Difficulties Saudi, Undergraduate, Male Students Encountered in Topic-Sentence Writing and Bloom's Cognitive Competencies They Relate to: A Case Study of (PMU)

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Abstract

This case study attempted to explore the difficulties Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing topic sentences for the traditional, argument essays they wrote for a core writing course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. The data collection technique used for this study was the document review, which included thirty traditional, argument essays. MAXQDA 2020 was utilized for the data analysis. The analysis resulted in five themes of difficulties: lack of precision, lack of concision, lack of orientation, mechanics difficulties, and grammatical difficulties. The writing difficulties in each of the five themes were found to relate to the following cognitive competencies: understanding, analysis, and evaluation. Only the difficulties in lack of orientation and mechanics themes, however, were found to relate to the remembering cognitive competence, whereas the difficulties in lack of concision, mechanics, and grammar themes were found to relate to application.

Keywords: Bloom's Taxonomy, MAXQDA 2020, topic sentence, traditional essays, saturation, lack of orientation

1. Introduction

Good writing in the college levels is 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 in professional life beyond the university." Addressing college writing students to create awareness in them about the significance of writing, 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 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 the college levels, however, constitutes a considerable challenge for even native speakers, let alone non-native ones who are engaged in learning this skill throughout the globe for this purpose. Because of its challenging and demanding nature, writing as an academic skill has been identified as a problem not only for undergraduate students but also for those who are involved in graduate studies (Bailey, 2014). One EFL/ESL student population whose writing skills research recurrently investigated was the Saudi college students. Weaknesses in vocabulary, spelling, grammar, word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure were repeatedly highlighted. Alhaisoni (2012), for instance, stated, "The majority of [Saudi] students have difficulty with writing composition" (p.1). Also, Tahaineh (2010, as cited in Alhaisoni, 2012, p 2) pointed to the Saudi students writing difficulties saying, "EFL [Saudi] students studying in institutions that use English as medium of instruction face severe problems in writing skills, and that factor hinders their academic progress" (Alhaisoni 2012, p 2). 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" (, 2015, p. 15). Similarly, Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) claimed, Saudi EFL/ESL students face a lot of difficulties when writing in English.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing topic sentences for the traditional, argument essays. The study, in addition, intended to identify Bloom's cognitive competencies to which these students' writing difficulties belong.

1.2 Research Questions

The study attempted to answer two questions. First, what were the difficulties that PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing topic sentences for the traditional, argument essays that they wrote in the fall of 2017/2018? Second, which of Bloom's cognitive competencies did these students' writing difficulties relate to?

1.3 The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study has two aspects. First, it is the first to investigate PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students' difficulties in writing topic sentences. Second, it is the first to identify Bloom's cognitive competencies to which these students' writing difficulties belong.

2. The Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The issue of difficulties in Saudi students' English writing has been under empirical investigation for a long time. The investigations highlighted different areas of difficulties: grammar, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence.

2.2 Grammatical Difficulties

In his analytical descriptive approach, Ahmed (2016) found that this population had grammatical, punctuation, lexical, spelling, and punctuation problems. His findings were supported by Nuruzzaman and Shuchi (2018). In one study, these two researchers expressed their interest in the investigation of the writing 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 different writing problems these students had. Similarly, Al Tameemy 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 among the different writing problems their subjects had were grammatical issues. According to them, 41.15% of these students' errors were grammatical.

2.2.1 Word Choice Difficulties

Because of the significant role the issue of word choice plays in writing, research conducted on this subject dedicated a lot of effort investigating the question of word choice in writing and its effects on the quality of communication. Within the field of writing, in fact, a sufficient quantity of studies was conducted in the area of EFL/ESL writing. However, little research was conducted on Saudi English students' writing. Among those who conducted research in this area was Ahmed (2016) who reported that his subjects committed 72 lexical errors. According to him, 40 of these errors were related to "wrong [word] choice" (p. 14). In other words, from 72 lexical errors, the subjects of his study committed 32-word choice errors, such as "He travelled to Makkah to take Omrah" as opposed to "He travelled to Makkah to perform Omrah." Again, although the issue of word choice is extremely important in writing and although Saudi EFL/ESL students encounter serious difficulties in this matter, little research was conducted on it (Mudhi, 2019).

2.2.2 Vocabulary Difficulties

Alharbi (2019) conducted a study investigating the difficulties faced by Saudi students who were learning English as a foreign language in 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. Alfaqiri, however, attributed [learners'] strong and weak vocabulary background to one social factor, namely "a lack of close contact between students and the primary users of the language" (2018, p. 4).

2.2.3 Revision Difficulties

Alhaisoni (2012) conducted a study investigating the strategies that Saudi male students used in revising compositions they wrote in Arabic, their first language (L1), and strategies they used in revising their EFL compositions (L2). He found that his subjects used these writing revision strategies more when they wrote in English than when they wrote in Arabic. In the analysis of 80 paragraphs written by EFL Saudi students, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) identified 28% coherence errors in their study Paragraph Coherence Errors. These errors, according to this study, were committed because of ineffective or illogical organization of the thoughts in paragraphs. They were also due to a lack of using connecting adverbs/adverbials, such as transitions and other signal words.

2.2.4 Punctuation Difficulties

In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016) reported that 12% of his study's subjects had punctuation problems. More specifically, 39.5% of the punctuation errors were specified as using the wrong punctuation mark, 37.5% as omitting punctuation marks, and 23% as inserting unnecessary punctuation marks. Also, AlTameemy and Daradkeh found that in the 80 paragraphs their students wrote, they found that the students committed 255 punctuation errors, which constituted 16.14% of the total errors they spotted.

2.2.5 Sentence Structure and Word Order Difficulties

Mudawi and Mousa (2015) curried an analytical descriptive study of the writing of Saudi students at the College of Education in Zulfi. Their objective was to identify the writing difficulties these students encountered and to suggest suitable solutions. Compared to previous similar studies, their findings were limited in vocabulary and spelling problems as well as difficulties to express themselves in writing. Further, in addition to 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, all these errors were a result of the influence of these students' first language—Arabic.

2.2.6 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. Also, in their previously mentioned study, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) spotted 234 spelling errors which constituted 14.81% of the total mistakes committed by their subjects. Again, the researchers haven't specified the types of spelling mistakes they identified in this study.

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" (p. 113).

3.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used to collect thirty traditional, argument essays written by thirty PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students for a core writing course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique used in this study was the document review. According to Blaxter (2010), "there is no doubt documents are an invaluable methodological tool" (p. 186).

3.4 Instrumentation

Instrumentation refers to the creation of the instrument used in the collection and analysis of the data needed for the study (Creswell, 2019). The instrument used for this study was the document analysis.

3.5 Participants

The participants in this study were thirty PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students who were between 19–22 years old. PMU stands for Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, which is located in Al Khobar, Eastern Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These students were from different Saudi cities, such as Al Khobar, Al Dammam, Al Qassim, and Al Jubail. They majored in engineering, business, human resource management, management, computer sciences, management information system, law, and IT. Also, they were Arabic native speakers. The majority of them spent three semesters learning English as a foreign language at PMU Preparatory Program, where they took intensive courses in listening, speaking, grammar, reading, and writing.

3.6 Data Collection

Thirty traditional, argument essays were collected. PMU Saudi undergraduate, male students wrote these essays as one of the requirements of a core writing course they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. The number of the collected essays was decided as a result of reaching data saturation, which is a stage in data collection and analysis at which the researcher notices that he or she is not obtaining any new significant information (Kumar 2005).

3.7 Document Data Analysis

All the topic sentences were copied and saved in a new file called topic sentences. Then each essay's three topic sentences were separated from the other essays' topic sentences using a horizontal line. Each student's name was substituted by a number to protect the participants' privacy. The analysis' objective was to answers the two following questions:

1. What were the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing topic sentences?
2. What were the cognitive competencies in Bloom's Taxonomy these students' writing difficulties belonged to?

MAXQDA 2020 was used for the document analysis. The analysis was carried out as follows. First, I read each topic sentence twice for familiarity. Second, I started coding each topic sentence using "data-driven coding" (Gibbs, 2016, p. 61). Meantime, I kept writing notes about each code I developed. These notes were meant to indicate each code's meaning and the concept it represented so that I would remember the situations to which it applied. These notes were also meant to help in the report-writing process. After finishing the first round of coding all the topic sentences, I repeated the same process to identify uncoded data that could be coded to the same variety of codes I had generated. Subsequently, I verified that the data I had coded were "consistent with the code name[s] and description[s]" (Gibbs, 2016, p. 65). Then I checked the entire coded data to verify that I was consistent with the application of all the codes. Using my notes, I discovered a lack of consistency among some of the codes; then   I corrected them by recoding. Having done that, each group of similar codes were combined together to create   a category. This led to the generation of twenty-five categories. Then these categories were classified into five themes. The first theme was a result of the combination of three categories. The second included two categories. The third had five. The fourth included six. The fifth included nine.

3.7.1 Bloom's Taxonomy

The revised version of Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) was utilized to decide the cognitive competencies to which the students' writing difficulties belonged. (See appendix A.) The cognitive levels (remembering, knowing, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating) to which the students' writing difficulties belonged were decided based on the definition of each cognitive level and the skills associated

with it. Specifically, if the same writing skill was consistently used incorrectly in one or in more than one topic sentence written by the same participant, such a difficulty was identified as resulting from a lack of remembering and/ or a lack of understanding, depending on the nature of the skill. For example, a recurrent incorrect spelling of the same word was identified as a lack of remembering and a lack of evaluation. More specifically, a spelling mistake was considered to relate to the evaluation cognitive competence because the student failed to utilize the means that were meant to help him in this matter, such as consulting a dictionary or using Word's spelling checker. Also, if the issue of gender bias, for instance, occurred all the time in the same student's topic sentence or topic sentences, such a problem was identified as a lack of understanding. However, if the same writing skill was used correctly and incorrectly in the same topic sentence and/or in the other topic sentences written by the same participant, such a writing difficulty was classified as resulting from either a lack of understanding, a lack of analysis, a lack of application, and/or a lack of evaluation. If the same writing skill was used incorrectly only once, whereas it was used correctly in the same topic sentence/or in the other topic sentences, it was diagnosed as an analysis and evaluation problem. If the writing difficulty was a series of confused structures, it was associated with the understanding, analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies. If the writing difficulty was a lack of precision, it was related to the analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies. If the writing difficulty was an unclear main idea, it was diagnosed to belong to the analysis, evaluation, and creation. If the writing difficulty was identified as "having more than one main idea" in one topic sentence, it was diagnosed to belong to the analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies. If the writing difficulty was categorized as a "word-choice" problem, it was classified into belong to understanding, evaluation, and creation.

4. Results

4.1 Students' Writing Difficulties

The document data analysis resulted in the following five themes of writing difficulties: lack of precision, lack of concision, lack of orientation, mechanics difficulties, and grammatical difficulties.

Table 1. Themes and Categories of the Students' Writing Difficulties

1 A lack of Precision	
1.1 Unclear main idea	4
1.2 Having more than one main idea	7
1.3 Difficulty with word-choice	11
2 A lack of Concision	
2.1 Confused series of structures	8
2.2 Redundancy	11
3 A lack of Orientation	
3.1 Failure to state the essay topic	17
3.2 Irrelevant essay topic	4
3.3 Irrelevant main idea	2
3.4 Difficulty with pronoun point of view	8
3.5 Sexist language	6
4 Mechanics Difficulties	
4.1 Difficulty with capitalization	3
4.2 Difficulty with spelling	6
4.3 Difficulty with punctuation	
4.3.1 Difficulty with comma	15
4.3.2 Difficulty with the hyphen	5
4.3.3 Difficulty with the apostrophe	4
5 Grammatical Difficulties	
5.1 Difficulty with the definite article	6
5.2 Difficulty with the indefinite article	7
5.3 Difficulty with prepositions	11
5.4 Difficulty with subject/verb agreement	5
5.5 Difficulties with referents	7
5.6 Difficulty with verb tense	4
5.7 Difficulty with word order	3
5.8 Difficulty with the possessive case	3
5.9 Difficulty with run-ons	2

4.2 Bloom's Cognitive Competencies to Which the Students' Writing Difficulties Belong

The following examples explain the relationship of each theme of writing difficulties with the cognitive competencies in Bloom's Taxonomy. The explanation is provided in a form of an example for each of the five themes of difficulties previously mentioned.

4.2.1 A lack of Precision

- Example of a student's topic sentence

"In addition to gender equality and ideas swap, men and women compete with each other by their nature and they may feel jealous of each other" (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1).

The writing difficulty in the above topic sentence is "having more than one main idea." This difficulty belongs to the understanding, analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies. According to Konza (2011), "we can see the lower level at the higher level as well. For instance, someone in the analyzing step can also function in remembering, understanding, and applying steps" (Koksal & Ulum, 2018).

4.2.2 A lack of Concision

- Example of a student's topic sentence

"The reasons of why should cell phones be banned while people are driving is because the numbers of deaths are being more and more year by year and that is a main public safety problem" (Essay 15).

The writing difficulty in this topic sentence is "redundancy," which belongs to application, analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies.

4.2.3 A lack of Orientation

- Example of a student's topic sentence

"*College student must not be punished for getting absent because he might get stuck on part time job due to which he misses classes*" *(Essay 22).*

The writing difficulty in this topic sentence is "a lack of orientation" because it represents a gender-bias problem. This difficulty was, therefore, found to belong to the remembering, understanding, application, and analysis cognitive competencies.

4.2.4 Mechanics Difficulties

- Example of a student's topic sentence

The mechanics difficulties identified in this study are spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The following includes an example of each.

     A. Spelling

"Absence's punishment dose not effect only the education quality, and the student's knowledge, it also effects student responsibility as well" (Essay 7).

This writing difficulty is related to the remembering, application, and evaluation cognitive competencies.

     B. Capitalization

"Gender equality means that Men and women should be treated equally and the goal is to achieve equality not only in the workplace but everywhere" (Essay 2).

The writing difficulty in the above topic sentence is related to the following cognitive competencies: remembering, application, and evaluation.

     C. Punctuation

"*Opponents whose work depends on cell phones like businessmen argue that they always have to answer the phone to keep their business running*" *(Essay 18).*

The writing difficulty in the above topic sentence was found to relate to the understanding, application, and evaluation cognitive competencies.

4.2.5. Grammatical Difficulties

- Example of a student's topic sentence

"Furthermore, punishing students for getting absent in class is necessary as they start to promote a culture of laziness" (Essay 24).

One of the different grammatical problems identified in this study was "difficulties with prepositions," as in the example above. This writing difficulty was found to relate to the understanding and evaluation cognitive competencies. Table 2 below shows the number of times the writing difficulties in each theme were found to relate to the cognitive competencies and their percentage. (Refer to "3.7.1 Bloom's Taxonomy" to see how these results were obtained.

Table 2. Frequency of the Writing Difficulties and the Cognitive Competencies they Belong To

Cognitive Competencies	A lack of Precision	A lack of Concision	A lack of Orientation	Mechanics Difficulties	Grammatical Difficulties	Total and Percentages
Create	6	12	27	6	0	51= 11%
Evaluate	13	15	33	34	34	129=29%
Analyze	13	16	33	28	35	125=28%
Apply	0	5	0	15	15	35=8%
Understand	6	5	14	29	16	70=16%
Remember	0	0	19	19	0	38=8%
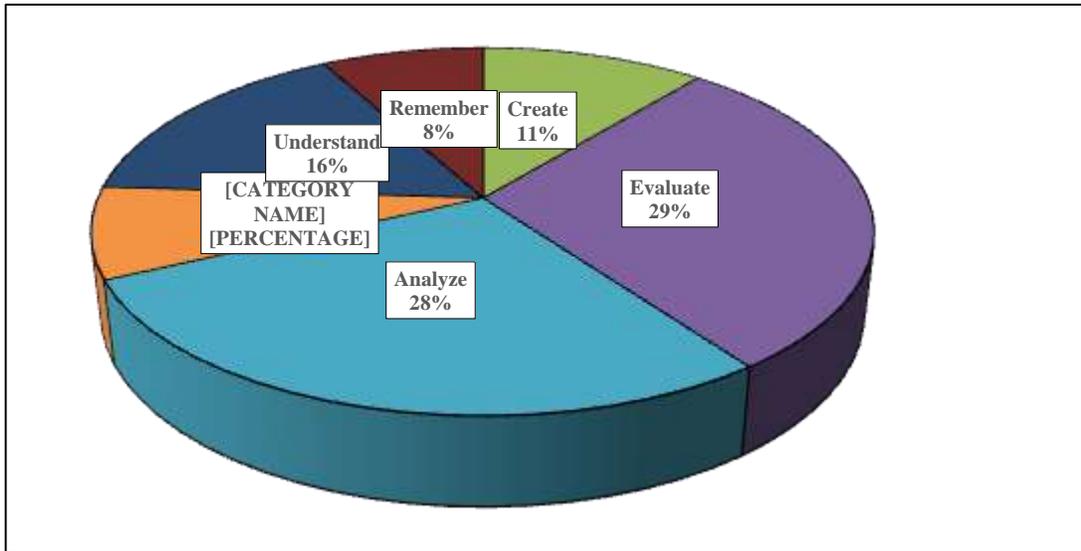
Figure 1. Bloom's Cognitive Competencies to which the Students' Writing difficulties Belong and Their Percentages

5. Discussion

5.1 Lack of Precision

A lack of precision was found to be a result of three factors: unclear main ideas, writing more than one main idea in a topic sentence, and difficulties with word choice. These factors are discussed in the following.

5.1.1 Unclear Main Idea

The analysis of the students' essays revealed that they had encountered difficulties writing clear main ideas. Because of space limitations, this researcher provides only one example of this difficulty—unclear main idea.

The Essay Topic: Why Cell Phones Should be Banned During Driving

Student's Topic Sentence: "*Cell phones should be banned because of social media" (Essay 28).*

The main idea in this topic sentence is unclear because the student did not specify the negative role of social media while driving. Reading the entire paragraph, the researcher found that this student wrote about the danger of using one's cell phone while driving. He focused on drivers' bad habits of using their cell phones to access social media as they are driving and the danger this behavior exposes them and others to. Generally speaking, it seems that the difficulties these students encountered in writing clear main ideas were a result of one or more of the following: a lack of planning, a lack of reviewing, a lack of editing, and a lack of proofreading.

5.1.2 Having More than One Main Idea

The investigation of the ninety topic sentences revealed that the students encountered difficulties observing the rule of writing only one main idea in each topic sentence. The following is one example.

Essay Topic: Why Male and Female Shouldn't Study Together

Student's Topic Sentence: "*I agree with that because maybe if male and female studying together maybe they Will do wrong thing or maybe they meet quickly behind the university leaving the Study going to boy's house or girl's house and doing bad things, and the parents don't Know about anything" (Essay 7).*

This topic sentence has multi main ideas. Readers, as a result, would be confused as which main idea the writer would discuss in the

paragraph. This difficulty could be a result of one of the following: a lack of planning, a lack of understanding that a topic sentence should have only one main idea, a lack of reviewing, proofreading, and editing. Accordingly, it belongs to the understanding, analysis, evaluation, and creation cognitive competencies.

5.1.3 Difficulty with Word Choice

The analysis of the students' topic sentences revealed that they experienced difficulties with the word-choice issue. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Men and Women Should Work Together

The Student's Topic Sentence: *"The second point which emphasizes over the working of men and women together is to increase the self-esteem of women in our society" (Essay 27).*

This student should have used the word "improve" or "enhance," instead of "increase" because increase can be used with quantities, not qualities. In other words, a person may do things that improve his or her self-esteem, enhance it, or raise its level. This finding is in line with Ahmed (2016). From the viewpoint of Bloom's Taxonomy, this difficulty could be related to following. First, if the students knew other more accurate words to use, but they didn't remember them, then these difficulties could be related to remembering. Second, if they used them because they thought they were the right ones, however, then these difficulties could be related to application. Further, they could be related to analysis and evaluation cognitive competencies.
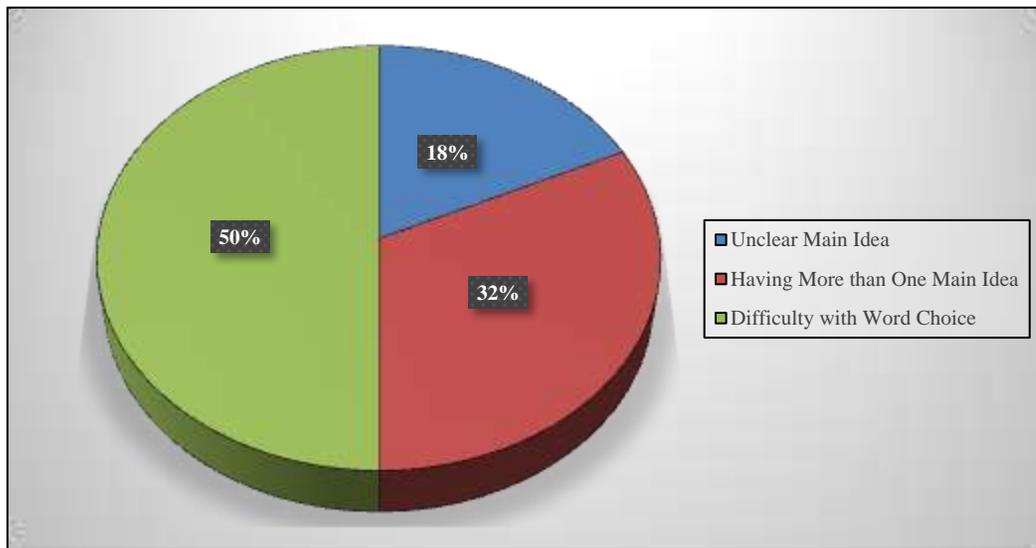

Figure 2. Lack of Precision

5.2 Lack of Concision

A lack of concision was found to be a result of confused series of structures and redundancy. These factors are discussed in the following.

5.2.1 Confused Series of Structures

Confused series of structures refers to writing a series of confused and confusing structures that include confused ideas, incomplete thoughts, word-choice problems, a lack of logical sequencing, and sentence structure problems. The following is an example of a topic sentence with multi-language problems.

The Essay Topic: Why Men and Women Shouldn't Work Together

The Student's Topic Sentence: *"Most of people do not anything about the privacy between the men and women they think both are same but there are different between both first think the women are shy not like the men also the women when they work together they can do whatever they want not same with the men also the women can know what the women customer want" (Essay 25).*

This attempt of a topic-sentence writing is extremely long. It occupies four lines, and it includes four problems: (1) a lack of knowledge that the topic sentence is the most important one in the whole-body paragraph; it should, therefore, be written precisely, concisely, correctly, and clearly, a lack of awareness that long sentences—even if are correct—are strongly inadvisable, (2) a lack of the students' awareness that their writing skills are limited and wouldn't come to their aid to write lengthy sentences, (3) and lack of clear thinking. Using Bloom's Taxonomy, one could conclude that this difficulty belongs to four levels of cognitive competencies: understanding, applying, analyzing, and evaluating. First, if students were taught and trained to avoid such problems, but they did not understand the lessons, then this problem belongs to the understanding cognitive level. Second, if they understand the lessons pertinent to this issue, but they failed to reflect their knowledge on these topic-sentence attempts, then this is an application problem. Third, if they failed to revise, edit, and proofread, then this difficulty belongs to the evaluation cognitive competence.

5.2.2 Redundancy

Redundancy is a writing problem that refers to using more words than necessary to express an idea. The analysis revealed that redundancy was another writing difficulty the students encountered. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Cell Phones Should Be Banned When Driving

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*The reasons of why should cell phones be banned while people are driving is because the numbers of deaths are being more and more year by year and that is a main public safety problem" (Essay 15).*

This student wanted to say, "*Cell phone usage should be banned because it causes a lot of deaths."* This precise sentence achieves the student's goal with almost 200% fewer words. Specifically, his attempted topic sentence included 35 words, whereas it could've been written with only 12 words. Possible reasons for such a writing problem are a lack of revision and a lack of exploration of different ways to express ideas concisely. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, this difficulty belongs to two levels of cognitive competence: application and evaluation.
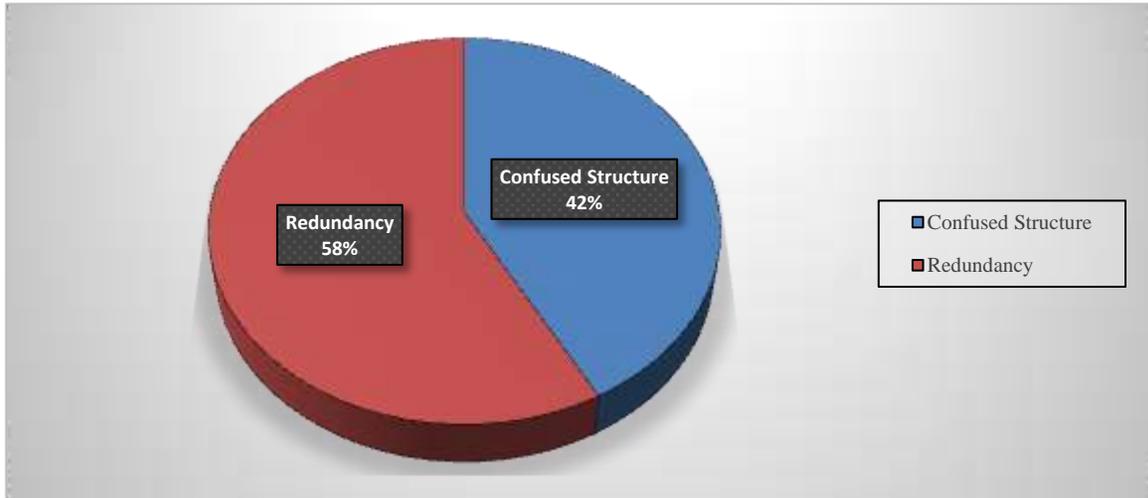

Figure 3. Lack of Concision

5.3 Lack of Orientation

Lack of orientation in this study refers to five writing difficulties: writing a topic sentence without stating the essay's topic, writing about an irrelevant topic, using an irrelevant main idea, using an irrelevant pronoun point of view, and using sexist language. The following discusses each of these difficulties.

5.3.1 Failure to State the Essay's Topic

The significance of mentioning the essay topic in the topic sentence is that it reminds the readers of the topic of the essay (Arlov, 2010). The following is an example of this writing difficulty.

Essay Topic: Why Should Students Be Punished for Absence?

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*The issue of absenteeism is not only the key indicators of low performance but it is also an indicator of diminished social and life achievement" (Essay 9).*

This student failed to mention the essay topic. Mentioning the essay topic is meant to remind the readers of the topic of the essay they are reading. Using Bloom's Taxonomy, one would relate to the understanding, evaluating, and creating cognitive competencies.

5.3.2 Irrelevant Essay Topic

Irrelevant essay topic problem refers to writing a topic sentence whose essay topic was not assigned. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why College Students Shouldn't Be Punished for Absence

Topic Sentence: "*The first reason for why I believe that attendance policy at PMU should be revised is that students have paid for these classes" (Essay 3).*

The reason, "students have paid for these classes," that this student provided as the main idea was irrelevant, for the topic was about whether or not college students should be punished for absence. Also, the issue of not punishing college students for absence was not confined to PMU. It was about all college students, regardless of the universities they attend. Further, it would have been a good idea if the student used PMU as an example of the universities where students should not be punished for absence.

5.3.3 Irrelevant Main Idea

Main ideas that don't relate to the essay topic are called irrelevant. This is another difficulty the students had, such as the following.

Essay Topic: Why Men and Women Should/Not Work Together

Topic Sentence: "*Workplace environment can be a sensitive place to the human beings more than they may seem" (Essay 11).*

The main idea in this topic sentence was irrelevant because the student did not state whether he was for or against the principle of letting men and women work together. Using Bloom's Taxonomy, one could argue that this difficulty relates to the understanding, evaluating, and creating cognitive competencies.

5.3.4 Difficulty with Pronoun Point of View.

It was noticed that for no good reason the students frequently shifted from the third-person point of view to the second-person point of view "you," as in the below example.

The Essay Topic: Why Should English Be the Instruction Language at PMU?

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*The second argument why it is better to study in English at PMU is to improve your English language" (Essay 10).*

This student was expected to write in the third-person point of view. However, he wrote in the second-person point of view—"you." He, obviously, attempted to make a point that having English as the instruction language at PMU benefits all this university's students. He was, therefore, expected to use the third person plural—that is, "to improve the students' English," instead of "to improve your English." This finding is in line with Al Tameemy and Daradkeh, (2019). This difficulty could be a result of failure to understand why and how to avoid the usage of the second person in such situations. It may also be a result of failure to remember the rule that discourages unnecessary use of the second person, singular and plural. Looking at this difficulty through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, one could argue that it relates to remembering, understanding, and evaluating cognitive competencies.

5.3.5 Sexist Language

The analysis revealed that the students had difficulties avoiding sexist language. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Should/not PMU Students be Punished for Absence?

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*College student must not be punished for getting absent because he might get stuck on part time job due to which he misses classes" (Essay 22).*

The above topic sentence addresses the issue from the male student's perspective, whereas the topic required the students to address it generically, without gender discrimination. Readers who do not know that PMU has male and female students would think it is a male-student university. This difficulty could be a product of the students' native language, which is Arabic. In some contexts, sexism in the Arabic language is obvious. In reference to a group of males and females, for example, Arabic speakers use the masculine pronoun. In addition, a gender-biased language problem could be a result of failure to remember the application of the rule that warns against it. Further, this difficulty could be a result of failure to edit and proofread. From Bloom's Taxonomy point of view, it could be said that it reflects shortcomings in the following cognitive competence: remembering, and evaluation.
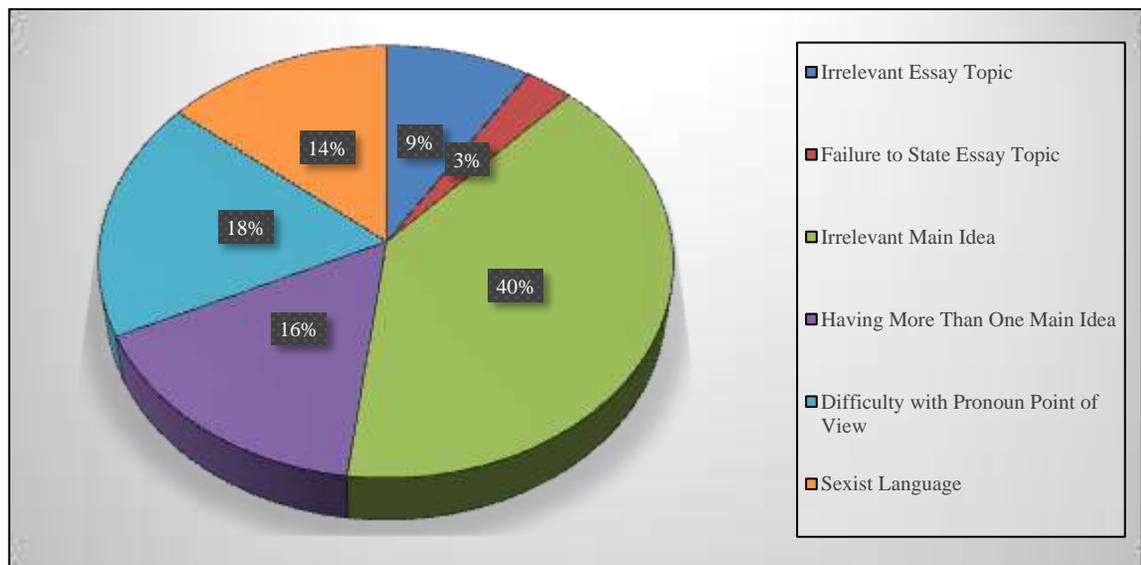

Figure 4. Lack of Orientation

5.4 Grammatical Difficulties

The analysis revealed that these students faced difficulties with the definite and indefinite articles, subject-verb agreement, referents, verb tense, word order, possessive case, and run-on sentences. Each of these grammatical difficulties is discussed in the following.

5.4.1 Difficulty with the Definite Article

The following is an example of the definite article problems.

The Essay Topic: Why Should English Be the Instruction Language at PMU?

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*The first argument to study at PMU in English is the fact that the English is a universal language" (Essay 10).*

In this sentence, the phrase "the English" does not refer to the language; however, it refers to the people of England (Kolln & Funk, 2002). This researcher investigated this difficulty throughout each students' entire essay to see whether it represented a mistake or an error. It was found that their application of this article's rules fluctuates between correct and incorrect usages. This may suggest a lack of understanding of the rule governing the use of this article or a lack of editing and proofreading, Therefore, it is related to the understanding and evaluation cognitive competence in Bloom's Taxonomy.

5.4.2 Difficulty with the Indefinite Article

The Essay Topic: Why Should English Be the Instruction Language at PMU?

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*English is simple language because you can translate any English words to another language; in addition, there are many simple ways in which we can express what we want" (Essay 13).*

The word "language" in the above topic-sentence attempt is a count noun, which was used in the singular form. Therefore, it was supposed to be preceded by the indefinite article "a," which was supposed to be written before the adjective "simple." To have a better understanding of this student's difficulty with the indefinite article, the researcher investigated this issue throughout the student's whole essay. It was found that he was inconsistent with its usage. Such a lack of consistency may indicate that it was a result of either a lack of understanding of the rule governing the use of the indefinite article and/or a lack of editing and a lack of proofreading. This finding is supported by Alanazi (2017) as well as Al Tameemy and Daradkeh, (2019). Looking at this difficulty through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, it could be said that it relates to the understanding and the evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.3 Difficulty with Prepositions

The analysis revealed that the students had difficulties with the English prepositions. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why College Students Should be Punished for Absence

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*Furthermore, punishing students for getting absent in class is necessary as they start to promote a culture of laziness" (Essay 24).*

In this topic-sentence attempt, the student used the preposition "in" before the word "class," whereas he should have used the preposition "from," for people get absent "from" things, events, etc., but they don't get absent "in" them. The finding of Saudi students' difficulties with prepositions is supported by Javid and Farooq (2013), Al Tameemy and Daradkeh (2019), and Alharbi (2019). This finding suggests the students' lack of understanding the usage of the English prepositions. It also suggests they didn't consult their dictionaries for prepositions' usages. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, one could argue that this difficulty belongs to the understanding, application, and evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.4 Difficulty with Subject-Verb Agreement

The analysis revealed that the students encountered difficulties establishing subject-verb agreement. The following is one example.

The Essay Topic: Why College Student Shouldn't Be Punished for Being Absent

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*The second reason that support the claim of not punishing student for being absent from class is the reduction of creativity" (Essay 20).*

The word "reason" in this topic sentence is a singular noun. Since this sentence is written in the simple present, then the verb "support" should have agreed with its single subject "reason." It should, therefore, be written with an "s" at its end. In addition to checking the students' topic sentences, the researcher checked the entire sentences in the participants' essays to see whether this group of students encountered difficulties with subject-verb agreement in them, too. It was discovered that the students were inconsistent with the application of this grammar rule. The finding is supported by previous studies (Morgan, 2018; Tameemy & Daradkeh, 2019; Alharbi, 2019). This difficulty could be a result of failure to understand how the simple present tense works. It could also be a result of a lack of editing and proofreading. Looking at this difficulty through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, it could be related the understanding, application, and evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.5 Difficulty with Referents

Also, the analysis revealed the students had problems with referents, such as in the following example.

The Essay Topic: Elite Sports Players Deserve Their Income

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*But the advertisement is going to make more money than they spent to give the player for making it*" (*Essay 21*).

This student used the subject pronoun "they" to refer to soccer clubs' owners, whereas these owners are not mentioned in the sentence. In other words, the pronoun "they" does not have an antecedent. This finding is in line with Al Tameemy and Daradkeh (2019). Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, this problem could be related to the understanding and evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.6 Difficulty with the Verb Tense

Another grammar skill problem that the analysis revealed was the verb tense. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Should Cell Phones Be Banned When Driving?

Student's Topic Sentence: "*Nowadays, some people did not care about their life; as a result, they are driving very fast and using their phones*" (*Essay 30*).

This student had a problem being consistent with the verb tense. Since he intended to refer to the present time, he should have used the simple present. In reference to the phenomenon of cell the phone usage while driving, he used the past tense "did not care," instead of "don't care." Also, instead of using the simple present "drive," he used the present progressive "are driving." This verb-tense difficulty the students encountered is in line with Morgan (2018), Alanzi (2017), as well as Javid and Farooq (2013). Further, this problem could be resulting from a lack of understanding of how the English tenses work. It could also be a result of a lack of revising, editing, and proofreading. Viewed through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, it could be said it relates to the understanding and the evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.7 Difficulty with Word Order

The analysis revealed that some of the students had serious problems with word order. The following is one example.

Essay Topic: Why Some PMU Policies Should Be Changed

Student's Topic Sentence: "*Borrowing a book for two weeks policy at PMU is a joke*" (*Essay 4*).

This topic sentence has a word-order problem. Readers, however, may still understand what the writer intended to say. The word order of "policy" and "borrowing" as well as the abbreviation "PMU" in this topic sentence needs to be corrected so that they can help communicate the writer's intended message correctly. Three possible ways to rewrite this sentence correctly are the following:

1. *PMU policy of borrowing books for two weeks is a joke.*
2. *The two-week book-borrowing policy at PMU is a joke.*
3. *PMU two-week book-borrowing policy is a joke.*

These students' syntactic difficulties are supported by previous research (Sawalmeh, 2013; Mudawi & Mousa, 2015). They are a result of a lack of understanding of the English sentence structure, a lack of editing, and a lack of proofreading, which in the mirror of Bloom's Taxonomy belong to the understanding and evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.8 Difficulty with the Possessive Case

Another grammar skill with which the students encountered difficulties was the possessive case. The following exemplifies this problem.

The Essay Topic*:* Why College Students Should be Punished for Absence

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*Absences punishment dose not effect only the education quality, and the studetns knowledge, it also effects student responsibility as well*" (*Essay 6*).

This student intended to express the singular possessive case. He wrote "students knowledge" and "student responsibility," instead of "students' knowledge" and "students' responsibility" or "student's knowledge" and "student's responsibility." Most likely, this difficulty is a result of lack of understanding rules governing the possessive case. It could also be a result of a lack of proofreading. Using Bloom's Taxonomy, one could, therefore, relate it to the understanding, application, and/or evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.4.9 Difficulty with Run-ons

Another difficulty these students encountered was the run-on sentences, such as in the following example.

The Essay Topic:

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*Most of people do not anything about the privacy between the men and women they think both are same*" (*Essay 25*).

Obviously, a semicolon or a period is needed after the word "women." Run-on sentences could be a result of a lack of understanding of the English sentence structure and a lack of editing and proofreading. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, this difficulty could be related to the following cognitive competencies: understanding, application, analysis, and evaluation.
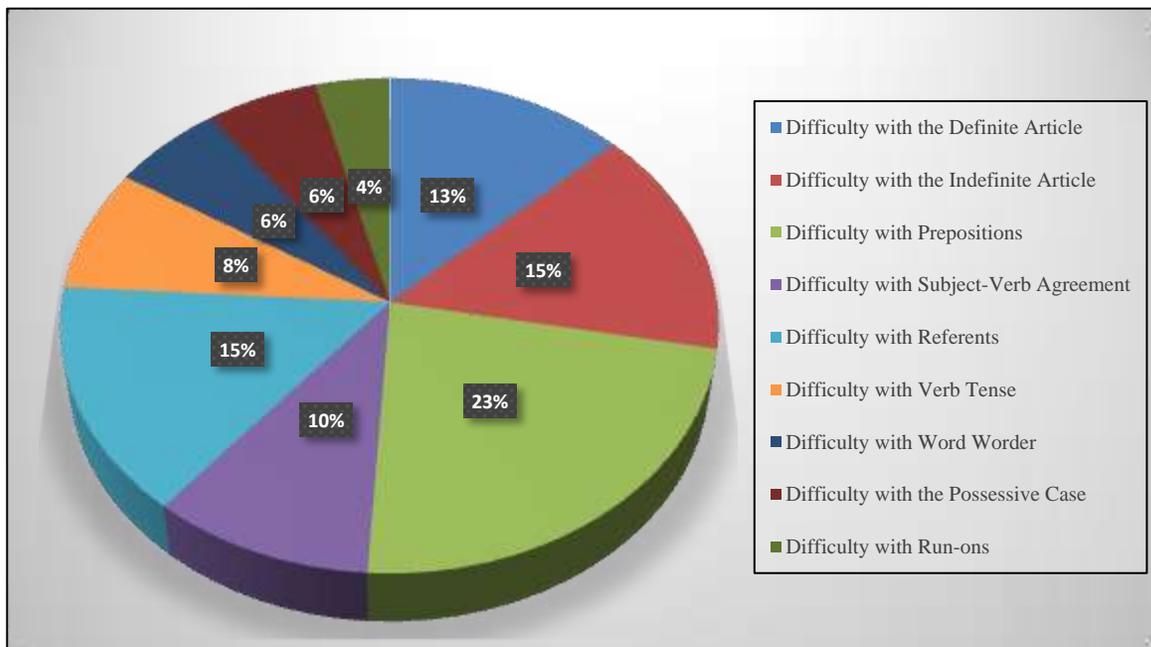
Figure 5. Grammatical Difficulties

5.5 Mechanics Difficulties

Mechanics include spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The analysis revealed that the students experienced difficulties with the English mechanics, specifically capitalization, spelling, the comma, and the hyphen. The following includes an example of each of these problems.

5.5.1 Difficulty with Capitalization

The Essay Topic: Why Men and Women Should Work Together

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*Gender equality means that Men and women should be treated equally and the goal is to achieve equality not only in the workplace but everywhere" (Essay).*

The word "men" in this example shouldn't have been capitalized, for it is an improper noun written in the middle of the sentence. Other situations where the students had difficulties with capitalization are failure to capitalize proper nouns and failure to capitalize the first word in some sentences. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, this difficulty could be related to the understanding and evaluation cognitive competencies.

5.5.2 Difficulty with Spelling

The Essay Topic: Why College Students Should be Punished for Absence

The Student's Topic Sentence: *"Absence's punishment dose not effect only the education quality, and the student's knowledge, it also effects student responsibility as well" (Essay 7).*

This topic sentence has three spelling mistakes. The first one is "dose," instead of "does;" the second and third are "effect" and "effect," which are the misspelling of "affect." These spelling problems could be a result of a lack of memorization and a lack of proofreading. They could also be a result of failure to use Microsoft Word's spelling checker and failure to use the dictionary. This finding is in line with that of Ahmed's (2016), Alanazi's (2017), as well as Al Tameemy's and Daradkeh's (2019). Using Bloom's Taxonomy, one could relate it to the following cognitive competence: remembering, applying, and evaluating.

5.5.3 Difficulty with Punctuation

The analysis revealed that these students had difficulties with the comma and the hyphen.

5.5.3.1 Difficulty with the Comma

The following is an example demonstrating this difficulty.

The Essay Topic: Why Cell Phones Should be Banned When Driving

The Student's Topic Sentence: "*Opponents whose work depends on cell phones like businessmen argue that they always have to answer the phone to keep their business running" (Essay 18).*

Because the phrase "like businessmen" in this sentence interrupts its flow, it should have been set off from the rest of the sentence with two commas, before and after it. Grammatically speaking, this is called an "interrupting phrase," and the commas, therefore, are needed to indicate this interruption. Saudi students' difficulties with punctuation, in general, are supported by previous research (Ahmed, 2016; Al Tameemy & Daradkeh, 2019). This difficulty could be the result of a lack of understanding of the rules governing the comma's usage and the situations that call for it. It could also be resulting from a lack of proofreading. Looking at it through the lens of Bloom's Taxonomy, one could associate it with the remembering, understanding, and evaluation cognitive skills.

5.5.3.2 Difficulty with the Hyphen

The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Shouldn't Students Be Punished for Absence?

The Student's Topic Sentence: *"College student must not be punished for getting absent because he might get stuck on part time job due to which he misses classes" (Essay 22).*

The phrase "part time" was used to modify the noun "job." A hyphen, therefore, should have been written between these two words as follows: "part-time." This finding is in line with Ahmed (2016) as well as Al Tameemy and Daradkeh (2019). This students' difficulty is a result of either a lack of understanding the rules governing the hyphen's usage or failure of proofreading for punctuation in general or for the hyphen in specific. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, it could be said that this difficulty belongs to the remembering, understanding, evaluation cognitive difficulties.
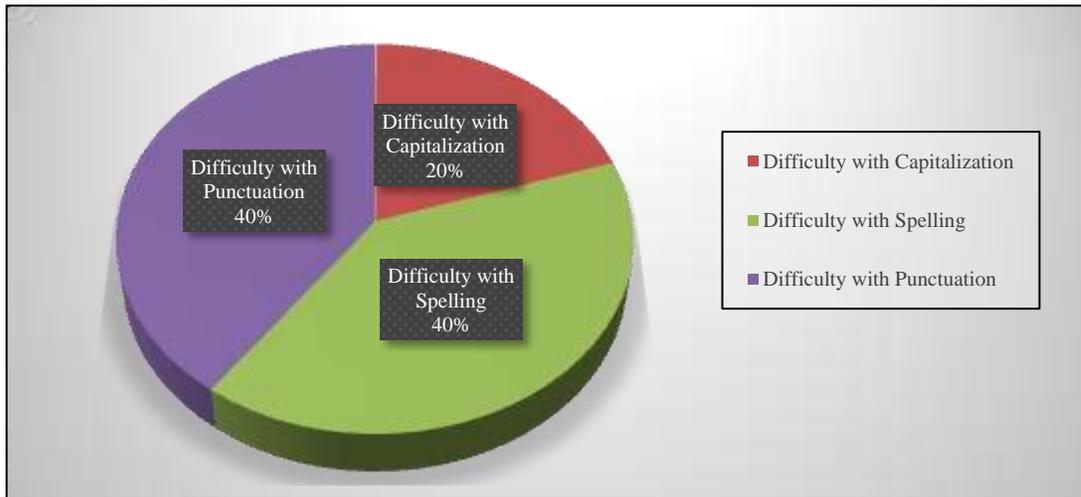

Figure 6. Difficulties with Mechanics

5.6 Triangulation

Credibility refers to how confident the qualitative researcher is about the truth of the study's findings. To establish credibility, this researcher used triangulation. According to Creswell, triangulation is a process in which the researcher provides evidence from different sources, various types of data, and different data collection techniques (Creswell, 2015). Because of the subjective nature of the classification of the students' difficulties in relation to Bloom's cognitive competencies, this researcher used triangulation to verify it. Specifically, each student's writing difficulty in each topic sentence was verified by checking it in the entire essay. For example, if a difficulty with the indefinite article in a topic sentence was classified as belonging to the understanding cognitive competence, the entire essay was checked for this writing difficulty to see whether the student's difficulty with it reflected a lack of understanding.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the difficulties Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing topic sentences for argument essays they wrote for the core writing course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall of 2017/2018. It also intended to identify the cognitive competencies these writing difficulties relate to in Bloom's Taxonomy. It was found that the students' writing difficulties fall into five themes: lack of precision, lack of concision, lack of orientation, mechanics difficulties, and grammatical difficulties. Further, the writing difficulties in each of these five themes were found to belong to the following cognitive competencies: understanding, analysis, and evaluation. However, only the difficulties in lack of orientation and mechanics themes belong to the remembering cognitive competence, whereas the difficulties in lack of concision, mechanics, and grammar themes belong to application.

6.1 Practical Implications of the Study

The study informs the Core's and Preparatory Program's writing instructors at PMU about the difficulties their students encounter in writing topic sentences in specific and in writing in general. It also informs them about the cognitive competencies the students need to improve in order to advance their writing skills. Finally, the findings of this study should motivate these instructors to utilize Bloom's cognitive domain

in teaching writing.

6.2 Future Research

Since this study utilized the cognitive domain in Bloom's Taxonomy, it is recommended that future research investigate critical thinking in students' decision-making in academic writing.

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Appendix A

Revised Bloom's Taxonomy
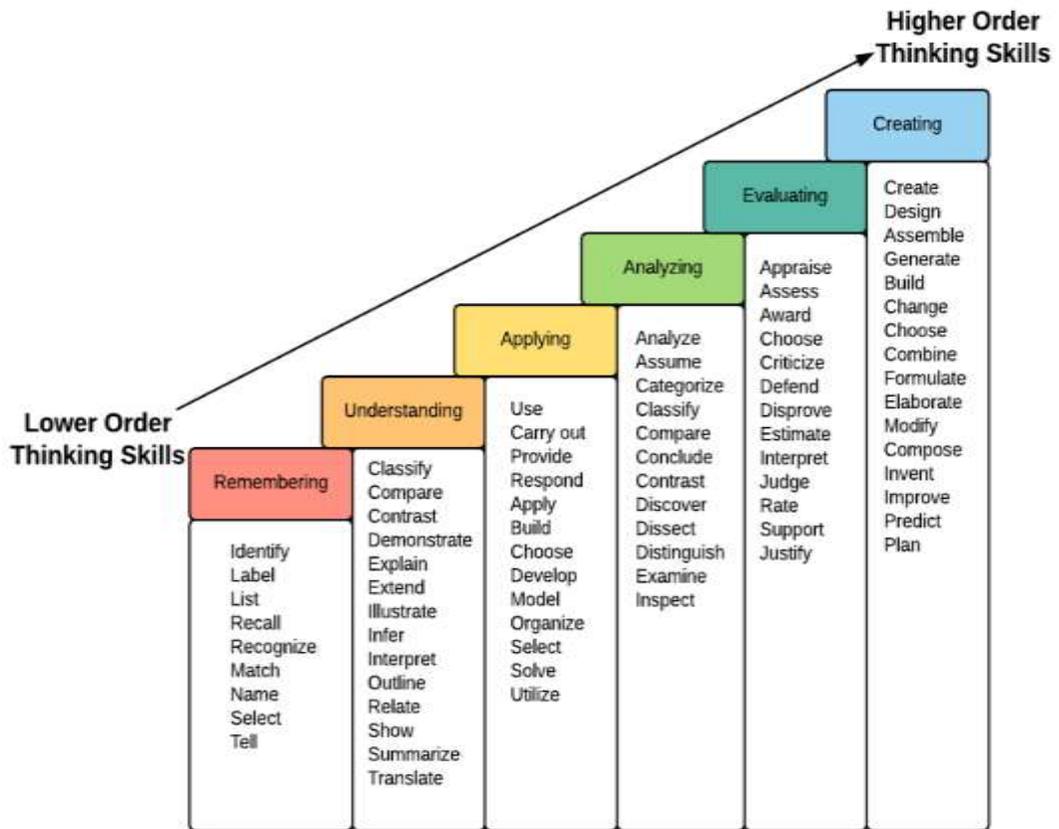
Appendix B

Codebook

Topic Sentence Analysis.mx20

9/24/2022

Code System

1 Lack of precision	
1.1 Unclear main idea	4
1.2 Having more than one main idea	7
1.3 Difficulty with word-choice	11
2 Lack of concision	
2.1 Confused series of structures	8
2.2 Redundancy	11
3 Lack of Orientation	
3.1 Failure to state the essay topic	17
3.2 Irrelevant essay topic	4
3.3 Irrelevant main idea	2
3.4 Difficulty with pronoun point of view	8
3.5 Sexist language	6
4 Mechanics difficulties	
4.1 Difficulty with capitalization	3
4.2 Difficulty with spelling	6
4.3 Difficulty with punctuation	
4.3.1 Difficulty with comma	15
4.3.2 Difficulty with the hyphen	5
4.3.3 Difficulty with the apostrophe	4
5 Grammatical Difficulties	
5.1 Difficulty with the definite article	6
5.2 Difficulty with the indefinite article	7
5.3 Difficulty with prepositions	11
5.4 Difficulty with subject/verb agreement	5
5.5 Difficulties with referents	7
5.6 Difficulty with verb tense	4
5.7 Difficulty with word order	3
5.8 Difficulty with the possessive case	3
5.9 Difficulty with run-ons	2

1 Lack of precision

1.1 Lack of precision >> Unclear main idea

This code refers to writing a main idea that does not have a clear connection to the topic or can have more than one meaning. The following is an example: Cell phones should be banned because of social media. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

1.2 Lack of precision >> Having more than one main idea

This code refers to using two or more main ideas in one topic sentence. An example of this is the following: In addition to gender equality and ideas swap, men and women compete with each other by their nature and they may feel jealous of each other.   (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

1.3 Lack of precision >> Difficulty with word-choice

This refers to using an incorrect word to express a certain idea. The following is an example in which the word "increase" is used instead of "improve." The second point which emphasizes over the working of men and women together is to increase the self-esteem of women in our society.   (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

2 Lack of concision

2.1 Lack of concision >> Confused series of structures

This code refers to writing a series of confused and confusing structures that include confused ideas, incomplete thoughts, word-choice problems, lack of logical sequencing, and sentence structure problems. The presence of all or some or of these problems leads to the creation of awkward texts that are confusing, difficult to read, and hard to continue reading them. Example: Some people say its fine for male and female to study together because there are good people, and they can't do these things because they have traditions, and stick to it, some other people say male and female shouldn't study together like I said they may be do wrong thing, not only that if they study together they will not focus on studying, and their thinking will be distracted and visualized, also they will locking to each other if they are in same class. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

2.2 Lack of concision >> Redundancy

This code refers to lack of being concise--using words that are more than needed to express an idea. An example of this is the following: A lot of people think that using the phone while driving is a dangerous thing to do. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1) Obviously, the phrase "thing to do" is redundant, and the sentence is much better without it.

3 Lack of Orientation

3.1 Lack of Orientation >> Failure to state the essay topic

This code refers to the students' failure to state the topic of the essay in the topic sentence so that the reader would realize the relationship between the essay topic and the topic sentence.

3.2 Lack of Orientation >> Irrelevant essay topic

This code means the student wrote about a topic different from the assigned one. An example of this is the following: The second reason that I believe attendance policy should be revised is that it does not take mental issues in consideration. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

3.3 Lack of Orientation >> Irrelevant main idea

This code refers to using a main idea that does not relate to the essay topic or is not one of the thesis statement's main ideas. An example of this is the following: Production is very important for international institutions and companies. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

3.4 Lack of Orientation >> Difficulty with pronoun point of view

This code refers to using the second person singular or plural whereas the topic should be addressed in general and without referring to a specific person. The following is an example: The final argument of learning at PMU in English is the fact you will have more information resources in English language.

(Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

3.5 Lack of Orientation >> Sexist language

his code refers to using the masculine pronoun whereas the context could be used for both genders.

4 Mechanics difficulties

this code refers to problems with spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

4.1 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with capitalization

This refers to failure the students' failure to observe capitalization rules.

4.2 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with spelling

This code refers to spelling mistakes. The following is one example in which the words "does" and "affect" were misspelled: Absences punishment dose not effect only the education quality (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

4.3 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with punctuation

this code refers to failure to use the right punctuation mark (comma, hyphen, apostrophe, etc.).

4.3.1 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with punctuation >> Difficulty with comma

This code refers to failure to use the comma and/or incorrect usage of the comma

4.3.2 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with punctuation >> Difficulty with the hyphen

This code refers to situations where the students failed to use the hyphen. An example of this is the following: A large number of students hold some part time jobs. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

4.3.3 Mechanics difficulties >> Difficulty with punctuation >> Difficulty with the apostrophe

This code refers to failure to use the apostrophe in expressing the possessive case. The following is an example: Absences punishment dose not effect only the education quality, and the students' knowledge, it also effects student responsibility as well (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5 Grammatical Difficulties

This code refers to different grammatical problems, such as verb tense, prepositions, and pronoun referent.

5.1 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with the definite article

This code refers to failure to use the definite article and/or using it where it is not needed. The following example represent a situation where the definite article is needed after the word "affect" and before the word "student," which is, in fact, was supposed to be "students'". [...] school in general have absences punishment is to prevent student from missing any important information that will affect student knowledge (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5.2 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with the indefinite article

This code refers to failure to use the indefinite article and/or using the indefinite article incorrectly.

5.3 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with prepositions

This code refers incorrect usage of the prepositions and/or failure to use a required preposition. The following example the student should have used "to" instead of the preposition "for." He wrote: "

using the phone for answer a call or follow the GPS is fine. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5.4 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with subject/verb agreement

This code indicates that the subject and the verb are not equal in number. An example of this is the following: school in general have absences punishment   (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5.5 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulties with referents

This code is used when the student repeated the same word, whereas he is expected to use a pronoun. It is also used when students use the wrong referent or a referent that has no antecedent. The following is an example: When a company calls a player to show on TV for advertising their products is so expensive. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5.6 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with verb tense

This code refers to shifting from tense to another without a good reason. The following is an example: There are a lot of people who loses his focus very fast, and when they their phones they did not understand what will be happened on the street. (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1)

5.7 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with word order

This code refers to putting words in the wrong order.

5.8 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with the possessive case

This code is used to indicate that the student did not use the apostrophe or the "s" in expressing the possessive case.

5.9 Grammatical Difficulties >> Difficulty with run-ons

This code refers to writing two independent clauses together without proper punctuation or appropriate conjunctions. An example of this is the following: Most of people do not anything about the privacy between the men and women they think both are same   (Topic Sentences for Analysis, Pos. 1). Obviously, a semicolon or a period needed after the word "women."