

Factors Underlying Difficulties Saudi Undergraduate Male Students Encountered in Writing Traditional Argument Essays: A Case Study of Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University

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Abstract

This case study attempted to investigate the factors underlying the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing traditional, argument essays for a core, writing course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. Using the purposive sampling technique and structured interviews to collect the data, the researcher interviewed PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male, students who took the course. Data saturation was achieved as a result of thirteen interviews. Then applying data-driven coding (open coding), MAXQDA 2020 was utilized to analyze the data. The analysis resulted in five factors responsible for the students' writing difficulties. They were as follows: the instructor's ineffective teaching style, the instructor's negative attitude toward the students, the students' insufficient writing competencies, the students' negative attitude toward writing, and the textbook difficulties.

Keywords: case study, traditional argument essays, core writing course, purposive sampling, data-driven coding

1. Introduction

Writing well is a demanding, intellectual process involving different activities that require focus, intellectual perseverance, discipline, and critical thinking. Explaining this demanding nature of writing, Zinsser (2001) stated, "Good writers know that very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time or the fifth time" (p. xi). According to Grami (2010, p. 9, as cited in Al Badi, 2015, p. 65), "Writing could be a difficult skill to be learned or taught due to the fact that it is not a simple cognitive activity; rather, it is believed to be a complex mental production which requires careful thought, discipline and concentration."

At college levels, good writing constitutes a major requirement for academic success. According to Rai and Lillis (2012, as cited in Mudawi & Mousa, 2015, p. 2), "Effective academic writing is vital to success in higher education and professional life beyond the university." Addressing college students, Arlov claimed, "In any field, those who stand out are usually good writers. They write clearly, they state their ideas completely, and they don't embarrass themselves with poor grammar or misspelled words" (2010, p. xvi). Griffiths (2016, as cited in Anh, 2019, p. 75) took the significance of good writing to an even a higher level of importance in modern life. He argued, "Especially, in the current period of modern technology development, the exchange of information is largely done on the keyboard, making it essential for people to be able to communicate coherently and effectively in writing."

Today, English writing for academic purposes at college levels, however, represents a considerable challenge for even native speakers, let alone non-native speakers who are learning this skill for the same purpose. EFL/ESL instructors in tertiary levels and below noticed the various difficulties their students encountered in mastering the craft of academic writing. Their observation led to continuous research that aimed at the identification of the types of difficulties that this population of students encountered in English writing.

A considerable quantity of research in this area was conducted on Saudi students' academic writing problems. It shed light on various areas of weaknesses in their writing. Vocabulary, spelling, grammar, word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure problems were repeatedly highlighted in different research studies. As Alhaisoni (2012) indicated, "The majority of [Saudi] students have difficulty with writing composition" (p.1). This observation was also supported by Al-Khairi (2013) who stated, "Saudi English-major undergraduates are very weak in writing skills and commit lots of errors in their academic writings and are usually engaged in sentence-level" (p 1). Peter (2008, p. 3), in addition, observed, "Differences in genre are one reason to explain why writing in English is so difficult for speakers of other languages including Saudi students." Similarly, Ankawi (2020) stated, "Saudi students face difficulties in English, especially academic writing" (p. 129). Thus, the need for the investigation of the factors underlying Saudi EFL/ESL writing difficulties is imperative. The current study, as a result, attempted to investigate this issue from the perspective of PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

As indicated earlier, good writing constitutes a milestone in academic success. Research on EFL/ESL students' academic writing, however,

revealed numerous difficulties these students encountered in this type of writing. An intensively researched EFL/ESL college student population was the Saudi. Research showed that, like all other EFL/ESL students, Saudi college students encountered various writing difficulties. Alanazi (2017), for example, identified many grammatical weaknesses in their writing, such as verb tense, articles, the be-verb, the auxiliary verb do, and conjugation. AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) identified difficulties in sentence structure, unity, development, coherence, point of view, and spelling. Ahmed, in addition, spotted punctuation and “wrong [word] choice errors” (2016, p. 14). Besides sentence structure problems, Mudawi and Mousa claimed that these students experienced difficulties with word order (2015). Another difficulty reflected in their writing was poor vocabulary (Alharbi, 2019) as well as the lack of revision (Alhaisoni, 2012). While the existing body of research focused exclusively on the identification of the difficulties Saudi EFL/ESL students encountered in writing, the problem that remained unexplored was the identification of the factors underlying these students’ writing difficulties.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors underlying the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing traditional, argument essays for a core, course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018.

1.3 Research Question

The question that this study attempted to answer was the following: What were the factors underlying the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing traditional, argument essays for a core writing course (COMM 1311) that they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018?

1.4 The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study should be looked at from four perspectives. First, it was the first to investigate this issue from the perspective of PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male, students. Second, its outcomes are beneficial to different PMU shareholders: the Core Curriculum Department’s leadership, the course instructors, and the course students. Third, the implications of the results could be transferrable to similar Saudi students who take the same course or its counterpart at any other Saudi university. Finally, the outcomes should be beneficial to the EFL/ESL research community.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The investigation of problems in EFL/ESL students’ writing captured the interest of researchers in different parts of the world. This section, however, focuses on the difficulties that research uncovered in the writing of Saudi college students. Problematic aspects that researchers were able to identify in this population’s writing included the following: grammar, word choice, vocabulary, revision, punctuation, sentence structure, and word order, as well as spelling.

2.2 Grammatical Difficulties

In his analytical descriptive approach, Ahmed (2016) found that this population had grammatical, lexical, spelling, and punctuation problems. His findings were supported by Nuruzzaman and Shuchi (2018). In one study, these researchers expressed their interest in the investigation of the errors in the writing of 90 undergraduate Saudi, male students. These students were taking a foundation English course at the English Language Center in the College of Languages and Translation at King Khalid University. They found that grammatical errors were among the other writing problems the students had. Similarly, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) conducted a study at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University on common paragraph writing errors committed by Saudi EFL students at preparatory levels. They found that grammatical difficulties were among the problems their subjects encountered. According to them, 41.15% of these students’ errors were grammatical.

Nuruzzaman, Islam, and Shuchi (2018) conducted a qualitative study on common errors in the writing of Saudi non-English major undergraduates at different proficiency levels. Their findings revealed that these students’ recurrent errors were grammatical. Likewise, Sawalmeh (2013) investigated the errors in a corpus of 32 essays written by 32 Saudi learners of English who were students in the preparatory year program at the University of Ha’il. The results showed these students committed common errors ten of which were grammatical. These types of grammatical errors included verb tense, subject-verb agreement, pronouns, prepositions, articles, double negation, and sentence fragments.

Javid and Farooq (2013) conducted a comprehensive study on Saudi students’ writing. Their investigation was concerned with this population’s academic writing problems as well as gender-based writing errors. The study included 194 Saudi EFL learners (108 males and 86 females). Their findings came in full agreement with previous studies that indicated Saudi students’ serious problems in academic writing. In addition to their failure to use appropriate lexical items and organize ideas, these Saudi EFL learners had different problems with grammatical nature: verb tense, articles, prepositions, and irregular verbs. Further, Alfaqiri (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the difficulties Saudi, male students experienced in academic writing. His sample included 114 student participants. Their English proficiency levels were from “beginners to Ph.D. students” (p.7). He found that these students encountered difficulties in the process of writing. With the exception of this grammatical challenge, Alfaqiri didn’t specify the other kinds of difficulties his participants experienced.

2.3 Word Choice Difficulties

Writing as a genre of communication depends heavily on the element of the word and its usage. As a result, writers need to be extremely

careful in choosing and using their written words so that they can deliver their messages both accurately and successfully. Because of the significant role that the issue of word choice plays in writing, researchers dedicated a lot of effort to investigating its effect on communication. A huge number of studies were conducted in the area of EFL/ESL writing. However, little research was conducted on the Saudi, EFL/ESL students' writing. The following is a review of what research had revealed about these EFL/ESL students' writing difficulties. In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016), for example, reported that his subjects committed 72 lexical errors. According to him, 40 of these errors were related to "wrong [word] choice" (p. 14).

2.4 Vocabulary Difficulties

Alharbi (2019) conducted a study investigating the difficulties faced by Saudi students who were learning English as a foreign language at the undergraduate level. According to him, students' weak writing skills were the result of poor knowledge of grammar rules and poor vocabulary background. He claimed that these students' weaknesses were also due to ineffective teaching pedagogy. He also argued that students writing weaknesses should be diagnosed first; then syllabi should be designed according to the analysis results of such diagnosis. Alharbi, in addition, suggested that students be given many writing courses each of which should concentrate on only one aspect of writing, such as mechanics, vocabulary, organization, and content. Alfaqiri, however, attributed learners' weak vocabulary background to a social factor, namely "lack of close contact between students and the primary users of the language" (2018, p. 4).

2.5 Revision Difficulties

In the analysis of 80 paragraphs written by EFL Saudi students, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) identified 28% coherence errors. These errors resulted from the students' illogical organization of thoughts. They were also due to a lack of connecting adverbs/adverbials, such as transitions.

2.6 Punctuation Difficulties

In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016) reported that 12% of his study's subjects had punctuation problems: using the wrong punctuation marks and failing to use necessary punctuation marks. More specifically, 39.5% of the punctuation errors were classified as using the wrong punctuation mark, 37.5% as omitting punctuation marks, and 23% as inserting unnecessary punctuation marks. These students' punctuation problems were also confirmed by the EFL instructors in the same department. When these instructors conducted structured interviews with their students for the same study, they found that 90% of their students had problems with English punctuation. Also, AlTameemy and Daradkeh found that in the 80 paragraphs their students wrote, the punctuation errors were 255, which constituted 16.14% of the total number of all types of errors. The researchers, however, didn't specify the type of punctuation mistakes their subjects committed.

2.7 Sentence Structure and Word Order Difficulties

Mudawi and Mousa (2015) carried an analytical descriptive study of the writing of Saudi students at the College of Education in Zulfi. They used two tools to collect their samples: a questionnaire and an experimental task. Their questionnaire sample included 20 teachers from the English department and graduate students for the written task. Their objective was to identify the writing difficulties these students encountered and to suggest suitable solutions. Their findings revealed students' difficulties with sentence structure. Also, besides the different grammatical errors he spotted in his previously mentioned quantitative study, Sawalmeh (2013) found his Saudi student participants had problems with word order. According to him, these errors were a result of the influence of the students' first language—Arabic.

2.8 Spelling Difficulties

In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016) reported that the number of spelling errors was 222, constituting 27% of the total errors committed by his subjects. He classified these spelling errors into the following categories: omission of letters, insertion of letters, wrong choice of letters, the spelling of two words as a single word, single words spelled as two words, double letters, and missing or overuse of capital letters.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized the case study design. According to Kumar (2005), "The case study method is an approach to studying a social phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case. The case may be a person, group, episode, process, community, society or any other unit of social life" (p. 113). The case study design was used for this study because it allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of the population of the study. Accordingly, it is the most appropriate qualitative design to use in this case (Creswell, 2019). Case studies, in addition, have many advantages that suit the objective of this study. Some of these advantages are as follows: (1) they are drawn from people's experiences and practices and thus represent reality, (2) they provide data from which further analysis can be made, and (3) their data can be used as archives for further research studies (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2010).

3.2 Case Study

In reference to a case study as a qualitative design, Kumar (2005) argued,

[It] provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of the many specific details often overlooked by other methods. This approach

rests on the assumption that the case being studied is typical of cases of a certain type so that, through intensive analysis, generalizations may be made that will be applicable to other cases of the same type. (p. 113)

The word ontology is used to refer to researchers' belief about the nature of reality, whether such a reality is contextual-free or influenced by its context. Epistemology, on the other hand, refers to the researcher's relationship with the phenomenon under the study, which could be objective or subjective (Killam, 2013). The former relationship adopts the positivist approach, which views reality as only one. The latter, nevertheless, identifies with the relativist approach, which argues that reality can have different forms. Since methodology refers to the way the researcher decides to discover the reality underlying the phenomenon of the study, and since I believed the reality that I intended to explore was contextual and had multi-forms, I adopted the case study design as a methodology for discovering the truth.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

This study used the purposive sampling technique. The sample included 13 PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students who took the core writing course COMM 1311 in the fall of 2017/2018. As a result, they wrote traditional argument essays as one of the course's requirements. The objective of choosing these students was to conduct a structured interview with each of them to collect the data needed for the study.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique used in this study was structured interviews with PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students who were chosen based on the purposive sampling. The purpose of the interviews was to collect the data needed for the identification of the factors underlying the difficulties the course students experienced in writing the traditional, argument essays. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, all the interviews were virtually conducted via Zoom. Each interview took 35 – 45 minutes. The interview questions were divided into three categories: (1) questions about the students' engagement in the course, (2) questions about the course instructors' role, and (3) questions about the course textbook. The entire interview questions are available in Appendix A. In addition to keeping audio recordings of the interviews on my Zoom account, I recorded all of them on my iPhone.

3.5 Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect the required data for the study was an interview schedule (Kumar, 2005). According to Blaxter et al., "The interview method involves questioning or discussing issues with people. It can be a very useful technique for collecting data which would likely not be accessible using [other] techniques such as observation or questionnaires" (2010, p. 193). Some of the reasons for choosing the structured interviews were as follows. First, the questions used in this type of an interview are planned and written before the interview takes place so that they will help generate the data needed to achieve the purpose of the study. Second, they make the interviewees comfortable and certain that they will not forget any question. Third, because the interview questions are written, the interviewers will be able to ask all of them in the same logical order. Finally, the interviewers can email them to the interviewee so that the latter will prepare for the interviews and provide their best answers (Blaxter et al.; 2010, Kumar, 2005).

3.6 Participants

The participants in this study were Saudi, undergraduate, male students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, which is located in Al Khobar, Eastern Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They were full-time, unmarried students. They were between 19 – 22 years old, and they came from different Saudi cities and towns, such as Al Khobar, Al Dammam, Al Qassim, Al Jubail, Abqaiq, Al Qatif, and Al Riyadh. Also, they had different majors: engineering, business, human resource management, accounting, finance, computer sciences, IT, management information systems, and law. All of them were Arabic, native speakers who learned English as a foreign language. Around 90% of them spent between one to three semesters studying English as a foreign language at PMU Preparatory Program, where they took intensive courses in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. They also took two courses in study skills.

3.7 Data Collection

The data used for this study were collected using purposive sampling that included 13 PMU, Saudi, undergraduate, male students. Due to COVID-19, interviews were conducted via Zoom. The time at which each interview took place was decided according to each interviewee's convenience. The interview questions were sent to each interviewee via the email and WhatsApp so that they could prepare their best answers. (Blaxter et al., 2010). The interviewees were encouraged to (1) review the lessons and assignments they took in that course, (2) review the essays they wrote for the course, along with their instructors' comments, and (3) take notes that would be helpful to them in answering the interview questions (Creswell, 2019). The style of questions used for the interviews was open-ended. The interviews were conducted with participants until the data collected from them had reached saturation.

At the beginning of each interview, I welcomed and thanked the interviewee for participating in the study. Then I started with two icebreaking questions, such as: How is your day going? The objective of these questions was to make the interviewees comfortable. Next, I requested the interviewee to set his phone on "Don't Disturb" mode. This was meant to block possible incoming calls which, if not controlled, would've distracted both of us and would've badly affected the quantity and quality of the data each interview was expected to generate. Subsequently, I reminded the interviewee of the topic of the study, its objectives, and encouraged him to be outspoken and objective. In addition, I reminded each interviewee that I would audio record the entire interview and transcribe it for analysis. I also assured him that no one would have access to the interviews' data.

After setting my iPhone and Zoom on the recording mode, I started each interview. During the interviews, I wrote important observation

notes that I thought could be helpful in the data analysis. Examples of such notes were participants' efforts to remember issues and feelings of frustration. I also sometimes took notes immediately at the end of each interview (Blaxter et al, 2010). Sub-questions were also posed to each interviewee to generate more important information from him (Creswell, 2019). I applied different strategies to make the interviewees interested in the continuation of the interviews and provide me with more data. Examples of such strategies were the use of verbal cues, such as "I see," "OK," and "Yah." At the end of each interview, which took around 35 – 45 minutes, I asked each interviewee for permission to quote him in the report, if a situation called for quotations. I also assured him that his name wouldn't be mentioned in the study. Finally, I thanked him. I also created another copy of each recorded interview and saved it in a folder carrying the interviewee's initials. Then I saved it in my Dropbox, in a separate folder called "The Interviews."

4. Data Analysis and Results

The objective of this section is to identify the factors underlying the students' writing difficulties. The thirteen interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Office 365. Words of this Microsoft Office version includes a feature enabling users to convert recorded speeches into transcripts. Transcripts produced this way, however, include many words and expressions that are different from those that the speakers utter. This problem results from similarities in the pronunciation of some English words and expressions, such as "right" and "write," "there" and "their," as well as "see" and "sea." Such problems occur even in the transcriptions of English native speakers' speeches. When transcribing non-native speakers' speeches, therefore, more of these problems occur. Accordingly, each of my 13 transcripts included plenty of errors that took a lot of hours to correct. By the time I finished correcting each transcript, I discovered that I had listened to its recording between three to four times. Having corrected all the transcripts, I started reading them again and again. Specifically, I read each transcript three times.

My first reading of each transcript was quick. Its objective was to become familiar with the text. The objective of the second reading, however, was to highlight important data that I thought could be helpful in the analysis. The third reading, nevertheless, was meant to identify and highlight relevant data that were overlooked in the second reading. Subsequently, I uploaded all the interviews' transcripts into MAXQDA 2020, which is a software program designed for computer-assisted data analysis. Whereas MAXQDA helps organize the process of qualitative data analysis, it does not analyze the data.

Each of the transcripts was uploaded as a document carrying the interviewee's initials. For coding, I used "data-driven coding" (Gibbs, 2018, p. 61), which is also called open coding. I continued the coding process as follows. First, for coding consistency and accuracy, I treated each question and its answer as a separate segment in each interview transcript. Second, I read and coded all the interviewees' answers to the same interview question before proceeding to the subsequent questions and their answers. I applied the same procedure for coding the entire interviewees' answers, until all the transcripts were fully and carefully coded. Meantime, within MAXQDA program, I kept writing notes about each code I developed. These notes were meant to indicate the meaning of each code and the concept it represented so that I would remember the situations to which it should be applied as I was coding the transcripts.

After finishing the first round of reading and coding, I repeated the same process to identify the uncoded data that could be coded to the same variety of codes I had already generated. Having ended this round, I went back again to check and verify that the data I had coded were "consistent with the code name[s] and description[s]" (Gibbs, 2018, p. 65). Next, I started another round of reading the objective of which was to identify the uncoded data so that I could assign them new different codes. I also verified that I had accurately explained the new codes' names in new notes for coding accuracy and consistency. At the end of this phase of data analysis, I went back again to check all the coded segments to make sure I was consistent with the application of all the codes I had created. With the assistance of my notes, I discovered some lack of consistency among the huge number of codes; accordingly, I eliminated the issue of inconsistency by renaming them correctly.

Subsequently, I identified similarities among the codes, so I coloured each similar group of codes with the same color. Then I listed each group of similar codes under a new category. This led to the generation of 32 categories from which I created five themes. The first theme included seven categories. The second included six. The third had ten. The fourth consisted of five, and the fifth included four. Specifically, the interview data analysis resulted in the following themes: (1) the instructor's ineffective teaching style, (2) the instructor's negative attitude, (3) the students' insufficient writing competencies, (4) the students' negative attitude toward writing, and (5) the course textbook's difficulties.

Table 4.1. shows the five themes and subthemes resulting from the analysis of interview data

Themes and Subthemes	Occurrence
1 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style	78
1.1 Lack of Model Essays	10
1.2 Use of Model Paragraphs	11
1.3 Ineffective Explanation	11
1.4 Lack of Collaborative Learning	16
1.5 Failure to Teach Grammar	11
1.6 Failure to Teach Punctuation	9
1.7 Failure to Provide Writing Websites	12
2 Instructor's Negative Attitude	49
2.1 Failure to Provide Feedback	19
2.2 Being Discouraging	20
2.3 Lacking Belief in Students' Abilities	13
2.4 Lacking Interest in Students' Learning	20
2.5 Poor Communication	20
2.6 Being Strict	15
3 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies	55
3.1 Topic Nature	17
3.2 Being Concise and Precise	6
3.3 Expressing Ideas	8
3.4 Revising and Proofreading	6
3.5 Outline Writing	9
3.6 Thesis Statement Writing	7
3.7 Vocabulary Challenges	13
3.8 Time Limit	20
3.9 Grammatical Challenges	7
3.10 Punctuation Difficulties	6
3.10.1 Commas	1
4 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing	27
4.1 Lack of Brainstorming	7
4.2 Writing Without Outline	13
4.3 Lack of Seeking Feedback	15
4.4 Lack of Using Writing Websites	6
4.5 Lack of Revision	6
5 Textbook Difficulties	25
5.1 Native Speakers' Level	12
5.2 Model Essays' Style	16
5.3 Model Essay Topics	8
5.4 Vocabulary	10

5. Discussion

As already mentioned, the investigation of the factors underlying the difficulties that PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students experienced in writing the traditional argument essays resulted in the identification of five factors: (1) the instructor's ineffective teaching style, (2) the instructor's negative attitude, (3) the students' insufficient writing competencies, (4) the students' negative attitude towards writing and (5) the course textbook difficulties. Each of these factors is discussed below.

5.1 The Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style

The data analysis showed that the students were unhappy with their instructor's teaching style. The analysis revealed eight aspects pertinent to the instructor's ineffective teaching style. This finding was in line with Ankawi (2020) who claimed that writing strategies were not taught in the Saudi curriculum. One aspect of the instructor's ineffective teaching style was the failure to provide the students with model essays representing the writing genres they were expected to learn and produce. At all levels of education, one crucial element in effective teaching is providing learners with examples that help achieve the lessons' objectives. Textbooks at all levels of education, therefore, teem with examples whose objectives are to help teachers achieve the objectives of their lessons and to aid the students to fulfil the lessons' learning outcomes. Suffiana and Rahmanb (2010) reported, "examples play an important role where the teacher uses certain examples to explain" (p. 313). According to the participants, instead of providing and explaining a whole essay representing each writing genre, some instructors used only a single model paragraph to show the students how to write each type of essay. One student stated, "*We didn't have model essays. We had only paragraphs as examples*" (KL, Pos. 66). In an angry, interrogative, disapproving tone another participant said, "*I cannot write an essay based on a sample paragraph with seven or eight sentences*" (FL, Pos. 22).

Another aspect of the instructor’s ineffective teaching style that emerged from the data analysis was ineffective explanations. Effective explanation of essay writing may require the usage of different teaching strategies. Such strategies include breaking the essay down into paragraphs and showing the students the role of each paragraph in the development of the whole essay. One more aspect of the ineffective teaching style was the instructor’s failure to engage learners in collaborative learning. A highly effective teaching strategy today is the engagement of students in collaborative learning. This style of teaching promotes the value of diversity and helps extract the best of it. Collaborative learning, in addition, improves the learners’ communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking skills. It also enhances their intellectual courage, open-mindedness, and sense of community. Collaborative learning, above all, leads to a better quality of learning and a high quality of task achievement. Further, it is the best strategy the instructors may utilize to help their students develop PMU six competencies. These competencies are communication, critical thinking and problem solving, leadership, professional development, teamwork, and technical competencies.

The nature of the writing skill itself, in fact, requires the involvement of learners in different group activities. Such group activities could be used, for example, in the stage of learning how to write each type of essay. With the instructor’s leadership and help, the students in this phase may discuss the nature of the writing genre (e.g., descriptive, cause/effect, and argumentative), its structure, and objective. The students in this stage can collaboratively break down the model essay into its major elements and analyze each of them. This procedure helps realize the role of each element in the development of the whole essay. In his answer to a question about whether the course instructor put the students in groups to discuss model essays or any other writing activities, one participant stated, “During the class in groups, no... no. in groups no, never no” (IM, Pos. 69-70).

Another aspect of the instructor’s ineffective teaching style was failure to teach grammar and failure to engage the students in grammatical exercises. In reference to this issue, one participant stated, “I mean he, like, he didn’t give us like a grammar lesson he gave us like advice on the grammar” (KD, Pos. 46). Obviously, one essential element in good writing is strong grammar skills. Without such skills, students’ writing will be ineffective, even if it involves high levels of critical thinking. More specifically, lack of strong grammar skills results in the students’ failure to write different types of sentence structures, which are at the core of good writing (Strunk & White, 1979; Arlov, 2010).

The data analysis revealed another aspect of the instructor’s ineffective teaching style: failure to teach punctuation. The role of punctuation in writing is similar to that of traffic signs in driving. As traffic signs help motorists drive safely and arrive at their destinations easily, strong punctuation skills assist writers to express their ideas accurately so that their audience would understand their messages clearly. A writer, for instance, might be in a situation that allows him/her to use the comma, the dash, or the colon. The writer’s intended goal determines the best choice he/she makes in such a situation. Writers, therefore, need to be well informed about the rules governing the usage of different punctuation marks and the various occasions that call for each so that they can employ them correctly to deliver their messages not only successfully but also efficiently. Moore (2016) argued that “punctuation functions to divide written discourse into manageable units” (p. 23).

Also, the data analysis revealed that the course instructors did not provide their students with writing websites that they could refer to for help. Today, specialized websites play crucial roles in all fields of education. Writing instructors should, therefore, provide their students with writing websites that are known for their good quality and availability of students’ needs in simplified explanations. They should also involve their students in using such websites in class and at home to do exercises and to access information pertinent to their writing courses.

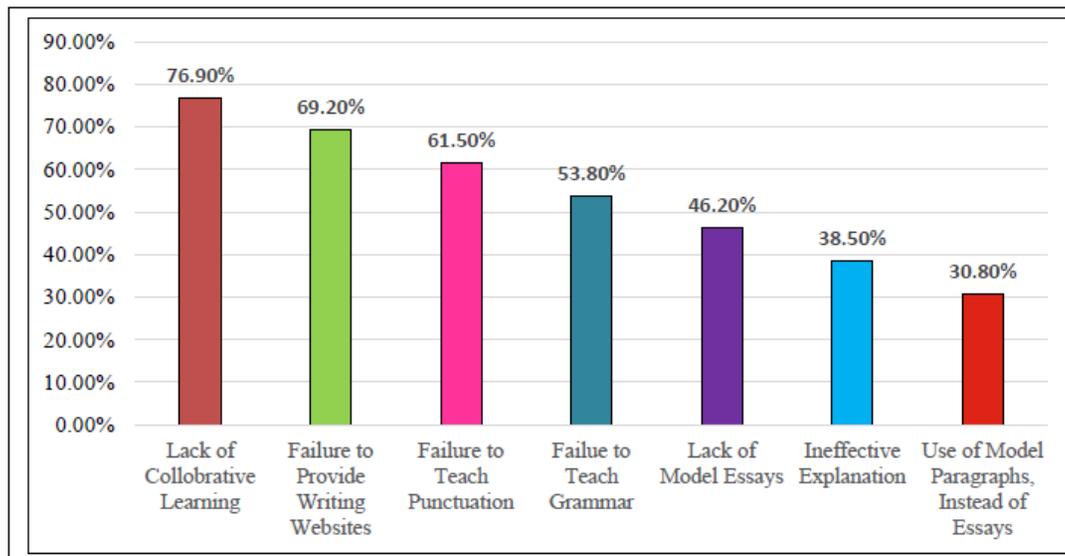


Figure 1. shows from the students’ perspective, the characteristics of the instructor’s ineffective teaching style

5.2 The Instructor's Negative Attitude

In addition to the instructor's ineffective teaching style, the analysis showed that students' writing difficulties were a result of the course instructor's negative attitude. This negative attitude was found to have several types. The first type of the instructor's negative attitude was failure to provide learners with feedback. According to Brown, (2001), "Giving feedback in the process of writing is important to improve students' writing quality" (Wahyuni, 2017, p. 40). In reference to his writing instructor, one participant stated, "*He says grammar is different than writing, and we should come prepared for the course you should have known the grammar before you came to the course. So, uhh, he never gave us any feedback about grammar*" (AD, Pos. 34).

Learning to write well requires that learners regularly receive feedback on their writing. The writing instructor's provision of clear and constructive feedback constitutes a major factor in the improvement of learners' writing skills. Without receiving feedback on their writing difficulties and without receiving suggestions on how to avoid such problems, students will not realize their writing shortcomings. The same writing problems, as a result, will recur in their different writing assignments. According to Wirantaka (2019), "Written feedback in academic writing is an essential factor that enables teacher and students to interact with each other to improve students' writing" (p. 1). Students would feel frustrated and even cheated when their writing instructors return their essays to them without feedback, but with only scores on them. Such a negative attitude, in addition, would create a sense of apathy in the students who would consequently start to treat their writing tasks with minimum levels of care, an issue that would, of course, contribute to a lack of improvement in their writing skills.

It seems that some writing instructors avoid giving feedback to their students for different reasons. One of these reasons could be the instructor's lack of reading the students' essays. Such irresponsible behavior, if it exists, could be owing to the instructor's avoidance of the demanding nature of reading EFL/ESL students' essays for evaluation and feedback, for the majority of these students' writing include a lot of mistakes of different nature. Another possible reason for instructors' lack of providing feedback to their students could be their being overwhelmed by the huge number of students in their writing classes, a matter that requires them to spend considerable amounts of time to read and write various types of feedback.

The second type of instructor's negative attitude was being discouraging. One of the characteristics of discouraging teachers is their assumption that what they had already taught should have been learned. Such teachers, as a result, feel annoyed when their students approach them for explanations of issues they taught. They assume such students were not paying attention when they explained the lesson. Thus, they think the best way to deal with such students is to ignore them or to give them embarrassing answers, such as "Your question reflects that you were not paying attention when I explained this issue." Another characteristic of discouraging instructors is lack of empathy. Such instructors assume that students have sufficient background to understand new lessons. As a result, they feel they are not responsible for explaining what the students failed to learn from courses they had already taken.

The third type of instructors' negative attitude was lack of interest in the students' learning. Dedicated teachers take teaching as both a profession and a mission. When teachers have interest in students' learning and growth, they enjoy helping them. They also feel that the best reward they receive is seeing that their students are learning and growing. Having common ground with their students represents a pivotal motivator for dedicated teachers to help their students build the future they dream of. The instructor's lack of interest in the students' learning, however, could be a result of taking teaching as a profession because it was their last resort. The instructors' negative attitude, in addition, could be resulting from their personality. It could also be a result of a lack of serious teacher evaluation by the students and the department.

Instructors' lack of interest in the students' learning creates a bad relationship with them and makes them resentful. If the teaching profession is evacuated of its ethics, it will breed nothing but the failure of many: the students, the instructors, the educational institutions, and the community. When students are committed to their own education, and when they are aware of both their rights and the instructor's duty toward them, apathetic instructors will modify their negative attitudes and will raise to the level of their students' expectations. In other words, such a mature student's attitude transforms into a clear message that their indifferent instructors would hear and understand, even without being written or verbally pronounced.

The fourth aspect of the instructors' negative attitude was poor communication. This finding is consistent with that of Khan, Khan, Zia-Ul-Islam, and Khan (2017) who stated, "Teacher with poor communication skills may cause the failure of students to learn and promote their academics" (p. 18). One participant expressed his unhappiness with his instructor, saying, "*He weren't really explaining why is this wrong, which I think you should do to make sure students understand why they had problems*" (MD, Pos. 20). Morreale, Judy, and Pearson (2000, as cited in Khan et al., 2017, p. 18) argued, "Teacher with poor communication skills may cause failure of students to learn and promote their academics."

The fifth type of instructor's negative attitude was being strict. From students' perspective, strict teachers are rigid, have a single teaching approach, and have no room for humor. They are also considered boring, impatient, and mean. Strict teachers trigger anxiety and create unpleasant learning environments. Further, they make learners unhappy entering the classrooms, and they destroy the joy that the students

are expected to derive from learning. They also ruin creativity in the students, for freedom functions as a womb in which ingenuity is born.

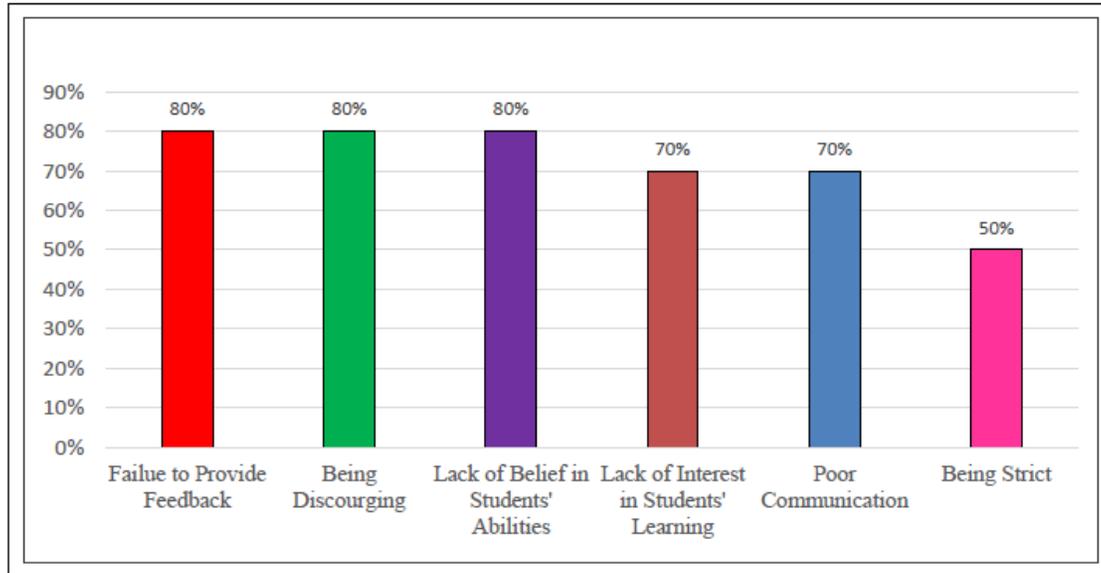


Figure 2. shows, from the students' point of view, the different aspects of the course instructor's negative attitude

5.3 The Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies

In addition to the instructor's ineffective teaching style and negative attitude, the students' writing difficulties resulted from their poor writing competencies. First, the nature of each essay topics represented a major difficulty for them. Having a general idea about a topic, for example, plays a fundamental role in understanding an article about it. Likewise, being familiar with a topic aids writers to write well about it. When writers have no clue about a topic, however, their writing task on it becomes difficult. In this case, such writers need to access various sources of information on that topic. Then they need to engage in different, demanding cognitive activities to prepare themselves for the writing process. Such activities include reading, analyzing, annotating, and notetaking. Similarly, when students have little or no idea about the essay topic, and when they have a limited amount of time for writing, they won't be able to reflect their actual writing competencies in their essays. Also, going through such a challenging experience exposes them to high levels of anxiety that encumbers their ability to engage in the activities that the writing process requires, such as planning, decision-making, composing, evaluating, revising, and editing. EFL/ESL students who recurrently encounter this situation are likely to experience harmful psychological feelings that would gradually condition them to associate writing activities with stress and anxiety. Writing instructors should, therefore, make sure their students are familiar with each writing topic and have the desire to write about it.

Second, the ability to write concisely and precisely was another difficulty the students experienced in writing argument essays. Writing precisely and concisely is not a gift. It's a skill that earnest writers gradually develop. It not only requires language mastery; it also demands a high level of critical thinking. Books written by good writers and published by credible publishers still include lots of texts that need to be rewritten to rid them of verbosity. Hence, for EFL/ESL students to write concisely and precisely, they should be given considerable amounts of time. They should also receive a lot of training and feedback on their writing. Suggestions to help EFL/ESL students to write concisely and precisely are as follows: (1) staying focused (2) avoiding the use of expletive structures, (3) avoiding cliches, (4) using shorter transitions, (5) avoiding the use of unnecessary qualifiers, and (6) replacing phrases with single words (Arlov, 2010).

Third, students' difficulty to express ideas accurately represented another aspect of their writing incompetence. This EFL/ESL students' incompetence could be owing to a limited vocabulary background (Alharbi, 2019; Alfaqiri, 2018). It could also be a result of insufficient exposure to the target language. EFL/EFL learners who encounter difficulties expressing themselves should be involved in consistent reading activities. They should also spend substantial amounts of time listening to native speakers talking about a variety of topics. Such exposure—if sufficient and consistent—will gradually improve their vocabulary and grammar skills. It will, accordingly, improve their competence in expressing themselves in spoken and written English. Another strategy that EFL/ESL students may adopt to build their vocabulary is to memorize the meanings of new words and their derivations, such as their verb, adverb, adjective, and noun forms. For instance, if a student encounters the word “beautiful” for the first time, he/she should learn its meaning. Then he/she should memorize its verb, adverb, and noun forms—namely, “beautify,” “beautifully,” and “beauty.” Subsequently, he/she should practice using all of them in full sentences.

Further, the difficulty to write good thesis statements for the traditional essay represented another writing incompetence of these students. Writing a correct, clear thesis statement for the traditional essay wouldn't be a difficult task if the students can write English sentences

correctly. The only special issue about this specific thesis statement is that it requires the inclusion of the essay’s three main ideas, which are supposed to be parallel. Usually, students have a problem including these three main ideas in the thesis statement. This problem could be a result of two possible reasons. The first is that they don’t have the skill to express the three main ideas in a parallel form, for producing parallel structures requires adequate vocabulary background and strong grammar skills. The second is probably the students’ failure to remember the requirement of stating the main ideas in their thesis statements.

One more student’s writing incompetence was poor grammar skills. This finding is consistent with Morgan, (2018) and Ahmed (2016). Strong grammar skills represent a major requirement in good writing. The quality of EFL/ESL students’ grammar skills is the responsibility of both the teachers and the students. English grammar lessons are usually unpopular not only among non-native English language students but also among native-speaking ones.

Also, poor punctuation skills represented another writing incompetence of these students. This finding is supported by Ahmed (2016) and by Al Tameemy and Daradkeh (2019). Having strong punctuation skills aid writers to communicate their messages effectively. Generally, students’ punctuation problems could be attributed to four major factors: the instructor’s failure to make their students aware of the significance of punctuation in writing, failure to teach them this skill, failure to provide them with sufficient training in the use of the different punctuation marks, and failure to provide them with feedback on their punctuation problems. The students, on the other hand, are even more responsible for their poor punctuation skills, for today they have access to many sources that they could utilize to improve their punctuation skills. For instance, they have the writing textbooks, the teachers, and the Internet. Today, the Web, for example, teems with credible writing websites that provide plenty of punctuation lessons and exercises.

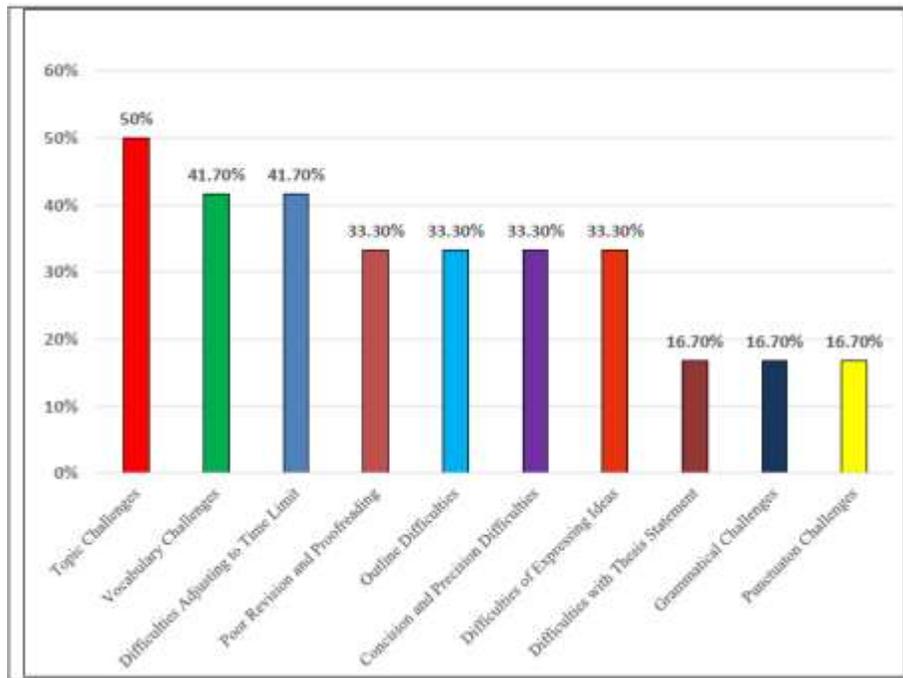


Figure 3. shows the students’ insufficient writing competencies

5.4 Students’ Negative Attitude Toward Writing

The students’ negative attitude toward writing constituted the fourth factor underlying their writing difficulties. This finding was consistent with that of Hashemiana and Heidari (2016) who reported, “There was a relationship between positive attitude and the writing skill” (p. 476). This negative attitude reflected in the students’ various bad writing habits. Such bad habits included a lack of brainstorming, writing without essay outlines, lack of seeking feedback, lack of using writing websites, and lack of revising. First, the lack of brainstorming reflected the students’ negative attitude toward writing. For example, when I asked a participant whether he would start his essay-writing process with brainstorming activities, he answered, “I think I just started writing. I would start writing and then I would just organize the paper based on what I had wrote. I did not brainstorm” (AN, Pos. 5-6). Brainstorming at the beginning of the writing process is a major step to explore, discover, and generate ideas. Magosoudi, Bahonar, and Haririan (2013) defined brainstorming as “a technique used to encourage individuals to generate ideas and come up with a list of possible solutions to a certain problem” (p. 60). To become productive at this stage, writers should have open-mindedness, and they should let every idea have a place on their brainstorming sheets or computer screens. That is, being judgmental in this stage is counterproductive, and it should, therefore, be avoided altogether (Osborn Brainstorming Technique, 1939). Also, writers may involve others, such as family members and friends, in the generation of ideas. If these suggestions are observed, the average person can produce more ideas than if he/she brainstorms individually (Magosoudi, Bahonar, & Haririan, 2013). Because brainstorming is a learned skill, writers’ ability to become productive when engaged in it depends on their experience, the strategies they

use, and their attitude toward it. EFL/ESL instructors should, therefore, encourage their students to put more effort into it.

Second, students' lack of developing essay outlines was the second aspect of their negative attitude towards writing. Asking one participant, I said, "OK, but did you write an outline?" He answered, "No" (MY, Pos. 26). Writing an outline could be challenging for many writers who do not have a clear mental picture of what their final product would look like. Starting with an outline is usually a habit of disciplined writers who consider it a fundamental component in their writing process. Arabic-speaking EFL/ESL students usually do not learn at school how to write outlines for their Arabic essays. Thus, their Arabic essay first drafts were not based on outlines. This habit probably affected their attitude toward the creation of outlines for their English essays. Also, since most of the students in this study had problems with brainstorming, they couldn't write outlines for their essays, and those who tried encountered difficulties writing well-developed outlines. One of the participants expressed the difficulty he encountered in writing outlines saying, "Another challenge was managing outlines, which was difficult for me. The challenge was how to gather all of my thoughts in a single page. And I have to summarize the main points. Just that's why I did not know how to write. It was a challenging for me" (FL, Pos. 4).

Students should, therefore, be encouraged in developing essay outlines based on sufficient brainstormed material. Because writing an outline requires involvement in different levels of brainstorming, many EFL/ESL students write essays without specific plans. They prefer finding their way through while writing the actual texts. Since the students of this study were given very limited amounts of time to write their essays, they probably decided to skip developing outlines to save time. EFL/ESL instructors should, therefore, provide their students with enough amounts of time to write their essays. At the same time, they should make the development of outlines a major requirement in the essay-writing process. They should also adopt the writing-process approach, instead of the final-draft approach. More precisely, instead of checking only the students' final drafts, instructors should grade the whole writing process, which includes brainstorming, outlining, first-draft writing, revising, editing, proofreading, and final-draft writing.

The third aspect of the students' negative attitude toward writing that contributed to their writing difficulties was failure to seek feedback on their essays before submitting them for grading. Responding to my question about whether he gave his essays to someone other than the course instructor for feedback, one participant answered saying, "If any other I know I would not show anyone else, I would just show my professor before the due date. I would show him this is what I have so please give me some feedback and I'll make some adjustments before submission, but not to anybody else" (AN, Pos. 31-32). The acquisition of good writing skills requires learners to seek feedback from different people who are good at writing. EFL/ESL students should, therefore, be encouraged to seek feedback on their essays from, at least, one person other than the course instructor. Also, writing instructors should provide their students with a checklist specifying the main elements that their essays should include, such as the thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting sentences, and supporting details. Further, they should provide the students with a list of common writing mistakes that EFL/ESL students usually have in their essays, so that they can avoid them. Peer editing is another helpful strategy that EFL/ESL writing instructors should involve their students in as a final step in their essay-writing process.

Finally, another aspect of the students' negative attitude toward writing was failure to revise their essays before submitting them for grading. This finding is in line with Alhaisoni (2012) and Daradkeh (2019). In reference to his essay writing process, one participant stated, "I... I usually do it just once" (MY, Pos. 28). The objective of the revision is to ensure that the writer has communicated his/her thoughts in the best manner possible. Students, however, may skip this important step due to a lack of perseverance. Thus, revision should be a requirement in which students check their first drafts for structure, content, flow, coherence, and cohesion. To check the existence of these elements and to improve their quality, students need to spend considerable amounts of time and effort. Also, since their objective of taking a writing course is to learn and earn important writing skills, students should adopt a good attitude towards it.

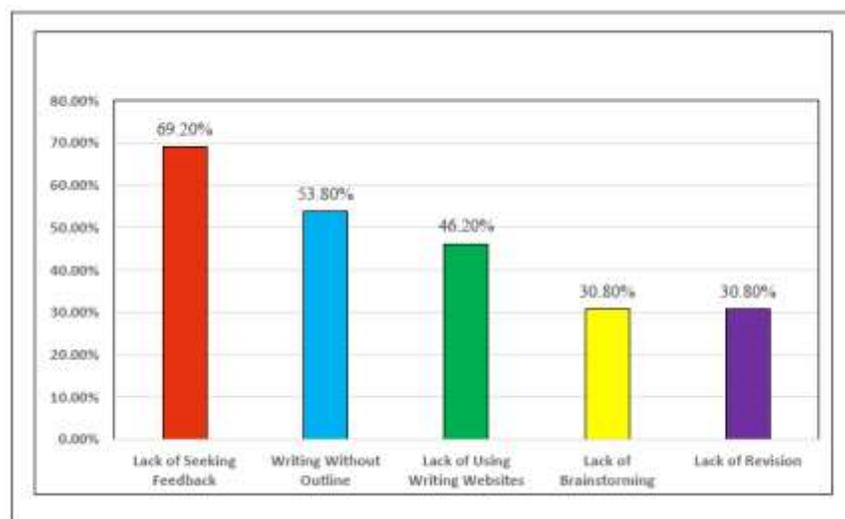


Figure 4. shows the different aspects of the students' negative attitude toward writing

5.5 Textbook's Difficulties

Textbooks play a vital role in teaching and learning. Selecting the right one for a course is, therefore, fundamental to the success of the course instructor and the students. Accordingly, when selecting textbooks for EFL/ESL students, those in charge should consider three issues: the course objectives, the student's culture, and their English level. When the textbook's language level is higher than the students', however, the achievement of the course objectives will be jeopardized. The students, in addition, will not only fail to benefit from the course, but they will also encounter harmful psychological experiences, such as frustration, stress, fear, and anxiety. Their self-esteem, as a result, will be damaged.

The data analysis showed that the participants perceived the course textbook as too hard, and it was written for native speakers at the college level. One participant stated, "I think the book is too difficult for the students. It's native speakers' level" (FL, Pos. 64). Another participant expressed his opinion on this textbook saying, "I think it was difficult. When I tried to read the essays, I am gonna write about, I think to understand the type of essay, the vocabulary they were using, plus the style of writing ... it is really confusing" (MH, Pos. 118). This level of the textbook's difficulty was signified by the nature of the topics of its model essays and the style in which they were written. The textbook was originally written for American college students registered in Eng. 101. It included plenty of material that addressed American cultural issues. Some of its topics would not only fail to connect with EFL/ESL students, but they would also alienate native speakers who are not American. In other words, the issue of cultural bias occupied considerable space in it. As one participant put it, "I would like to add that when I read the model essays for the essay, that we were assigned to, I did not find them helpful. In fact, I think I was more confused when I read them" (HN, Pos. 75). The textbook, in addition, was full of idioms and clichés the meanings of which were difficult for non-native speakers. Further, the words used in different lessons, especially those in the model essays, were hard. This difficulty was reported by different participants, such as the following who stated, "It was full of really difficult vocabulary words" (SN, Pos. 80). Another participant pointed to the same issue saying, "I mean it felt sometimes like I mean the words are difficult" (HN, Pos. 72).

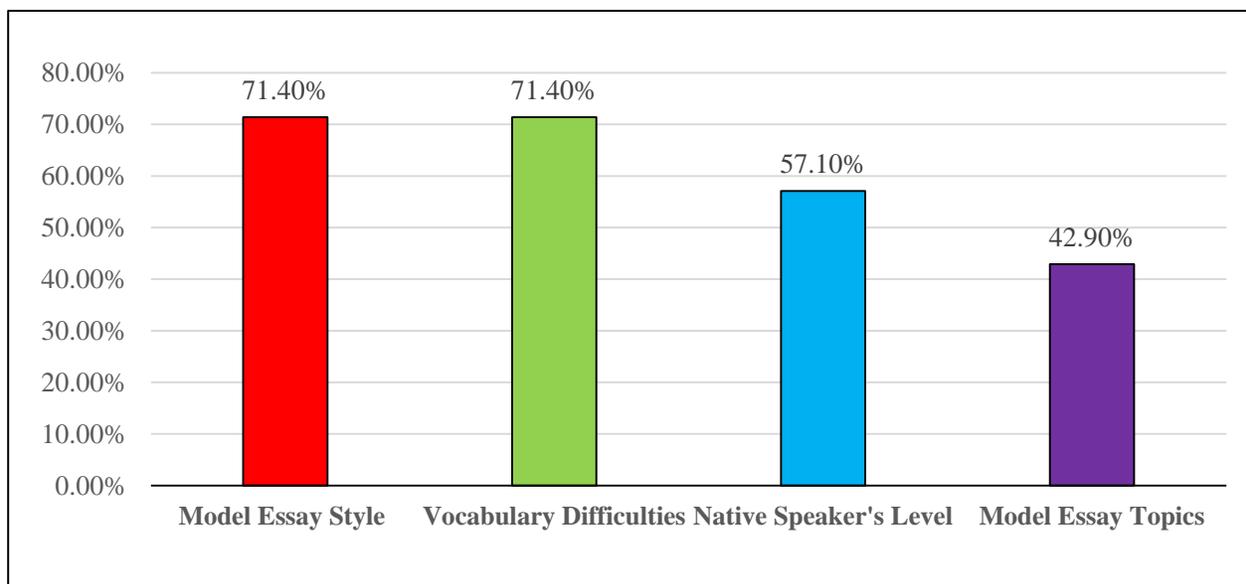


Figure 5. shows, from the participants' perspective, the textbook's aspects of difficulties

6. Conclusion

The investigation of EFL/ESL students' writing difficulties received a lot of researchers' attention. Their studies involved students of different cultures, such as Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Karena, Pakistani, Turkish, and Middle Eastern. A predominant Middle Eastern EFL/ESL student population that has been a recurrent subject of this investigation was the Saudi male and female college students. Researchers conducted a plethora of studies on them to find out the writing difficulties they encountered. The investigation of the factors underlying these students' writing difficulties, however, didn't receive the attention it requires. This study, as a result, explored the factors underlying the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing the traditional argument essay for a core, writing course they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. The investigation revealed five factors—specifically, the instructor's ineffective teaching style, the instructor's negative attitude, the students' insufficient writing competencies, the students' negative attitude towards writing, and the course textbook's difficulties.

6.1 Limitations

As previously mentioned, the data required to discover the factors that led to the students' writing difficulties were generated from structured interviews with thirteen students who took the core course COMM 1311. Thus, the data collected from these interviews could have students' bias, and if so, the findings might be inaccurate for the following reasons. First, the student interviewees might have withheld information

damaging to their images and/or egos. Second, students who didn't do well in that course and those who had bad experiences with the course instructors might have developed negative attitudes toward them. And if they had, their negative attitudes might have been reflected in the data they provided in the interviews. Accordingly, such data would have led to inaccurate findings about the course instructors. Further, the period between the semester in which the interviewees took the course and the time in which they were interviewed might have affected their ability to remember important details.

6.2 Practical Implications of the Study

The findings of this study should motivate the leadership of PMU Core Curriculum Department to work closely with the course instructors to find effective solutions to their students' writing problems. Specifically, the course instructors, in particular, should explore more effective pedagogies and teaching styles that engage their students more earnestly and motivate them to achieve the course's learning objectives. Further, the course instructors should adopt a positive attitude toward their students so that the latter would trust them and become more motivated to approach them when they need help. Also, the Core Curriculum Department's leadership should work closely with the Preparatory Program's leadership to ensure that the students who graduate from that program have fully acquired the competencies required to take Written Communication (COMM 1311). Moreover, both of these leaders should create awareness in their students about the significance of writing in their academic and professional success. They should also use effective strategies to help their students adopt a positive attitude toward writing. Finally, the Core Curriculum Department's leadership and the course instructors should come up with a textbook that matches the students' English level.

6.3 Future Research

Since this study looked at the underlying reasons for the students' writing problems from the students' point of view, future studies should investigate this issue from the course instructors' perspective. Also, because the ontology used in this study was constructivism, it is recommended that future studies approach this problem from the positivist, ontological point of view.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

A. Questions about the Students

1. Describe your toward writing in general when you registered in COMM 1311.
2. Why?
3. What was your attitude toward COMM 1311?
4. Why?
5. What writing difficulties did you encounter when you were taking COMM 1311?
6. What were your reasons for the writing difficulties you encountered in that course?
7. What did you do to overcome your writing difficulties?
8. Describe the effort—if any—you put into learning about writing in general?
9. How much effort and time did you put on each writing assignment before submitting it? Why?
10. Do you think you could've put more effort on your writing assignments?
11. If the student's answer is yes, then I should ask him, "Why do you think so?"
12. If the student's answer is no, then I should ask him, "Why didn't you put such more effort?"
13. Did you use to procrastinate concerning your writing assignments? Why?
14. How often did give your essays to someone else for constructive and instructive feedback? Why/Why not?

B. Questions about the Instructor

1. How effective was your teacher in teaching writing and what made you think so?
2. How knowledgeable do you think your teacher was about writing?
3. Tell me why you think so?
4. Was he challenging to the students?
5. Why do you think so?
6. How passionate was the teacher about the course?
7. How did you know?
8. Was he interested in the students and keen to make them learn to write well?
9. How do you know?
10. How motivating was he to you?
11. What did he do to motivate you/ what did he fail to do to motivate to improve your writing skills?
12. In your opinion, do you think your teacher was well prepared for each lesson?
13. What made you think so?
14. Did he begin each class explaining the lesson's objectives and its learning outcomes?
15. What is the significance of this in your opinion? Do you really care? Why?
16. Do you think the instructor believed in the students' ability to learn to write well?
17. What did he do/didn't do that makes you feel so?
18. Did the teacher give you feedback on each assignment?
19. Describe the quantity and quality of feedback you received from your teacher concerning each writing assignment.
20. If the interviewee says the instructor didn't give students feedback, I will ask him whether he asked his instructor for feedback.
21. If the interviewee claims that his instructor gave him feedback, I will ask him to explain how he benefited from the teacher's feedback.
22. How encouraging was the teacher to concerning asking questions during the class?

23. How encouraging was he to students to visit him in his office if they need help?
24. Was he interested in listening to the students in that class and what made you think so?
25. Did the teacher provided you with any writing websites to help you learn about writing?
26. If the answer is yes, how did you use them and for which writing activities?
27. How often did the teacher give collaborative activities in the class?
28. How helpful were collaborative activities to you?

C. Questions about the Course Textbook

1. Explain your own opinion about the course subject matter?
2. Did you receive the textbook for this course at the beginning of the semester?
2. In what ways was the textbook helpful to you in learning the course subject matter?
3. Would you describe some activities you used the textbook for?
4. What difficulties did you experience using this textbook?
5. Do you think the department should keep the same textbook or it should change it?
6. Why?

Appendix B

Codebook

Interview Data Analysis.mx20

10/21/2021

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1 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style

1.1 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Lack of Model Essays

This code refers to the instructor's failure to provide students with a model essay representing each of the writing genres they were supposed to learn how to produce in the course. Example, "I didn't feel like he cared or like one of the students to be better writer like he was just doing his job and that's it. That's how I felt" (HN, Pos. 45)

1.2 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Use of Model Paragraphs Instead of Full Essays

This code indicates that instead of using a complete (a five-paragraph essay), the course instructor used only a paragraph as a model to show students how to write each genre of essay. Example: Omar: Whenever the teacher taught you a new writing genre, did he come up with a model essay that you read and discuss in groups? AD: A model essay? I'd say no. Paragraphs yes, I think he gave us paragraphs and he would explain on the paragraphs. (AD, Pos. 64-65)

1.3 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Ineffective Explanation

This code refers to the instructor's ineffective way of explanation of the course subject matter. Example: Omar: OK, how effective was the teacher in teaching that course? MH: He was not effective and if a student asked me, I would say. Don't take courses with him. (MH, Pos. 64-65)

1.4 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Lack of Collaborative Learning

This code refers to the instructor's failure to engage students in collaborative activities during class to help them learn from each other as a result of their engagement in teamwork, which is one of the six competencies that PMU intends to equip its students with. Example: Omar: Did he engage you in collaborative class activities? IM: During the class in groups, no... no. in groups no, never no. (IM, Pos. 70-71)

1.5 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Failure to Teach Grammar

This code refers to the teacher's failure to teach students any—or at least survival—grammar skills and/or failure of getting them involved in any grammar exercises. Example: Omar: Did you get any grammar or punctuation lessons in that course? KD: Uh, no grammar or punctuation lessons. (KD, Pos. 44-45)

1.6 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Failure to Teach Punctuation

This code refers to the instructor's failure to teach punctuation. Example: Omar: How about punctuation? KL: We didn't have punctuation lessons. (KL, Pos. 46-47)

1.7 Instructor's Ineffective Teaching Style >> Failure to Provide Writing Websites

This code refers to the instructor's failure to provide students with helpful writing websites and so that they could refer to them for learning and for improving different writing skills. Example: Omar: Did the teacher provide you with writing websites to help you improve your writing skills? HN: Uh, no he did not. (HN, Pos. 66-67)

2 Instructor's Negative Attitude

This code refers to the students' perception of the instructor's negative attitude. When they ask him questions that would help them understand assignments, he would tell them to read the guidelines. According to one participant, "It is always like the read the guideline response or something like that, so it wasn't taking it. I think like they gave up on like the fact that they could get a response or get their feedback like me. I mean I honestly don't think it's going to make a difference whether I asked or not. (HN, Pos. 43) "

2.1 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Failure to Provide Feedback

This code refers to the teacher's failure to provide the students with feedback on their essays. Example: Omar: Did you receive feedback on your essays? AD: Well actually he doesn't give us feedback. He just gives us a grade and based on the grade you look for the mistakes no feedbacks are given. (AD, Pos. 58-59) Another example: Our teacher didn't write feedback, he just handed us grades (SD, Pos. 11). Another No feedback either written or spoken. His feedback was either good or very good or excellent, and I don't consider this feedback. (FL, Pos. 41)

2.2 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Being Discouraging

This code refers to the fact that students perceived the course instructor as discouraging. Example: "He'll take a bad attitude towards us and our standing will not be good. We are afraid of losing points, so therefore I just surrendered." (FL, Pos. 43)

2.3 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Lack of Belief in Students' Abilities

This code refers to the fact that the students' perception was that their instructor did not believe in their ability to learn how to write well. Example: Omar: Did the teacher believe in the students' ability to learn how to write? MH: Not all of them, just the top-scoring students. (MH, Pos. 80-81)

2.4 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Lack of Interest in Students' Learning

This code refers to the fact that the students felt that the teacher wasn't keen that they learn the course subject matter and acquire the writing skills of the course. An example of this is the following: "I didn't feel like he cared or like one of the students to be better writer like he was just doing his job and that's it. That's how I felt"(HU, Pos. 45) Another example: To be honest, to be honest he was not interested at all. For me, and my opinion, just my opinion, he was not interested in students' learning at all. (MH, Pos. 47-48)

2.5 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Poor Communication

This code refers to the instructor's discouraging attitude toward students' communication with him. Example: "The questions weren't clear and whenever you ask him what it means, he always says read the question. When we say we read it, he says read it again. I don't get it". (AH, Pos. 21).

2.6 Instructor's Negative Attitude >> Being Strict

This code refers to the instructor's unwillingness to change his mind concerning his plans and requirements: Example: "He was also a little too strict. Like too strict" (AD, Pos. 29).

3 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies

This code refers to the students' limited competencies that encumbered their ability to write good essays.

3.1 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Topic Challenges

This code refers to difficulties students encountered due to their lack of familiarity with the essay topics. What makes it belong to this theme (students' insufficient writing competencies) is that they have limited knowledge about a huge number of issues. Obviously, the more knowledgeable a writer is about a broad spectrum of issues, the easier for him/her to write about them.

3.2 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Concision and Precision Difficulties

This code refers to the students' limited competence of ability to express ideas precisely and precisely. Such competence could be acquired by lots of reading about different topics and by listening to native speakers speaking about different topics and issues.

3.3 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Difficulties to Express Ideas

This code represents the difficulty that the students encountered in expressing their thoughts in English words, which is a skill that requires a lot of reading and listening to native speakers with the intention of learning.

3.4 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Poor Revision and Proofreading

This code refers to the students' poor competence to revise and proofread their essays before submitting them for grading. Revising and proofreading require commitment, consistency, and perseverance that didn't reflect on the students' quality of writing.

3.5 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Outline Difficulties

This code refers to the difficulties students encountered in developing essay outlines.

3.6 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Thesis Statement Difficulties

This code refers to the difficulties the students encountered with writing essay thesis statements. I called a competence because it requires knowledge, training, planning, revising, editing, and proofreading. Example: "Yeah, that was the hardest part. Like, yeah, that that's the hardest part is the thesis statement (MH, Pos. 13)

3.7 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Vocabulary Challenges

This code refers to the writing challenges the students encountered as a result of their limited vocabulary background. I consider it a competence because it requires lots of reading, listening, memorizing, learning the different meanings of each word, and knowing how to use it in different contexts to express specific thoughts or ideas. Example: "First challenge for me was the lack of vocab" (FL, Pos. 5).

3.8 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Difficulties to Adjust to Time Limit

This code refers to the problems the students encountered in the course as a result of insufficient amount of time that the instructor gave them within which they were supposed to write and submit their essays for grading. This competence requires training and practice that enables writers to meet a writing task in a challenging amount of time, such as in writing essays for IELTS and TOEFL.

3.9 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Grammatical Challenges

This code refers to the grammatical difficulties students encountered in the course.

3.10 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Punctuation Difficulties

This code refers to the students' poor punctuation competencies. Example: "I use less full stops and lots of commas. So that was a problem ... one of the difficulties I faced" (IM, Pos. 11)

3.10.1 Students' Insufficient Writing Competencies >> Punctuation Difficulties >> Commas

This code indicates students' difficulties with using comma. Example: I use less full stops and lots of commas. So that was a problem ... one of the difficulties I faced. (Ibrahim, Pos. 11)

4 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing

This code refers to the students' unhelpful habits (negative attitude) they had that encumbered their abilities to improve their writing skills.

4.1 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing >> Lack of Brainstorming

This code refers to the students' unhelpful writing habit of writing essays without brainstormed material. Example, I just started writing. I would start writing and then I would just organize the paper based on what I had wrote. I did not brainstorm. (AN: 7). Another example: "Well, it doesn't really matter for brainstorming because you don't know the topic" (MH, Pos. 27).

4.2 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing >> Writing Without Outline

This code refers to writing essays without developing outlines for such essays. Writing without an outline reflects the student's negative attitude toward writing, for writing requires writers to go through different steps, each of which leads to a successful writing task. Those who have a negative attitude toward writing usually make a shortcut to accomplish the writing task. Example: "For me, outlining is a waste of time, so the only thing I do is brainstorming for general information" (AD, Pos. 11).

4.3 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing >> Lack of Seeking Feedback

This code refers to students' failure to seek feedback on their essays. Such feedback should have been sought from classmates or from a person other than the course instructor. Also, this person should be someone that the students think is capable of providing them with instructive feedback before submitting their essays for grading.

4.4 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing >> Lack of Using Writing Websites

This code refers to students' failure to use writing websites that can help them improve their writing skills. Referring to writing websites for learning about writing requires learners to use these websites recurrently and read carefully and studiously. Example: Omar: Did you use any website to improve your skills? Muyad: To be honest, no. I don't, I didn't, I didn't use any (MU, Pos. 90-91). Another example: Omar: Did you use any writing websites for that course? MU: I don't think so. (Muhannad, Pos. 78-79)

4.5 Students' Negative Attitude Towards Writing >> Lack of Revision

This code refers to the students' habit of submitting their essays' first draft for grading before revising, editing, or proofreading them. This, of course, reflects, their lack of perseverance and keenness to learn as much as possible from the experience of writing each type of essay. Example: "I write one draft and submit it" (MU, Pos. 16). Another example: "The teacher would ask us to write the first draft and submit it. Yes, in fact, if you write the second draft and he felt that you wrote the second draft and submitted it, he will mark you down" (FL, Pos. 15).

5 Textbook Difficulties

This code refers to the students' opinion about the course textbook.

Textbook was Difficult 

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This code refers to the difficulties the students encountered in learning from the course textbook, for according to them it was a native speaker's level. Example, "I don't think this book is good for beginner writers. And it felt it is more advanced writer. So, it was difficult" (HN, Pos. 69). He also stated, " I tried to use it like to read the essays and stuff it was like really hard to figure out like those supporting sentence like I mean it felt sometimes like I mean the words are difficult. It's hard to understand (HU, Pos. 71)

5.1 Textbook Difficulties >> Native Speakers' Level

This code refers to the fact that the course textbook was written for native speakers who are college students, but it wasn't written for non-native college students.

5.2 Textbook Difficulties >> Model Essays' Style

This code refers to the fact that the model essays in the textbook were way above non-native speakers' English level, for the topics and the way the model essays are written include lots of idioms, expressions, and vocabulary words that the students were unfamiliar with.

5.3 Textbook Difficulties >> Model Essay Topics

This refers to the fact that the topics discussed in the textbook were more suitable for native speakers than for non-native ones.

5.4 Textbook Difficulties >> Vocabulary

This code refers to the fact that the vocabulary in the textbook's model essays and in the other different issues discussed in it, such as grammar and punctuation exercises, are difficult.

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