categories presented in revised Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domain. Remembering and understanding were assigned to the "Low Level" category. The categories of apply, analysis, evaluate, and create were coded under the "High Level" category. These taxonomies describe the cognitive skills that students are required to possess at various levels of cognitive demand and indicate the extent to which students exercise a high level of cognitive skill when completing EFL writing assignments. It was important to analyse the cognitive levels of writing tasks in order to determine if students were encouraged by the EFL curriculum and language instructors to use higher order cognitive skills, such as the ability to critically analyse or synthesise received information, as these would play a key role in successfully completing secondary level.

The results of this study showed that the main focus of writing assignments in the curriculum and in classroom observation was on tasks that required low Levels of cognitive demand. In addition, it was also discovered that considerably less attention was given to tasks that required high levels of cognitive demand. Thus, while students were indeed taught how to understand and remember, comparatively less emphasis was placed on ensuring that they could comprehend, apply, analyse, synthesise, or evaluate the information they were given. This is of particular concern as these are the key requirements which students at the university level must satisfy in terms of their writing abilities in order to achieve academic success. More specifically, it is these tasks that are most important in the higher education level as students must demonstrate a high level of cognitive ability in expressing their ideas and opinions on a wide range of information and knowledge.

As illustrated in Figures 5.1 and 5.2, a far higher proportion of writing tasks focus on skills that require a low level of cognitive demand in terms of the EFL Textbook, the EFL Workbook and classroom observation. Based on these figures and according to Anderson et al. (2002) classification, it is clear that students are not completing writing tasks that encourage them to develop their analysis, evaluation, or creativity skills. In higher education, more emphasis is placed on application, analysis, and evaluation, all of which are coded under a high level of cognitive demand. Thus, in order to effectively prepare students for the demands of writing at the university level, the secondary level EFL curriculum and classroom instruction must modify their writing tasks so that a broader range of skills are acquired and refined by the students.

Most importantly, language instructors should focus on the writing tasks that require the highest level of cognitive demand as this will prepare students more effectively for university and will ensure that they perform well in writing tasks (Ahmad, 2010) due to their familiarity with tasks that require a high level of cognitive demand. This will have a positive effect on the learning outcomes of students and will also facilitate them in adapting to the university academic environment where they will require advanced writing skills and a high level of cognitive competency.

More specifically, the ability to analyse, apply, and synthesise information is required in order to complete essays, analyse case studies or perform scientific research. In effect, any academic task or project undertaken in university is likely to require a high degree of intellect as well as a high level of proficiency in high

cognitive demand skills. In light of this, the EFL curriculum should ideally train students more effectively in this area.

### 5.4.3 CURRICULUM EMPHASIS ON EFL WRITING SKILLS

The importance of preparing EFL learners for the writing skills required at a university level should be effectively emphasised by the writing skills in the secondary EFL curriculum as well as classroom instruction. In order to determine the extent to which EFL writing is used as a means to achieve the listed outcomes in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade EFL writing curriculum, an investigation into how often each EFL language skill (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) appeared in EFL curriculum documents was undertaken. This investigation to determine the importance placed on writing skills in comparison to the other key language skills, namely listening, speaking and reading.

The results of this study showed that the number of writing statements reflected in the curriculum is higher in comparison to other skills, such as listening, speaking, and reading. As illustrated in Figure 5-1, 32% of skills focused on writing tasks based on all EFL documents with only 10.5%, 30.5%, and 27% focusing on listening, speaking, and reading tasks respectively. This indicates that writing skills are prioritised over other language skills in the EFL curriculum, though oral language skills are also highly emphasised. Considering such a large emphasis is placed on the cultivation of advanced writing skills, it is essential that the EFL curriculum focuses on writing tasks that will prepare students for the demands of academic writing once they begin higher education studies. In effect, while the current curriculum recognises the value of writing skills in facilitating the students' pursuit of a higher

education level, the style and nature of these writing tasks is not conducive to the acquisition and refinement of key academic writing abilities, namely exposition, evaluation and critical analysis skills.

In higher education, academic writing is one of the most important skills students are required to possess for higher education learning and overall academic achievement and success (Kim, Mendenhall, & Johnson, 2010). The achievement of students at a university level is typically evaluated by their performance in written assessments, such as projects, proposals, reports, and short response essays (Badiozaman, 2014). As the primary measure of a student's academic competency depends on their ability to express themselves and their ideas cohesively in writing, it is imperative that the EFL curriculum and classroom instructors prepare secondary level students effectively by engaging them in a wide range of writing tasks that require them to exercise their critical, analytical and comprehension abilities, all of which require a high level of cognitive demand. By doing so, EFL students will already be accustomed to the requirements of academic writing and will be more likely to perform successfully at university as a result.

Overall, the results show that the current EFL curriculum places more emphasis on writing skills when compared to other language skills in terms of the number of writing activities contained in the EFL workbook and textbook. However, based on the results of the RQ6 and RQ7, it appears that the majority of these writing statements focus on narrative tasks that require a low level of cognitive demand. In light of these findings, it is clear that more emphasis should be placed on the number of writing activities included in the books as well as the nature of these activities and the level of cognitive demand they require. More specifically, while the findings

indicate a bias toward narrative writing tasks, it is perhaps more important for students to be trained in exposition-based writing tasks as this will enable them to complete advanced level assignments, such as case studies or scientific research, more effectively. As academic writing requires students to exercise their critical and analytical skills, more emphasis should be placed on writing assignments that assist students in acquiring and refining these abilities in order to better prepare them for the transition into higher education and the demands of more advanced educational programmes. Broadly speaking, the future success of students from an academic perspective may depend largely on the quality of the EFL curriculum and it is thus imperative that changes are made to ensure that Yemeni students are given the opportunity to acquire linguistic proficiency and fulfil their potential in higher education level without being hindered by their lack of familiarity with the requirements of academic writing.

To examine how well the EFL writing curriculum equips secondary schools students to meet academic writing in English at the higher educational level, the study examined the types of writing task, the cognitive domain, as well as the emphasis on writing as the means to achieve the learning outcomes stipulated in the selected curriculum. The findings showed that curriculum is highly emphasised on the writing skill than reading, listening, and speaking skills. However, the findings on the types of writing tasks and the level of cognitive demand of the writing tasks show that the students in the selected secondary level are not highly trained in writing the expository essays which require high cognitive demand. In contrast, more emphasis is given on training students with narrative writing tasks, which requires low cognitive demand.

## **5.5 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION**

The contribution of this study can be discussed in terms of its theoretical, methodological, and practical implications.

### **5.5.1 Theoretical Contribution**

To guide the evaluation processes of the curriculum, an analytical framework was adopted 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. This analytical framework constitutes the theoretical underpinnings of linguistic education. The research was subdivided into two parts. The first focused on aligning the teaching of English in Yemeni secondary schools with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the other assessed how the secondary curriculum was actually equipping students for university-level required English writing skills. These two parts together made up the analytical framework of the study and provide the possibility for further research in Education. The empirical support for the framework derived from the evaluation phase of this study, creates new opportunities, and provides new directions for further theoretical development of linguistic studies in different EFL settings.

### **5.5.2 Methodological Contribution**

The research design and procedures used in this study to investigate the predominant approaches to second language writing instruction reflected in the Yemeni EFL writing secondary curriculum as well as to determine how well this curriculum

prepares students for writing in English at higher educational level allowed for varied sources of data to be integrated into one study. Utilising different ways of collecting and analysing data has the potential to overcome the limitations of single approaches and provides a more thorough data description (Yin, 2009; Creswell, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, a methodological implication of this research is that the detailed documented procedures of conducting a case study with multi-method and data integration could provide useful guidelines for future studies.

### 5.5.3 Practical Implications

The results of this study raised interesting implications for education institutions, curriculum designers, and teachers, especially in an EFL context. With regard to evaluating the alignment of the curriculum and instructional approaches with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the findings showed that the Yemeni EFL writing curriculum is cognitive in nature rather than communicative. The study examines the different types of SLA theories and L2 writing approaches and the related writing instructional approaches, and learner roles and teacher roles. The findings of evaluating SLA theories, second language (L2) writing instructional approaches, learner roles, and teacher roles revealed that there are misalignments in the theoretical grounding with regards to the communicative status of the selected curriculum. With the aim to examine the secondary EFL writing curriculum in Yemen and to determine how the EFL writing curriculum equips students in Yemeni secondary schools with the EFL writing skills required to meet academic needs at higher educational level, the study examined the types of writing task, the cognitive domain as well as the emphasis on writing as the means to achieve the learning

outcomes stipulated in the selected curriculum. The study findings show that writing skill is more highly emphasised in the Yemeni EFL secondary curriculum than reading, listening and speaking skills. However, the findings on the types of writing task and the level of cognitive demand of the writing tasks showed that the students in the selected secondary level are not highly trained in writing the expository essays which require high cognitive demand. In contrast, more emphasis is given to training students with narrative writing tasks, which require a low level of cognitive demand.

Greater knowledge in the area of linguistics and EFL teaching methods and acquisition in higher education and beyond can be gained as a result of this study, which focused primarily on aligning the curriculum in Yemeni secondary schools with CLT and preparatory classroom teaching activities.

The findings of the present study showed that the 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum does not match the principles of CLT approach at a curriculum design level. The misalignment of its theoretical underpinning in the selected curriculum is evidenced via the analysis of writing tasks in the EFL textbook, EFL workbook, and classroom observation. In addition, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum does not fully prepare the Yemeni learners for the required English writing skills at university level in terms of types of writing tasks and the level of cognitive demand. These findings provide evidence of the Yemeni 12<sup>th</sup> grade writing curriculum to be one of the possible causes of writing problems faced by Yemeni learners at university level.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, as the Yemeni 12<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum does not fully reflect the communicative, it needs to be revised in terms of its label as a communicative-based curriculum. Second, modification need to be made in order to make the secondary curriculum as relevant

as possible to using English in higher education, thus best equipping Yemeni students. Knowing this, the Ministry of Education in Yemen, curriculum designers, and teachers can realistically plan for the improvement of English writing acquired skills. In the next section, a number of recommendations are presented accordingly.

## 5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study present important implications for the Ministry of Education and teachers in relation to the preparation process of secondary students to English writing at tertiary level in terms of secondary writing curriculum evaluation and development, as well as the preparation process of secondary students in EFL writing. The misalignment of the curriculum to its label as a communicative curriculum as well as the lack of effective preparation of secondary learners in English academic writing to tertiary level implies that the Ministry of Education needs to plan for revision. For example, the findings of the study revealed that the Yemeni EFL writing curriculum is not in alignment with the communicative approach, as it is labelled, in terms of reflected language acquisition (SLA) theories, second language (L2) writing approaches and their corresponding instructional approaches, teacher role and learner role. Results showed that English language teaching in Yemen is based around the cognitive theory of information processing and structural linguistic / behaviourism theory rather than the socio-cognitive / socio-cultural theories that underwrite the communicative approach to EFL teaching.

In addition, the findings discussed on learner roles and teacher roles denoted the emphasis on a teacher-centred approach. The writing tasks represented in the secondary curriculum and classroom instruction showed that more importance is

placed on individual writing tasks in contrast to pair and group tasks, and the dominant role of the teacher is director in comparison to the role of teacher as a catalyst and facilitator. This demonstrated a misalignment with the communicative approach as it is labelled. CLT is learner-centred experience-based, which puts real-life situations at the forefront of language learning (Xu, 2010), and language is acquired through meaningful communication (Howatt & Widdowson, 1984; Nunan, 2003a).

In the socio-cultural view, which is the foundation of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), increased emphasis is placed on purposeful and meaningful interaction in promoting cognitive development (Crossley et al., 2007) in which the learners actively contribute to the construction of their own learning microcosm (Myles, 2002; Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013), and the learning happens in an interactive network of cognition, social interaction and the environment (Atkinson, 2002). Furthermore, the results of L2 writing approaches indicated that the product-based approach in writing theory is the most reflected second language writing theory in both the EFL textbook, EFL workbook and less emphasis was placed on the genre-based approach. However, the focus of writing in the communicative approach should be more on the genre-based CLT approach, which aims to integrate the knowledge of a particular genre and its communicative purpose. This could help the students produce a text to communicate with others in the same discourse community successfully.

As detailed above and supported by the findings, a teacher-centred classroom is the favoured dynamic of most EFL teachers in Yemen. The findings state that additional focus is required on classroom activities that stimulate students'

communication and interaction. Teachers play a critical role in shaping students' academic experience of English writing and other language skills. Teachers need to gain the expertise and skills to comprehend CLT principles and effectively apply them in a classroom setting. They need to demonstrate their competencies in the communicative approach. The findings of the study foregrounded that writing lessons in the classroom were mainly managed using teacher-centred instructional strategies, however for effective EFL Writing skills acquisition, learners should be responsible for their learning and should take an active role through different phases of academic writing in English. Students need to be exposed to purposeful and contextualised academic writing activities through practical examples from real life situations and provided with the support of their peers for actively interacting, discussing, and giving feedback.

Moving to a student-centred EFL writing classroom will positively impact on academic writing performance in secondary and tertiary education. Therefore, wide reaching policy change should be implemented by the Ministry of Education to modify the secondary writing curriculum based on communicative principles. Curriculum designers require a thorough comprehension regarding communicative-grounding and the principles of CLT in terms of its underpinning second language acquisition theories, second language writing approaches and the related communicative instructional approaches, and learner roles and teacher roles. The writing curriculum at secondary level has to be designed based on the socio-cognitive/socio-cultural theories and genre-based writing approach, which are the grounding principles of the CLT approach. The objectives of the curriculum need also to be reviewed and mapped out with communicative-based writing tasks in the course book and workbook. The teacher's guidebook has to be modified accordingly

with the emphasis on CLT and with a more detailed structure of conducting writing classes based on student-centred classroom settings.

Ensuring the alignment between the curriculum documents including the course book and workbook with CLT features is also crucial and needs to be considered in these modifications. Integrating these CLT principles in the writing curriculum will lead to effective CLT implementation in the reflected writing tasks and in the design of the instructional approach, which subsequently affects the instructional implementation towards student-centred learning. Ensuring full alignment between the EFL writing curriculum documents including the EFL writing course book and workbook with the grounding principles of the CLT writing instructional approaches, along with educating teachers in CLT classroom practices, will result in better learner-centred teaching of English in Yemen and, crucially, lead to students having an increased competency at English throughout out their education, including attending university.

With regard to the types of writing tasks reflected in the EFL writing secondary curriculum, the findings of this study revealed that the EFL textbook and the EFL workbook documents focus mainly on narrative tasks, with less attention granted to expository tasks. From this perspective, the overemphasis on narrative tasks in the EFL curriculum and in real-life teaching practice may hinder Yemeni students in performing well in writing tasks when they enter higher education. This is important to students' learning as in order to comprehend expository texts, students needs to have encountered them in their learning previously (Williams & Pao, 2011).

To assist secondary students, especially in the latter stages of secondary education, move beyond simply describing experiences, events or facts in writing and begin acquiring a more critical and analytical perspective, the importance of the curriculum is crucial, thus it should be planned and designed well to suit the learning context and outcomes desired by the Ministry of Education. Curriculum designers have to be fully aware of and involved in the processes involved in planning and designing the curriculum. If the Yemeni secondary EFL writing curriculum continues to omit expository tasks from its scope, this will result in students repeatedly being underprepared linguistically upon commencing university study due to the crucial part writing exercises of this nature play in fully educating students in the English language.

In relation to cognitive demand, the findings drawn from the EFL textbook and the EFL workbook documents also demonstrated that high cognitive demand skills such as analysing and evaluating are not sufficiently represented. This is an example of an issue surrounding learning to write in English that has resulted in Yemeni EFL students at secondary level remaining ignorant of basic processes in English writing. As they enter tertiary education, the difficulties associated with writing continue to exist and this often leads to increased frustration, as they are unable to cope with academic writing at this level. In the context of higher education, learners need to be trained more specifically with the skills of analysing, applying and synthesising information, all of which are required for completing essays, analysing case studies, or performing academic research. The implication of these findings is that at the design level the EFL workbook and EFL textbook fails to address higher-level cognitive demand skills. This might also be one of the underlying reasons why secondary students cannot perform well at EFL writing at

secondary level, which further affects their writing performance at university level. As a result, the writing curriculum currently used in secondary schools should be modified in order to focus more on tasks that require a high level of cognitive demand.

The evidence from English writing classroom instruction made manifest that the primary emphasis in classrooms is placed on low-level cognitive demand writing skills. This suggested that teachers might not be aware of the need to prepare students at secondary level with the high cognitive demand thinking skills for academic writing at university level. The findings of the classroom observation in this study indicated that teachers still mainly focus on teacher-centred instructional strategies, while there is a lack of using contemporary, student-focused instructional approaches. As mentioned above, the predominant instructional strategies used by teachers in the EFL writing classroom are based on a teacher-centred model in which the role of teacher is as director rather than facilitator.

Mohammed (2012) has posited that the teaching style of EFL teachers in Yemen aggrandises grammar translation (a mode of instruction cogent with the structuralism theory of SLA) at the expense of other aspects of linguistics, a statement supported by the findings of this study from classroom observation. These teaching practices are not in alignment with contemporary recommended CLT instructional approaches. Furthermore, results of classroom observation showed that expository writing skills and high cognitive demands skills are given less emphasis in the preparation of secondary students in learning to write in English. One reason for this relates to the curriculum, as the results of the study showed, and another reason relates to the training of secondary teachers who can lack the professional

training from the central government education agency that would fully train them in delivering EFL programmes of work (Al-Ahdal, 2010). Fostering students' higher cognitive demand skills is considered a vital education goal (Zohar & Dori, 2003), as the students need to be able to process multifarious texts using various levels of cognitive demand to understand differing genres (Xu, 2011). The lack of effective English teaching practice is one reason behind the difficulties students face in acquiring English language skills in an EFL context (Mourtaga, 2006). Therefore, it is highly recommended that EFL secondary teachers receive training in order to go beyond the traditional teaching and learning strategies toward contemporary communicative instructional approaches.

In order for students to be sufficiently prepared for EFL writing at higher education level, EFL writing instruction at secondary level should focus more on writing tasks that require high cognitive demand. In order to be able to fully manipulate expository texts in a university setting, Yemeni students need to have been directed in the structure and format of informational writing during their secondary education (Goldman & Rakestraw, 2000). Therefore, for the effective preparation of secondary students in EFL writing, it is important that the EFL writing curriculum as well as EFL writing instruction appropriately incorporate writing tasks of all categories of cognitive demand, but with significant emphasis on high cognitive demand writing tasks so that students will be fully equipped for higher education learning.

Henceforth, considering the proposed recommendations by the Ministry of Education, curriculum designers, and EFL Writing teachers will ensure that EFL learners overcome the challenges of learning EFL writing and become successful

learners with the ability to create a cogent, flowing segment of extended text, communicate professionally with instructors and peers, and develop the competency required for analysing and synthesising information for professional communication, academic performance, and achievement and success in higher education.

## **5.7 STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH**

This research had several major strengths. First, the theoretical underpinnings used in line with the research objectives and settings. This thesis adapted an analytical framework for the evaluation of the secondary curriculum – in particular, the writing curriculum based on the model of Richards & Rodgers (2001) and Sidek (2010). The framework includes defined steps, namely: Investigating the SLA theories and instructional approaches reflected in the secondary EFL writing curriculum; investigating the L2 writing approaches and instructional approaches, the learner roles, the teacher roles, the types of writing tasks, and analysing the cognitive demand of writing tasks within the secondary EFL writing curriculum. Proposing clearly defined steps for the evaluation process of the curriculum supported with relevant theoretical discussion will assist educational institutions, curriculum designers, and educators in their efforts to develop the EFL writing curriculum for secondary schools, as well as to promote effective teaching and learning strategies that equip students with the writing skills needed at higher education level.

Second, that the respondents were familiar with the context and nature of the research was a strength of this study. Voluntary participants were selected based on their satisfaction of specific criteria to ensure that each member of the sample group possessed a good level of expertise in English language learning. The diversity of the

sample group with different level of expertise across a number of schools ensured that the data collected was as rich, meaningful, and relevant as possible.

Third, the research design of this study was a strength as it used a theoretically supported framework as well as multi-methods. Using multi-method helped the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of EFL writing in the Yemeni EFL context. The study incorporated curriculum evaluation, which is an essential process in teaching and learning to investigate whether a curriculum is fulfilling its purpose and whether students are actually learning (DiFlorio et al., 1989). Evaluating the curriculum by examining the related underlying theories and instructional approaches of language acquisition was essential and presented useful insights on how well the curriculum prepares secondary students for writing at higher levels of education. In addition, classroom observation, the foremost method for gathering data regarding teaching (McGreal, 1983; Roberson, 1998; Wajnryb, 1992) was also used to explore teaching and learning aspects related to the communicative approach of the curriculum and the preparation characteristics for higher educational levels. Data from classroom observation helped in observing the actual practices of the teachers in real life EFL writing classroom instruction. Such methodological triangulation can improve a study's validity (Yin, 2009). Overall, using multi-method helped to make the research findings more comprehensive, complementary, and valid.

Fourth, a strength of this research is that the process of the investigation was clearly operationalised and documented, and the results were clearly reported. The study phases, related methods, and expected outcomes were first identified. In addition, case study protocol including the data collection, analysing, and validation

process was developed and sent to the schools and relevant authorities to describe the roadmap of the study and their involvement in the data collection process so they could be clear of the study objectives, procedures, and relevant tasks. With classroom observation, prior to conducting the classroom observations a set of steps with related procedures and forms were identified to guide the observation process including getting permission, developing classroom observation sheets, and carrying out the sampling and data collection. Having a classroom observation protocol helped to keep the researcher organised, whilst providing a useful way of coordinating an observation (Creswell, 2011). This helped to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings (Yin, 2009) and made the transformation between the study phases and research objectives transparent, logically linked and connected.

While the research has reached its aims with a number of theoretical and practical contributions as well as the number of strengths discussed above, there were some limitations that should be acknowledged as reported in chapter 1 (section 1.10).

## **5.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the research findings, recommendations for future include:

1. Future research could employ multiple-case studies. Collecting data from a broader number of schools in Yemen would lead to increased insight and better understanding of EFL acquisition in a Yemeni EFL context.
2. Further research could investigate the same proposed research questions in another similar EFL context. Replicating the case study protocol and

supporting procedures and forms in another similar EFL context would provide vital insight into EFL writing acquisition in different settings; thus, the results of comparable studies showing the similarities and differences would contribute to the overall improvement of English language teaching and learning in different educational settings.

3. This study focused on analysing only the EFL writing curriculum and instruction in the last grade of Yemeni secondary schools, as the researchers deemed this to be the crucial year of education prior to higher education. Therefore, further studies are recommended to analyse the EFL writing curriculum for grades 10, 11, and 12, of Yemeni secondary education. Expanding the scope of the research to incorporate grades 10 and 11 would maximise the potential revisions to the secondary curriculum necessary for educating students in English to the requisite University standard.
4. The current study examined EFL writing instruction using classroom observations with reference to SLA theories and writing instructional approaches, teacher role, learner role, types of writing tasks, and cognitive demand level. However further studies are recommended to undertake additional classroom observation in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of EFL writing instruction at secondary level in Yemen. In addition, conducting interviews with EFL secondary school teachers is recommended with the aim of gauging teachers' awareness of and interest in contemporary teaching methodology. Conducting these interviews will best ensure whether teachers are equipped to deliver EFL teaching in a different format.

5. The results of this study showed a misalignment with the proposed objectives of the secondary curriculum as a communicative curriculum. The findings presented evidence from EFL curriculum document evaluation as well as EFL writing instruction. Therefore, purposeful and manageable policies for curriculum evaluation including a number of performance evaluation indicators should be stated, announced, and conducted frequently to ensure high quality teaching and learning of English language, with the additional aim of continuous improvement of English language acquisition skills. Local experts who are familiar with the context need to be involved at all the stages of curriculum evaluation and development.
6. Further research could propose additional factors and procedures to be integrated into the analytical framework used in this study for further reaching evaluations of the curriculum alignment to the proposed theoretical underpinnings, as well as for the preparation process of students at one education level advancing to the next. Considering other factors relating specifically to context could provide ancillary possibilities for future research.