



**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**The EFL Essay Writing Difficulties of Egyptian Student Teachers of English:  
Implications for Essay Writing Curriculum and Instruction**

Submitted by

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To

The University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

(January, 2011)

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current study is conducted with the aim of investigating the essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student teachers of English. More specifically, it attempts to fulfil the following three aims: explore the focuses of teaching essay writing at one of the pioneering faculties of education in Egypt; investigate the different essay writing practices used by Egyptian essay writing teachers from teachers as well as their students' perspectives; and identify the essay writing difficulties encountered by Egyptian student teachers of English at the concerned faculty of education from both students and their teachers' perspectives. The current study adopts an interpretive methodology that uses a sequential mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. Therefore, I administered a questionnaire to 165 student teachers of English and 7 essay writing teachers, conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 student teachers of English and 7 essay writing teachers, and observed nine essay writing sessions of different teachers. Data is analysed quantitatively using SPSS descriptive statistics and qualitatively using exploratory content analysis. Findings of the current study reveal that there are eleven focuses of teaching essay writing at the concerned faculty of education. These focuses have been classified into four main categories: Mechanics/Language, Content, Structure/Layout and Practising Writing. Findings also shed light on the essay writing teachers' practices in relation to planning, teaching, feedback and assessment. Finally, findings show that student teachers of English encounter the following difficulties in their essay writing: planning difficulties, organisational difficulties including coherence, cohesion, and stylistic difficulties, lexical problems, and technical difficulties including grammar, punctuation, spelling and revision and editing. According to the above mentioned findings, a theoretical writing model has been devised and a pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt has been proposed. Implications for essay writing curriculum planning and instruction are also included. Finally, suggestions for further research are provided.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah (God) who helped me at all times complete this piece of work successfully. My special thanks should go to the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education and the Egyptian Cultural Centre and Education Bureau in London which sponsored me during my four year of full-time study for the PhD degree at Exeter University in the UK.

Second, I would like to thank my first supervisor, Dr. Salah Troudi for his academic, professional and psychological support throughout the journey of this thesis. His academic support is invaluable in terms of providing reflective, critical and constructive feedback on each and every chapter in my thesis. He also encouraged me to publish some research papers and to disseminate my research findings in two international conferences in Canada and USA. Professionally, he wrote references for different academic and teaching jobs to which I applied in the UK. Psychologically, he supported me to settle down since the first day I met him, throughout my MPhil modules until the last day before my thesis submission. I really appreciate his help.

In addition, my thanks are extended to my second supervisor, Dr. Jill Cadorath who saved no effort to help me finish this work in the best possible form. She guided me throughout this journey of discovery with precious and insightful views about each chapter, without which this thesis would not have been well-organised. She was always there for me when I needed help whether by attending my tutorials, responding to my e-mails and phone calls, or revising my chapters.

In addition, I would like to extend special thanks to all student teachers of English and the seven essay writing teachers at the concerned faculty of education who participated in the current study. Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Lamiaa and my two children Alaa and Esraa who stood by me in the hard and good times. My wife used to urge me to improve the quality of my work before submitting it to my supervisors. She always provided me with supportive and encouraging environment where I could work diligently to finish my thesis on time.

## **DEDICTAION**

*I dedicate this thesis to my late Dad, Mum and my wife  
who greatly shaped my life and always dreamt to see me a PhD holder.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

<b>Abbreviation/Acronym</b>	<b>What does it stand for?</b>
<b>(BA)</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>(BERA)</b>	British Educational Research Association
<b>(CL)</b>	Co-operative Learning
<b>(CMC)</b>	Computer-Mediated Communication
<b>(DDL)</b>	Data-Driven Learning
<b>(EAP)</b>	English for Academic Purposes
<b>(EFL)</b>	English as a Foreign Language
<b>(ELT)</b>	English Language Teaching
<b>(ESL)</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>(ESP)</b>	English for Specific Purposes
<b>(EWP)</b>	Extended Writing Project
<b>(GPA)</b>	Grade Point Average
<b>(FOEP)</b>	Faculty of Education Enhancement Project
<b>(HEEP)</b>	Higher Education Enhancement Project
<b>(L2)</b>	Second Language
<b>(M/C)</b>	Multiple-Choice
<b>(NCERD)</b>	National Centre for Educational Research and Development
<b>(SPSS)</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>(TEFL)</b>	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
<b>(TESOL)</b>	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
<b>(W/P)</b>	Writing Performance

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

سورة طه (١١٤)

*In the Name of Allah the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate*

***And say: My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.***

(Sura 20: 114)

## CHAPTER I

### RATIONALE AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

#### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the current study in a number of ways. First, an introduction is written to pave the way to the reader about the problem of the study. Second, the focus of the current study is problematised. Third, the rationale for conducting the current study is given. Moreover, the significance of the study is highlighted. In addition, research aims and questions are presented. Finally, terminology and overview of the study are spotlighted.

When education is regarded as one of the means by which any country could be developed, Ministries of Higher Education are supposed to give teacher education high priority, as teachers are the cornerstone in shaping students' learning, personalities and future. This suggests that an inadequate teacher preparation could contribute to the deterioration of a whole generation to come. A solid academic, cultural and pedagogic teacher preparation programme is a contributing factor to the success of the educational process. Hence, teacher preparation programmes should provide student teachers with the essential teaching skills that qualify them to be efficient teachers.

There are a number of possible reasons that could contribute to an inadequate teacher education programme. First, there is a disconnection between the theoretical knowledge that pre-service teachers study at university and their teaching practice at schools (Zeichner, 2010). Second, teacher education is plagued with the fear of using bold ideas to prepare high-quality teachers who can help students from different backgrounds to learn effectively (Wang et al., 2010). Moreover, students' low motivation as suggested by (Brown, 2001) could result in an inadequate teacher education in some countries including Egypt. Similarly, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings such as Egypt often involve large classes and limited teaching hours, which make learning English an apparently insurmountable challenge (Rose, 1999). Additionally, the different teachers' practices might have an unfavourable impact on developing a good teacher education programme. Finally, lack of accountability is most likely to be another reason for an ineffective second language teacher education (Richards, 2008).

Student teachers' writing in a teacher training situation should illustrate their awareness of their communicative goals, of the reader, and of the writing context. Despite numerous approaches to the teaching of L2 writing (e.g. the product-based approach, the process-based approach, and the post-process approach) having evolved from different teaching methods, tackling EFL writing is still one of the most challenging areas for teachers and students. Egyptian student teachers of English at the concerned faculty of education have to pass many academic courses in English. Nevertheless, these students still experience many difficulties in their essay writing as indicated by the results of the preliminary essay writing questionnaire administered to one hundred students (see appendix 1).

### **1.2 Problem of the Study**

A growing challenge in education is to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for student teachers of English to effectively write English essays. The importance of essay writing for student teachers is undermined by Grabe and Kaplan (1996: 24-25) who stated that "students in English as a foreign language contexts will need English writing skills ranging from a simple paragraph and summary skills to the ability to write essays and professional articles." In addition to composing expository, argumentative and narrative pieces of writing during the course and under exam conditions, students are in need of writing formal letters, research reports, lesson plans, and translations of Arabic text (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). Moreover, student teachers' mastery of these writing skills will be transferred to their future students when they graduate as English language teachers.

Essay writing, which constitutes a problem for many ESL/EFL students worldwide, is a major challenge for Egyptian student teachers of English. To the best of my knowledge, most of the Egyptian studies conducted about essay writing at the university level are either quantitative in nature or qualitative focusing on other aspects of EFL writing. Therefore, the problem of the current study is concerned with exploring the difficulties that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter while planning, composing and revising their essays in English.

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

EFL student teachers face certain problems in learning writing. As many teachers of English have noted, acquiring the writing skill seems to be more laborious and demanding than acquiring the other three language skills (Zheng, 1999). Similarly, Nunan (1999) considers producing a coherent piece of writing an enormous challenge, especially in one's second language. This is magnified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts—the structure, style, and organization—often differ from those in other languages (Leki, 1991) as they require great effort to recognise and manage the differences. This is particularly true of the rhetorical conventions of the Arabic language.

In many Arab countries including Egypt, the education systems emphasise writing for taking tests. For many students, the only reason to practise writing is to pass examinations or to get a good grade in the course. From students' viewpoints, this reduces the value of writing to developing a written product and receiving a grade from the teacher. This approach is not likely to make students interested in writing, which becomes decontextualised and artificial, giving them no real sense of purpose or perspective of a target audience. In this respect, some studies in the Arab world (Khalil, 1985; Sa'adeddin, 1989; El-Hibir & Al-Taha, 1992) and a few Egyptian studies were conducted offering different approaches and remedial programmes to overcome the decontextualization of writing and develop some EFL essay writing skills.

To the best of my knowledge, there are few Egyptian studies addressing EFL essay writing, most of which highlighted that the experience of Egyptian students underscores a wider lack of attention to EFL writing problems and challenges. Among these studies are El-Banna (1987), Dadour (1998), El-Koumy (1999), Hassan (2001), Ibrahim (2002), Mekheimer (2005), El-Samaty (2007) and Abdel-Latif (2009). Most of these studies did not investigate the EFL essay writing difficulties, but rather were either intervention programmes or of exploratory nature of other writing aspects that aimed at improving students' EFL writing performance.

The need for the current study in the Egyptian context arises from the following reasons. First, while supervising student teachers of English at different primary,

preparatory and secondary schools, I noticed that they cannot express themselves clearly in writing, in the form of well-organised and coherent lesson plans as well as reports about their reflective teaching practices. Second, I observed in the teaching practice at different schools that student teachers of English could not teach their students how to develop their pieces of writing. Lacking the criteria for marking students' written pieces of composition, they could not consequently mark them in an objective and pedagogic way. Third, English majors complain about their essay writing courses because they are offered titles of writing topics about which they should write comfortably at home without being given any guidance or feedback.

Moreover, results of the preliminary essay writing questionnaire that I administered to 100 English majors at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt pinpointed that the current teaching practices adopted by most essay writing teachers are most probably impeding students' learning of EFL essay writing (see appendix 1). Table (1.1) below summarises the most significant results of this preliminary questionnaire.

**Table (1.1) The most significant results of the preliminary questionnaire**

<b>Teacher Practices in the Essay Writing Course</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Sub-practices</b>	<b>Students' Percentage</b>
<b>The most significant results</b>	1	The teacher never discusses the most common essay writing mistakes in a student group conference.	97%
	2	The teacher always uses classroom lecturing to teach me how to write essays	97%
	3	Students rarely practice essay writing once a week	93%
	4	Students are rarely taught how to organise their essays coherently through well-written examples.	92%
	5	Students rarely write about topics that express their own interest.	90%
	6	Students rarely plan their essays using pre writing activities such as brainstorming, webbing, semantic mapping ...etc.	88%
	7	Students never review each others' essays.	87%
	8	Students are sometimes taught how to write different genres of essays (i.e. descriptive, expository, argumentative, and narrative).	85%
	9	Students are rarely taught how to organise their essays cohesively through well-written examples.	83%
	10	Desks are rarely arranged in a way that allows pair and group discussion	81%

Finally, there are no assessment criteria by which students' written essays are marked, and no proof of any formative assessment practices relating to students' writing development.

#### **1.4 Aims of the Study**

In accordance with what has been reviewed, the EFL essay writing of Egyptian student teachers of English has been undervalued resulting in encountering some difficulties. Taking Egyptian students' writing needs into consideration, the current study attempted to achieve the following aims. Firstly, the current study attempted to explore Egyptian essay writing teachers' focuses in teaching essay writing as perceived by the teachers, their students and me. Secondly, it aimed to examine Egyptian essay writing teachers' practices as viewed by the teachers, their students and me. Thirdly, it endeavoured to investigate the essay writing difficulties as seen by Egyptian student teachers of English and their essay writing teachers. Finally, it intended to propose an approach to teaching EFL essay writing and provide implications for EFL essay writing curriculum and instruction at the concerned faculty of education in along with other Egyptian faculties of similar contexts.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The current study has contributed to EFL higher education in Egypt in terms of English language pre-service teacher education, educational research, and English essay writing curriculum planning and instruction.

From the perspective of teacher education, the current study has the potential to improve English language teacher education in a number of ways:

- a) It provides an understanding of the difficulties faced by student teachers of English in essay writing. This is significant for teacher educators since it aims to provide a pedagogical approach to teaching EFL essay writing.
- b) It also sheds light on the importance of students' needs and interests which enables teacher educators to know how to satisfy these needs and conduct successful and memorable learning.
- c) It brings to Egyptian teacher educators' attention the different essay writing practices in relation to planning, teaching, feedback and assessment of essay writing. This could help them reinforce the good practices and improve the other inappropriate ones.

- d) It also highlights the role played by essay writing in improving the academic achievement of students in other courses due to their ability to express their ideas in well-organised essays. This will help better prepare highly qualified teachers of English who could write coherently and cohesively in English.
- e) It raises teacher educators' awareness of the contextual factors affecting their students' learning of essay writing. Consequently, they would be able to facilitate their students' learning and eliminate all the obstacles that students might encounter leading to better learning opportunities.
- f) It helps essay writing teachers to get to grips with students' cognitive, psychological and socio-cultural aspects of learning essay writing which would help them provide the most appropriate support for their students.

At the level of educational research, the current study made a significant contribution summarised in some respects:

- a) Using the interpretive-constructivist research framework could serve as an example for further studies in education. This approach has been largely neglected in Egypt, no previous study having used an exploratory approach to investigate the writing difficulties faced by Egyptian student teachers of English.
- b) Adopting a sequential mixed method research design to combine both quantitative and qualitative research in the form of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation, has not been extensively used in Egypt and lays the ground for further research.
- c) Adopting flexible research agendas in approaching educational research which are essential for collecting realistic data that defends against the researchers' subjectivity.
- d) Adding to the worldwide research on ESL/EFL writing in general and to the EFL essay writing research within the Arab and the Egyptian contexts in particular.
- e) Using the key findings of the current study as a solid basis for conducting other intervention studies that could help improve Egyptian students' English essay writing skills at the university level.

With reference to essay writing curriculum planning and instruction, the current study is potentially significant as it proposes an approach to teaching EFL writing in Egypt which helps curriculum planners and designers take the following issues into consideration:

- a) Planning the course objectives to meet students' needs and interests.
- b) Designing writing tasks that suit students' different proficiency levels.
- c) The diversity in the choice of teaching materials to be used with EFL students in the essay writing classroom.
- d) The different EFL essay writing teaching techniques.
- e) The available opportunities for collaborative learning/writing such as pair work and group work.
- f) Paying due attention to the different socio-cultural and psychological issues in planning and teaching essay writing.
- g) The varied feedback practices that could be used in the essay writing classroom.
- h) The multiple assessment practices available at the different stages of teaching essay writing.

### **1.6 Questions of the Study**

Taking the study aims into account, the research questions of this study are as follow:

- 1- What are the focuses of teaching EFL essay writing to Egyptian student teachers of English?
- 2- How do EFL essay writing teachers and their students perceive the current teaching practices used in the essay writing course?
  - a) How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers view their teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?
  - b) How do Egyptian students view the teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?
- 3- How do Egyptian student teachers of English and their essay writing teachers perceive the essay writing difficulties?
  - a) How do Egyptian student teachers of English perceive their essay writing difficulties?
  - b) How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers perceive their students' essay writing difficulties?

## **1.7 Terminology of the Study**

According to the context of the current study, I made use of the following terms.

### **1.7.1 EFL Essay Writing**

Writing is not produced in isolation, but it is the outcome of the interaction between writers and their surrounding environment. It is a socially constructed process not only because it reflects thinking, but it shapes it as well. This stance suggests how writing is viewed within social constructionism. Social constructionist approaches to composition, as Clark et al. (2003) pinpoint, underscore the role society plays in shaping the written discourse and the significance of having the society expectations in mind when working with students.

Rafoth & Rubin (1988) and Williams (2003) argue that writers socially construct their written texts in a number of ways. First, writers construct mental representations of the social contexts in which their writing is embedded. Second, writing as a social process or system can create or constitute social contexts; this suggests that writers compose texts as a reaction to the social requirements of these social groups, not in response to an instinctive need to communicate. Writers create texts collectively with other participants in discourse communities. Finally, writers assign consensual values to writing and thus construct a dimension of social meaning.

The context of learning and teaching in Egypt views English as a Foreign Language. Therefore, I will refer to EFL and not ESL essay writing as the context of the current study. In line with the process genre writing approach synthesised in the current study, I perceive EFL essay writing is a multidimensional process in a wholly socially-determined context where students and their teachers jointly-construct genres of writing through the different stages of modelling, planning, writing and revision leading to students' independent construction of text.

### **1.7.2 Essay Writing Difficulties**

These refer to the EFL essay writing difficulties: namely, learning-related, instructional, socio-cultural and socio-political challenges that affect students' EFL essay writing while jointly-constructing genres of writing.

### **1.8 Overview of the Study**

This study is divided into two phases. Phase one is represented in the administration of the questionnaire to a sample of 165 English majors at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. The questionnaire was administered to gain access to the participants' views of the study variables. This is followed by an integration of the questionnaire results with the findings of the qualitative data obtained through the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observation. Phase two is represented in conducting the in-depth semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observation.

This chapter paved the way for the current study to spotlight its problem, rationale, significance, aims and questions.

Chapter II is intended to familiarise the reader with the Egyptian context and background within which this study took place. This included the nature and philosophy of the Egyptian educational system, English Language Teaching (ELT) in Egypt, the system of teacher education in Egypt and its problems, the pedagogic, cultural and academic components of Egyptian prospective EFL teacher education programme, and the essay writing course at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt.

Chapter III presents the literature review with special emphasis on some aspects related to the development of EFL/ESL writing in general, with special reference to the Arab world and the Egyptian context in particular. This encompassed theory and research in ESL/EFL composition, the major factors affecting the EFL/ESL writing development including learning factors, instructional factors and contextual factors and finally the different ESL/EFL writing difficulties that students encounter in their essay writing.

Chapter IV outlines the methodology of the current study. Firstly, it addresses the ontological assumptions underpinning the current study. Secondly, it presents the theoretical framework as well as the epistemological stance adopted. Thirdly, it sheds light on the research paradigm, the mixed methods design with its detailed data collection and data analysis instruments and procedures. Finally, the ethical considerations as well as the limitations of the current study are presented.

Chapter V presents a detailed analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data of the three research instruments of the study: namely, the questionnaire, the semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observation. This included statistical data analysis as well as interpretation of qualitative findings.

Chapter VI discusses the key findings of the current study with specific reference to the context of the study and the pertinent literature, attempting to give a comprehensive picture of essay writing teaching and the difficulties student teachers of English encounter at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. Additionally, it addresses the theoretical and pedagogical contribution to knowledge and their implications. Finally, a number of areas for further research are suggested.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with familiarizing the reader with the Egyptian context and background within which this study took place. It is divided into five sections. Firstly, it describes the nature and philosophy of the Egyptian educational system. Secondly, it sheds light on ELT in Egypt. Thirdly, it highlights the system of teacher education in Egypt, with special reference to the problems and issues facing Egyptian teacher education in general and EFL teacher education in particular. In addition, it pinpoints the preparation components of Egyptian prospective EFL teacher education: pedagogically, culturally and academically. Finally, it depicts a realistic picture of the essay writing course at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt.

#### **2.2 The Nature and Philosophy of the Educational System in Egypt**

The educational system in Egypt has undergone many changes and reforms in the last decade. In the 1990s, it was described as a system that was heavily bound with administrative and management procedures, centralised, based on seniority rather than merit, common in duplicating effort, and characterised by weak communication among the different levels and sectors (Jarrar & Massialas, 1992). Moreover, they add that there are some other characteristics of the educational system in Egypt such as chronic teacher shortages, scarcity of teachers' professional development, out of date curricula, the lack of physical facilities and instructional materials, dropouts and repetition, low literacy rates, and the mismatch between the skills developed and the skills needed for the market (Ibid).

Furthermore, Zaalouk (1995) depicted the status of the Egyptian educational schools as suffering from shortage of space, buildings in bad repair, large class size, frequently reaching 60 or 70 students and difficult access to schools in rural areas due to poor communications. Despite the government's efforts to enhance Egyptian education, this bad state has not undergone much change as the quality of Egyptian schooling in the public sector is low which has been most likely to have deteriorated in the last two decades (Birdsall & O'Connell, 1999: Daily News Egypt, 2010).

In addition, Hargreaves (1997) summed up a clear description of the Egyptian educational system as having a linear unifying fashion; low level teachers in the knowledge of the subject matter and in pedagogy; a mismatch between syllabuses and curricula drawn at the central national level and the actual teaching/learning situation; ritualization and mechanistic learning and teaching methods. Poor teacher morale and motivation in relation to low salaries were also reported as other problems facing teachers in Egypt (Birdsall & O'Connell, 1999). In short, the Egyptian educational system is a very top-down and hierarchical workplace where teachers generally have very little say in decision-making (Snow et al., 2006).

Recently, the Egyptian educational system has been marked by underfunding, unmotivated teachers, heavy reliance on testing in grade promotion and university admissions, a culture of fear and frustration, rote memorization, uncritical thinking, uncreative expression and private tutoring (Aboulghar, 2006; Fahmy & Salehi-Isfahani, 2008; Soliman & AbdElmegied, 2010). This underdeveloped educational system calls for an immediate reform towards the country's development.

Moreover, Hargreaves (1997) clarifies that the above mentioned status of the educational system is the result of a number of factors including increasing population, the huge bureaucracy, chronic economic instability and inequality, government commitment to equality through national prescription in education and weaknesses in the education system, such as lack of teacher training and resources. All these factors resulted in a ritualised, restricted and pressurised learning and a teaching system that inhibited the reform of teaching practices.

This nature of the educational system is recently underscored by (Galal, 2002) who stated that the education system is not providing markets with the quantity and quality of educated individuals most in demand. In addition, El-Sebai (2006) emphasised the problems and challenges facing higher education in Egypt including (1) antiquated system-wide governance and management; (2) low quality and relevance at the university level; (3) low quality and relevance at the middle technical level; and (4) limited fiscal sustainability of publicly financed enrolments.

The Egyptian education system is still suffering from some challenges until now (Badawi, 2010). Firstly, more than 15 million students are enrolled in pre-university education, while another 2.5 million are already enrolled in post-secondary education. Secondly, Egypt's vast area (i.e. 1.01 million square kilometres) creates discrepancies in the quality of education offered between urban, rural and remote areas. Finally, there are 17 million illiterates in Egypt who need to be able to read and write.

In response to an urgent need of educational reform, in 1992 a document was issued entitled "Mubarak and Education: a View for the Future" outlining the future policy of education. In reaction to this document, a series of national conferences were held to develop education. In 1993 the national conference on primary education was held, followed by another one in 1994 on improving preparatory education. Moreover, another national conference was held in 1996 focusing on promoting teachers' status. In addition 2000 witnessed a national conference which was dedicated to spotting and caring for talented pupils (Egypt State Information Service, 2005).

Hence, Egypt has taken a strategic decision to move forward towards achieving reform economically, politically and socially. On the social level, the reform focused on improving education for all levels and eradicating illiteracy of which great achievements have been accomplished. This reform was underscored by President Mubarak's speech in 2004 in which he highlighted that reform in education requires "the re-structuring of the educational system, on all levels, on bases that secure the right of education to all, improve the quality of education and produce

open-minded mentalities that are capable of dealing with the spirit and challenges of the age; intellects that do not depend on traditional thinking but rather on creativity, innovation, research and criticism” (Egypt State Information Service, 2005).

In response to this urgent call for reform, the Arab Egyptian National Centre for Educational Research and Development (NCERD) highlighted “upgrading methods of teacher training and ways of benefiting them” as one of three initiatives for improving education that has become one of the priorities which the state is working to achieve (Shehab, 2004). Moreover, according to Said (2008), the philosophy of reforming higher education in Egypt is based on six priority reform projects that are being carried out:

- 1- Faculty and Leadership Development Project.
- 2- Information and Communication Technical Project
- 3- Quality Assurance and Accreditation Project
- 4- Faculty of Education Enhancement Project
- 5- Higher Education Enhancement Project Fund
- 6- Egypt Technical Colleges Project

The Faculty of Education Enhancement Project (FOEP, 2007:2) with which this study is concerned highlighted that the vision of the project is “achieving a comprehensive modernization of the faculties of education, to go in tandem with the world scientific and professional development, while taking into consideration the Egyptian culture in general and the environment of each faculty in particular, on a systematic basis that guarantees the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and total quality as an approach to reform.” This project has several themes, one of which is reforming teacher preparation system that included reforming both integrated and sequential systems of teacher preparation at the faculties of education in Egypt. The implementation of this theme included studying international trends and standards for teacher preparation, developing Egyptian standards, defining curricula, developing an admission system, pre-employment training, internships and postgraduate studies. In the following section, I shall address the Egyptian teacher education system in more detail.

### **2.3 Teacher Education in Egypt**

Faculties of Education in Egypt provide two distinct preparation programmes: integrated preparation and continuing preparation (Hegy, 2006; Kouhouk et al., 2008). Students enrolled in the integrated teacher preparation programme are required to take four years of education and academic core courses. These include principles of education and psychology, principles of teaching, social and historical foundations of education, and basic cultural courses. In addition, students must successfully complete courses in methodology, educational psychology and technology, educational philosophy, comparative education, curriculum, and social psychology, specialised courses in the Arts sections or in the Science sections, as well as cultural courses. As part of the English language teacher preparation programme, student teachers perform teaching practice in preparatory schools during their third year and in secondary schools during their fourth year. Upon completion of the four-year programme, a student is qualified for a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in one of the following specialised areas: Arabic and Islamic studies, English, French, German, History, Geography, Philosophy, or Sociology; or a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in one of the following specialised areas: Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Commercial Education, Industrial Education, Agricultural Education, and Basic Education.

The Continuing Teacher Preparation programme is aimed at educating graduates of non-education faculties to become teachers. These students enrol in education courses full time for one year or part time for two years. Successful completion of these courses results in obtaining a general diploma in education and an appointment as a preparatory school teacher. Graduates of the general diploma programme and the integrated programme may apply to take postgraduate studies in education if their GPA is not less than 'Good'.

Recently, university faculties have witnessed an increase in the number of the students. In addition, students realise that good university grades yield financial benefits, and successful completion of the degree allows them to teach in schools and to earn extra money through private tutoring for the national exams. Furthermore, education is in high demand throughout the Arab nations, and

Egyptian-educated teachers can easily work as expatriates, especially in the Arab Gulf States and African countries.

### **2.3.1 Problems and Issues Facing Egyptian Teacher Education**

Teacher preparation is an essential part of the Egyptian comprehensive continued development. Qualified teachers would give the economy a chance to stabilise and enable Egypt to enjoy a majority of literate population. Several fundamental problems plague Egyptian education as a whole and teacher education specifically (Razik & Zaher, 1992). First, the control of the teaching profession and low salaries, given by Ministry of Education, has discouraged teachers to reach the required high standards in their profession. Additionally, the lack of co-ordination efforts between the universities has resulted in poorly-defined criteria for effective teaching.

Nine years ago, Hargreaves (2001) highlighted that Egyptian teachers' problems are many. First, teachers' quality and dedication to work is of low nature. Second, they are less than adequately paid; salaries which encourage private tuition. Third, most teachers are not adequately trained at the pre-service teacher training and receive very little in-service training. Furthermore, they are mostly deprived of compensation. Finally, most types of student assessment used are traditional focusing on written tests of rote-learned materials.

Recently, it has been asserted that Egyptian student-teachers are overloaded with studying many pedagogic courses, from five different pedagogic departments which lead them to encounter a number of problems (Obeid, 2010). First, they are burnout academically due to studying courses that are repetitive in their content, teaching aims and methods, and assessment techniques. Second, professors' absence from their lectures due to their participation in university projects and grants negatively affects students' learning for being deprived indirectly and unintentionally of their professors' experiences. The gap between theory and practice is another important issue that Obeid addressed to highlight that education professors recommend their students to use online learning; whereas they use lecturing as the only method of instruction. Another problem is that teaching practice schools are not co-operative with Faculties of Education as there is no actual involvement and interaction between them. Education professors and

their student teachers feel that they are unwanted guests at teaching practice schools where not only dialogue does not take place between student-teachers, cooperating teachers and school supervisors, but also they are not given the opportunity to practise their teaching in most classrooms. Furthermore, school supervisors are mostly subjective in assigning student teachers' final evaluation score. He added that private tuition is a common phenomenon where courses are summarised and students are trained on traditional exam questions and model answers. In doing so, student teachers are deprived of autonomous learning, and creative and critical thinking: two of the most important missions of Faculties of Education in Egypt. Finally, there is a gap between pedagogic and academic professors who blame each other for the low level of Faculties of Education and their graduates.

In reference to student teachers of English in Egypt, Seliem and Ali (2010) stressed that they lack English linguistic competence and professional knowledge. Therefore, they measured the effect of support groups and critical incidents analysis to help improve student teachers' teaching and linguistic performance. Results proved that the two strategies are influential in developing student teachers' linguistic competence and professional knowledge.

For the Egyptian educational system to be improved, we should pay due attention to the preparation of teachers from within the faculties of education. This could be fulfilled through the coordination of efforts between what the teacher educators do at the faculties of education and what the Ministry of Education does at the higher level. As teacher educators and trainers in the different specialities, we should empower our student teachers by planning, designing, implementing and evaluating our own teacher education and pedagogic programmes in order to address the areas of weaknesses and enhance the areas of strength. In reference to the Ministry of Education, it could help create and implement policies that encourage and support teacher education research, incentives that support teachers' social status and ongoing in-service teachers' professional development.

## **2.4 English Language Teaching in Egypt**

English is the first and most commonly used foreign language in Egypt. It is a highly valued language in both public and private Egyptian schools to the extent that it was introduced as a mandatory subject to first year primary in 2003/2004. Students receive five periods of English language teaching every week and this language teaching continues throughout the secondary schools.

Kachru (1992:233) places Egypt in what he calls the 'Expanding Circle' of countries in which English is becoming a universal second language. In addition, there are a number of Egyptian contexts, such as medicine, higher education, the sciences, or tourism, which reach the 'Outer Circle' as well. Many Egyptian universities require English-medium instruction in the final two years of university study in majors such as science, engineering, and technology (Schuab, 2000). In addition, there are some faculties in Egypt whose medium of instruction is only English such as the English Departments at the Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Law. As an important aspect of the current study, it is worth focusing on EFL teacher education in the Egyptian Faculties of Education.

### **2.4.1 English Language Teaching at the Pre-University Stages**

The pre-university educational system in Egypt is composed of three main stages: primary, preparatory and secondary. Student teachers of English will be teaching in any of the three stages according to the available job opportunities. At the primary stage, pupils start studying English from grade one to grade six. They study an English series called *Hand in Hand*. At the preparatory stage, pupils continue to study English for three more years. The name of the English series is changed into *Hello*. At this stage, third year preparatory pupils start to study a short story called *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. At the secondary stage, students continue to study the *Hello* series for three more years with a supplementary short story in each year.

#### **2.4.1.1 Teaching English in the Primary Stage**

The aims of teaching English in the primary cycle are intended to familiarise the pupils with the language (orally and in writing) in a stress-free and fun-loaded atmosphere to prepare them for more demanding tasks in the subsequent stages. Below is the general statement of the performance objectives of Teaching English

as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in all stages in terms of language skills (English Language Teaching Unit, 2010:3).

TEFL in the primary cycle aims to fulfil the following:

- 1- assure that learning English is easy while developing children's enthusiasm for, and desire to learn a new language.
- 2- develop positive learning habits such as turn-taking, organisational skills, and co-operative learning.
- 3- enlarge children's' horizons so that they become familiar with different cultures while developing an understanding of their own.
- 4- experience language awareness in terms of how English works and differs from Arabic.
- 5- enable children to communicate simply, but effectively through the development of oral proficiency in English.
- 6- lay solid foundations for the development of literacy skills in English.
- 7- enrich the pupils' vocabulary and develop their enthusiasm as well as their reading skills.

#### **2.4.1.2 Teaching English in the Preparatory Stage**

TEFL in the preparatory cycle aims to fulfil the following:

- 1- develop positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language
- 2- enable pupils to appreciate the importance of English in the progress of science and technology at both national and international levels.
- 3- encourage openness to foreign cultures
- 4- develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in an integrated way, with the focus on the development of communication skills
- 5- develop the ability to extract information from recorded listening or a reading text or through different forms of mass media
- 6- train pupils in the skills of logical and critical thinking
- 7- provide for self-realization focusing on this concept through assigning tasks to pupils which contribute to this purpose
- 8- train the pupils to participate positively in dialogue and to respect the opinions of others (e.g. through debate, discussion and the exploration of concepts)
- 9- train the pupils in problem-solving, collaborative learning, and the use of different learning resources

- 10- develop skills for learner autonomy by enabling pupils to acquire a set of learning strategies (e.g. Problem solving, discovery learning, creative thinking, and critical reading)
- 11-encourage the development of pupils' creativity.
- 12-develop pupils' moral and social values by encouraging attitudes of tolerance, cooperation and teamwork.

#### **2.4.1.3 Teaching English at the Secondary Stage**

TEFL in the secondary cycle aims to fulfil the following:

The main aim of *Hello! English for Secondary Schools* is to further equip students with the necessary language, thinking and study skills to communicate effectively and understand competently spoken and written English. It aims to give students the necessary experience and confidence to apply these skills inside and outside the classroom and beyond school in their current and future lives. New language, skills and topics are introduced gradually and practised thoroughly so that students have the chance to learn and use the language before they move on. Critical thinking skills and awareness of strategies to improve language and learning skills support the learning of the language and contribute to the development of a more autonomous learner.

##### **2.4.1.3.1 Specific Objectives of TEFL at the Secondary Cycle**

- Extending learners' linguistic knowledge
- Taking account of learners' development
- Pointing learners towards the right direction
- Taking into account individual differences in learning styles
- Reading the English language with understanding and critical judgement
- Writing clearly on various topics
- Listening and speaking well, especially in structured situations
- Developing an understanding of the structure of the English language
- Promoting study skills for further study.

#### **2.4.1.4 The Effect of Teaching Composition Writing in Arabic on EFL Writing**

Spoken Arabic is totally different from written Arabic which makes learning to write in Arabic a challenging task for beginning learners. Drawing on my personal experience as an Egyptian student at the different pre-university stages, I will shed light on the teaching of Arabic composition writing in Egypt. Pupils in Egypt start to write pieces of composition in their primary schools. As a primary school pupil, I started to learn Arabic composition writing in grade five, once a week for a period of 35 minutes. The teacher selects a writing topic and writes it on the board. S/he elicits responses from the cleverest pupils in class and writes them on the board. After that, the teacher writes some formulaic expressions which pupils can use to start, include in the middle, and at the end of their written paragraphs. Moreover, the teacher explains some punctuation rules to follow while writing such as indentation, dash, semi-colon...etc. After that, the teacher asks pupils to write their composition pieces at home as a homework. The next week, the teacher collects the composition writing notebooks to mark them in her/his free time. The type of written feedback received was a reaction response rather than corrective or constructive one. At the end of the semester, composition writing constitutes a part of the Arabic language exam in which we used to have an obligatory writing topic. After pupils pass the primary stage, they are transferred to the preparatory and secondary stages where teachers expect us to have learnt everything in Arabic composition writing. Therefore, they teach us nothing new. Actually, no composition writing book was used to help us learn how to write pieces of composition in Arabic. This made us unable to know what good standard Arabic looks like in writing and how to plan, structure or organise our writing in Arabic. But for the help of our parents at home, we would not have been able to write Arabic composition. Consequently, we start learning English as a foreign language without having a solid theoretical model in L1 that we can adapt to write in English. This could foreshadow the numerous difficulties that Egyptian students may face in English writing at the pre-university stages as well as at the university level.

#### **2.4.2 EFL Teacher Education in Egypt**

In Egypt, qualified English teachers have not kept pace with government mandates. El-Naggar et al. (2001) point out that many English teachers lack training in the effective instruction of young learners and experience in communicative teaching methods, and they feel that their own English skills are inadequate. This places great emphasis and responsibility on the shoulders of those in charge of planning, designing and implementing English language teacher education in Egypt at the pre-service level, where student teachers are trained to be qualified teachers, and at the in-service level, where English teachers' professional development is monitored and evaluated to help them continue progressively in their profession.

According to Snow et al. (2006) non-native teachers of English represent 80% of all English teachers globally and their level of language proficiency deserves due attention. Taking this into consideration, the site of this study, states the following aims in their documentation for the ELT preparation programme. By the end of the programme, student teachers should be able to:

- become models of language proficiency.
- become knowledgeable about the dynamics of culture in general.
- draw on a comprehensive command of subject matter and the language of instruction
- provide multiple paths to help students develop language proficiency
- select; adapt; create and use varied resources
- employ a variety of assessment methods
- contribute to the growth and development of their colleagues

To fulfil these aims, the Faculty of Education runs the ELT teacher education programme that will be outlined in detail in the following section.

## **2.5 Prospective EFL Teacher Education**

To be a teacher of English in any of the pre-university stages (primary, preparatory or secondary), Egyptian students join the ELT programme in one of the twenty-two faculties of education in Egypt. Primary teachers of English usually join the English and Social Studies programme in the basic education department at the faculties of education. These teachers are educated to be teachers of English and Social Studies at the primary stage. Their programme of study lasts for four years, each of which consists of two semesters.

With regards to the preparation of teachers of English at the preparatory and secondary stages, the area of the current study, students join the ELT programme at one of the faculties of education which lasts for four years, each of which consists of two semesters. This programme encompasses three components of ELT teacher preparation: pedagogic, academic and cultural. The pedagogic courses are introduced in the first two years of the programme and are taught more intensively in the last two years of the programme. The cultural courses are taught at the same time, but last only for the first two years of the programme. In reference to the academic courses, they are taught through all four years of study. Further details of each component will follow.

### **2.5.1. ELT Pedagogic Component**

The pedagogic component of ELT teacher Education starts gradually with a 2-year course entitled "Introduction to Educational and Behavioural Sciences". The total number of hours for this course is 20 hours. Once students pass their first two years, they start to study pedagogic courses intensively along with their academic courses. The total number of pedagogic courses in the third and fourth years of study is twelve (with a total of 52 hours per week during each semester), equal to 30.9% of the total courses of study. The courses are Developmental Psychology, Educational Psychology, Comparative Education, History of Education and Instruction in Egypt, Problems of Education in the Arab World, Foundations of Education, EFL Teaching Methods, Curricula & Educational Media, Psychological Health, Social Psychology, Health Education and Teaching Practice.

### **2.5.2 ELT Cultural Component**

The cultural component of the ELT teacher preparation programme takes place in the first two years of study. Students are prepared culturally by studying three courses: Excerpts of Arabic Literature and Grammar, European Languages (a continuation of the second foreign languages studied in the GCSE: French, German or Italian) and Human Rights. These courses are studied for 16 hours per week, equal to 7.3% of the total courses of study.

### **2.5.3 ELT Academic Component**

The academic component of ELT teacher preparation programme takes place during all four years of the programme of study. Students take seven academic courses in the first two years of study, reduced to six subjects in the last two years of study. The courses are Translation, Poetry & Criticism, Novel & Prose, Drama & Criticism, Phonetics & Grammar, Essay Writing and Linguistic Drills, and History of English Literature. All courses are taught during all four years of study except History of English Literature, which is taught for the first two years of study only. These taught courses which are allotted 136 hours per week, represent 61.8% of the total courses of study. According to my experience as an undergraduate student at and the results of the preliminary questionnaire and informal interviews with a group of student teachers of English, the Essay and Linguistic Drills course, as the focus of the current study, will be detailed in the following section.

#### **2.5.3.1 Essay Writing and Linguistic Drills**

The Essay and Linguistic Drills course at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt is allotted 24 hours, given in 12 lectures, of two hours each. There are no clear objectives, but the faculty of education has adopted the standards of the adolescence and young adulthood English language arts in America based on the National Board for the Professional Teaching Standards, one of which is that teachers of English should develop and refine students' abilities to write different types of texts for a variety of purposes and audiences effectively and independently. This suggests that teachers of English should have these abilities to be able to help their students acquire them. As the title of the course denotes, it is composed of two parts: essay writing and linguistic drills. The essay writing part of the course is meant to develop and refine students' writing skills.

With regards to the teaching approach, this is a description based on personal experience as an undergraduate student in the essay writing course at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. Although some teachers may vary the procedure a little, overall this is a fairly realistic description of what occurs. The lecturer starts with asking students to buy a book or photocopy the material s/he gives them. What happens inside the essay writing classroom does not relate to TEFL methodology as most lecturers read from the book and then assign parts of the written exercises to be done at home. The next time, the lecturers teach essay writing, they start with answering the homework with only those few brilliant students who might be graduates of private English language schools. After that, they start reading again the next part and do the same thing as before. Sometimes, they ask if there are any ambiguous parts that students do not understand, but students frequently do not respond. This may be for a variety of reasons, the most important of which is the fear of losing face.

Based on our observation (i.e. myself and my fellow observer), I will spotlight a typical example of an essay writing class of one of the three teacher observed. The essay writing lecture starts with the teacher sitting in a chair with a table, in front of the blackboard, on a stage that is two meters away from his students. The students and their teacher are sitting in a big lecture theatre that accommodates 165 students where each student has a copy of the article given by the teacher on their desks. The lecture lasted for 50 minutes although it should last for 90 minutes. The teacher starts his lesson by asking his students the following question: "Where did we stop last time?" One of the students replied saying "the third paragraph on page 4." After that, the teacher asks for a volunteer to read the paragraph where they stopped last time. One of the female students raised her hand and the teacher gave her permission to start her reading out loud. Once this student finished reading, the teacher asked for another volunteer to read the same paragraph once more. Therefore, some other students raised their hand and the teacher chose one to read for the second time out loud. Then, the teacher starts to ask about the meaning of different words in the read paragraph. Students started to give him synonyms of the words one following the other. At the same time, the

teacher asked students for word derivatives such as the noun of this verb, the adjective, the opposite...etc. Next, the teacher asked all students about the main idea of the paragraph and the link between this paragraph and the preceding one. Students started to raise their hands to give the answers. After three attempts, one of the students gives the right answer from the teacher's point of view. This teaching procedure lasted for about 22 minutes. After that, the teacher repeated the same teaching procedure with the same steps. The only difference between this teaching procedure and the previous one is that the teacher stood up and started to write the word synonyms, antonyms and derivatives on the board. This teaching procedure lasted for 28 minutes. Finally, the teacher told his students that they will continue the rest in the next lecture.

In reference to the linguistic drills, they are incorporated in this course with the aim of developing students' reading comprehension. In reality, most lecturers give students a reading comprehension passage to read and answer its questions. The lecturer hands one of the students a copy of a reading passage to photocopy for all his/her classmates. S/he then assigns students to read this passage at home and answer its questions before coming to classroom. In the next session, only a number of the better students are called upon to answer. When a student gets the answer wrong, the lecturer asks for someone else who could give the right answer, justifying his/her answer. In most cases, lecturers ignore all the other students who have not read the reading passage and consequently did not take part in answering the questions.

The lecturers of this course are graduates of the English department, Faculties of Arts, in Egypt. They are either 'demonstrators' holding B.A., 'assistant lecturers' holding M.A. or 'lecturers' holding PhD degree in either English literature or linguistics. Each lecturer has his/her own teaching approach that is mainly derived from what they have learnt as a university student. At the Faculty of Arts, there are no TEFL methodology courses. In terms of the university lecturers' professional development, they attend research seminars related only to developing their academic research skills. This means that these lecturers are not methodologically prepared enough to teach any of the academic courses including essay and linguistic drills at the faculties of education or at any other faculty in Egypt. The concerned faculty of education in Egypt resorts to these essay writing teachers to

teach the essay writing and linguistic drills course because they are the only available academic staff. These lecturers change from one year to another, resulting in different teaching approaches and materials that might duplicate learning and confuse students.

Concerning the course material, there is no specified series of books to be followed from year one to year four. The lecturers either ask students to buy a certain essay writing book of the lecturer's choice, or to photocopy whatever material the lecturer gives them each lecture. This means that there is no specified syllabus or any directions that could guide students to the right essay writing path. This implies that it is difficult to know what students have studied or learnt due to the fragmented nature of the teaching materials given to them.

Based on my personal experience and our observation, the formative assessments that took place during the course were marginal and unreflective of students' level or needs. As a graduate of the same faculty of education in Egypt, I am fully aware that the formative assessments take place in the form of attendance and classroom participation. No other formative assessment techniques were carried out during the course. In relation to the summative assessment, it takes the form of the written examination at the end of the course. The exam paper of this course is divided into two main sections: essay writing and a reading passage with some comprehension questions in the form of essay questions and multiple choice questions. In the essay writing section, students are required to choose one of three essay writing topics about which they should write an essay not less than five paragraphs. Once all the exams are over, students wait for about two months for their results. What is disappointing for students is that they get their results for all the courses in the form of marks only with no reports at all. In addition, all the results are hung on the wall for all students in the form of class lists including their names, studied courses and marks which violates their privacy, but this is the university policy. In this way, students do not know why they got a good mark for a certain course and a bad mark for another one.

In addition, the course does not give students the opportunity to evaluate the course or to express their own views about what they have learnt. Furthermore,

the lack of both the formative assessment and students' evaluation of the course makes lecturers unaware of how dangerous it is to ignore students' needs and views in both teaching and assessment. Thus, assessment is considered really discouraging for students and time consuming for the busy lecturers.

In relation to the feedback practices used in this course, the most commonly used one is the oral discussion of students' most common mistakes in writing. The lecturers are busy teaching students only what they perceive to be necessary and ignore their own perceived needs. Thus, students receive oral feedback through discussing the most common mistakes among a sample of 10% of students whose written essays are marked. Thus, lecturers discover that students are weak in essay writing only when they read their students' written essays while marking them at the end of the year.

Another critical issue that should be addressed here is the lack of clear criteria for marking students' written essays. The lecturers do not use rubrics through which they can judge the quality of the written essay and students can know their level. In addition, students receive their mark for the exam without any feedback reports, which prevents students from knowing their points of strength and weakness in writing.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the essay writing and linguistic drills course fails in a number of areas. It fails to help students learn how to write well-organised essays in English. As a result, it fails to help student-teachers of English to transfer good writing skills to their students in the teaching practice. This justifies conducting the current study to investigate the essay writing difficulties that Egyptian student-teachers of English encounter while writing their essays in English.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Pinpointing the Egyptian context and background within which the current study has taken place paves the way for more comprehensive vision of a whole study to come. It is considered an introduction to know the nature and the current status of the Egyptian educational system in general and the ELT teacher education programme in particular. In this sense, it can help us understand the reasons behind any weakness or shortcomings in this programme at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. The next chapter will shed light on the pertinent literature review that addresses various essay writing issues globally, nationally and locally in Egypt.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this literature review is to shed light on some aspects related to the development of EFL writing in general, with special reference to the Arab world and the Egyptian context. This chapter is divided into three main sections, each of which tackles one aspect of EFL writing. The first section reviews a number of issues including theory and research in ESL/EFL writing, approaches to teaching ESL/EFL writing, EFL writers, various definitions of EFL writing, the nature of ESL/EFL writing, purposes of writing, and the importance of essay writing. The second section deals with three major factors affecting the EFL/ESL writing development: learning factors, instructional factors and contextual factors. The third section is concerned with the different EFL writing challenges and difficulties that students encounter in their writing. These difficulties have been divided into seven subsections including: prewriting difficulties, organisational difficulties with special reference to cohesion and coherence, lexical difficulties, and technical writing difficulties such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, revision and editing.

#### **3.2 Theory and Research in ESL/EFL Writing**

Presenting the theoretical background of ESL/EFL writing is of great value to the understanding of the basic beliefs and practices in the field whose historical and philosophical dimensions pave the way to approach the current instructional paradigms from a well-grounded and critical standpoint (Matsuda, 2003b; & Polio, 2003). In addition, Ferris & Hedgcock (2004) encourage us to view theory not as abstract and distant from the challenges novice and expert teachers encounter, but as an enormous practical value. Studying the historical accounts dealing with ESL writing theory and practice (Cumming, 2001; Leki, 2000; Matsuda, 2003a, 2003b; & Raimes, 1998) provides insightful views into the different ways ESL writing theory and practice have originated, shedding light on how the field has reached this status as a unique comprehensive discipline. This highlights that the theoretically-grounded principles in accordance with empirical research shape our thinking about the planning, the practice and the assessment of our teaching. Without theoretical knowledge, teachers would not be able to recognise the points

of strengths and the shortcomings of their teaching. This underscores the role of teachers as critical and reflective researchers who could action change.

Ferris & Hedgcock (2004) illustrate that L2 writing lacks an organised body of conclusive theory and research that could be used as a base for a straightforward introduction to processes of learning and teaching. Although there is a huge corpus of research on L2 writing, Cumming and Riazi (2000) suggest that the field is currently lacking a coherent and consistent understanding of “how people actually learn to write in a second language” and of how teaching contributes to this learning (p. 57).

According to Ferris & Hedgcock (2004), there are a number of trends in ESL writing theories and schools of thought and suggest a categorization based on the following five foci:

**a) Focus on Discursive Form, Traditional Form, and “Current-Traditional Rhetoric” (1966).**

This trend has linked L2 writing approaches in the 1960s to the audio-lingual method in second language teaching. This method is characterised by dependence on mimicry, memorisation of set phrases and over-learning. Structures are sequenced and taught one at a time using repetitive drills. This method viewed writing as reinforcing oral patterns of the language being learned and testing learners' accurate usage of grammatical rules (Rivers, 1968). Writing approaches in this period underscored controlled composition in which copying short, competently written pieces of composition is underpinned to help students practise specific syntactic patterns and lexical forms (Silva, 1990; Matsuda, 1999; Kroll, 2001). In an extension of this model, known as “current-traditional rhetoric” (Berlin & Inkster, 1980; Silva, 1990; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) students were taught to write coherent pieces of composition by combining and arranging sentences into paragraphs based on prearranged formulae. In this model, imitating some specific rhetorical patterns based on authentic samples was pinpointed (Barnett, 2002).

**b) Focus on the Writer: Expressionism and Cognitivism (1976).**

The focus on what writers “actually do as they write” (Raimes, 1991:409) has occupied researchers and teachers' minds. This paradigm scrutinised the heuristics, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive processes that writers use as they plan, draft, revise, and edit their composed texts (Cumming, 2001; Manchon, 2001; Ransdell & Barbier, 2002b). Classroom procedures related to this writer oriented research include practice with invention strategies, creation and sharing of multiple drafts, peer collaboration, abundant revision, and implementation of editing strategies. The corpus of this approach may ask writers to choose their own topics and to complete writing tasks more than any other approach (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004).

**c) Focus on Disciplinary Content and Discursive Practices (1986).**

In this model, students in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are assisted with “the language of the thinking processes and the structure or shape of content” (Mohan, 1986:18). This emphasis on content does not exclude the use of writer processes-oriented principles and procedures such as prewriting, revision, collaboration, and peer review (Horowitz, 1986b; Guleff, 2002; Johns, 2003). The main core is placed on “the instructor's determination of what academic content is most appropriate to build whole courses or modules of reading and writing tasks around that content” (Raimes, 1991: 411).

**d) Focus on Readers and Discursive Communities: Social Constructionism (1986).**

Reader and discourse-based frameworks for ESL writing instruction have emerged partly as a reaction to the prescriptions of writer-centred approaches. Reader and discourse-oriented writing pedagogy is based on the social constructionist tenet that writers need to be well-trained in one or more academic discourse communities. This requires writing instruction to prepare students to anticipate, satisfy, and even challenge the demands of academic readers while composing their written products (Flower, 1979; Flower, Long, & Higgins, 2000; Pennycook, 2001; Hyland, 2002).

To operationalise a reader-centred pedagogy emphasising discipline-specific rhetorical forms, teachers need to collect texts and assignments from the relevant disciplines, analyse their purposes, assess audience expectations, and keep learners informed with their findings. According to this view, writing instruction most appropriately centres on identifying, practising, and reproducing the implicit and explicit features of written texts aimed at particular audiences (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004).

**e) Focus on Socio-political Issues and Critical Pedagogy, (1990).**

Critical pedagogy to literacy instruction stems from the charge that social constructionist approaches have tended to overlook “socio-political issues affecting life in and outside of academic settings” (Benesch, 2001: xv). While EAP and socioliterate approaches view writing and the teaching of writing as having social purposes, critical pedagogy challenges the assumptions that those purposes are necessarily useful to novice writers.

The ESL/EFL writing theory that is most appropriate to the context of the current study is the one focusing on readers and discursive communities. I think that it is suitable for the current study for the following reasons. First, reader and discourse-oriented writing pedagogy is based on social constructionism that theoretically informs my current study. Second, Egyptian student teachers of English experience some difficulties in writing although the assessment of learners’ educational outcomes is mainly conducted through writing. This accentuates the need for student teachers of English to be well-trained in one or more academic discourse communities. Third, Egyptian EFL essay writing lecturers might need to employ a variety of teaching strategies and techniques that help them teach students the discipline-specific rhetorical forms. This will enable Egyptian student teachers of English to identify, practise, and reproduce the different features of written texts aimed at particular audiences coherently and cohesively. Finally, student teachers should learn how to write collaboratively as this aspect of social interaction reinforces one of their teaching/learning skills (i.e. co-operative learning).

### **3.2.1 Approaches to Teaching ESL/EFL Writing**

Teaching writing is not an easy task due to its complex nature that requires the mastery of a combination of different skills (Alber-Morgan et al., 2007). This section deals with four major approaches that have affected the development of ESL/EFL writing: the product approach, the process approach, the genre approach, and the post-process approach to teaching writing.

#### **3.2.1.1 The Product Approach to Teaching Writing**

The product approach as its name suggests, focuses on students' finished written products. It focuses mainly on linguistic knowledge, stressing the appropriate use of vocabulary, syntax and cohesive devices (Yang, 2005). Most of the time writing tasks encourage learners to imitate, copy and transform models provided by teachers or textbooks. Accordingly, the final product which reflects the writer's linguistic knowledge is highly valued. In this perspective the teacher plays a primary role as an examiner (Zamel, 1987).

Within this approach, teaching writing is viewed primarily as teaching mechanics: punctuation, spelling, and correct usage. Classroom time allotted for writing is typically allocated to drills and exercises on mechanics or grammar. The basic rationale is that good writing is correct writing. Literature and reading, not writing are the foci of the product approach. Students have two reading assignments weekly but only two writing assignments annually. Assignments always ask students to write about their personal experiences such as what they did during summer vacation, and the responses formed the basis of writing activities for the rest of the year (Williams, 2003).

#### **3.2.1.2 The Process Approach to Teaching L2 Writing**

Reassessing the effectiveness of the product approach to composition writing resulted in more attention to examining and understanding the actions that develop writing as a process and not as a product. Consequently, this has led to a shift towards what is called the process approach to ESL/EFL composition writing. The concept of this approach sees writing as “a complicated cognitive process” and “involves multiple stages: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing” (Zeng, 2005:67). It emphasises the stages of the writing process as well as the writer's individual and independent production. Importantly, it examines how writers create, compose and revise ideas in order to generate a text (Zamel, 1983a).

The emphasis in a process-oriented classroom is on process rather than on product. Students attempt to master the behaviours that characterise good writers, with the teacher offering advice and suggestions. Activities focus on writing, discussing drafts, and rewriting. Therefore, an important difference between the product approach and the process approach is that students do much more writing in the latter. Completing an essay is not the focus of the process approach, but what matters is helping students through the diverse stages of composing. Classrooms become writing workshops in which students share what they write with one another and teachers regularly facilitate as students develop compositions through several drafts. The workshop has become a central feature of writing in the process approach in which teachers facilitate learning and writing (Donovan & McClelland, 1980; Williams, 2003). Moreover, Atkinson (2003:11) holds process writing in high regard and considers the stages of pre-writing, drafting, feedback, and revising as important classroom activities. He further adds that it is difficult to conceptualise the effective teaching of different kinds of writing at the university level without it.

In the context of the Arab world, a number of research studies (El-Shafie, 1990; Mohammad, 1993; Al-Sharah, 1997; Ghannage, 2000; Mansor, 2005; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Abdel-Latif, 2009) confirmed the feasibility and practicality of the process writing approach to developing the EFL writing skills of Arabic speaking students. For example, El-Shafie (1990) showed that the study participants made a recognisable consistent progress in the quantity and quality of writing over the year. In a writing process classroom, El-Shafie reported that Arab secondary students improved the quality of their writing from first to last draft of each assignment and from one piece of composition to another. He finally concluded that the writing process classroom facilitated the development of both good and poor writers, despite wide variation in the amount of revision from student to student and topic to topic.

Similarly, Mohammad (1993) assured that using the process writing approach in a writing course to develop the writing skills of Egyptian secondary stage students was more effective in developing students' writing skills than the traditional method of instruction used in Egyptian classrooms. In harmony with that, Al-Sharah (1997) recommended that teaching writing as a process to intermediate proficiency Arab EFL students along with compensatory textual and rhetorical exercises are recommended. Moreover, Ghannage (2000) reported that writing creatively as a process could be applied to help Lebanese primary-school students gain fluency as well as accuracy while communicating in the language. It is concluded that the application of the creative writing process could affect the learning of listening/comprehension, reading/comprehension, guided writing, grammar and spelling as well as the quality of writing in different genres.

### **3.2.1.3 Genre Approach to Teaching L2 Writing**

Hyland (2003:23) defines genre theory as "a socially informed theory of language offering an authoritative pedagogy grounded in research on texts and contexts, strongly committed to empowering students to participate effectively in target situations." He adds that learning based on explicit awareness of language, rather than through experiment and exploration is at the heart of genre pedagogy.

This approach is theoretically underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the collaborative nature of learning between the teacher and students. In this approach, the teacher's role is instrumental in the sense that s/he supports students to move gradually from modelling target genres, to joint text construction through the writing of several drafts and peer-assistance until they can construct text independently (Ibid). In this regard, Badger & White (2000) summarise the genre-based approach highlighting that it focuses on writing in terms of linguistic knowledge and a social purpose. However, the development of writing takes place by analysing and imitating the texts that the teacher provides to his students.

A genre-oriented approach is based on a systemic functional theory of language proposed by Halliday (1994). The approach is based on a teaching-learning cycle where strategies such as modelling texts and joint construction are promoted. The approach is based on 'learning through guidance and interaction'. The learning-teaching cycle is shown in: modelling a text, joint construction of a text, and independent construction of a text (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Dudley-Evans, 1997; Firkins et al., 2007).

Genre proponents believe in the dialogic nature of writing (Bakhtin, 1986) due to its presupposition and response to an active audience, and its involvement in many voices through links to other texts. Therefore, genre writing is embedded in discourse community where writers, texts and readers interact in a particular discursive space (Swales, 1998). Therefore, Bakhtin's concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (1986) played a significant role in genre theory. Consequently, the genre approach looks into writing from a linguistic perspective where it corresponds to different social contexts for different purposes such as writing sale letters, research articles, and reports (Flowerdew, 1993).

One point of strength of genre pedagogies in L2 writing as advocated by Hyland (2007) is studying language and context through analysing and deconstructing texts explicitly taking into consideration students' needs and enriching their resources to help them understand and critically engage in different discourses. Thus, genre pedagogies in L2 writing focus on studying language and context through analysing and deconstructing texts explicitly taking into consideration students' needs and enriching their resources to help them understand and critically engage in different discourses (Hyland, 2007). In this way, genre approaches are most likely to provide students with effective means to be able to question, compare, and deconstruct cultural and linguistic resources to reveal their fundamental assumptions (Hasan, 1996; Hyland, 2003).

Not only does genre view writing differently, but it also offers a number of unique teaching practices. Unlike process writing, genre based pedagogies places L2 writing within a contextual framework that underlies the meanings and text-types in a specific situation (Hyland, 2003). To construct a well-written text, students need to be knowledgeable of the lexico-grammatical patterns which can normally take place while planning, writing or revising (Flowerdew, 2005). Therefore, enlightening student writers with the genre-specific grammar helps them to perceive writing instruction not as a hidden process that needs exploration, but as a conscious manipulation of language and choice (Hyland, 2003).

#### **3.2.1.4 Post Process Approach to Teaching Writing**

The post process approach has come into being not as a rejection of the process movement, but as its extension (McComiskey, 2000). It is viewed by Hyland (2003b) as equivalent to the Australian genre approach as a social response to the process approach. Moreover, the post-process movement does not represent a unified theoretical front, but it might be defined as “the rejection of the dominance of process at the expense of other aspects of writing and writing instruction” (Matsuda, 2003: 79-80).

To make it clearer, Matsuda (2003b: 78-79), for example, refuses the supremacy of the process approach at the expense of other aspects of writing and recognises the multiplicity of L2 writing theories and pedagogies. An example of the post process approach is represented in the process genre approach to teaching writing. In their paper, Badger & White (2000:157-160) devised an approach to teaching writing informed by a synthesis of three approaches: product, process, and genre. They argue that each of the three approaches complements the other. Their approach views writing as a series of stages derived from a certain situation to produce a text. When learners lack knowledge, the teacher, other learners, and examples of the target genre can be used as potential sources. The teacher’s role in this approach provides the required knowledge and skills to his/her students to facilitate their progress.

For Badger & White, writing involves knowledge about language, (as in product and genre approaches), knowledge of the writing context and purpose (as in genre approaches), and language use skills (as in process approaches). Moreover, writing development takes place by exploiting students' potential (as in process approaches) and by providing input to which students respond (as in product and genre approaches).

In compliance with reviewed literature and related studies, the findings of the current study, the nature of EFL essay writing in Egypt, and the social constructionism as the theoretical framework informing the current study, a synthesis of both the process approach and the genre approach is believed to yield an appropriate approach informing the theoretical and the pedagogical approaches to teaching L2 essay writing in Egypt for a number of reasons. Firstly, the genre approach exposes students to models of the target genre that they are studying which helps them to understand and analyse its structure and features. This modelling process helps students to be self-confident in their skills, motivated to write and critical of other's pieces of writing. Secondly, the teacher's role in the genre approach is different from other writing approaches as s/he jointly constructs written text with their students; a step that is needed in Egypt as it reinforces students leaning and supports them psychologically. In addition, the genre approach focuses on helping students learn the different lexico-grammatical patterns; some skills in which Egyptian student teachers of English have difficulty in writing. Finally, the genre approach leads students to gradually construct a written text independently, which is the most important and desired outcome in Egypt.

A number of other reasons, as argued by Casanave (2004), assert that process writing can help enhance and develop students' writing skills. First, L2 writing teachers can help students improve different aspects of writing through effective invention, drafting and revising strategies, awareness and control, expressivity and fluency. Second, the act of writing within the process movement frees students from the formal restraints of academic assignments and assists them to explore issues of personal relevance. However, this does not mean that process writing neglected the accuracy needed for academic writing as when students revise and

edit, they can spot any errors that took place while writing (Zamel, 1983a, 1984). Finally, writing pedagogies informed by the expressivist views calls for using free writing, brainstorming, personal journal writing, and personal essay writing. The use of topics within these pedagogies is not assigned by the writing teachers, but they relate to students' personal lives. Egyptian student teachers of English experience some difficulties in the different essay writing skills which justifies the need for training in the different invention strategies, writing of multiple drafts, peer collaboration, abundant revision, as well as some editing strategies for which the process approach calls (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). More detailed description of this proposed approach is provided in the implications section (see section 6.6).

### **3.2.2 ESL/EFL Writers' Uniqueness**

Reviewing the literature about ESL/EFL writing, I found out that there is a distinction between native English speaking students and students whose English is a second or a foreign language. Silva (1993) underscored this difference by observing that "L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in important ways from L1 writing" (p. 696). In this sense, it should be brought to our attention that "there is no such thing as a generalised ESL student" (Raimes, 1991, p. 420). In response to this, Kumaravadivelu (2003) pinpoints that adopting the best teaching approaches depends on our current ESL/EFL writing knowledge that meet our students' needs.

On the part of ESL/EFL writing teachers, there are a number of challenges of which teachers should be fully aware. These challenges include linguistic, ethnic, and cultural background, not to mention language proficiency, literacy, educational attainment, and cognitive development (Cumming, 2001; Leki, 2000; Raimes, 1998; Spack, 1997b). Also, classroom teachers should be attentive to learners' attitudes toward learning, formal instruction, and the target subject matter, as well as students' motivation to acquire linguistic, cognitive, and academic skills. Age, academic goals, aptitude, anxiety, cognitive strategy use, language awareness, and social distance are among other factors known to influence learning (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). I have shed light on all these aspects of writing learning and teaching to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of the challenges facing classroom teachers of ESL/EFL writers. At the same time, I recommend addressing

these challenges while planning, designing and teaching writing to EFL student writers.

Thus, a fundamental characteristic distinguishing ESL/EFL writers from their native speakers' peers is that they are bilingual. This distinct privilege that bilingual students possess is a double-edged weapon as it makes them unique learners enjoying linguistic, metalinguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills that may differ from the skill sets of monolingual, native students of English (Carrell & Monroe, 1995; Harklau et al., 1999; Brisk & Harrington, 2000). Despite being similar in some respects, there are differences between L1 and L2 writing that need to be addressed by experts in L2 writing instruction. If these issues are addressed appropriately, student writers will be fairly treated, effectively taught, and equally succeed in their writing-related personal and academic endeavours (Silva, 1993).

In reference to the current study, Egyptian student teachers of English are bilingual as they are native speakers of Arabic and learners of English as a foreign language. They have studied all their different subjects at the pre-university level in Arabic for a period of 12 years, except English and the second foreign language; French, German, Italian or Spanish. Being bilingual, these students need special attention in their EFL writing due to the differences between the two languages in rhetorical structures, layout, organisation, style and mechanics.

### **3.2.3. Writing Defined**

Chakraverty & Gautum (2000) define writing as “a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic and to analyse and classify any background knowledge. Then, writers need a suitable language to structure these ideas in the form of a coherent discourse.” (p.1). Differently, Andrews (2001) views writing as “a complex activity that draws on the imagination, feeling, state of mind, mood, cognitive state, capability with the medium, context and other factors” (p. 43). Syntactically, Abisamara (2001) regards writing as “a process of natural generation of ideas with focus on meaning and communication that precedes concerns about form and grammar” (p.1). Lately, Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh (2007) define writing as “a complex activity, a social act which reflects the writer’s communicative skills which is difficult to develop and learn, especially in an EFL

context" (p. 147). Recently, Myhill (2009:405) views L1 writing as being composed of three domains: a cognitive psychological perspective, a socio-cultural perspective and a linguistic perspective. In line with the process genre approach to teaching L2 writing adopted in the current study, I perceive EFL essay writing is a multidimensional process in a wholly socially-determined context where students and their teachers jointly-construct genres of writing through the different stages of modelling, planning, writing and revision leading to students' independent construction of text.

#### **3.2.4. Purposes of Writing**

Students write for a number of reasons including the following: to be assessed; to improve their critical thinking skills, to assist their understanding and memory; to broaden their learning beyond the classroom; to enhance their communication skills; and to be prepared as future professionals in different spheres of knowledge (Coffin et al., 2003). In relation to Egyptian student teachers of English, they mostly write for summative assessment purposes in the form of end of course tests. This might be attributed to a variety of reasons. First, most of essay writing teachers' approaches at university do not focus on asking students to practise writing in classroom. Second, students perceive EFL essay writing as a difficult skill that they have not mastered which justify their low scores in the essay writing exam. Moreover, students are not in the habit of writing for pleasure. Culturally, most students are not encouraged whether prior to joining university or at university to write for any other reason except for study and assessment purposes. In addition, students are psychologically challenged about writing for fear of losing face in front of their teachers and classmates. This might also denote students' reluctance to peer review written essays.

### **3.2.5. Importance of EFL/L2 Writing**

EFL/L2 writing as a multifaceted skill is important for several reasons (Tchudi, 1999: 244 & 245). First, it clarifies one's thinking and helps to explore one's ideas. Moreover, writing is far more than just generating ideas on paper; composing is more than translating ideas into words. It is a way of developing and exploring ethics and values, of penetrating into questions that perplex, as a way of forming deep and lasting social relationships. Moreover, composing may be regarded as the most fundamental of the liberal arts as it certainly encompasses most of the language arts

EFL/ESL Writing has always been considered an important skill in teaching and learning. As Rao (2007) comments, EFL writing is useful in two respects: First, it motivates students' thinking, organizing ideas, developing their ability to summarise, analyse and criticise. Second, it strengthens students' learning, thinking and reflecting on the English language.

In relation to the context of the current study, essay writing is significant to the learning of Egyptian student teachers of English for the following reasons. On one hand, mastering the essay writing skills will facilitate student teachers' acquisition of the basic study skills needed for understanding what they study and expressing it in their own words and from their points of view. This will assist them to keep away from memorization, rote learning and plagiarism that are much discouraged in the recent theories of teaching and learning. In addition, competence in essay writing will help students pass all their academic courses successfully because they mainly depend on answering the examination questions in writing. Moreover, being proficient in essay writing in English will enable student teachers of English to be successful teachers and action researchers in the future. They will be able to reflect in writing about their teaching experiences, students' needs, problems and progression. Finally, essay writing is deemed necessary for teachers of English because they will transfer these skills to their future students through teaching, modelling, assessing and giving feedback to them when responding to their written essays.

### **3.3 Factors Affecting EFL/ESL Writing Development**

Reviewing the literature, three main factors affecting the development of ESL/EFL students' writing were identified. The first group of factors addresses some learning-related factors such as some psychological factors, students' English proficiency level, and students' prior knowledge. The second set of factors deals with instructional-related factors which tackle teaching large classes, different strategies to teaching writing, feedback practices and assessment challenges. The last category of factors addresses the socio-cultural factors affecting students' writing development with special emphasis on Arabic interference in English writing.

#### **3.3.1 Learning-Related Factors**

##### **3.3.1.1 Psychological Factors**

Due to the significance of the psychological factors in learning any foreign or second language, I am focusing here on what research says about these factors in relation to ESL/EFL writing development. There are a number of psychological factors reviewed here including students' motivation, self-confidence, writing anxiety as well as a number of factors responsible for students' negative writing apprehension. All these factors seem to play an influential role in student's ESL/EFL writing development as discussed below.

In relation to motivation, Bacha (2002) highlights that low motivation levels can be very difficult and unrewarding for both learners and teachers. She further claims that EFL writers are known to face problems in developing their writing skills at the university level. These problems are even more stressed with L1 Arabic non-native speakers of English in required English composition courses. In this context, developing students' writing skills was not a motivating experience, but it was necessary to acquire the basic academic research skills.

Another psychological factor that seems influential to students' writing development is self-confidence. For example, Tyson (1997) underscored that writing multiple drafts, emphasis placed on the "publication" of students' work, and teacher's comments that focused more on content and organization than on grammatical error helped them produce better pieces of composition and develop

more self-confidence in writing. Similarly, Albertson (2006) claims that if students had confidence in their abilities to learn or try new methods, they seemed to adapt or adjust more quickly than those who had little confidence in their literacy practices. Sasaki (2004) revealed that overseas experiences helped students improve their English proficiency, English composition quality/fluency, and confidence in English writing as well as motivation to write better pieces of composition.

Writing anxiety is said to negatively influence both the learners' motivation and academic achievement on one hand and teachers' attitudes towards writing on the other hand. Research has shown that high apprehensive writers, in comparison with other low apprehensive writers, tend to stop more while composing (Hayes, 1981) and are less concerned with planning the overall structure of their essays (Selfe, 1984) than the low apprehensive ones. In the Egyptian context, For example, Hassan (2001) highlighted that writing apprehension is a crucial factor in the writing development of Egyptian EFL university students. Students with low apprehension wrote better quality pieces of composition than those with high apprehension. This shows that writing apprehension negatively influenced the quality of students' composition writing. Moreover, it was revealed that low apprehension students had higher self-esteem than high apprehension ones, and low self-esteem students were more apprehensive in their writing than their high self-esteem counterparts.

Moreover, test anxiety was reported to be one of the reasons given by thirty-two Saudi female college students when asked to comment on their errors (Salebi, 2004). Similarly, Kurt & Atay (2007) showed that the peer feedback group experienced significantly less writing anxiety than the teacher feedback group. It was also revealed that the participating prospective teachers benefited from the peer feedback process as they received opinions from their classmates to elaborate on, and this collaboration helped them look at their essays differently and lessen their writing anxiety. In the same vein, Abdel-Latif (2007) reported that lack of linguistic knowledge, low foreign language competence, self-esteem, poor history of writing achievement and perceived writing performance improvement, low English writing self-efficacy, instructional practices of English writing, and fear of

criticism are the factors accounting for the Egyptian English majors' negative writing apprehension and low English writing self-efficacy.

### **3.3.1.2 EFL Proficiency Level**

It is argued that proficient learners of English are said to produce good quality pieces of writing (Edelsky, 1982; Larios et al., 2001; Ito, 2004; Cumming, 2006). For example, Edelsky (1982) stated a number of factors including L2 student writers' proficiency might influence students' level of knowledge and writing in English. In a similar vein, (Larios et al., 2001) revealed that L2 higher proficiency participants devoted less time to concentrated formulation in the central stages of composing in English. In addition, Cumming (2006) proved that L2 proficiency is a significant factor in developing the overall quality of students' written products. However, he added that proficiency did not obviously influence the processes of composing.

Other researchers have addressed the extent to which students' mother tongue proficiency affects the English writing of students. They claim that students who are proficient in L1 writing perform better in L2 writing. For example, Dweik & Abu-Al-Hommos (2007) who investigated the influence of Arabic proficiency on the English writing of bilingual-Jordanian students showed that there was a significant relationship between the two languages highlighting that proficient students in Arabic writing performed well in English writing. In a similar EFL context, Lopez (2005) found out that there is a positive correlation between L1 and L2 reading, and between L1 and L2 writing performance. This implies that finding difficulty in writing in a foreign language may be linked to the difficulty in writing in students' first language. Moreover, Ito (2004) indicated that those students who write good quality pieces of writing in their L1 are better performers in their L2 writing.

Not all studies are in this direction. In fact, some studies have concluded that students' writing ability is not related to their proficiency of the language or content. For example, Bart & Evans (2003) reveal that students' possession of content knowledge did not significantly correlate with their writing proficiency. Similarly, Raimes (2006) found out that there was little correspondence

demonstrated among proficiency, writing ability, and the students' composing strategies.

### **3.3.1.3 Students' Prior Knowledge of Writing Topics**

Prior knowledge in general appears to form the best possible base for comprehension and composition (Heller, 1999). Gaining background knowledge help learners write essays about interesting topics. In addition, when writers' prior knowledge is well-developed, it affects their leaning and confidence as far as producing written texts is concerned (Myhill, 2005). Ferris & Hedgcock (2004) highlight that prior knowledge and experiences that students bring to the composition classroom are major distinctive characteristics between native and non-native speakers of English. They add that background knowledge and strategic proficiency can be clearly seen in ESL/EFL students' responses to texts and topics, in their reactions to the activities of ESL writing classrooms, and in their familiarity with the rhetorical patterns of academic and professional discourse communities.

Prior knowledge plays an essential role in activating students' minds in both reading and writing. Students' schema is much affected by what they read, why they read it, and what genre they are mainly interested in. Schemata is a double-edged weapon in students' learning of reading and writing. Adequate schemata can be facilitating to learning. Prior knowledge of text structures facilitates comprehension and composition (Heller, 1999). On the other hand, L2 readers and writers lacking schematic knowledge might be hampering their learning (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). This justifies the significance of pre-reading or prewriting activities as helpful stimuli to students' prior knowledge in comprehension and composition (Anderson, 1984).

Research findings show that comprehension and composition are hindered if a reader or writer lacks adequate background knowledge about text structure, topics, and ideas (Anderson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980; Stein & Trabasso, 1982; Reid, 1993a; El-Mortaji, 2001; Scordaras, 2003). For example, Reid (1993a) has highlighted that "when content and form are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy. But when one or the other (or both) are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic" (p. 63).

Shedding light on the importance of reading to enhance Egyptian students' prior knowledge, EL-Koumy (1997) pinpointed that integrated instruction of reading and writing, simultaneous teaching of reading and writing, better preparation of English teachers to read like writers and write like readers are highly needed. Moreover, Scordaras (2003) revealed that prior knowledge and writing experiences seem to affect ESL writers' revision processes. In the same vein, El-Mortaji (2001) found out that prior knowledge about written English is one among other influential factors leading to students' success. In this respect, (Ediger, 2001 & Moran, 2001) emphasise that teachers should acquaint their students with the texts and topics that they think are influential cognitively, culturally, and educationally.

In relation to the Egyptian context, I think that some psychological issues need to be addressed. First, there is a need for increasing students' motivation to write in English as they suffer from low motivation levels. Second, the use of multiple drafts, teachers' written comments, peer-review and publications of students' written work could be useful strategies that may help them gain self-confidence, high motivation levels and less writing anxiety. In addition, more attention needs to be paid to the instructional practices of English writing to help them overcome these psychological challenges.

In reference to Egyptian students' low proficiency level, it could be useful to engage students in some learning opportunities in the essay writing class where they could read in L1 and L2 as well as write in L2. In addition, Egyptian students lack adequate background knowledge about text structure, topics, and ideas as reported in the findings of the current study. Therefore, acquainting students with the texts and topics that they think are influential cognitively, culturally, and educationally is highly recommended. Moreover, providing some pre-reading or prewriting activities might be helpful to enhance and activate students' prior knowledge in essay writing. Making use of integrated instruction simultaneous teaching of reading and writing are also thought to increase students' prior knowledge.

### **3.3.2 Instructional-Related Factors**

#### **3.3.2.1 Teaching Large Classes**

Teaching a large class is a big problem for both teachers and students due to a number of shortcomings, three of which are pinpointed by Blatchford et al. (2007) as follows. First, classroom management is rather difficult in large classes. Second, teacher-student relationship is affected negatively, especially with shy students who suffer a lot because they cannot participate and question what they do not understand. Teachers' use of time for marking, planning, and assessment is a problematic issue in large classes. Moreover, teachers find it hard to encourage and involve students' interests in large classes (Ballantyne et al., 2000). Additionally, Bourke (1986) reported that large classes cause some problems such as noise tolerated, non-academic management, and teacher lecturing or explaining. Finally, feeling anonymous and interpersonally distant from the teacher can be harmful to students struggling with course material (Isbell & Cote, 2009). To avoid most of these problems, it is recommended that class size should be manageable to help students learn and graduate successfully (Roettger et al., 2007) or effective teachers' training workshops should be held to train teachers on classroom management techniques that suit large classes.

Teaching in large classes affects teachers' use of teaching methods. Lecturing is the main teaching method and the most common form of communication used in universities (Edwards et al., 2001; McGarr, 2009). There are many reasons for this. First, a lecture is relatively inexpensive and does not need much preparation time in comparison to other teaching methods (Kozma et al., 1978). Second, it can be useful if the lecturer finds links between what is being taught and students' prior knowledge and relate this to real life experiences to help make knowledge significant (Dolnicar, 2005). Moreover, it can be a venue for students to explore their journey into complex knowledge (Laing, 1968). Finally, lecturing could be seen as a more convenient way of transferring knowledge to large classes (McGarr, 2009). It was explicitly stated that Egyptian university lecturers use lecturing as the main teaching method to overcome the problem of large classes (Holliday, 1996). In addition, Al-Ashkar (2010) has referred to large classes as one of the challenges facing future teachers and their students in Egypt. Despite considering lectures as one of the strongest methodologies used in higher education

institutions (Moore et al., 2008), it is not an excuse for Egyptian university teachers to use it all the time. It is not the best available option in all educational contexts at the different educational stages as it does not suit all purposes of teaching or all students' learning styles. This denotes that university teachers are recommended to use varied teaching methods to differentiate their instruction to suit large classes.

In the current study, the problem of large classes is one of the problems facing the Egyptian educational systems at both the pre-university and university levels. Due to the over-population problem in Egypt, classes at the pre-university stages range from 60-80 in different areas. This is also reflected in the large classes that are crowded with students at the university level in general and at the essay writing classes at the concerned faculty of education in particular. Therefore, there is a need to address this problem at the pre-university stages by allocating funds to build more schools and expand the existing one so that classes do not exceed 35 students. To cope with the current status, teachers' training providers need to equip teachers with a number of class management and teaching strategies that they could use to overcome the problem of large classes. At the university level, I think it is important to employ a sufficient number of teaching assistants to help university lecturers with their classroom management, teaching and assessment practices. This will help improve students' learning experiences.

### **3.3.2.2 Different Strategies to Teaching Writing**

Some strategies to teaching writing have been reported in the literature to have an effect on developing the EFL/ESL writing skills. These strategies include making use of students' personal experiences, using literature, explicit instruction, concept mapping, the use of invention techniques, dialogue journals, cognitive orientation of EFL students, and computer use in writing courses.

First, some ESL/EFL writing researchers pinpointed that making use of students' personal experiences and responses can be useful in developing students' writing skills. For example, Milner (2005) revealed that grief writing proved to be helpful for orphaned students and other trauma survivors. Thus, it may be useful for essay writing teachers to study the interdisciplinary field of writing, telling, and healing

in order to respond better to students' voluntary disclosures of significant loss. Similarly, Al-Khatib (2001) highlighted the use of personal letters as a mode of communication between Arabic students writing English letters and a group of British readers. He examined a number of personal letters to establish interpretive links between the type of material collected and its situational and cultural context. In the Egyptian context, Ahmed (2006) conducted an experimental study to measure the effect of using the whole language approach on developing some composition writing skills of Egyptian students. He stated that responding to authentic situations like writing letters to a newspaper editor to help solve personal problems facing the readers was helpful in encouraging students to think and produce well-written pieces of English composition in terms of content and organization.

Second, other researchers have claimed that using literature in the composition writing courses will help EFL/ESL students develop their composition writing (Robbie, 1998; Erkaya, 2005; Hirvela, 2005; Isaacs, 2009). For example, Erkaya (2005) highlighted that the integration of literature adds a new dimension to EFL teaching. She added that short stories, for example, help students learn all the language skills more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories. In addition, Robbie (1998) investigates the effect of educational drama on improving writing abilities of 108 Portuguese EFL students. Students' writing was found to develop significantly in both content and grammatical fluency in a relatively short period of time.

Another strategy used to develop students' writing skills is said to be explicit instruction. For example, EL-Koumy (1999) investigated the effects of explicit versus implicit instruction in story grammar on the narrative writing skills of 83 Egyptian students at the university level. His results indicate that students receiving explicit instruction scored significantly higher in the post-test, supporting the value of explicit instruction in story grammar. Similarly,

Al-Ghonaim (2005) revealed that explicit instruction of rhetorical structures helped students improve their writing competence. Specifically, they reported that using models along with instruction has resulted in various benefits concerning writing and writing structures, including rhetorical modes, text organization, specific use of words, sentence patterns, parallelism, run-on sentence, revision, wordiness, content information, and motivation to use reading-writing related activities in the future.

In terms of vocabulary development, Lee & Muncie (2006) have found out that explicit explanation is one of the different successful strategies that increased learners' use of target vocabulary in writing. Moreover, Albertson (2006) advocates that using more explicit methods in teaching will enable more students to improve their literacy competence. Similarly, Rao (2007) demonstrated that explicit instruction of brainstorming strategy had a measurable effect on writing performance. In the same vein, Talebinezhad & Negari (2007) who investigated the effectiveness of concept mapping as a learning strategy on students' self-regulation, reported that students gained higher self-regulation (metacognitive self-regulation, time and study environment, effort regulation, peer-learning, and help-seeking) as the result of explicit teaching of concept mapping strategy.

In addition, the use of invention techniques is claimed to be an effective tool in forcing shifts in perspective and making connections (Figg, 1980; Zamel, 1982; Spack, 1984; Xu, 1990; Oluwadiya, 1992; Amer, 2003; Myhill & Amer; 2004). For example, Amer (2003) showed that the quality of Egyptian students' pieces of composition in both experimental groups using the invention techniques were better than those in the control group using the traditional method of instruction.

Furthermore, Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini (2005) have spotlighted the effectiveness of dialogue journal as another strategy that is believed to assist the development of ESL/EFL writing. They indicated that writing dialogue journal as a language education activity in EFL pedagogy may empower learners and provide them with opportunities to express their 'voice'. It is further revealed that dialogue journal writing led to gains in critical self-reflective EFL writing ability. Similarly,

El-Koumy & Mirjan (2008) showed that electronic dialogue journaling is an effective method for developing EFL students' writing performance.

Other researchers have paid attention to the importance of cognitive orientation of EFL students. In support of this strategy, Allami & Salmani-Noudoushan (2007) underscore that this strategy is important for their success in their writing courses. This clarifies that teachers need to address cognitive issues in their teaching of writing.

The literature reviewed about computer use in L2 writing courses illustrates the potential benefits and pitfalls of these computer-based programmes. Some of the key points discussed in the literature include (a) using word processing can yield many benefits which need careful preparation and teaching by ESL teachers, (b) teachers must be attentive to the many drawbacks of writing software programmes and warn their students against them (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004).

Some of the studies conducted in ESL/EFL writing highlighted a significant relationship between using computers and writing improvement. For example, Elkholy (2002) who examined EFL learners' use of e-mail to improve their writing proficiency found out that e-mail use is as effective as other activities designed to improve students' L2 writing proficiency. Moreover, learners perceived a benefit from using e-mail to facilitate language learning. Additionally, Mansor (2005) explores the impact of students' interactions and knowledge construction via e-mail incorporating process writing approach and pair work activity on EFL writing performance. Overall, students' writing performance, specifically the content, organization and writing style was improved. Additionally, participants revealed positive perceptions towards collaborative learning via e-mail discussion.

Moreover, Li (2006) found that participants paid more attention to higher order thinking activities while evaluating their written texts in the computer session, that they revised significantly more at most levels on the computer, and that their computer-generated essays received higher scores in argumentation than the hand-written ones. Similarly, Shang (2007) demonstrates that 40 EFL Taiwanese students made improvements on syntactic complexity and grammatical accuracy.

It is also pinpointed that exchanging e-mail messages with their peers at least four times improved their writing performance. Students' self-reports reveal that using e-mail was a positive strategy that helped improve students' foreign language learning and attitudes towards English.

Lazarowitz & Bar-Natan (2002) investigated the writing of 210 Jews and 389 Arabs in three learning environments: cooperative learning (CL), computer-mediated communication (CMC), and the combination of CMC and CL. The findings indicate that the power of peer interaction in cooperative learning with CMC was greater than each learning environment by itself. The quality implementation of these two (computer and peers) is the key element for students' writing development.

In contrast to the above mentioned studies, Hawisher (1984) indicated that the writing of 20 advanced college freshmen on a computer did not lead to increased revision. The students did not make different kinds of revisions with a computer. The essays written with computers were of similar quality to those written manually. Similarly, Chen & Cheng (2006) carried out a study in which three EFL writing classes consisting of 68 third-year English majors responded to a questionnaire, wrote samples, received feedback by My Access, and were interviewed. The findings show that more than half the students felt that the computer-based writing programme was either moderately or slightly helpful to them in improving their writing skills and that the students were much less satisfied with the grading function than the writing/editing functions.

Most of the above mentioned studies highlight that using computer software programmes is helpful in improving students' writing skills and attitudes toward writing. However, it is worth noting that teachers and students need to be well-trained on how to implement and monitor these programmes, not to waste time and effort.

I can argue that an efficient writing syllabus, a dedicated teacher and motivated students result in better essay writing development. This claim was supported by Mattar (1989) who found out that there is a possible link between Arab EFL learners' problems in writing and some possible defects in their writing skills syllabus. This finding is valid according to the evaluation of the writing syllabus prior to conducting this study. Similarly, Zaher (1995) indicated that published course books have not met the needs of Egyptian EFL university students whose English language proficiency was too low. This draws our attention to the importance of designing efficient writing syllabi instead of the deficient ones to help improve students' writing skills.

It is highly recommended that some of the aforementioned L2 writing strategies could be useful in developing Egyptian students' EFL essay writing performance. First, the use of students' personal experiences and topics of their own choice could help Egyptian students overcome their writers' block from which they complain. Secondly, using authentic materials such as literature in the essay writing classroom could possibly increase the exposure to EFL reading that most Egyptian students need. Moreover, resorting to explicit instruction of brainstorming strategy, concept mapping, rhetorical structures, vocabulary, and grammar will most likely unveil any confusion and ambiguity in the students' minds. In addition, the use of invention techniques and dialogue journals is thought to develop Egyptian students' voice in writing as well as critical self reflection on their writing. Furthermore, having an efficient essay writing syllabus will help Egyptian students develop their writing skills accurately and fluently. Finally, teachers are suggested to incorporate computer based teaching to facilitate Egyptian students' learning of EFL essay writing.

This section has provided us with some different strategies that could help both essay writing teachers and their students develop the required essay writing skills in English. According to the Egyptian context of the current study, some of these applicable strategies have been used as guidelines in the design of the proposed approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt.

### **3.3.2.3 Feedback Practices**

Ferris (2003) argues that providing feedback on students' writing is a vital element in developing their successful and accurate writing. Studies which have investigated the impact of feedback on learners' use of language on early drafts show that such feedback can lead to improved grammatical accuracy after one semester (Polio et al., 1998) as well as improvement in lexical complexity (Storch & Tapper, 2007).

The need for more focused research on peer feedback among EFL/ESL students was the preoccupation of some researchers. For example, Al-Hazmi (1998) investigated the effect of peer feedback and self-assessment in the context of word-processing composition on Arab ESL students' writing quality, revision types, and essay length. Findings reveal that while students in the peer feedback group were concerned with surface structure revisions (e.g. spelling, punctuation, vocabulary), the self-assessors focused on developing the content of their compositions by adding more text to their first drafts. It was also pinpointed that lower achievers in both groups focused on formal issues while revising their compositions (e.g. mechanics, grammar, and vocabulary), but higher achievers attended to the development of the content of their essays. In contrast, Rinnert & Kobayashi (2001) underscored that inexperienced EFL students attended predominantly to content in both judging and commenting on pieces of composition, but more experienced ones attended to clarity, logical connections and organization.

In the same vein, Levine et al. (2002) examined the nature of peer response in the writing of student populations in Israel (EFL) and America (ESL). Both similarities and differences were found in the revision behaviour of Israeli and American students. There were notable differences in the quality and quantity of responses between the two groups as well as in the dynamics of the peer response sessions. Some variation was found between the two groups in the attitude towards peer response and to the authority of the teacher. Similarly, Yang et al. (2006) examine whether peer feedback may provide a resource for addressing this issue by examining two groups of students writing essays on the same topic at a Chinese university; one receiving feedback from the teacher and one from their peers. Findings revealed that teacher feedback was more likely to be adopted and led to

greater improvements in the writing. However, peer feedback was associated with a greater degree of student autonomy, and so even in cultures that are said to give great authority to the teacher, there is a role for peer feedback.

Trying to understand students' reaction to feedback, Warden (2000) offered three different combinations of feedback and redrafting opportunity over four assignments. Results suggest that Taiwanese business English writing students may implement proofreading and self-directed redrafting behaviours aimed towards improving their writing when objective sentence-level error feedback is supplied with no opportunity for further correction.

There has been much debate over the effectiveness of error correction for both teachers and students. Truscott (1996 & 2007), for example, argues that grammar correction is ineffective and has harmful effects for both teachers and students. He thinks that grammar correction in L2 writing classes should be discarded, for the following reasons: (a) Substantial research shows it to be ineffective and none shows it to be helpful in any interesting sense; (b) for theoretical and practical reasons, one can expect it to be ineffective; and (c) it has harmful effects. However, there is an increasing evidence supporting the claim that grammar correction is effective and useful and should not be stopped in L2 writing classes (Ferris, 1995 & 1997; Ashwell, 2000; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Chandler, 2003). For example, Chandler (2003) examines the effect of students' error correction between assignments on error reduction in subsequent assignments and which methods of error feedback and correction are most effective. Results suggest that error correction between assignments reduces subsequent errors without affecting fluency or quality. Furthermore, it is suggested that direct correction and underlying errors are more effective feedback methods than describing the type of error.

Perpignan (2003) examines written dialogue between a teacher and her learners. This dialogue consists of the learners' written text, the teacher's written feedback and the ongoing responses that ensue from this initial exchange. The findings reveal that it is precisely through written dialogue between the participants in the

learning-teaching situation, that an understanding of the feedback dialogue can best be reached.

In terms of methods and types of feedback employed by EFL teachers on the English writing of Saudi EFL students, Asiri (1997) revealed that teachers' written feedback focuses mainly on the surface level problems (like grammar, vocabulary and mechanics), ignoring other important features of the students' writing (like content and organization). In examining the relationship between teacher feedback and the quality of writing produced, Abbuhl (2005) compared two groups of students (one receiving semester-long instruction; the other, only one set of written comments). It was indicated that both groups made significant improvements in the quality of their written work, but the extra feedback and instruction given to the first group resulted in greater gains in organization, argumentation, linguistic accuracy, and complexity.

In relation to the Egyptian context of the current study, the feedback practices used by the essay writing teachers tend to focus on one direction which is discussion of students' most common mistakes in writing. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers mix between peer-review and teachers' written feedback. In addition, it is a good idea to select the type of feedback that is most appropriate to students' linguistic needs, proficiency level such as corrective and/or constructive feedback. Finally, the use of electronic feedback would be very useful as it meets individual students' needs.

#### **3.3.2.4 Assessment Challenges**

Assessing students' written essays is essential for both teachers and students. It helps teachers and curriculum designers to know the extent to which their intended learning outcomes of their writing course have been met. On the other hand, it helps students identify their weaknesses and strengths in writing, how far they have mastered a certain skill. In this way, assessment will help develop and enhance students' essay writing skills and teachers' planning and teaching.

To better understand the purposes for language assessment, Cumming (2001) interviewed 48 highly experienced instructors of ESL/EFL composition about their specific and general purposes for language assessment, and their usual practices for writing assessment. Unlike ESP writing, the assessment of ESL/EFL writing for general purposes was associated with varied methods and broad-based criteria for assessing achievement and focused on individual learners' development.

In terms of self and peer assessments, Saito & Fujita (2004) conducted a study in which 47 college Japanese students studying English writing were assigned to write two essays. Each essay was commented on and rated by two teachers, three peers and the writers themselves. Peer and teacher ratings were found to correlate significantly. The results also indicated that students had favourable attitudes towards peer rating and that peer feedback did not influence their favourable attitudes about the feedback.

To investigate how self- and peer-assessments work in comparison with teacher assessments in actual university writing classes, Matsuno (2009) indicated that many self-raters assessed their own writing lower than predicted. Self-, peer and teacher-raters assessed grammar severely and spelling mildly. The analysis also revealed that teacher-raters assessed spelling, format, and punctuation differently from the other criteria. It was concluded that self-assessment was somewhat idiosyncratic and therefore of limited utility as a part of formal assessment. Peer-assessors on the other hand were shown to be internally consistent and their rating patterns were not dependent on their own writing performance. Similarly, El-Koumy (2004) investigated the effect of self-assessment of writing processes versus products on the quality and quantity of EFL Egyptian students' writing. The results showed no significant difference in the mean scores between the two groups on the pre-test. The post-test results revealed that the process group scored significantly higher than the product group on the quantity of writing and that the latter group scored significantly higher than the former group on the quality of writing.

Other researchers were concerned about teachers' ratings of students' written texts. For example, Shi (2001) examined differences between native and non-native EFL teachers' ratings of the English writing of Chinese university students. No significant differences between the two groups in their scores for the 10 essays were found. The English teachers attended more positively in their criteria to the content and language, whereas the Chinese teachers attended more negatively to the organization and length of the essays. The results raise questions about the validity of holistic ratings as well as the underlying differences between native and non-native EFL teachers in their instructional goals for second language writing. Similarly, Kobayashi & Rinnert (1996) investigated how 465 readers with different backgrounds evaluated 16 versions of Japanese university EFL students' English compositions. There were no significant differences between the two teacher groups in the overall assessment of the two rhetorical patterns.

In the same vein, Barkaoui (2007) employed a mixed-method approach to investigate the effects of two different rating scales on EFL essay scores, rating processes, and raters' perceptions. Four EFL teachers in Tunisia rated a set of 24 EFL essays silently and two subsets of four essays while thinking aloud using a holistic scale and then a multiple-trait rating scale. The essay scores were analysed using G-theory while the think-aloud protocols were coded. The holistic scale resulted in higher inter-rater agreement. Raters employed similar processes with both rating scales. Raters were the main source of variability in terms of scores and decision-making behaviour.

Some research studies have paid attention to the effect of personality types of both writers and raters on judging students' writing fairly. For example, Carrell (1995) conducted an empirical study that indicated that the personality types of writers affect the ratings their essays receive, and the personality types of raters affect the ratings they give to essays. However, there is no significant relationship between writers' styles and raters' styles. Although composition teachers speak of the importance of purpose, of audience, or organization, of proof, or process, of revision, Connors and Lundsford (1993) found little of this emphasis in teacher comments on students' writing. This means that teachers don't apply what they claim.

In an attempt to develop two EFL tests of communicative writing ability, Assad (1985) developed a test consisting of a multiple-choice (M/C) and writing performance (W/P) test. The study reports an experiment of the two tests, involving two groups of Arabic-speaking EFL learners, 55 from the Language Center of United Arab Emirates University and 174 college students at the same university. These results suggest that the use of a W/P test and an analytic scoring procedure achieve a high degree of objectivity in evaluating the communicative writing performance of EFL students. While the M/C test does assess receptive writing ability, it is not recommended for EFL classroom use.

In relation to essay evaluation of a sample of final exam essays written by Arabic non-native students of English attending the Freshman English I course in the EFL programme at the Lebanese American University, Basha (2001) investigated two important issues: choice of an appropriate rating scale and setting up criteria based on the purpose of the evaluation. The results indicate that more attention should be given to the language and vocabulary aspects of students' essay writing and a combination of holistic and analytic evaluation is needed to better evaluate students' essay writing proficiency. In the final analysis, relevant evaluation criteria go hand in hand with the purpose upon which the criteria, benchmark essays and training sessions are based.

Unhappy with the contradiction of teaching writing skills through a process-genre approach and testing them by means of a timed essay, Walker & Ri'u (2008) devised the Extended Writing Project (EWP) as an alternative evaluation mechanism. This requires students to write an extended text in consecutive sections that are drafted and revised with external help. At the marking stage, the final version is compared with the drafts to gain an insight into the development of both content and language from the planning stage to the final version. The EWP allowed the incorporation of process into the assessment of writing skills, and encouraged increased learner autonomy. Despite flaws, the EWP was well-received by students as reflected in a voluntary questionnaire.

In the EFL Taiwanese context, Yang (2007) reported four factors that critically affect the frequency of teachers' assessment task use: perceived competency, assessment education, teachers' beliefs about the pedagogical benefits of assessment, and the difficulty of implementing classroom assessment (Time constraints, classroom management, pressure from parents, and heavy workloads influenced teachers' assessment implementation).

In reference to preparing composition questions, Antoniazzi (2005) pinpointed that having criteria for preparing composition assignments as well as some examples of flawed and successful writing prompts can help foreign language teachers do a better job when teaching FL writing. In relation to a good question, four main criteria were used: engaging; designed to comply with the interests and abilities of the student writers; seeking to elicit a specific response; contextualised and authentic.

Overall, a number of issues have been studied in relation to the ESL/EFL writing assessment. Some of these issues dealt with the purposes of writing assessment, the effect of self and peer assessments on students' writing development and the validity of teachers' ratings. Other research studies were concerned with comparing native to non-native teachers' ratings of students' writing. Moreover, the effect of communicative test development and the effect of writers and raters' personality types were addressed. All these issues require some attention while assessing ESL/EFL students' writing to lead to more valid and reliable assessment techniques. Within the Egyptian context, formative assessment is done on a marginal level in the form of attendance and classroom participation. In relation to the summative assessment practices, they are traditional and stereotypical in the form of end of year examination. Therefore teachers need to develop themselves professionally in terms of assessment knowledge and practices. On the other hand, the university needs to find ways to reduce the number of large classes to make the teacher's assessment tasks feasible and applicable within the Egyptian context.

### **3.3.3 Socio-Cultural-Related Factors**

'Socio-cultural' denotationally refers to the context in which both society and its culture interact. The development of ESL/EFL writing is influenced by a number of socio-cultural factors including students' rhetorical patterns, expressing social values in writing, L1 transfer into L2 and the incomplete understanding of the target language socio-cultural background (Momani, 2001; Al-Khatib, 2001; Lee, 2003; Fernsten, 2008; Uysal 2008; Hinkel, 2009)

In terms of the factors affecting the writing patterns and the writer identity, Uysal (2008) examines the writing patterns of eighteen Turkish participants' texts. The results revealed that some rhetorical preferences are transferred bidirectionally from L1. However, educational context, L2 level, topic, and audience were reported to account for these patterns and their transfer. Similarly, broad-based topic accessibility also implies reliance on writers' personal experiences and socio-cultural background knowledge that can lead to a greater topic-effect on L2 writing (Hinkel, 2009). In harmony with that, Fernsten (2008) tried to clarify how embedded ideologies and power relations shape understanding of ESL writer identity. Using a post-structural and socio-cultural perspective, Fernsten highlights the politics of language and the teaching of writing, in relation to students' racial, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds when different from the dominant culture of the school.

Some researchers support the claim that understanding the socio-cultural aspects of the target language plays a great role in language development. For example, Momani (2001) found that some of the problems facing students of English as a foreign language at the university level are socio-culturally related. They express their attitudes, thoughts, and social values controlling the target language in an unusual way. This was clear in the 5% of the subjects who could correctly interpret a culture-bound text; whereas 95% of the subjects could not interpret the same texts due to the cultural-embedded meanings. Similarly, Al-Khatib (2001) argues in his study that the incomplete understanding of the sociocultural background of the target language might result in certain peculiarities, often seen as errors, which are the result of the contradiction between the Arabic and the English learning cultures. Similarly, (Qaddumi, 1995 and Mohamed & Omer, 2000) argue that the

cultural, rhetorical and linguistic background of Arabic is presented as variables affecting students' performance in writing in both Arabic and English.

Investigating the pedagogical, social and personal complexities influencing EFL classroom processes, Lee (2003) qualitatively analysed two teachers' pedagogic practices and their students' purposes in the Korean EFL context. It is concluded that teachers and students' beliefs, purposes and views relating to processes of teaching and learning EFL writing should be taken into consideration to deal effectively with EFL writing classrooms. Exploring the effect of socio-cultural backgrounds on students' use of linguistic and textual resources in meaning construction, Castro (2004) pinpointed that Filipino college freshmen writers with shared socio-cultural backgrounds employ similar linguistic and textual features in their writing. This shows how writing practices are of socio-cognitive nature. In other words, writing practices are not only cognitive processes in which the mind is engaged to produce a piece of writing, but they are shaped by social and cultural factors as well. In a similar context, Chen (1994) indicated that considerable difference was found between American, South Korean, and Mexican students in their writing development, reflecting cultural influences in writing styles and thought content, but no significant difference was found in contextual influences, individual factors, or perceptions of effective writing instruction.

### **3.3.3.1 L1 Interference in L2 Writing**

In his description of the Arabic language, Kaplan, (1966) claimed that Arabic is marked by a complex series of co-ordinations. This claim was supported by Hamdi (2008) who reported that the main problem of Arab ESL students in composition writing is related to the excessive repetition and coordination that she attributes to the transfer from their L1, Arabic. Similarly, Allen (1970: 94) stated that "Arabic organisation is circular and non-cumulative, and Arabic writers come to the same point two or three times from different angles so that a native English reader has the curious feeling that nothing is happening." However, focusing on the difference between aural and visual modes of text development in Arabic and English, Sa'adeddin (1989) argued that unlike English which uses visual mode as the norm model for written texts, Arabic utilises both visual and aural modes. He adds that failing to switch modes in the writing habits results in negative transfer, associated

with sociolinguistic misunderstanding and breakdown of interaction. He further suggests that selection of materials for reading and writing exercises which will include a number of good Arabic texts, written in the visual as well as the aural mode could benefit the learners' developing writing skills, whether in Arabic or in English.

As two different languages, Arabic and English have been studied by a number of researchers in relation to the effect of Arabic as students' native language on their English language development in general and L2 writing in particular. Turning to syntactic features, Tadros (1978) mentioned three main differences between English and Arabic as far as relative clauses are concerned: (1) the use of direct translation of the Arabic pattern which uses a relative pronoun plus a personal pronoun, (2) the omission of the relative pronoun and (3) the use of the definite article for the relative pronoun.

A handful of studies have revealed how Arabic negatively interferes in EFL writing. For example, Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic (1983) pinpointed that the contrasting features between Arabic and English have been identified as potential contributors to observed error production and weaknesses in some reading skills, but most particularly in writing skills. Moreover, Doushaq (1986) who analysed the content area writing of 96 Arab university students studying EAP English revealed problems in three major categories: sentence structure, paragraph structure, and content. It was reported that weakness in foreign language writing skills appeared related to weakness in mastery of Arabic writing skills.

In another study, Lakkis & Abdel-Malak (2000) compared the prepositional uses in Arabic and English among a group of Arabic learners studying at the American University in Beirut. They found out that there are some aspects of similarities between prepositions in English and those in Arabic. There are structures that are equivalent in both languages and others that are not. This study proved that there are some areas in which negative and positive transfer occur in using prepositions between the two languages. Similarly, Mourtaga (2004) highlighted that texts and other data of Palestinian students' showed some frequent writing errors in verbs,

punctuation and articles. These errors were attributed to the interference of Arabic in the English writing of these students.

A number of recent studies have confirmed what Ostler (1987) reported in relation to the prominence of the writer's L1 as an influencing factor in the L2 organisational structures. For example, Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) selected 20 bilingual Jordanian students to investigate the relationship between L1 (Arabic) proficiency and L2 (English) writing performance. Findings revealed that Arabic writing skills can be transferred positively to the target language (English). In another study, Alsamadani (2010) investigated the relationship between Saudi EFL students' writing competence and their Arabic writing proficiency. Thirty-five college students majoring in English who participated in this study were asked to write English and Arabic argumentative essays on the same topic during two different sessions. Using the ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981), to mark students' written essays, findings indicated a strong correlation between students' L1 (Arabic) writing proficiency and their L2 (English) writing competence.

To examine the writing processes between L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English) of twelve Libyan university students, El-Aswad (2002) conducted a triangulated case study in which he used observation, think-aloud protocols, interviews, questionnaires, and written products to collect data. Some of his most significant findings revealed that most students composed their texts with a clear purpose, but paid little attention for audience. The main writing process differences were represented in planning, time and content; writing time was shorter in L1 than in L2; reviewing in L1 focused on organisation and content, but on form, grammar and vocabulary in L2. Similarities were apparent in mental planning and reliance on internal resources as the subjects alternated between writing, repeating, and rehearsing. The L2 pieces of composition gradually emerged with repetition, pauses, and the use of L1, and were believed to be hindered by students' imperfect linguistic knowledge and mastery of L2.

Therefore, I can argue here that the teaching of L1; Arabic in my case, affects the L2 learning in general and L2 writing in particular. With reference to the teaching of Arabic composition in Egyptian pre-university classes, section (2.4.1.4) has drawn a realistic picture based on the researcher's personal experience within the Egyptian pre-university educational system. If students have been taught how to write in Arabic composition, I think they would have formed a mental model they could use in their learning of L2 writing. Thus, there is a strong call to reform the pedagogical practices of Arabic composition in Arabic speaking countries to avoid the several L2 writing difficulties that they may encounter.

### **3.4 EFL Writers' Difficulties**

This section reviews a number of writing difficulties with special reference to the EFL context in general and Arabic speaking students in particular. The difficulties reviewed are the prewriting difficulties including topics of writing; the organisational difficulties including cohesion, coherence; lexical difficulties as well as technical one such as grammar, punctuation, spelling and revision and editing.

If writing constitutes a critical problem for native speakers of English (Myhill, 2005; Alber-Morgan et al., 2007), it is highlighted that it is the most difficult skill for Arab students (Al Kamil & Troudi, 2008). Composing a coherent and cohesive piece of writing is a scary task for most EFL students. This is because writing is a demanding process that requires various skills and strategies (Matsuhata, 2000), shared writing conventions between writers and readers, and familiarity with genre type and rhetorical conventions (Olshtain & Celce-Murcia, 2003).

Second language writing as a research arena has gone through a dramatic explosion recently to the extent that it gained recognition as a unique field of research and inquiry (Matsuda & De Pew, 2002; Silva & Brice, 2004). However, SL/FL writing investigations have not received the deserved attention. In this sense, (Manchon & Haan, 2008) pinpointed that SL writing research has widened its scope at the levels of theoretical discussions, empirical research, and pedagogical recommendations. On the other hand, where English is taught as a foreign language, FL writing has been dealt with less prominently in terms of theoretical and pedagogical discussions in the field.

There are many studies conducted about FL writing all over the world, but I will pay close attention to those carried out mostly in the Arab world since the early 1980s till now. The reasons for doing this are three fold: first, the current study is contextualised in an Arab country: namely, Egypt; second, all Arab countries share two main characteristics; Arabic language as students' native language and similar cultural and religious backgrounds; third, English at these countries is spoken as a foreign language and not a second language. Most of these studies have emphasised that Arabic speaking students encounter many different writing difficulties in English (Khalil, 1985; Sa'adeddin, 1989; Halimah, 1991; El-Hibir & Al-Taha, 1992; Alkaff, 2000; Atari & Triki, 2000; Al-Ghonaim, 2005; Al-Buainain, 2007; Al-Kamil & Troudi, 2008; Abdel-Latif, 2009).

Other studies have spotlighted specific difficulties in the English writing of Arabic speaking students such as prewriting difficulties (Langer, 1983; Fakhri, 1995; Myhill & Amer, 2004; Rao, 2007; Huang, 2008; Hinkel, 2009), cohesion difficulties (Cooley, 1987; Hamdan, 1988; Qaddumi, 1995; Al-Sharah, 1997; Taher, 1999; Mohamed & Omer, 2000), and coherence difficulties (Elkhatib, 1983 & Al-Sharah, 1997). In addition, some studies highlighted the technical difficulties in the English writing of Arabic speaking students such as grammar and vocabulary (Elkhatib, 1984; Kamel, 1989; Al-Sharah, 1997; Abdel-Latif, 2009) revision & editing difficulties (Scordaras, 2003; Atari & Triki, 2000; Khuwaileh, 2000; Min, 2006) punctuation difficulties (Abu-Hadid, 1994; Mourtaga, 2004) & spelling difficulties (El-Hibir & Al-Taha, 1992). In this context, the current study is attempting to explore the difficulties that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter in their FL essay writing. It adds to the theoretical and pedagogical discussions in FL writing in general and FL essay writing in particular. The next section spotlights some of the difficulties that face students in their prewriting.

### **3.4.1 Prewriting Difficulties**

Prewriting is considered an essential part of the writing process, but for which composing would be difficult. The terms 'planning' and 'prewriting' have been interchangeably used in the literature. It has been defined variously since the 1960s. In this respect, Rohman (1965) defines prewriting as "the stage of discovery in the writing process when a person assimilates his "subject" to

himself." (p.106). Later, Emig (1971) defines prewriting as "that part of the composing process that extends from the time a writer begins to perceive selectively certain features of his inner and /or outer environment with a view to writing about them - usually at the instigation of a stimulus - to the time when he first puts words or phrases on paper elucidating that perception." (p. 39). Planning, as a deep iterative and interrelated process was defined by Flower and Hayes (1981) as "not a unitary stage, but a distinctive thinking process which writers use over and over again during composing" (p. 375). I think prewriting is the first phase of writing in which writers engage in one or more activity to collect information about the topic under investigation and to generate coherent and cohesive ideas for writing.

Some studies highlighted that ESL/EFL students encounter some prewriting problems. In reference to the lack of interesting ideas or significant topics that encourage students to write, Rao (2007) stresses that these are some of the prewriting problems from which many students suffer. In addition, Myhill & Amer (2004) highlighted that awakening students' imagination and activating their minds are two of the problems puzzling most EFL teachers in their writing classes. Other researchers investigated how to help poor writers generate more ideas during composition planning (McClish, 1988 & Evans, 1995). Similarly, Shi (1998) investigated students' problems in three pre-university writing classes in relation to generating diverse vocabulary and ideas for the writing tasks.

#### **3.4.1.1 Topics of Writing**

A handful of studies have examined the effect of writing topics on students' writing performance. These studies are inconsistent in their conclusions. For example, some have argued that topics of writing can affect students' writing performance positively (Langer, 1983 & Hinkel, 2009), while others have advocated that lack of ideas about the topic is not the reason behind poor quality writing (Al-Magableh, 1995).

The literature illustrated several concerns about essay writing topics. For example, Mahfoudhi (2001) indicated that little emphasis is placed on planning in the writing course of EFL students in a Tunisian Faculty of Arts. This is clearly shown in teachers' infrequency of discussing the assigned topics with their students before they actually begin writing. In other studies, however, other priorities were found. For example, Huang (2008) found that difficulty of essay topics in examinations is a crucial aspect that can hinder students' ability to write. The students surveyed perceived several factors that determined the writability of an essay topic. They ranked their knowledge of and interest in the topic as the first concerns, followed by their writing experience, and data availability. This was also confirmed by Lee (2008) who reached the conclusion that writing performance is greatly affected by task-related elements such as topic familiarity, difficulty, task-type, and subject matter of the prompt, which are perceived differently by each individual writer.

Some researchers pinpointed that there is a relationship between writing topics and writing quality. For example, Langer (1983) suggested a strong and consistent relationship between topic-specific background knowledge and the quality of student writing. It was also indicated that different kinds of knowledge were predictive of success in different writing tasks. Likewise, Hinkel (2009) argued that the writing topic significantly affected the modal verbs use in L2 essays, depending on the writers' L1s and the contextual meanings and functions of obligation and necessity modals. She concludes that more personally distant topics elicit fewer disparities between L1 and L2 prose than topics in which the student writers are expected to draw on their personal experiences.

In contrast, other researchers claim that writing topics have little or no effect on students' writing quality. For example, Fakhri (1995) compared the way topics are structured in both Arabic and English and concluded that there were no significant difference between the layout of Arabic and the English writing of Arab students. Kellogg (1978) revealed that both low- and high-knowledge writers have no difference in strategy use for allocating processing time across planning, translating, and reviewing. Moreover, the degree of cognitive effort devoted to planning, translating, and reviewing was task-dependent. Al-Magableh (1995)

pinpointed that low performances in students' writing may not be attributed to lack of ideas about the topic, but rather to lack of knowledge about the writing process in general and the nature of the topic in particular.

A number of factors related to writing topics were argued for as significantly influencing students' writing. First, students' self-selection of writing topics was highlighted by Gradwohl & Schumacher (1989) who stressed that learners had significantly more knowledge on the topics they selected themselves compared to the other unwanted topics or teacher-selected topics. Second, listening to students' interests and providing choices in teaching led to more student motivation and involvement in learning (Worthy, 2000). This was also confirmed by other researchers who have also found that students' self-selected reading and writing, reading interesting books, and participating in learning projects of their own choice improve reading, writing, and learning attitudes and achievement (Dorrell & Carroll, 1981; Parrish & Atwood, 1985). Finally, in terms of the role of preference in writing topics, Shippen et al., (2007) compared urban and rural middle school students' preferences to indicate that the major overlapping topics for all participants included current events, teen issues, politics, school, and celebrities. Common adolescence issues were more salient in preference of writing topics.

As far as the Egyptian context is concerned, a number of techniques are asserted to help students improve their planning skills. First, the use of invention techniques such as free association, cubing, or brainstorming, and more structured formats such as lists, or matrices of questions to answer about the topic are reported to help Egyptian student-writers generate ideas for EFL essay writing. It is also recommended to ask student writers to choose their own topics and to complete writing tasks in a learner-centred approach rather than a teacher-directed one. Some of these topics might include current events, teen issues, politics, school, hobbies and celebrities. In addition, students' self-selected reading and writing, reading interesting books, and participating in learning projects of their own choice are believed to improve reading, writing, and learning attitudes and achievement.

### **3.4.2 Coherence Difficulties**

I am reviewing this section on writing coherence to denote the difficulty of mastering this skill among non-native speakers of English. It is part of the difficulties that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter while writing their essays in English. If this skill is mastered, it will make the written text a unified whole that helps the reader better understand the intended meaning of the writer.

Coherence, or texture, according to Halliday and Hasan (1976), is the combination of semantic configurations of two different kinds: register and cohesion. Coherence in written text is “a complex concept, involving a multitude of reader- and text-based features” (Johns, 1986:247). Text-based features mean cohesion (i.e., the linking of sentences) and unity (i.e., sticking to the point). Reader-based features mean that the reader interacts with the text depending on his/her prior knowledge. Hinkle (2004) defines coherence as “the organization of discourse with all elements present and fitting together logically” (p. 265). This denotes that a coherent essay consists of an introduction, a thesis statement, rhetorical support, and a conclusion (Carrell, 1982; Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Recently, Tanskanen & Benjamins (2006:192) define coherence as “an outcome of a dialogue between the text and its listener or reader.”

Lee (2004) highlighted that low English proficiency students find it difficult to develop coherent writing due to paying attention to language matters rather than making meaning. Some ESL/EFL writing studies have focused their research on issues related to coherence in writing. For example, Langer (1983) examined the effect of topic-specific background knowledge on the general quality and local coherence of student writing. It is suggested that writers not only need to generate, present, and relate intricately linked ideas, but they also need a large body of loosely associated information that can be used to elaborate, embellish, and enliven the presentation. Similarly, Cooley (1987) found out that content and structural features of written discourse are responsible for the coherence of a text. It was also recommended that textual features cannot be ignored, as they can be responsible for disguising an underlying coherence. Moreover, Atari (1983) indicated that Arab university students tend to follow certain techniques in their written English that make their writing incoherent such as including a broad

statement in the opening sections of their essays before introducing the topic sentence. Additionally, Elkhatib (1983) found out that Arab students' overuse of coordinate sentences and misuse of topic sentences are the reasons for their incoherent and unacceptable quality of writing.

A number of researchers in the Arab world have spotlighted students' coherence problems in writing (Atari, 1983; Elkhatib, 1983; Taher, 1999). For example, Arab students' written texts revealed that repetition, parallelism, sentence length, lack of variation and misuse of certain cohesive devices are major sources of incoherence and textual deviation (Qaddumi, 1995). Similarly, Shamsheer (1995) investigated cohesion and coherence problems in the writings of Yemini university students majoring in English. It is indicated that students encountered coherence problems as a global organisation of a given text. Workshops and the collective work in the classroom have been reported as contributing factors to improving and enhancing the writing process in general and coherence in particular. In addition, (Cooley, 1987; Hamdan, 1988; Boudihaj, 1999) asserted that Yemini and Moroccan students have some weaknesses, in terms of coherence and cohesion, manifested in the students' written texts. On the other hand, El-Bacha (1997) indicates that Lebanese students' sub-texts formed from the highly bonded sentences showed satisfactory coherence ratings of organization of ideas. To decide which features of written discourse account for the coherence of a text, Cooley (1987) cohesively analysed 28 texts written by six Tunisian students of English and six texts by native speakers. He found out that coherence is both content-based and structural: it relies upon a well-sequenced presentation of consistent ideas. However, textual features are also important, as they can be the reason for masking an underlying coherence. He suggests that the organization of material and fostering audience awareness may help students with coherence problems.

Overall, this reviewed literature on coherence has yielded contradicting results about the difficulties Arab students face in writing. Similarly, most Egyptian student teachers of English find it difficult to write coherent pieces of writing. In response to that, a number of strategies could be suggested to help them develop their coherence skills. First of all, collaborative planning and construction of text as

proposed in the pedagogical approach to teaching L2 writing in the current study, whether between groups of students or between students and their teacher, are most likely to result in coherent written essays. The use of invention technique could help develop students' coherence skills. Second, teachers' use of workshops in the essay writing class could lead to learning from each other and overcome any coherent problems in their writing. Finally, the use of the modelling of the target genres whether written by students or by experts could be a good technique that shows students how coherent texts look like. This will enable them to distinguish between good and bad coherent texts.

### **3.4.3 Cohesion Difficulties**

In this section, the different definitions of cohesion are given. In addition, the various effects of cohesion on text structure are pinpointed. Finally, examples are given on how different quantitative and qualitative studies dealt with cohesion at different levels: the English speakers' writing level, comparative studies between native speakers of English and EFL/ESL student writers, and studies addressing the cohesion difficulties in Arabic speaking students.

Many researchers agree that cohesion, on the macro level of writing, is related to linking ideas whereas on the micro level of writing, it is concerned with connecting sentences and phrases. "The concept of cohesion is a semantic one; it refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:4). Thus, a cohesive tie has a semantic relation between endophoric and exophoric. Endophoric is what Halliday and Hasan referred to as within-text cohesive ties, whereas exophoric refers to items outside text. For Halliday and Hasan, cohesion depends upon lexical and grammatical relationships that facilitate the understanding of sentence sequences as a connected discourse rather than as independent sentences.

Masatosi (1986) highlights the importance of text cohesion saying that a text stands as a text by means of cohesion. But for cohesion, sentences would be disjointed and would result in a number of unrelated sentences. Horning (1991) perceives cohesive elements to be words or sentence structures which may or may not be next to each other in the text. Recently, Bailey (2003) emphasises that text cohesion is highly dependent on its clarity and readability through linking all

phrases together. He adds that this could be achieved by using methods such as the conjunctions and within text references. In a similar vein, Hinkel (2004) refers to cohesion as the connectedness of ideas in discourse and sentences to one another in text to produce a unified flow of information. She then comments that others have a limited view of cohesion as the ways of connecting sentences and paragraphs into a unified whole.

Witte and Faigley (1981) shed light on the five major classes of cohesive ties in English: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical reiteration and collocation. Reference occurs when one item in a text points to another element for its interpretation. Substitution replaces one element with another which is not a personal pronoun, and ellipsis involves a deletion of a word, phrase, or clause. Conjunctive elements are not in themselves cohesive, but they denote certain meanings which assume other components in the discourse to be there. Lexical reiteration and collocation are restricted to lexical ties only.

Many writing researchers have been inspired by Halliday and Hasan (1976) to think about text cohesion. Holloway (1981) for example, sees cohesion as one way to improve teaching and testing of writing. Witte and Faigley (1981) use cohesion in terms of high and low ratings of compositions. Irwin (1980) investigated the effect cohesive ties have on text comprehension and recall. Tierney and Mosenthal (1983) explored the cohesion-coherence causality relations. Stephenson (1981) studied cohesive ties in relation to culturally-bound subject matter. Recently, Meurer (2003) investigated the relationship between cohesion and coherence in two different kinds of text: essays and narratives.

Moreover, diverse studies have acknowledged the importance of text cohesion in academic writing as a mechanism that facilitates discourse flow and they also added that constructing cohesive texts by ESL/EFL learners requires focused instruction and additional attention (Carrell, 1982; Ostler, 1987; Haswell, 1989; Horning, 1991; Reid, 1993; Byrd & Reid, 1998; Hinkel, 2001a, 2002a, Ting, 2003). On the contrary, Cooley (1987) claims that less attention should be paid to the teaching of conjunctive adverbs, as they do not contribute in any way to coherence, and they may even cause confusion in an otherwise coherent text.

Although quantitative studies of cohesive ties can be instructive, (Pritchard, 1981) for example, found a higher occurrence of cohesive ties in 'problem passages' of students' essays, this is a completely different exercise to evaluating how these ties are used. As Hartnett (1986: 143) concludes "using cohesive ties successfully is apparently not easy. Both good and poor writers may use the same kinds of cohesive ties, but they use them differently." This justifies mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods, and comparing frequency and semantic/syntactic use, deemed essential when studying learner's language because this gives us a complete detailed profile about the learners that help us understand how to improve the learning/teaching process. Some of these studies are conducted on a small-scale basis using small sample size. For instance, Connor (1984) carried out a study based on six essays in which cohesion density was not found to be a distinctive factor between native and ESL students. Khalil (1989) draws our attention to another problem, represented in few empirically-based studies. This is why there is a bad need for large-scale studies in order to obtain a more precise account of cohesion/coherence problems in the writing of EFL/ESL students.

Internationally, a number of studies have dealt with cohesion difficulties that native speakers of English encounter in their writing. For example, Cox et al. (1990) examined the appropriate or inappropriate use of cohesive devices and the overall cohesive harmony in the writing of 48 third and fifth grade students from a school district northwest of Chicago. They found out that good readers achieved significantly more complex cohesive harmony than did poor readers. Moreover, poor readers made inappropriate use of cohesive devices significantly more often than did good readers. This denotes that good readers tended to be good writers who achieved more cohesive harmony. These results imply that students' knowledge of cohesion is highly related to their developing reading skills.

In relation to cohesion in discourse in general and connector usage in particular, Granger & Tyson (1996) carried out a study whose quantitative analysis revealed that no overall overuse of connectors by learners was found. However, qualitative evidence confirms the overuse and underuse of individual connectors, as well as semantic, stylistic and syntactic misuse. They recommended that learners should

not be given lists of 'interchangeable' connectors, but instead they should be taught how to use them in context using authentic texts.

Exploring the effect of socio-cultural backgrounds on students' use of linguistic and textual resources in meaning construction, Castro (2004) pinpointed that Filipino college freshmen writers with shared socio-cultural backgrounds employ similar linguistic and textual features in their writing. This shows how writing practices are of socio-cognitive nature. In other words, writing practices are not only cognitive processes in which the mind is engaged to produce a piece of writing, but they are shaped by social and cultural factors as well. Similarly, Mohamed & Omer (2000) argue that the cultural differences between Arabic and English speech communities are directly responsible for the different use of cohesive devices in the two languages. They claim that Arabic cohesion is characterised as context-based, generalised, repetition-oriented, and additive. In contrast, English cohesion is described as text-based, specified, change-oriented, and non-additive. However, there is another claim suggesting that different cultures structure their discourse in different ways; therefore, incoherence can result from an inability to adopt the discourse patterns of English is not proved, at least with regard to Arabic speakers (Cooley, 1987). In my view, I think that socio-cultural factors affect the cohesion of Egyptian student teachers of English. This is clear in the students' literal translation and use of formulaic expressions in their writing.

Some of the studies that have compared the writing quality of native and non-native speakers signify that writing quality may depend on overall coherence in content, organization, and style rather than on the quantity of cohesion (Faugley & Witt, 1981; Connor, 1984; Scarcella, 1984). In this respect, Johnson (1992) examined cohesion in expository essays written in Malay and in English by native speakers of both languages and in ESL by Malaysian writers. The development of content in the compositions written in Malay in comparison to those written by English native speakers indicate that ESL students are progressing in the usage of syntactic cohesive links and the organization of material, reflecting previous writing experience in the Malay language. The findings pinpoint that the use of cohesive devices is affected by a number of factors including the developmental level of the writers, the acquired behaviour of second language learning from

teachers and textbooks and the transfer of writing habits and linguistic patterns from the first language.

In the Arab world, some studies have highlighted the different cohesion challenges that native speakers of Arabic encounter while writing in English. These studies have dealt with various issues in cohesion such as Arabic and English use of cohesion, topic unity and familiarity, content and structural aspects of cohesion, text organization, analysis of syntactic features and cohesive devices, lexical cohesion patterns and the overuse and the underuse of specific cohesive devices.

To investigate possible sources and solutions to the problem of textual incoherence and deviation, Qaddumi (1995) compared the writings of a group of Arab students at the University of Bahrain in both Arabic and English. 460 composition papers have been reviewed and 30 texts were analysed in both languages to discover possible interference. Bahraini students' performance in writing in both Arabic and English was shown to be influenced by cultural, rhetorical and linguistic background of Arabic. Texts analysis reveals that some of the major sources of incoherence and textual deviation in students' writing include repetition, parallelism, sentence length, lack of variation and misuse of certain cohesive devices. It was concluded that more attention should be paid to topic unity in the teaching of writing. Similarly, Taher (1999) was mainly concerned with coherence of the written text, but the combined areas of cohesion, coherence and style/register were analysed in Arabic and English in the writing of Yemeni students of English in higher education. The main findings of the analysis of students' writing in both languages showed that students, suffered from lack of vocabulary, lack of knowledge about the language itself, lack of competence in using language according to situations, insufficient language practice and linguistic and cultural transfer.

To investigate the cohesion and coherence properties and the problems related to Yemeni students of English, Shamsheer (1995) analysed the writings of 37 Yemeni students majoring in English. It is clear that Yemeni students do not face serious problems in text cohesion either in controlled or authentic writing tasks. On the other hand, they encountered coherence problems as the global organisation of a

given text. To overcome these problems, the researcher found out that using workshops and group work in the classroom helped improve and develop the writing process greatly.

In Jordan, Hamdan (1988) conducted a study investigating the extent to which topic familiarity affects the coherence and cohesion in texts written in English by Jordanian university students. His findings asserted that students have weaknesses in topic development; content organization and focus. With regards to students' awareness of textual coherence in subject-related writing tasks, students' level was satisfactory, though it still needs considerable development. In relation to students' competency of cohesive devices, the results reveal that cohesion proficiency on a general topic was unsatisfactory, but on a subject-related topic, it was satisfactory. The researcher came to the conclusion that topic familiarity, and exposure to analogous tasks in routine academic practices can be helpful in enhancing student writers' ability to produce texts which are more fairly coherent and cohesive.

In Morocco, Boudihaj (1999) who analysed 15 syntactic features, 4 cohesion devices in 60 exam-type English essays written by Moroccan university students, reveals that three measures taking accuracy, fluency and coherence into account correlate with quality writing. Results of another statistical test show that some variables of syntax, cohesion and coherence correlate well with each other. In Lebanon, El-Bacha (1997) investigated the extent to which lexical cohesion patterns in expository texts written by Arabic speaking students of English in the EFL programme are an indicator of writing quality. The findings indicate that there were no significant relations between lexical cohesion. Moreover, the sample sub-texts created from the highly bonded sentences showed satisfactory coherence ratings of organization of ideas.

Regarding the use of some connecting devices such as coordination, or markers of cause and effect and conditionals, Meygle (1997) has shown that students did not use many subordinators at either level, but they overused coordination devices. It seems most likely that students were in need of cohesive devices, but they were not proficient in using them since the analysis demonstrated that both groups of

students used many co-ordination devices or linkers, in particular 'and', which alone was actually used by all students.

It is clear from the above reviewed studies that cohesion constitutes a serious problem to Arab students. Many researchers in different countries in the Arab world including Bahrain (Qaddumi, 1995), Oman (Mohamed & Omer, 2000), Yemen (Shamsher, 1995 & Taher, 1999), Tunisia (Cooley, 1987), Jordan (Hamdan, 1988), Morocco (Boudihaj, 1999), Lebanon (El-Bacha, 1997), and Syria (Meyle, 1997) have paid our attention to the different aspects of cohesion difficulties from which students suffer. However, to the best of my knowledge, no single Egyptian study tackled cohesion in writing. Hence, the current study is exploring the cohesion difficulties, among many others, that Egyptian student teachers of English face in their essay writing. This will inform my research whether cohesion difficulties in the Egyptian context are similar or different to those previously reviewed ones.

A number of teaching techniques have been suggested to help Egyptian students overcome their cohesion and coherence difficulties in writing. For example, using model genres written by previous students would help students with the layout and organisation of their essays, especially coherence and cohesion. Moreover, teachers' explicit instruction in the different writing skills is believed to help students overcome any stumbling blocks in their writing. In addition, a number of scheduled parallel support sessions could be run by qualified and experienced essay writing teachers could be useful. Moreover, the use of invention technique could help develop highly cohesive and coherent texts.

#### **3.4.4 Lexical Difficulties**

Having a repertoire of vocabulary is an essential prerequisite for writing. However, some research studies have stressed that L2 writers encounter some difficulty with vocabulary (Dennett, 1985; Arndt, 1987; Skibniewski, 1988; Yau, 1989; Krapels, 1990; Silva, 1991). This was also the case with many Arabic speaking students (Elkhatib, 1984; Al-Akloby, 2001; Hemmati 2002). In an attempt to deeply identify errors in the writing samples of four Arab college freshmen students of English, Elkhatib (1984) revealed the following eight lexical errors: (1) overgeneralisation of the use of one translation equivalent; (2) literal translation;

(3) divergence; (4) confusion of words formally or phonetically similar; (5) confusion of related or unrelated words with similar meanings; (6) unfamiliarity with word collocation; (7) overuse of a few general lexical items; and (8) nonce errors (i.e. those that seem to defy analysis).

Some other researchers have claimed that several factors can lead to Arab students' vocabulary problems. For example, Al-Akloby (2001) explored the vocabulary situation at Saudi secondary school level with 52 students and 5 EFL teachers, and one of the writers of the teaching materials being used in schools. Findings uncovered some factors that are believed to be potential sources of vocabulary learning failure. Inefficient use of vocabulary learning strategies was ranked as the first concern, followed by the lexical syllabus embodied in the official wordlist and the insufficiency of textbook. Furthermore, limited presentation of vocabulary to pronunciation and meaning only, ineffectiveness of vocabulary recycling and vocabulary testing, the negative impact of summer holiday, students' low motivational intensity, and the weak parental involvement were other causes to students' vocabulary problems.

In other studies, however, other issues were reported to lie behind ESL/EFL students' vocabulary problems: using think-aloud protocols and interviews with 30 Iranian EFL writers, Hemmati (2002) found out that learners had both competence-based and performance-based vocabulary problems, and their strategies for coping with the problems appeared to be pertinent to their writing proficiency; while in a study by Williams (2004) who addressed the problem of lexical choice that arises in the writing of ESL/EFL learners, the general lack of linguistic resources typically available and the misuse of the available resources were considered key issues causing these problems. In the same context, in a study by Abdel-Latif (2009), Egyptian students' lack of linguistic knowledge (i.e. grammar knowledge and vocabulary knowledge) seems to be the most important determinant of Egyptian students' written products and processes.

To overcome some of the previously-mentioned vocabulary problems encountered by Arab students, Mohamed (2003) designed a mixed method study for Egyptian students in which two experiments were conducted and some interviews were

made with Egyptian EFL teachers and students. This study aimed at examining the position held by the interference theory regarding the negative effects on learning and to compare the effects of different methods of semantic, thematic, and unrelated sequencing of new EFL vocabulary items on short and long-term retention. It was suggested that sequencing new EFL vocabulary items according to meaning similarity has a harmful effect on learning, and that new lexical items are best retained when they are presented in thematic sets. Moreover, Hyland (2007) suggested a genre approach to help L2 learners understand the vital roles of vocabulary choices and cohesion patterns in achieving literacy in a second language.

#### **3.4.4.1 Collocational Use**

Collocations are regarded as a central aspect of L2 vocabulary development. Collocational knowledge is crucial for language acquisition (Hanks, 1987). Collocations are common combinations of words that native speakers use unconsciously (Lewis, 2000). Due to the complexity of collocations, they cause serious problems to non-native speakers of English. These problems might result from the interference of L1 in L2. This implies that EFL/ESL teachers should teach collocations explicitly to their students (Hill, 2000).

There is a general agreement about the division of collocations into lexical and grammatical categories. For example, Benson et al. (1997) distinguish between lexical and grammatical collocations and designate eight main kinds of grammatical collocations and seven kinds of lexical collocations. Other researchers such as Mahmoud (2005) points out that there are two types of collocation: open ones that refer to nodes that can cluster with a wide range of other words and restricted ones that refer to clusters that are fixed or like idioms. Thus, it is important to be competent in using the different types of collocations to master the English language (James, 1998).

Some researchers have shown that English collocations are problematic for ESL/EFL students. For example, Fan (2009) compared the collocational use of ESL students from Hong Kong and native speakers in their writing. It was found that collocational use of ESL students might be influenced by their native language and

their inadequacy in the lexis and grammar of the target language. Findings of the study recommend that collocational knowledge should be broadly viewed and a pedagogical approach to the learning and teaching of collocations should be adopted. Similarly, Li (2005) found out that Taiwanese EFL college students made 188 collocational errors in their writing; 121 grammatical and 67 lexical. Results indicated that L1 errors occurred most frequently in the participants' writing. In harmony with the previous studies, Koosha & Jafarpour (2006) indicated that the Data-Driven Learning (DDL) approach proved to be highly effective in the teaching and learning of collocation of prepositions to Iranian EFL learners. Second, learners' performance on collocation of prepositions was shown to be positively related to their level of proficiency. Third, Iranian EFL learners tended to transfer their L1 collocational patterns to their L2 production. Moreover, Zughoul & Hussein (2003) confirmed the writers' hypothesis that Arab university English language majors at all levels face difficulty with English collocations.

As a whole, this section shed light on some vocabulary and collocational problems that ESL/EFL students as well as Arab students encounter in learning English in general and English writing in particular. It also highlighted some of the factors resulting in vocabulary problems within the Arab context. Findings of all of the reviewed studies affirmed that Arab students encounter some problems related to vocabulary and collocation. This draws our attention to finding solutions to these problems to help students in their English essay writing. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers use modelling of the target genre to familiarise themselves with the different lexical patterns used in the text. It could be also beneficial for essay writing teachers to present lexical items to their students in thematic sets to guarantee better retention. Moreover, the use of invention technique could help boost students' vocabulary repertoire.

### **3.4.5 Technical Writing Difficulties**

Spelling, punctuation, handwriting, grammar, and editing and revision have been referred to as basic components of technical writing (Smith 1994 & Ho 2000). In the current study, I adhere to this categorization of the essay writing skills because it is feasible and eliminates redundancy. However, I will reorganise it according to their importance in English essay writing in Egypt as follows: Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling, Editing and Revision. This reorganization is due to the degree of importance in teaching and learning.

#### **3.4.5.1 Grammatical Difficulties**

It is worth making a distinction between two main trends in L2 grammar. On one hand, some researchers conceive grammar in terms of accuracy and error-correction. On the other hand, other researchers perceive grammar as a tool for developing awareness of how linguistic structures shape meaning. With regard to the first view, Truscott (1996, 1999, 2007) claims that correcting grammatical errors in writing is not helpful and even harmful. In contrast, other researchers view grammar error-correction as beneficial and promoting language development (Sheen, 2007a; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis et al., 2008). The other trend of grammar is embedded within a socio-cultural perspective where developing awareness about the linguistic patterns made in a written text at the different lexical, syntactic and textual levels is viewed as important (Myhill, 2005). Therefore, making a connection between grammar and meaning helps learners not only to be aware of how grammar shapes meaning, but also to explore the complex nature of their learning experiences (Ibid).

Learning how to use English grammar is important in language learning. Knowledge and competency of English grammar can help language learners use language effectively and think about how language structures are used to get meaning across (Rodby & Winterowd, 2005). However, research revealed that grammar teaching does not necessarily support the development of learners' writing (Wyse, 2007).

To further investigate this paradox, research studies have been conducted to pinpoint that students are not proficient in English grammar. For example, Nyamasyo (1992) analysed examination scripts from a cross-section of 18 to 20 year-old students at the secondary stage and proved that Kenyan pre-university students suffer from grammatical and lexical errors of their written English. Moreover, Mourtaga (2004) conducted a study in which 35 male and 35 female Palestinian freshman students wrote on one of 18 different topics related to the student writers' life and culture. Findings revealed that student' errors in verbs, articles and punctuation, were the most frequent.

In reference to grammatical errors in writing, some research studies have proved that students' grammatical errors are common among ESL/EFL students' writing. Most importantly is that these studies have suggested using some remedial approaches to help students better understand and use grammar correctly in writing. For example, Mouzahem (1991) examined the grammatical errors in the performance of a group of Syrian university students and concluded that focusing primarily on the teaching of grammatical rules is not the optimal solution in the Syrian context, but the communicative functions of writing need to be given more attention. Similarly, Abdulla (1995) found out that grammar is taught in a structural manner that is isolated from all language skills. It was also shown that all language skills are taught in separate courses. This justified that the idea of an integrative approach to teaching English in general and writing in particular would be beneficial to Yemini students of English at the university level. To make language learning meaningful, he calls for the integration of grammar and lexis in a piece of discourse as the central unit of learning. Moreover, he believes that language skills must be integrated in learning tasks. In the same vein, Al-Sharah (1997) who investigated the writing of 210 students studying English at two Jordanian universities, revealed that both bottom-up: linguistic aspects such as words and grammar, and top-down: rhetorical aspects, such as the organization and structure of text, content, and purpose are needed in the writing process. Moreover, Bidin (2004) considered that a discourse-based grammar approach is appropriate for local graduates in Malaysia to a certain extent for improving accuracy and appropriateness of tense usage in L2 writing.

The above mentioned research studies give rise to the fact that grammar is a problematic area in the writing of ESL/EFL students. It is also clear that Arab students find grammar a challenging area while composing in English. This pinpoints that we, as researchers and curriculum designers, should take this into consideration and step forward regarding improving students' grammatical skills, especially in writing. Within the Egyptian context, it might be helpful to teach grammar to students and bring to their attention that they have to apply these grammatical rules while constructing a written text in English.

#### **3.4.5.2 Punctuation Difficulties**

Punctuation is often underestimated as a writing skill among most Arab teachers and learners of English at the pre-university stage. This often results in students' difficulties and problems in punctuation skills. In this respect, Flower (1979) illustrated that lack of punctuation skills leads to incorrect cues about how to divide the sentence. This incorrectly-punctuated writing makes it difficult for the reader to follow what they are reading, forcing them to stop, reread and reinterpret the sentence.

Previous research (Liggett 1983; Kharma 1985; Doushaq and Al- Makhzoomy 1989; Kharma and Hajjaj 1989; Halimah 1991; Abu-Hadid 1994; Al-Hazmi 1998; Macarthur, 1999; Mourtaga, 2004; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh, 2007) asserted that the mechanical aspects (i.e. punctuation and spelling) of writing stand as a major concern for Arab EFL learners. For example, Abu-Hadid (1994) designed an analytical and experimental study to overcome Egyptian secondary school students' punctuation errors. Results of the study indicated that the use of integration approach to language skills and the mastery learning approach helped students get rid of most of their punctuation errors.

Similarly, Macarthur (1999) supported the claim that students who find writing challenging often struggle with the basic transcription processes involved in writing, including handwriting or typing, spelling, capitalization and punctuation. In the same vein, Mourtaga (2004) found out that Palestinian freshman students, whose texts and other data were examined, have errors in punctuation and both Arabic and English were sources of many of these errors. In reviewing students'

written texts, Al-Hazmi (2006) pinpointed that punctuation was the least reviewed feature of Saudi students' writing. Finally, Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh (2007) highlighted that certain features of Jordanian students' writing including punctuation were the most problematic.

This section spotlighted how punctuation has an important role in ESL/EFL writing. It also showed how punctuation constitutes a problem for most Arabic speaking students. Egyptian students have reported to be suffering from punctuation errors in their writing (Abu-Hadid, 1994). This awakens our minds to the importance of focusing on the different effective punctuation teaching/learning strategies that could be used to solve this problem such as direct instruction, the integration approach and mastery learning.

#### **3.4.5.3 Spelling Difficulties**

Spelling is one of the basic skills for writing in general and essay writing in particular in any language. It is important to master spelling skills because if words are misspelled, they might mean something completely different leading to problems in comprehension. Foreign learners of English, as well as many native English speakers, are plagued by difficulties in spelling (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). This view was supported by Cook (1997) who compared the spelling of adult L2 users of English with native L1 users. Results showed that common spelling mistakes are made in the familiar categories of letter insertion, omission, substitution and transposition, apart from a lower proportion of omission errors for L2 users.

It may be encouraging to know that nearly 85% of all English words have a regular spelling (Miller 1973). However, it should be noted that the number of rules and exceptions is substantial and the nature of the rules is quite composite. Thus, Cook (1997) underscores that effective spelling is important for second/foreign language learners because of its social implications. Yet, spelling receives minimal attention in research.

It is known that Arabic writing conventions and vowel system are enormously different from those of English. This makes it much more difficult for Arabic speaking students to spell English words correctly. This was confirmed by a number of studies (Ibrahim, 1978; Beck, 1979; El-Hibir & Al-Taha, 1992; Abdel-Aziz, 1993; Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh, 2007; Fender, 2008). For example, the results of Beck (1979) indicated that spelling mistakes formed the most common errors found in the compositions of freshmen at the University of Petroleum and Minerals in Saudi Arabia. This was clear as 98% of all paragraphs examined contained at least one spelling error, with the majority containing many more. Moreover, El-Hibir & Al-Taha, (1992) stressed certain errors in orthography that frequently occurred in the writing of 150 students in Saudi Arabia at the university level. Common spelling problems were evident in students' writing. Moreover, Abdel-Aziz (1993) pointed out that Egyptian secondary stage students have difficulties in writing skills in general and spelling in particular. To overcome these writing difficulties, she designed an experimental study based on using self-correction strategy that proved effective in eradicating students' errors in grammar, lexical rules and spelling. Shokrpour & Fallahzadeh (2007) highlighted that certain features of Jordanian students' writing including spelling received the highest errorless scores in students' writing. Recently, Fender's test results (2008) indicated that Arab students scored significantly lower on the spelling test and the reading comprehension test than the intermediate-level ESL learners in the EAP programme.

In harmony with that, Ibrahim (1978) examined spelling errors in the written work of undergraduate students at a Jordan university and found that most spelling errors fell into one or more of the following categories: non-phonetic nature of English spelling, differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic, analogy errors, inconsistent spelling in English word derivation, and transitional errors resulting from ignorance or overgeneralisation of a spelling rule.

Nearly all the reviewed studies in this section have shown that Arab students encounter some problems in their English orthographic skills, especially spelling. This is somewhat true of Egyptian student teachers of English. However, their difficulties in spelling are not as grave as those in coherence and cohesion.

#### **3.4.5.4 Revision and Editing Difficulties**

To have a good piece of writing, students have to revise in different forms such as delete, add, replace and so on. For this to happen, students should be trained on how to use these revision strategies to be able to revise on their own. A handful of studies have paid due attention to how students revise their writing in English. To describe how twelfth grade Arab students revise their compositions, El-Shafie (1990) conducted a qualitative case study to examine every piece of writing over the span of a year. Results show that each student made recognizable consistent progress in the quantity and quality of writing over the span of a year. Both the amount and type of revision operations used by all students were similar. Students substituted, added, and deleted far more often than they expanded, reduced, and moved their texts. Syntactic revision was more frequent at the word, surface, and phrase levels than at the clause, sentence, and multi-sentence levels. All students revised extensively to find words to convey meaning. Most students focused on formal and meaning-preserving revisions more than other types of semantic changes. Students changed from revising linearly in first drafts or early assignments to revising recursively in final drafts of later assignments. Moreover, Silva (1993) highlighted that, L2 writing in general involves less reviewing, less rereading of and reflecting on written texts.

The factors affecting the revision processes of students' writing were the concern of some researchers. For example, Scordaras (2003) shed light on the factors affecting the revision processes of two stronger ESL writers and two weaker ones. Prior knowledge and writing experiences seemed to affect their revision processes more than any other factors. In the same vein, Kehagia (2005) found out that time spent on revision was of prime importance; less profound revisions were of cosmetic and grammatical nature, whereas more profound revisions were of informational nature.

In terms of teacher commentary on EFL students' revisions, Sugita (2006) used three types of handwritten teacher commentary: statements, imperatives, and questions. Results show that teacher's comments in the imperative form were more influential on revisions than questions or statements and appeared to help students make substantial, effective revisions. This outcome may imply that selecting comment types when teachers write between-draft comments should be practised with care.

Studying the effects on writing development and attitudes of the process approach with enforced revision and peer feedback, Jouhari (1997) showed that Saudi college freshmen at King Abdul-Aziz University became more proficient in generating ideas, drafting, processing feedback and revising and gained more favourable attitudes. Similarly, Al-Hazmi & Scholfield (2007) conducted a piece of action research using enforced draft peer revision, using a checklist to improve the English writing of low proficiency Saudi university students. There were clear draft improvements in quality, especially in mechanics, despite only modest amounts of meaning-changing and multisentential revisions being recorded. Most changes were meaning preserving. However, final draft quality improved only slightly on performance after the intervention and fell significantly in a time limited exam situation following it.

As reported in the findings of the current study, revision and editing is a neglected stage in Egyptian students' essay writing. One of the main factors that led to this is students' lack of training in revision and editing; a skill which Egyptian essay writing teachers are recommended to use. In fact, the lack of Egyptian students' writing practice in class makes revision and editing impossible. Therefore, there is a strong need to help students write in English whether at home or in class. Once students were given the opportunity to write, it would be useful for teachers to employ peer-review and teacher's commentary on their students' revisions by giving a mixture of corrective and constructive comments that would encourage students to improve. In addition, it is suggested to use a checklist to improve the English writing of those students with low proficiency level.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has defined and explained the basic concepts and constructs of the current study. It has clarified how the interpretivist theoretical framework fits the purpose of the study. The literature reviewed throughout has shown how ample research is available on the different aspects of ESL/EFL writing theories, approaches and writer's identities. It has also illustrated what factors have greater impact than others on students' writing development. In addition, the different ESL/EFL writing difficulties including planning, cohesion, coherence, vocabulary and technicalities have been reviewed to pinpoint which of them is pertinent to the Egyptian context in which this study is conducted. The literature showed that the current study is unique in its exploration of the different essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student-teachers of English. This chapter has also helped me to develop the different research instruments used in the current study (i.e. the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the semi-structured observation).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology of the current study. Firstly, it addresses the ontological assumptions as well as theoretical framework and its epistemological stance underpinning the current study. Secondly, it presents the research paradigm, the methodology, the mixed methods design with its detailed data collection and data analysis instrumentation and the research procedures. Moreover, it highlights how trustworthiness is achieved in the current study. Finally, the ethical considerations and the study limitations of the current study are pinpointed.

#### **4.2 The Philosophical Assumptions**

##### **4.2.1 The Ontological Assumptions**

Ontology is defined by Crotty (2003:10) as “the study of being”. It is concerned with the kind of world we are investigating, its nature of existence, and the structure of reality. More clearly, the ontological assumptions are those that respond to the question ‘what is there that can be known?’ or ‘what is the nature of reality?’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1989:83). The assumption underpinning the interpretive paradigm is the ontological position that suggests the existence of multiple realities within the social world. In this assumption, it is asserted that the social phenomena and their meanings are being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, these realities are characterised by being abstract, multifaceted, contextually-bound and subjective. They can be studied through their holistic and distinctive features (Guba and Lincoln, 1999). This implies that a specific social phenomenon under investigation is not only the product of social interaction, but it is also revised and changed constantly. Recently, the notion has included the researcher’s own accounts of the social world (ibid). In this world, it is assumed that the world that is being investigated is a world populated by human beings who have their own thoughts, interpretations and meanings about it.

I believe that the ontological position underlining the current study is that of different versions of reality as seen by different people in the world. To reveal the identity and the characteristics of this world, I use different data collection instruments such as questionnaires, semi-structured in-depth interviews and semi-structured observation to explore the difficulties and challenges that the participants encounter in their learning of essay writing. These different participants represent multiple realities about the essay writing difficulties. In addition, the combined quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques allowed me to come up with different verifications about the nature of this socially constructed world of human beings and to interpret the students and their teachers' feelings, attitudes, experiences and perceptions about the reality of teaching and learning essay writing in general and the reality of the different difficulties and challenges that are encountered within the Egyptian context in particular.

#### **4.2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The current study is informed by the interpretive paradigm which seeks culturally-derived and historically-situated interpretations of the social world in which we live (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism is defined as “an approach that assumes that the meaning of human action is inherent in that action, and the task of the inquirer is to unearth that meaning” (Schwandt, 2007:160). In addition, Cohen et al. (2007:22) advocate the use of interpretivism in educational research stating that (1) individuals are unique and largely non-generalisable; (2) there are multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on, single events and situations; (3) situations need to be examined through the eyes of the participants, rather than the researcher only.

The interpretive approach aims at understanding the context within which participants act, and understanding the process by which events and actions take place, telling us from an emic viewpoint why they have happened (Maxwell, 1996 and Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This includes developing a description of an individual or setting by looking at the issue from different perspectives, analysing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about the meaning, both personally and theoretically (Wolcott, 1994). In other words, the interpretive approach helped me explore and understand the

context within which EFL essay writing is taught and learnt at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. This also helped me reveal the difficulties and challenges that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter in their learning of English essay writing.

#### **4.2.2.1 Epistemological Stance**

Epistemology is “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 2003:3). Epistemology is also ‘concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate’ (Maynard, 1994:10) in Crotty, *Ibid*, 8). The Epistemological stance used in this study is constructionism which is defined as “the view of that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” Crotty (2003:42). Thus, meaning is not discovered, but constructed.

In line with this, Burr (1995) outlines the following four broad social constructionist tenets; First, social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (including ourselves); it invites us to be critical of the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us, and to challenge the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world. Second, the ways in which we commonly understand the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific. Third, knowledge is constructed through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated; therefore, social interaction of all kinds, and particularly language, is of great interest to social constructionists. Finally, each social construction of the world brings with it, or invites, a different kind of action from human beings. The social action appropriate to understanding a human behaviour in this way sustains some patterns of social action and excludes others. If we have these tenets in mind, we will realise that writing courses could be designed to encourage students’ questioning of the knowledge they construct, engage students in reflections on

culturally specific issues, and help them collaboratively develop a good understanding of what they compose and how they compose it.

Epistemologically, social constructionism as the adopted stance is fulfilled in the current study as follow. First, meaning is socially constructed about the essay writing difficulties through exploring the different views of the participants. Second, these socially constructed views are more verified by the methodological triangulation shown in the data collection (i.e. questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and semi-structured observation). Finally, constructionists say that there is no true or valid interpretation. This is why the suggestions for further research are an invitation to reinterpretation of aspects of relevance to the current study.

Within the interpretive paradigm, knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the same vein, the current study is based on social constructionism. Social constructionist approaches to writing are derived from perspectives in philosophy, as well as other fields that emphasise the importance of community consensus in determining knowledge. This view is based on the idea that individuals perceive the world according to the shared beliefs and perceptions of the community to which they belong (Clark et al., 2003). In the current study, Egyptian student-teachers of English compose their essays in the light of the shared beliefs, backgrounds, culture and perceptions of the Egyptian community within which they lived, learnt what is socially acceptable, interacted with each other and shared different experiences. If they try to construct their written essays in a way that contradicts the community social consensus, this might be socially irrelevant and epistemologically unacceptable for the Egyptian community.

### **4.3 Research Methodology**

Methodology is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of the methods to the desired outcomes.” Crotty, (2003: 3). It aims to describe, evaluate and justify the use of particular methods (Wellington, 2000). Within the interpretive paradigm, knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed and endorses eclecticism and pluralism. Different, even conflicting, theories and perspectives can be useful ways to gain an understanding of people and the world (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The methodology of the current study is of an exploratory nature where I thoroughly probed the phenomenon under investigation. This provides insights into and comprehension of the focuses of teaching essay writing, essay writing teachers’ practices and the essay writing difficulties through using a range of data and an overall interpretive methodology that attempt to gain an in-depth understanding of the essay writing difficulties as encountered by Egyptian student teachers and as reported by their essay writing teachers. This interpretive methodology attempts to justify why the participants hold different views.

#### **4.3.1 Research Methods**

In compliance with the exploratory nature of the methodological decision adopted in the current study, the research design of the current study employs mixed methods. The data collection methods used in this study have potential strengths and weaknesses. As highlighted in the literature, mixed methods research is used to refer to any research study that integrates one or more qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection and analysis (Creswell 2003 and Borkan, 2004). Therefore, I used what Greene et al. (1989) call mixed methods to avoid the pitfalls of each of the research instruments. There are five reasons for conducting mixed methods research: (a) triangulation, (b) complementarity, (c) initiation (d) development, and (e) expansion (ibid). In reference to the current study, the use of mixed methods is useful in terms of triangulation where more than one research method are used as well as complementarity where the weakness of one research method is complemented by the strength of another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Moreover, using more than one method can reduce some of the biases that might occur when only one method is used. Consequently, the findings would be more representative of participants’ views.

Similarly, as a philosophical underpinning for mixed methods studies, (Patton, 1990 and Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) stress the importance of focusing attention on the research problem in social science and then using pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about the problem. All these factors make combining both quantitative and qualitative methods a solid basis for educational research.

In reference to using mixed methods in L2 writing research, Matsuda & Silva (2005) advocate the view that researchers are recommended to investigate L2 writing from different perspectives including social sciences, humanities as well as physical sciences. In addition, they recommend L2 writing researchers to mix research methods to complement each other and surmount the potential challenges of any single method. Moreover, they discourage researchers from engaging in infertile arguments that perceive quantitative as superior to qualitative or vice versa, but rather encourage them to use existing research designs, modify designs, combine designs, and/or develop new designs.

In particular, the current study followed the sequential mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998 and Creswell, 2003) in which the quantitative and the qualitative phases of the study were conducted in sequence. The quantitative phase is represented in the questionnaire, whereas the semi-structured observation and the semi-structured interview constitute the qualitative phase. The questionnaire was administered first, followed by the semi-structured interviews with the participants and the semi-structured observation came as a final stage.

#### **4.3.2 Data Collection Methods**

In most educational research studies, the research questions determine what methods to be adopted. Methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and collect data related to some research questions or hypotheses” (Crotty, 2003:3). To answer the three research questions of the current study, I designed three research instruments: a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and a semi-structured observation. Both the questionnaire and the interview consist of two versions: one for student teachers of English and the other for the essay writing teachers. The semi-structured observation was used to record the focuses

of the essay writing classes, the different teaching practices used and any essay writing difficulties that might arise during the lecture. Table 4.1 below shows each of the research questions vis-à-vis the research instruments and the number of participants used to help answer each research question.

TABLE (4.1) Research questions Vis-à-vis research instruments and participants

No.	Research Question	Research Instruments	Participants
1	What are the focuses of teaching EFL essay writing to Egyptian student teachers?	1- Students' Questionnaire.	165 students
		2- Students' Interview.	14 students
		3- Teachers' Questionnaire.	7 teachers
		4- Teachers' Interview.	7 teachers
		5- Classroom Observation	3 teachers: 9 lectures; 5 lectures for one teacher, 3 for another teacher and 1 for the last one.
		6- Teaching Materials	3 different types of materials
2(A)	How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers view their teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?	1- Teachers' Questionnaire.	7 teachers
		2- Teachers' Interview.	7 teachers
		3- Classroom Observation.	3 teachers: 9 lectures; 5 lectures for one teacher, 3 for another teacher and 1 for the last one.
2(B)	How do Egyptian students view the teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?	1- Students' Questionnaire.	165 students
		2- Students' Interview.	14 students
3(A)	How do Egyptian student teachers of English perceive their essay writing difficulties?	1- Students' Interview.	14 students
		2- Students' Questionnaire.	165 students
3(B)	How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers perceive their students' essay writing difficulties?	1- Teachers' Questionnaire	7 teachers
		2- Teachers' Interview.	7 teachers

#### **4.3.2.1 Participants**

Sampling is an important step in any research. Therefore, selection of an appropriate sampling strategy is an essential to all qualitative researchers (Cohen et al., 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The sampling strategy used in the current study is of two types: probability and non-probability (ibid). The probability sampling strategy was used while collecting the questionnaire data from 165 Egyptian student teachers of English. These students were randomly selected from third and fourth year students at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. On the other hand, convenience sampling constituted the non-probability sampling strategy. In this regard, Given (2008) highlighted that convenience sampling is used when the participants are accessible and consequently relatively easy for the researcher to exploit. In convenience sampling, researchers try to deepen their understanding of the chosen participants by selecting information rich cases that are insightful in terms of the phenomenon under investigation. Finding participants who can enrich and clarify the addressed phenomenon is one of the major goals of sampling in order to maximise our learning about that phenomenon. Therefore, I used convenience sampling by selecting fourteen student teachers of English to be interviewed and all seven essay writing teachers available at the time when the study was being conducted.

These students and their essay writing teachers were selected according to the criterion of accessibility (Silverman, 2001). That is to say, students were participating in a Bachelor Degree in TEFL education programme at the time the study was being conducted and represented half of the student teachers of English at the faculty. All the essay writing teachers are/have been teaching essay writing to any of the four years of the programme.

In relation to the current study, I deliberately selected third and fourth year English department students at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt because I wanted to investigate the essay writing difficulties as encountered by students who have been studying essay writing for more than two years to examine the different views behind these difficulties. In addition, seven essay writing teachers, 3 male and 4 female, based in the English Department, of the Faculty of Arts at the same university were purposively chosen. This number

represents all the essay writing teachers available at the English Department. The Faculty of Education does not appoint essay writing teachers as the English department is not one of the main four departments at the Faculty of Education. The sample of the current study consisted of 165 students (i.e. 50% of all student teachers of English) of whom fourteen students were selected to be interviewed and seven essay writing teachers who not only responded to the questionnaire, but they were interviewed as well. This suggests that the sample selected for the current study is representative of student teachers of English as a whole and their essay writing teachers at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt.

The choice of student and lecturer interviewees was based on criterion sampling strategy according to which all cases that meet some specific criteria of usefulness and importance for research quality assurance are selected (Patton, 1990 and Kuzel, 1992). The criteria for student interviewees were: any student, who filled in the questionnaire fully, elaborated on their answers to the open-ended questions and were willing to be interviewed. In reference to the lecturer interviewees, two criteria were used. First, lecturers who are/have been teaching EFL essay writing to English department students at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. Second, EFL essay writing lecturers who were willing to participate in the current study'.

Participants comprised students from third and fourth years rather than the first and second years, as the aim was to focus only on these students who have already learnt how to write an essay and were able to provide a comprehensive picture covering the difficulties they encountered over the accumulated years of the essay writing course. Participants consisted of both male and female students, aged from 19-21 years, native speakers of Arabic, sharing the same Egyptian nationality and culture, but with different background knowledge. In addition, these students have started their teaching practice of English at different preparatory and secondary schools in Giza and Cairo governorates.

### 4.3.3 Research Procedures

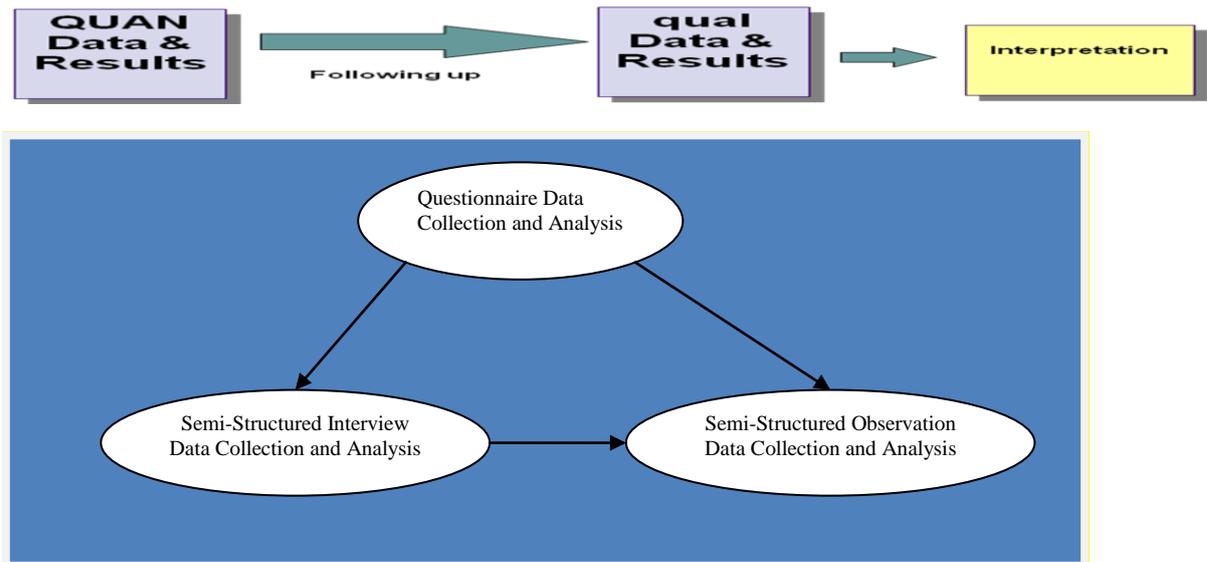


Figure (4.1) Sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Data was collected in three phases. First, the preliminary questionnaire was designed according to some reviewed studies. This questionnaire consisted of 37 close-ended items. It was composed of five dimensions, each of which shed light on the teaching practices adopted by the essay writing teachers in the essay writing course. These dimensions are pre-writing, during writing, post-writing, classroom organisation and management, and instructional aids. A scale of frequency was used to know how frequent the items in each of the five dimensions occurred. The scale of frequency was designed in the form of a 5 point Likert scale. Each of the five response options was assigned a number from 1 to 5 for scoring purpose. The response options and their assigned numbers are as follows: always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) and never (1). This questionnaire was checked for content validity by administering it to three TESOL lecturers in Egypt who suggested some minor changes to be valid. I also checked this questionnaire for reliability on 35 students, using Cronbach Alpha reliability scale that proved that the questionnaire is reliable (0.686). It was administered in 2006 to 100 English majors at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. Having checked it for validity and reliability, I statistically analysed the results using SPSS. For a list of the most significant results, see Table (1.1).

The second phase of data collection is represented in the main questionnaire of the current study. Figure (4.1) indicates the procedures followed for this study. The questionnaire was piloted on a sample of fifty English department students. Having checked the reliability using Cronbach Alpha's reliability scale in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the questionnaire proved reliable (0.717). After that, 165 students were asked to fill in the questionnaire, which was quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. At the same time, seven essay writing teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire which was not piloted because of the small number of essay writing teachers.

The third phase of the data collection is concerned with the qualitative data collection and analysis: namely, the semi-structured interview and the semi-structured observation. Fourteen students as well as seven essay writing teachers have been purposively selected to be interviewed according to some criteria. Students' interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated by me for two reasons: first, I'm a native speaker of Arabic and second, I studied translation from Arabic into English and vice versa for six years. I translated the recorded interviews and e-mailed the translated transcripts with the Arabic versions to three Egyptian translators who are graduates of the English Department, Faculty of Arts, at an Egyptian university to validate them. Regarding teachers' interviews, they were conducted in English, audio-taped and transcribed. The major research aims were used as guidelines for topic ordering and construction of categories (Radnor, 2001).

In relation to the semi-structured classroom observation, my fellow observer and I conducted 9 classroom observation sessions, for 165 students and 3 teachers in the essay writing course as follows: one teacher allowed us to observe five lectures, the second one allowed us to observe three lectures and the last one allowed us only once to observe his essay writing lecture. More details about how the semi-structured observation sessions are analysed are presented in section 4.5.3.

#### **4.3.4 Trustworthiness**

The weight and value of any quantitative research is judged against its validity and reliability. However, in qualitative research, it is suggested establishing alternative criteria for assessing its quality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In line with this, trustworthiness is put forward as the main criterion for assessing qualitative studies. Trustworthiness is defined as “a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research.” (Bryman, 2008:700). In other words, trustworthiness enables qualitative researchers to illustrate the merit of their studies away from the often ill-fitting quantitative parameters (Given, 2008). For a qualitative study to be trustworthy, four criteria need to be achieved: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Bryman, 2008; Given, 2008).

##### **4.3.4.1 Credibility**

In reference to credibility, it is defined by Given (2008:138) as “the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants’ expressions and the researcher’s interpretations of them.” Therefore, it is pinpointed that the researcher should endeavour to match the constructed realities in the interpretations of the data with the realities of the study participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the current study, my accuracy in reporting descriptive and interpretive accounts of the data was achieved through the use of investigator triangulation and participant feedback/member checking. First, two observers including myself recorded and described the research participants' behaviour and the context in which they were located. This allowed cross-checking of the observation filed notes to make sure the investigators agree about what was observed. Moreover, investigator triangulation was also achieved by using three translators to check the translation of the students’ Arabic transcripts of the interviews. Second, participant feedback/member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used by e-mailing the written transcripts to the study participants to clear up any areas of misunderstanding. In this way, I managed to understand things from the participants' perspectives and provided a valid account of these perspectives. This resulted in more credible and defensible research findings.

#### **4.3.4.2. Dependability**

In relation to dependability, it is defined by Schwandt (2001: 258) as “the process of the enquiry and the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process of the enquiry is logical, traceable and documented.” In the current study, I used methodological triangulation which conforms to the use of mixed methods in research. Methodological triangulation is an attempt to enhance the validity of research findings by using various techniques in the same study (Mathison, 1988 and Murray, 1999). The rationale behind using methodological triangulation is that weaknesses inherent in one method are balanced by the strengths in another (Jack & Raturi, 2006). It involves the use of different methods and sources to check the integrity of, or extend inferences drawn from the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The mixed methods of data collection instruments (i.e. questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and semi-structured observation) were used to explore the participants’ views and perspectives of EFL essay writing teaching/learning, thus giving more depth and add vivid layers of description to the participants’ views about what is investigated.

Combining observation with interviews in the same study is a common approach in qualitative research (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Interviews allow access to what people say, but not to what they do. The only way to find out what ‘actually happens’ in the essay writing class is through observation. Thus, the semi-structured interviews were conducted first in order to find out what are the key issues from the perspective of the study participants, and to look for these in the observation.

I believe that integrating qualitative and quantitative methods is not dichotomous, but rather harmonious. This view is supported by many researchers who believe that the combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis is advantageous for some reasons (Paul, 1996; Johnson, 1997; Vitale et al., 2008). In this regard, Rossman and Wilson (1991) pinpoint that there three main reasons for using mixed methods: (a) to enable confirmation or corroboration of each other via triangulation; (b) to provide richer detail and analysis; and (c) to initiate new lines of thinking through attention to inconsistencies, providing better argument. Moreover, Vitale et al. (2008) highlighted that using mixed methods

does not only add to the research toolbox, but they also allow a synthesis of traditions to take place. In reference to the current study, I used the questionnaire (i.e. quantitative and qualitative research technique) as well as in-depth semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation (i.e. qualitative research techniques) to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods.

#### **4.3.4.3 Confirmability**

Confirmability reflects the need to ensure that the interpretations and findings match the data (Given, 2008). In other words, no claims are made that cannot be supported by the data. Confirmability was achieved in the current study by doing two things. First, I gave a clear description of how my research data was collected and analysed. This was supported by the feedback given by my two thesis supervisors. Second, I used what Given (2008) calls 'an audit trail' where I asked an independent reviewer to verify that the research process and interpretations of the data are consistent on both the literature and methodological levels. Finally, I returned all the written transcripts of the interview to the research participants by e-mail to make sure that they are consistent with their perceptions. Accordingly, few changes were made.

#### **4.3.4.4 Transferability**

Transferability reflects the researcher's awareness and description of the scope of one's qualitative study so that its applicability to other different contexts can be readily determined (Given, 2008). Despite the fact that the findings of my study are related to one of twenty-two faculties of education in Egypt, it is at the level of categories, concepts and explanation that generalisation can take place. Assessing representational generalisation in qualitative research, as Ritchie & Lewis (2003) argue, rests on two broad concerns. The first issue deals with the accuracy of the data collection and data analysis processes. This was achieved in the current study through the inclusion of a range of variables, and the use of multiple methods for triangulating the data collected and the findings. I also provided the reader with some possible interpretations of the findings and related such findings to other pertinent literature in EFL/ESL writing from different contexts: internationally, nationally and locally. In addition, strict procedures were followed for the data collection and analysis, as outlined in (section 4.3.4). The second issue addresses

the sample's representativeness of the parent population. Representation here, as Ritchie & Lewis (2003:268) claim, is not a statistical representation, but an inclusive one. In the current study, symbolic representation was achieved through the diversity of dimensions and constituencies that are central to explanation. In other words, the findings of the current study are not concerned with a single case of essay writing, but they are representative of the many essay writing difficulties and practices which Egyptian student teachers of English might encounter in their learning of English writing. The arguments for this are as follows. First, they are Egyptian students taught by Egyptian university teachers. These teachers might not be methodologically qualified as they are graduates of English Department at the Faculties of Arts, rather than Faculties of Education. Second, Egyptian students share the same culture and the same pre-university learning experiences, where English writing receives little attention. I can argue here that the findings of this study may be reflected elsewhere in the Egyptian context based on the diversity of the characteristics the sample represents, the detailed description of the context, and the level of abstraction in the data analysis. Thus, I can assume that the findings the current study can be generalised representationally.

#### **4.4 Development of Research Instruments**

##### **4.4.1 Development of Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is one of the most widely used and useful instruments for collecting data in L2 research, being easy to construct, extremely versatile and uniquely capable of gathering large information quickly in a processable form (Dornyei, 2003). The questionnaire of the current study is a mixed survey instrument containing both close and open-ended items. The close-ended questions are easily coded and tabulated quantitatively leaving no room for rater subjectivity. In addition, Brown (2001) highlighted that close ended-questions are marked by providing uniformity across questions with reference to the types and specificity of the obtained data, are easier to be answered and less likely to be skipped by respondents, and are relatively objective. The close-ended items used in the current study were in the form of multiple choice that required respondents to circle or underline one of five responses in a Likert scale that best suits their views.

On the other hand, the open-ended questions are designed with the purpose of yielding qualitative data through the text responses written in the respondents' own words (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Moreover, these open-ended items can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead to the identification of some issues not previously expected (Dornyei, 2003). The open-ended questions used in the questionnaire of the current study included items where no response options were offered, but rather a blank space to be filled in by the respondents (Dornyei, 2007). One example of an open-ended question asked of the student teachers was 'If you would like to add any other difficulties that you face in the prewriting stage, please do so in the space provided below.'

Both students and teachers' questionnaires started with an introduction informing the participants about the aims of the study and the confidentiality and privacy of data. The topics covered in students and their teachers' questionnaires of the current study are illustrated in Table 4.2 below.

TABLE (4.2) Questionnaire Topics

Main Sections	Sub- sections	Items
<b>(I) FOCUSES OF TEACHING/LEARNING ESSAY WRITING</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grammar</li> <li>➤ Idioms and Collocations</li> <li>➤ Paragraph and Essay structure</li> <li>➤ Theoretical Knowledge</li> <li>➤ Analysis of written essays</li> <li>➤ Prior knowledge</li> <li>➤ Topics of writing</li> </ul>
<b>ESSAY WRITING TEACHERS' PRACTICES</b>	<b>Teaching Procedures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ teaching materials</li> <li>➤ Activating topic prior knowledge</li> <li>➤ Brainstorming</li> <li>➤ topic-based teaching</li> <li>➤ lecturing</li> </ul>
	<b>FEEDBACK PRACTICES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Oral feedback</li> <li>➤ Written feedback</li> <li>➤ Class discussion of written mistakes</li> <li>➤ Types of teacher/students conferences</li> <li>➤ Peer-review</li> </ul>
	<b>ASSESSMENT PRACTICES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pre-assessment</li> <li>➤ Formative assessment</li> <li>➤ Self assessment</li> <li>➤ Marking criteria</li> </ul>
<b>(II) ESSAY WRITING DIFFICULTIES</b>	<b>Pre- writing Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Brainstorming</li> <li>➤ Generation of relevant ideas</li> <li>➤ Planning interesting topics</li> <li>➤ Planning unfamiliar topics</li> </ul>
	<b>Coherence Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Introduction writing,</li> <li>➤ Conclusion writing,</li> <li>➤ Writing of thesis statement,</li> <li>➤ Topic sentence and paragraph development.</li> <li>➤ Writing about ONE unified idea only</li> </ul>
	<b>Cohesion Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The use of semantically appropriate cohesive ties</li> <li>➤ The use of different cohesive ties,</li> <li>➤ Reference, Ellipsis, Substitution, Ties of different genres</li> </ul>
	<b>Stylistic Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Clarity of style,</li> <li>➤ Modes of writing</li> </ul>
	<b>Lexical Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Use of appropriate vocabulary</li> <li>➤ Synonyms</li> <li>➤ Antonyms</li> <li>➤ Idioms</li> </ul>
	<b>Technical Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Grammar</li> <li>➤ Punctuation</li> <li>➤ Spelling</li> </ul>
	<b>Revision and Editing Difficulties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Revising the coherence, cohesion and style of writing</li> <li>➤ Revising the word choice and grammatical structures</li> <li>➤ Revising punctuation and spelling</li> </ul>

All the sections and sub-sections of the questionnaire have been logically sequenced according to the process of writing development and the research aims. The sequence started with the focuses of teaching essay writing, moving smoothly on to consider the practices of the essay writing teachers. Finally, the different essay writing difficulties are presented.

At the end of the questionnaire, I asked respondents to provide me with some demographic data such as name, age, gender, grade, e-mail address and telephone number. This demographic data was not placed at the beginning of the questionnaire because I did not want the participants to feel that I was violating their privacy, which could affect their responses to the questionnaire as suggested by (Dornyei, 2003). The purpose of this demographic data was to enable me to contact these participants, who met the pre-set criteria as the basis for the sampling strategy (See the demographic data section at the end of appendix 3), and to set a convenient date, time and place for the interview.

Questionnaires of both essay writing teachers and their students consisted of 59 close -ended items and nine open-ended questions. Two response scales to the close-ended questionnaire were used: a scale of frequency and a scale of difficulty. The scale of frequency was designed to know how frequent the items in each of the following three main sections occurred: focuses of teaching essay writing, the essay writing teachers' practices. The scale of frequency was designed in the form of 5 point Likert scale. Each of the five response options was assigned a number from 1 to 5 for scoring purpose. The response options and their assigned numbers are as follows: always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) and never (1). The scale of difficulty was designed to know the difficulty level that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter in items related to the different essay writing skills: prewriting, coherence, cohesion, style, lexical, technical and revision. The response options and their assigned numbers are as follows: very difficult (5), difficult (4), neither difficult nor easy (3), easy (2) and very easy (1).

In reference to the completion rate, 100% of student teachers and the essay writing teachers completed the questionnaire. The reason behind this is that I administered the questionnaire to students in their essay writing class and waited for them to complete it. In relation to teachers, all of them preferred to complete it before holding the interview to get a good idea of my research topic. It took student teachers 37.5 minutes to complete the questionnaire, according to the following average formula:

$$\frac{30 \text{ minutes for the fastest respondent} + 45 \text{ minutes for the slowest respondent}}{2} = 37.5$$

With regards to the essay writing teachers, it took them 12.5 minutes to complete the questionnaire according to the same average formula.

$$\frac{10 \text{ minutes for the fastest respondent} + 15 \text{ minutes for the slowest respondent}}{2} = 12.5$$

Both students and lectures' questionnaires have been checked for validity before piloting them. All the items of the questionnaire have been clearly and simply worded. Content validity was checked by e-mailing the two questionnaires to nine TEFL/TESOL specialists to check the content of the questionnaire items. Few comments were given according to which the following modifications were made. First, the open-ended questions were added as they were not included in the preliminary form of the questionnaire. Second, it was suggested that the demographic data section was moved to the end of the questionnaire as it was at the beginning initially. Third, reorganization of some items was suggested. Moreover, rewording some phrases and expressions was also suggested. Finally, I was advised to separate items according to specific categories. Consequently, the aims of the current study matched the content of the questionnaire and thus, measured what was supposed to be measured.

#### **4.4.2 Development of Interview**

Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) define an interview as “a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge.” (p. 3).

As Robson (2006) argues, “there are three main types of interviews; the fully structured interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured interview” (p. 270). The similarity between the structured and semi-structured interviews is that they both have pre-determined questions. However, they are different in other aspects. For example, the semi-structured interview is more flexible as it allows the order of questions to be modified according to the researcher’s views of what is most important, question wording to be changed, particular questions to be omitted because of their inappropriateness, or additional ones included. The current study used semi-structured interviews because their flexibility makes them more suitable to the aims of the current study. In other words, the research instruments of the current study have pre-determined questions, but allow space for modification, deletion and inclusion of certain questions and items. A semi-structured in-depth interview was chosen for the current study to elicit data for a number of reasons. It is a flexible tool, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard (Cohen et al., 2007). Interviews are significant in data collection because they help participants discuss their different interpretations of the real world in which they live, and express how they see issues from their own viewpoints.

In-depth interviews have other strengths: for example, they are distinguished by the general characteristics of face-to-face interviewing (Darlington & Scott, 2002). They are flexible data collection instruments due to their immediacy yielding deep and thick description of the topic to be investigated and the discussion direction. They give the interviewee a degree of power and control over the course of the interview (Nunan, 1992) and they enable the interviewer to get inside the perspectives of the respondents to find out about people’s attitudes, beliefs and perceptions towards a certain issue, to delve deep into people’s past and future experiences, and to generate hypotheses (Vulliamy, 1990). In relation to the

current study, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews when other sources of data collection were not adequate for finding out about the whole range of essay writing difficulties from which students suffer. In the current study, the semi-structured interview aimed at investigating student-teachers' views about the different practices of their essay writing teachers and the different experiences that they encountered in their learning. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers to explore how they conceive their teaching practices and their views about the different essay writing difficulties that their students face.

The interview questions for both students and their teachers were designed using the main sections of the questionnaire. Students' interview questions as well as those of the essay writing teachers covered the following topics: (1) experience/memories of learning essay writing, (2) essay writing teaching practices and (3) essay writing difficulties. For full details of questions and their probes, (see appendices 4 & 5). Eleven questions were asked to cover the above mentioned topics in the interviews of both students and their essay writing teachers.

Before conducting the interview, I carried out a trial run, as suggested by (Dornyei, 2007), with two TESOL teachers who previously taught essay writing in their department. They suggested that more specific probes should be added, especially in the area of essay writing difficulties. In addition, I conducted a trial interview with three students at the English department at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. These students suggested that I should clarify some of the terms used such as cohesion, coherence, and style.

Having made modifications in response to the trial runs, I next made arrangements by phone with fourteen student teachers and seven essay writing teachers and agreed a specific date and time that was convenient for both of us. The interview sessions lasted for 25-30 minutes with students, but for 35-60 minutes with the essay writing teachers.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder that facilitated keeping the recorded files on the computer. Teachers' interviews were conducted in English, but students' interviews were done in Arabic, as they felt that they were better able to convey the message clearly and fluently in Arabic. I had to translate all the interview questions into Arabic. To carry out member checking, three Egyptian translation specialists reviewed them for me and agreed that the translation is accurate.

#### **4.4.3 Development of Observation Sheet**

Observation is the most frequent data-collection method used in qualitative research (McMillan & James, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is defined as "the act of noting a phenomenon, often with instruments, and recording it for scientific purposes" (Angrosino, 2007:54). It is more unique than other data collection tools in relation to the use of immediate awareness, or direct cognition, as a principal mode of research (Cohen et al., 2007). It has the potential to yield more valid and authentic data than would otherwise be the case with mediated or inferential methods (Ibid). It is a research instrument used to collect information about classroom practices such as how teachers put their ideas into practice (Vasey, 1996), and how they link pedagogical purposes to linguistic patterns of interaction (Seedhouse, 1994).

Observation can be used in educational research for various reasons. Observational data is an attractive source for collecting live data from live resources as it gives the researcher the opportunity to look at what is taking place in situ rather than at second hand (Patton, 1990 and Ruane, 2005). In addition, Mason (2002) sheds light on other possible reasons for using observation as a research tool as follows. First, observation could be used when the researchers' ontological perspective considers interaction, actions, and behaviours and the way people interpret them as central to their studies. Second, it could be used when the researchers' epistemological position suggests that meaningful knowledge cannot be generated without observing the phenomenon under investigation. Third, using observational methods advocates the view that social explanations and arguments require depth, complexity, roundedness and multidimensionality in data. Fourth, it is used when the type of data required is not available in any other form or way.

Finally, it is useful when the researcher tries to answer a research question or to approach it from a particular dimension as part of a multi-method strategy.

In the current study, I used non-participant observation because my ontological and epistemological positions view the world as composed of multiple realities where observation can add to the knowledge created about reality through the participants' eyes. In addition, I used observation as a research tool because what it can capture cannot be done by other research tools such as questionnaire and interviews. Finally, being part of the mixed method research design adopted in the current study, observation helps to complement the descriptive and interpretive account created by the interviews and open-ended questions in the questionnaire. This is shown in observing the essay writing teachers while teaching to know their focuses of teaching essay writing and to record some of their teaching practices in relation to teaching materials, procedures, methods, feedback and assessment.

There are three main types of observation in educational research: structured observation, semi-structured observation and unstructured observation (Cohen et al., 2007). Structured observation will have its categories determined beforehand, the semi-structured observation will have an agenda of issues to be observed, but will collect data in a less systematic way, and the unstructured observation will be hypothesis generating as the observer here needs to explore the situation to decide its significance to the research. Irrespective of which type to use, observation is often appropriate for providing direct information about language, language learning and the language learning situations (Brown, 2001).

The semi-structured type of observation adopted in the current study enabled me to explore the focuses of teaching essay writing, observe the current teaching practices and shed light on some of students' experienced difficulties in the assigned writing tasks taking place in class. In other words, the semi-structured observation reviewed observational data before suggesting an explanation for the phenomena being observed (Cohen et al., 2007).

The semi-structured observation phase took place after the interviews. I carried out nine observation sessions in total: four for second year students, one for third year students and four for fourth year students. It was planned to observe third year students for four sessions, but this was not possible as their lecturer allowed me to observe his class only once. Therefore, I included second year students instead to make up for the missed observation sessions. The duration of each observation session varied from one year to another: 90 minutes with second year students, 50 minutes with third year students and 110 minutes with fourth year students.

To avoid researcher's bias in the semi-structured observation, I asked an associate research fellow in TESOL to be a second observer in all the sessions. We observed students and their teachers employing a semi-structured observation sheet prepared in advance. This observation sheet consisted of an introductory part in which the place and duration of the lecture, the objectives of the lesson, the teaching materials used and the grade of students were recorded. The researchers started to record their observation according to four dimensions that are guided by the research aims: focuses of teaching essay writing, teaching practices, essay writing difficulties and unexpected emerging events (see appendix 6).

The two observers obtained permission from the teachers and their students to observe them. Observation sessions were arranged with each lecturer separately. Being keen not to disrupt the organization of the lesson or the smooth transition of the teaching procedures, we came earlier than the teacher to the lecture theatre. We seated ourselves in two empty back benches not to distract students' attention during the lecture. Our observation role was that of non-participant observers (Spradley, 1980; Woods, 1986; Darlington & Scott, 2002; Ruane, 2005; Angrosino, 2007). The reasons behind our choice of being non-participant observers in the current study are as follows: First, we did not want to distract the attention of those being observed (Darlington & Scott, 2002); second, we wanted to remain as detached as possible from the situation being observed (Ruane, 2005) and finally, we wanted to cause no reactivity among the study participants to our presence as researchers (Newman & Benz, 1998).

At the end of each observation session, we cross-checked our descriptive field notes and made sure that what was written represented what was actually happening inside the essay writing lecture. Whenever a disagreement occurred over a certain point, a discussion followed to reach a consensus about what was intended. This investigator triangulation helped enhance the validity of the semi-structured observation tool (Bryman, 2008). In other words, the research findings became more credible and defensible.

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) data analysis consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction is carried out by reducing large amounts of data through the production of summaries, abstracts, coding, writing memos ...etc. Data display is used to mean the use of matrices, thematic charts, networks...etc. Conclusion drawing/verification refers to researcher's attempt to find answers to the research questions. According to Holliday (2002), thick description could be reached through the interlinked weaving of the data, commentary and argument.

Data analysis is one of the most complex processes of qualitative educational research. I acknowledge that the process is tedious and time-consuming but has the potential to yield insightful views. It is part and parcel of qualitative research in terms of data collection and relating the research findings to major concepts. In the current study, three research instruments were used to collect data: questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews and semi-structured observation. Data analysis was both daunting and demanding processes for two reasons. First, there are many pages of questionnaire open-ended responses, interview transcripts and many observation field notes that made me feel that the process seems huge. Second, the iterative nature of the analysis process was endless. Finally, I expected that there might be some chunks of data that are of little or no importance.

The findings from the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observations of the current study are thematically outlined. First, I analysed the semi-structured interviews conducted with the 14 students of English in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of study, the semi-structured interviews with the seven essay

writing teachers and the semi-structured observation of nine sessions of three different essay writing teachers at three different years of study at the teacher education programme at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. I also analysed the findings from students' responses to the open-ended items in the questionnaire. In addition, results from the close-ended items in the students' questionnaires and those of their teachers were statistically analysed for percentages. The approach that I followed in the data analysis is based on integrating qualitative findings and statistical results. The data analysis is presented in line with the three research questions of the current study. It is worth noting that all the extracts taken from students' interviews are my translation from Arabic into English which have been reviewed by three Egyptian translation specialists.

Data analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative data in this study. For the quantitative data, SPSS was used to analyse the results of the close-ended items of the questionnaire using descriptive statistics. In reference to the qualitative data analysis, participants' responses to the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, the semi-structured interview and the observers' filed notes were coded and analysed using exploratory content analysis. Data was transcribed, translated where necessary resulting in the emergence of themes that were categorised, codified and then compared with the whole set of data using a constant comparison method that required reading and rereading within and across the participants' responses (Lalik & Potts, 2001). This method of data analysis helped me analyse data logically and sequentially in terms of coding, ascertaining categories and themes, creating thematic charts, ordering the topics and themes, weaving the data and the interpretive commentaries to present the findings in the form of a persuasive argument.

I went through some steps in the data analysis process. These include simultaneous data collection and analysis, the practice of writing memos during and after data collection, the use of some sort of coding, the use of writing as a tool for analysis, and the development of concepts and connection of one's analysis to the literature in one's field (Given, 2008:186). First, collection and analysis of data are iterative processes where early data analysis yields sufficient insight to shape

further data collection. Second, I engaged in memoing during and after data collection. During the writing-up of my field notes or transcribing interviews, I took notes of personal ideas and reflections that came to my mind as I was collecting and analyzing the data. This process included guesses, questions raised by the data, or links to literature that were useful in interpreting the data and relating them to other substantive areas.

Third, I started my data analysis by transcribing and translating the interviews and open-ended responses and the observation field notes. My research questions were used as a guide in the data analysis process. At the beginning, data analysis was unclear and challenging. I started coding my transcripts using line-by-line coding of text. Later on, chunks of data were coded according to the theme they were addressing. To do this, I started using word-processing to cut and paste lines of data and categorise them under a certain theme. I also made use of the different colours available in Microsoft Word to distinguish different themes and sub-themes. Multiple readings of the texts took place to come up with the initial categorisation of themes and sub-themes. Having developed a list of preliminary codes, I started to refine the codes to include more relevant categories. It was challenging when I found that two pieces of data could fit into two different categories. Moreover, I was unable to classify other data chunks that did not fit the initial categorization. This is a stage where emerging themes started to appear such as psychological and socio-cultural issues.

Fourth, I arrived at a more profound analysis of the data when I initiated the data writing-up. At this stage, I felt that I am in need to go back to the data to recode for concepts that became apparent during the initial data writing. Finally, my data analysis moved toward developing concepts and relating them to the pertinent literature.

#### **4.5.1 Analysis of Questionnaires**

The participants' responses to the close-ended questions of the questionnaire were coded using numbers 1-5. An Excel file was established on the computer to carry out the data entry process. This file was created to facilitate the access to the numerical data and to keep a safe copy. After that, an SPSS file was set up to perform the different statistical treatments of data. Then, all numerical data was copied from the Excel file and pasted into the SPSS file. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category in the questionnaire and the data was presented visually with tables as shown in Chapter V.

Responses to the open-ended questions placed at the end of each section in the questionnaire were analysed qualitatively. This made it easy for me to fit participants' responses into the different themes and sub-themes as illuminated by the interview analysis.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis of Interviews**

In January (2009), the transcribed interviews were e-mailed back to the interviewees for validation. The recorded interviews were fully transcribed in about two months and translated in another month. Students and teachers checked their transcripts and confirmed that that the transcripts conveyed the message they wanted to express clearly. In this way, the interview transcripts were checked for respondent validation (Randor, 2001). Students' interviews that were conducted in Arabic were translated into English. I translated the recorded interviews and e-mailed the translated transcripts with the Arabic audio files to three translators who are graduates of the English Department, Faculty of Arts, in an Egyptian university to validate them. Translators made slight changes in the translation and accordingly, I started the analysis process of the interviews. In reference to teachers' interviews, I started to analyse them after checking respondent validation (for an example of an interview analysis, see appendix 12).

Interview data analysis was mainly guided by the three concurrent flows of activity suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Other resources provided useful information regarding data analysis (Randor, 2001; Holliday, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Bryman, 2008). First, data reduction was carried out by dividing it into smaller

chunks through coding and labelling to assign units of meaning to the data (Randor, 2001). This helped me turn the huge amounts of data into controllable fragments (Bryman, 2008). Second, the data display was done through thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Thematic charts were created by identifying all data that relates to the already classified patterns, combining and cataloguing related patterns into sub-themes, and building a valid argument for choosing the themes. Finally, conclusion drawing/verification was achieved through what Holliday (2002) referred to as the combination of the data, commentary and argument to produce thick layers of description and insightful views about the participants in relation to the focuses of teaching essay writing in the Egyptian context, the different teaching practices used and the essay writing difficulties. In doing so, I attempted to find answers to the research questions of the study and provide implications and suggestions for further research. Thus, the data analysis process occurred in a reciprocal way rather than discrete activities (Little, 1999).

In relation to the themes that emerged during the data analysis process, two main themes contributing to students' challenges in writing were revealed; the psychological challenges and the socio-cultural ones. First, some psychological challenges have been reported by both students and their teachers that affect students' learning of EFL essay writing. These challenges include lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, writing anxiety. Second, a number of socio-cultural challenges emerged from the data analysis process. It has been revealed that some socio-cultural issues cause problems to students' learning of EFL essay writing at the university level. These issues include pre-university learning experiences, opinion suppression, lack of reading habit and L1 interference in EFL writing.

### 4.5.3 Analysis of Observation Records

Analysis of observational data and providing descriptive accounts of what is observed is not as easy or simple as one might imagine (Ruane, 2005). Field notes, an essential aspect of field research, is defined by Ruane (2005:170) as “the words, or images used to record one’s field observation”. Field notes are the raw data which was analysed to reach our findings and conclusions. According to Ruane (2005), researchers can record field notes in different ways: they can either use an audio-recorder, practice mental notes by drawing a detailed mental picture of an incident as soon as s/he recalls it, or by writing down short words and phrases that serve as prompts to a full reflection after leaving the field.

In the current study, observation sessions were audio-recorded, field notes were taken (Brown & Dowling, 1998) and mental notes were used (Ruane, 2005). In consistency with Lofland & Lofland (1995), some of the elements that should be included in any field notes have guided the two observers, taking into consideration that my fellow observer was not involved in the analysis of observation. First, a detailed record of each observation session was made. Second, all remembered events or episodes were recorded. Third, I also recorded any ideas that shed light on any possible pattern that could emerge in the analysis stage. Finally, I recorded my personal and emotional reactions, and notes for future observations. These steps helped me keep track of my observation record and initially start to categorise them into themes and sub-themes.

To start the analysis of the observed data, I created some files to transform the field notes into meaningful and useful categories, as suggested by Ruane (2005). First, I created a *mundane file* to organise all the recorded field notes into the most obvious categories according to the major themes of the semi-structured observation (see appendix 6). This helped me access all the information about major categories quickly. Second, I created *an analytical file* where all recorded data was analytically filtered to contain notes that illustrate a specific theme or sub-theme. Finally, a *methodological file* was created to contain all my notes about the research procedures which helped me justify the methodological decisions and procedures made in the writing-up stage.

Examples of recorded episodes include teachers' focuses in the essay writing class, the teaching materials used and the way they are used, the classroom interaction techniques, the teaching procedures, the feedback and the assessment practices. The field notes were analysed and matched against the data obtained from analysing both the semi-structured interview and the open-ended items of the questionnaire. Thus, insight could be gained into the assumptions or factors behind the different teaching practices and focuses vis-à-vis their associated contextual factors.

#### **4.6 Ethical Issues**

Ethics is defined by Simons (1995) in Pring (2000:142) as "the search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the political contexts in which we have to conduct educational research". Chilisa (2005) highlights research ethics and legitimacy of knowledge saying "ethical issues in research include codes of conduct that are concerned with protection of the researched from physical, mental, and/or psychological harm.... including anonymity of the researched and confidentiality of the responses." The importance of ethical issues was highlighted by Robson (2006: 66) who argues that "Control over what people do obviously has a moral dimension. Ethical dilemmas lurk in any research involving people."

According to the ethical guidelines of British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004), there are some ethical issues that should be taken into consideration while conducting research. In this study firstly, participants were asked to sign a voluntary informed consent form prior to the start of the data collection phase. I made sure that all the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that there was no risk in participating. I told them that their participation in the current study is optional and it is not compulsory in any way. I added that if they would like to participate in the study, this would be helpful, but if they feel that it is risky or that the study violates their privacy and/or rights in any way, they have the right to refuse to participate in the study. They were also made aware why they had been chosen to participate, how they were going to participate in the study and to whom the research reports/findings would be reported. I asked the participants' permission to fill in the questionnaire, to

conduct the semi-structured interviews and the semi-structured observation of some essay writing lectures. For a copy of the consent form, see appendix (7).

Secondly, participants of the study were not deceived in any way about their participation in the study. As recommended by (BERA, 2004), I filled in an ethical research approval form before the start of the study and sent it to the Chair of the Ethics Committee at the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, to approve it. Consequently, I obtained the certificate of ethical research approval (see appendix 10). Having got this certificate, I started the process of data collection for this research.

Thirdly, participants were accorded the right to withdraw from the study as a norm for the conduct of research. They have been informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study for any or no reason and at any time. In addition, the participants' data was treated confidentially and anonymously. For example, participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and privacy (Pring, 2000). However, permission was taken from the head of the Faculty of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education to carry out the current study.

Complying with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data, participants were informed that their data would be stored in a secure place where only I and the thesis supervisors could access it. All research data will be disposed of as soon as I complete my thesis. Finally, the participants were asked for permission to use quotations from their interviews to support and strengthen the evidence for the research findings.

#### **4.7 Limitations**

Despite the significant contribution the current study made to EFL essay writing within the Egyptian context, the current study was limited to 165 students at the English department at the concerned faculty of education, a relatively small number in comparison to other exploratory studies. Consequently, transferring the findings beyond this particular Egyptian group should be practised with care.

Some other limitations of the current study deal with problems associated with the data collection methods that could not be totally eliminated. Firstly, some of the female student teachers wearing Niqa'b (i.e. Muslim's veil covering all the face except the eyes) were not happy to be observed in class and observers had to respect their views and exclude them from the observation. Secondly, using the criterion based sampling strategy was restrictive in the choice of the study participants to be interviewed. Thirdly, due to the time constraints under which this study was conducted, I was unable to check the study for theoretical validity which required an extended period of time. In addition, the current study is limited to the available faculty members and students. Moreover, the research instruments might be limited in their focus and not ideally perfect. Finally, the accuracy of students' responses could not be guaranteed as one university teacher and two student teachers were nervous and worried during the interview and this resulted in insufficient or incomplete data.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented a detailed description of the methodology employed in the current study. The use of a mixed-method design was justified. An account of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods was reported. Despite justifications given to the choice of the data collection and data analysis methods, I can argue that there is no perfect work. In other words, I do not claim that the methodology outlined in the current study was the best for this study. However, I did my best to acknowledge that there are still problems and limitations in the current study. The next chapter will shed light on the findings of the current study where quantitative and qualitative findings are integrated.

## CHAPTER V

### DATA ANALYSIS & RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the current study are presented. They have been sequentially divided into three sections according to the research questions of the study. The first section highlights the findings related to the first question, dealing with the focuses of teaching essay writing for Egyptian student teachers of English at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. Four main focuses divided into eleven sub-focuses are presented. The four main focuses are mechanics/language, content, structure, and practising writing. The second section is concerned with presenting the different essay writing teachers' practices; planning procedures, teaching practices, feedback practices and assessment practices. The last section sheds light on the essay writing difficulties<sup>1</sup> as perceived by student teachers of English and their essay writing teachers. These difficulties include planning, organisational difficulties, lexical difficulties, technical difficulties, as well as other difficulties. Finally, two major themes have emerged from the data; psychological challenges and socio-cultural issues related to the teaching and learning of EFL essay writing at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt.

#### 5.2 The Focuses of Teaching Essay Writing at the University Level in Egypt

##### Research Question (1)

*What are the focuses of teaching EFL essay writing to Egyptian student teachers of English?*

This research question looks into the different focuses of teaching essay writing at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. To answer this question, a number of research instruments that I designed were used to collect the required data: students and teachers' questionnaire, students and teachers' interview, responses to the open-ended question of students' questionnaire and the semi-structured observation sessions.

Analysis of the data derived from all the research instruments revealed that there are eleven focuses of teaching essay writing. Focuses here refer to aspects or skills on which Egyptian university teachers focus while teaching writing to improve

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I'm using the word 'difficulties' and 'problems' alternatively.

students' EFL essay writing quality. These teaching focuses are believed by Egyptian essay writing teachers to be potentially producing gains in writing quality which are similar to what was argued by Dyer (1996). These focuses were reported as seen by one or more research instruments: the essay writing teachers, students and the two non-participant observers. These focuses have been classified into four main categories: Mechanics/Language, Content, Structure and Layout, and Practising Writing. Figure (5.1) below shows these four main categories and their sub-focuses.

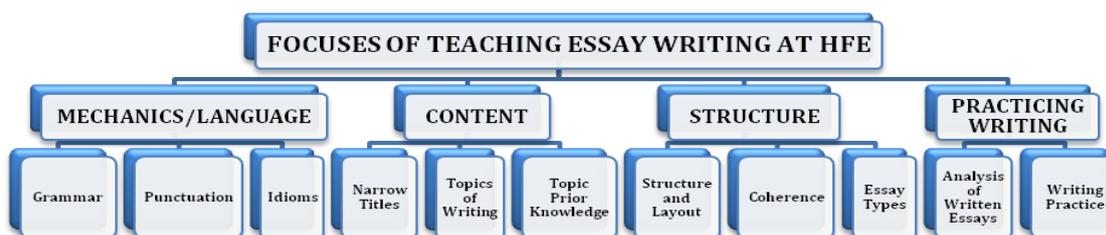


FIGURE (5.1) Focuses of teaching EFL essay writing

Table 5.1 below shows the rounded percentages of students and their teachers' responses to the questionnaire items that are related to some of the essay writing focuses mentioned in the figure above. These focuses are not presented in a sequence of importance:

TABLE (5.1) Students and their teachers' percentages of their essay writing focuses

<b>Focuses of Teaching Essay Writing</b>	<b>Students' responses</b>	<b>Teachers' responses</b>
Grammar	72%	75%
Idioms & Collocations	60%	65%
Essay Structure	57%	100%
Teaching Writing Theoretically	61%	70%
Analysis of Written Essays	87%	41%
Writing Practice	83%	75%
Topics of Writing	44%	85%
Topic Prior Knowledge	42%	88%

### 5.2.1 Mechanics/Language

The first category of essay writing focuses at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt relates to aspects of mechanics and language. According to the findings of the current study, this category includes three sub-foci: grammar, punctuation and idioms. After these sub-foci are presented, some possible reasons behind these focuses are discussed.

#### 5.2.1.1 Grammar

Analysis of the data revealed that grammar was one of the focuses reported by the study participants. Analysis of this questionnaire item in Table 5.1 shows that 72 % of the students and 75% of the teachers indicated that grammar is a focus in the teaching of essay writing classes. Despite this relatively high percentage, analysis of the qualitative data shows how grammar is taught and why it is a focus from students as well as their teachers' perspectives. Eight out of fourteen students declared in the interviews that their essay writing teachers taught them grammar throughout their previous years of study.<sup>2</sup> For example, Khalid commented thus:

*The teacher asked us to read one unit from a book entitled English Grammar in Use: Pre-intermediate Level. This unit was assigned as homework reading and the teacher used to check the correct answer in class.*

Similarly, Mahmoud added the following:

*I used to study a simple grammar book that the teacher asked us to photocopy, followed by some easy exercises. Moreover, the essay writing exam had a very easy section on grammar that primary school pupils would be able to answer correctly.*

The above extract sheds light on how grammar teaching in the essay writing course is dealt with in an inappropriate way. First, the words *unit*, *simple* and *Pre-intermediate* propose that students' level in grammar is not advanced. Second, the repetition of the word *easy* denotes that the grammar taught does not meet students' needs. Finally, the phrase *assigned as homework reading* implies that teaching grammar is marginalised in the essay writing class.

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<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I use the word 'students' to refer to student teachers of English and the word 'teachers' to refer to the essay writing lecturers to avoid confusion and to be consistent.

Teachers' views about grammar teaching were somewhat different, seeing the focus as more explicit and specific. For example, Dr. Mohammed <sup>3</sup> commented on the advantage of the essay writing book that he uses in class, saying that this book has a grammar section that helps improve students' grammatical skills. In this regard, he said:

*When I talk about grammatical structures... Say for example, students don't know how to use the first person pronouns. The book gives them so many sentences with common mistakes to analyse on that skill.*

With regard to grammar materials, Dr. Lamiaa justified giving students grammar extracts from different books to "strengthen their grammatical level." However, two other teachers preferred not to place special emphasis on grammar in the essay writing course. For example, Dr. Alaa commented thus:

*I'd rather blend essay writing with some bits and pieces of grammar in context, rather than teaching grammar out of context.*

The teachers' awareness of students' grammatical needs made them focus on grammar teaching in their essay writing course. They all see it as important, but they hold different views about how to teach it; some prefer to give grammar special attention, whereas others prefer to teach it when the need arises.

In line with this, I noticed that grammar is taught as one of the focuses in teaching essay writing. My colleague and I noted down during our observation sessions two essay writing teachers who were teaching students grammar rules when the need arose. After teaching them a specific grammar rule, one of these teachers asked students to do some grammar exercises as homework.

Egyptian essay writing teachers have focused on teaching grammar in the essay writing course because they think that their students are not competent in writing error-free sentences. Therefore, they advocated teaching grammar to improve students' grammar recognition and their performance in English writing (El-Bana, 1994; Lee & Wang, 2002). I can argue here that teaching formal grammar as a separate course to Egyptian students of English is essential to their language

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<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I use the title 'Dr. + pseudonyms' to refer to essay writing teachers and students' pseudonyms to refer to student teachers of English.

development. However, essay writing teachers could devote little time to teaching grammar for two reasons: first, grammar is taught in a separate course called 'Phonetics & Grammar' at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt in Egypt; second, there is little evidence indicating that the teaching of formal grammar is effective in improving the quality, fluency and accuracy of students' writing in English (Johannessen, 1990; Andrews, 2005; Andrews et al., 2006; Balester, 2009). I think that grammar can be taught implicitly in Egyptian essay writing classes through correcting students' grammatical mistakes in their written essays.

#### **5.2.1.2 Punctuation**

Two essay writing teachers focused on teaching punctuation as one of the essay writing mechanics. In this regard, Dr. Atiyat justified her focus in doing so as follows:

*Students' poor level in punctuation urged me to teach them some punctuation rules as I find many punctuation errors in their final exams.*

In the same context, observing one of the three essay writing classes revealed that punctuation rules with different examples were given special attention for three consecutive lectures.

When asked about their mastery of the punctuation rules, many students reported that they are in need of these rules as they have problems in punctuation for two reasons: first, punctuation rules and practice exercises have not been given much attention in the pre-university stages and second, most of their essay writing teachers at university perceive punctuation as less significant than content and organization skills.

In reference to Egyptian teachers' focus on punctuation, this might be attributed to two reasons. First, teachers found so many punctuation errors in their students' written essays at the end of course exams. Second, teachers wanted to bring to their students' attention that writing correctly-punctuated sentences and paragraphs are not insignificant as they might think.

### 5.2.1.3 Idioms

The final focus in the mechanics/language category is teachers' focus on idioms. This was confirmed by the study participants and the classroom observers. Analysis of the questionnaire item in Table 5.1 indicates that 60% of the students and 65% of the teachers view idioms and collocations as one of the teaching focuses in the essay writing course. These percentages are consistent with what the participants' views as expressed in the interviews.

Idioms as a focus was mentioned by half of the students interviewed: most of them commented on the photocopies handed out relating to idioms and collocations. Within the course of the interviews, some of the students voiced their concern about these idiomatic expressions and collocations as Soheir said:

*The teacher could have given us the handouts to photocopy and self-study them, but she wasted about five lectures dealing with them although they were easy for us as English majors.*

This might suggest that students are aware that they are in need of these idioms and collocations, but at the same time they are critical of the teacher' use of the lecture time that would be best dedicated to essay writing instead of learning many idioms that can be self-studied. In addition, it may imply that students are attentive that their teacher is not assessing what they actually need, but rather giving them what she thinks they should be taught.

In relation to the essay writing teachers, it is interesting to note that, compared with the multiple comments from students, only Dr. Esraa referred to her teaching of idioms and collocations as follows:

*I think students' low proficiency level in writing and lack of appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions urged me to teach them some idioms and collocations to increase their repertoire of vocabulary to help them write better and acquire some lexical items. To make sure students study these idioms well, I used to specify a question in the exam for idioms and collocations.*

The above extract reveals that the teacher focuses on idioms and collocations because she is responsive to their needs. This might mean that students rarely use collocations and idioms in their writing because they have not been taught how to use them before. She is doing this because she wants to ease students' comprehension and use of idioms in essay writing to elucidate their writing style.

As non-participant classroom observers, it can be confirmed that teaching idioms and collocations is one of the focuses in teaching essay writing. An example of this is seen while observing Dr. Esraa's class who asked her students in the previous lecture to photocopy a handout full of English idioms, phrasal verbs and collocations (see appendix 8). She started to read the idioms one by one and ask students to give her many examples of each one in their own words. After that, she asked students to answer the exercises on these idioms orally. This evidence supports the claim that idioms and collocations were a pivotal element in teaching essay writing at the university level in Egypt.

As far as teaching idioms is concerned, I think that Egyptian essay writing teachers do this for some reasons. First, they have referred to students' low vocabulary level and they wanted to engage students in more meaningful vocabulary learning. Second, most Egyptian university EFL teachers think that their students have difficulty using the idiomatic language in their writing as supported by (Wu, 2008). Therefore, they emphasise learning figurative language and idiomatic expressions not only to elucidate their writing style, but also to add more life to their writing. Third, idioms are frequently used in English speech and in writing which in turn would hamper one's understanding of language socially, academically and vocationally (Nippold & Martin, 1989). So, university teachers wanted their students to get to grips with these idioms and their importance in language learning, especially as future EFL teachers.

### **5.2.2 Content**

The second category of essay writing focuses at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt deals with essay writing content. In the light of the findings of the current study, this category includes three sub-focuses: narrow titles, topics of writing and topic prior knowledge. These sub-focuses are reported as viewed by the different study participants.

### **5.2.2.1 Narrow Titles**

Observation of Egyptian essay writing classes revealed that focusing on narrow titles is one of the content-related focuses. This was clearly observed in Dr. Azza's essay writing class where she was teaching essay writing according to the book. She gave students the opportunity to think of a topic, write a narrow title for it and then decide how they could develop it whether in a descriptive, narrative, expository or argumentative discourse. This was done orally on a theoretical basis. When I interviewed her informally after the observation, she said:

*I pay special attention to narrowing students' essay titles because they cannot differentiate between how to write a title and how to write a sentence. They also write broad and not specific titles. They cannot choose the most appropriate words in the titles. I'm trying to help them out of these problems by giving them some tips.*

I can argue here that students' problems in narrowing the titles might be attributed to the effect of Arabic as students' L1 on their English writing. This is because titles in Arabic are very attractive and more general. Additionally, the teacher wanted to find out how these titles could be developed using narrative, descriptive, expository or argumentative types of essays.

### **5.2.2.2 Topics of Writing**

Results of the current study pinpointed that 85% of university teachers focus on topics of writing in their teaching of essay writing and only 44% of students showed that their university teachers focus on topics of writing. Students' percentage is lower than that of university teachers due to being taught by more than one essay writing teacher. In addition, there might be a gap between theory and practice in what university teachers say and do.

Topics of writing were regarded as an important issue for teachers who focused on the topics of writing from different perspectives. For example, Dr. Mohammed focused on topics of writing in terms of sharing ideas and relating them to current issues. He commented on this saying:

*Normally when I teach a topic, I ask the students to share ideas with me. Normally, I relate the topics to everyday life or the current issues, problems politically, socially, economically and so on.*

Similarly, Dr. Mostafa tells us in the following extract how he uses the essay writing topics to keep his students updated with the current events and everyday life.

*I like from time to time to bring in some fresh air into the class by telling them let's discuss political or global topics, such as the environment, human rights, democracy, how to prepare yourself to life, how to be able to pass judgments and how you can reach to a reasonable and acceptable judgment at a certain issue.*

In addition, Dr. Alaa perceives topics of writing in relation to brainstorming ideas and engaging students in interesting and personal topics rather than familiar and boring topics. The following extract illustrates this view point:

*.....I don't mind spending with them [students] a lot of time to discuss and brainstorm ideas. In choosing the ideas, I try to ensure simple ideas that they can elaborate. I try to avoid abstract topics such as justice, courage, the importance of sacrifice, all of which are very general. On the other hand, when you discuss a topic about the importance of having a clean house, or what makes you happy or what makes you laugh or the relationships between boy and girls. These are topics which they are naturally concerned with and usually discuss among themselves. I try to avoid the familiar topics like the spring or the mother's day.....*

Other teachers, such as Dr. Lamiaa and Dr. Esraa, focused on the topics of writing from a sequential point of view. For example, Dr. Lamiaa illustrated this view in the following extract:

*Today, we give a hint and students start the brainstorming, followed by writing the introduction. Then, the next time, we will start commenting together asking the student to repeat her introduction and see how it is related to the body of her essay.*

Similarly, Dr. Esraa supported a similar view by stating:

*I discuss the introduction with my students referring to the theoretical knowledge that we discussed earlier. Then, I apply the same procedures for the body paragraphs and the conclusion.*

As topics of writing are an important part of any writing course, what students should write about is a major hurdle from which teachers complain in the writing course (Raimes, 1991). Egyptian university teachers focus on writing topics in their teaching of essay writing for a number of possible reasons. First, they might want to discuss one main topic of writing with all students at the same time to save time. Second, working on the same topics of writing from different perspectives

helps students see different examples of the same topic of writing. Moreover, they want to relate theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge. For example, they might want to show their students in practice how to relate the topic sentences to the thesis statement. Despite advocating the teaching of topic-based writing due to its positive effect on students' writing performance (Langer, 1983; Hinkel, 2009), I think that Egyptian university teachers use what Raimes (1991) calls the form dominated approach in which teachers assign topics to their students with the purpose of knowing how to write more than what to write.

### **5.2.2.3 Topic Prior Knowledge**

Analysis of this questionnaire item in Table 5.1 highlights that only 42% of students and 88% of teachers showed that activating students' topic prior knowledge is taught frequently as one of the focuses in the essay writing class. This percentage represents many teachers that is consistent with what they clarified in the interview. In contrast, students' responses to this item were inconsistent with what the teachers clarified.

Activating and enriching students' prior knowledge of the discussed topics is another focus on which the study participants commented. For example, Dr. Atiyat who is one of the teachers supporting the idea of enriching students' prior knowledge about some topics said:

*What's good about the book called "Weaving it Together" is that it contains many model paragraphs that they have to read to complete the different tasks. So, they have to read them in order to gain prior knowledge that will enable them to write about any topic later on.*

As non-participant classroom observers, we noticed that Dr. Atiyat was very concerned about reading model texts in class with her students. These texts were about certain topics such as sense of hearing, customs and traditions in different countries. When I asked her informally about the purpose of doing this, she said:

*I want to help students gain some prior knowledge about the topic under discussion because they lack prior knowledge due to their unwillingness to read even in Arabic.*

I think Egyptian essay writing teachers focus on activating students' prior knowledge for some possible reasons. First, students may lack ideas about the topic under discussion. Second, students lack the culture of reading even in Arabic. Third, students often come up with mixed ideas. Finally, they want to prepare their students for addressing different aspects of the same topic that can be discussed.

### **5.2.3 Structure**

#### **5.2.3.1 Essay Structure and Layout**

Analysis of this questionnaire item in Table 5.1 demonstrates that only 57% of students agreed that the structure of paragraph and essay as a whole is a frequent focus in teaching essay writing. Moreover, 100% of the teachers were in agreement that paragraph and essay structure is a main focus in the essay writing course. These statistical results are compatible with what was confirmed by both students and their teachers in the interviews.

Paragraph and essay structure is reported by the study participants to be one of the structural focuses in teaching essay writing. This was shown in the comments of some students. For example, Eman said:

*The teacher, in my first year at university, taught me how to write an introductory paragraph, developmental paragraphs, and a conclusion.*

On a paragraph level, Wafaa added:

*The teacher taught us essay writing in a very simple way. She taught us that each paragraph begins with a topic sentence, followed by supporting sentences and a concluding sentence. She was a great help.*

This view was supported by the comments of more than half of the essay writing teachers (i.e. four teachers). For example, Dr. Mohammed commenting on the paragraph structure, said:

*I teach them [students] the rules of writing, the paragraphs, how to write a paragraph and how to link it. They also study how to write different types of sentences like the topic sentence, transitional sentence, introductory sentence, concluding sentence and so on.*

In addition, Dr. Lamiaa explicitly referred to discussing paragraph and essay structure as a whole as follows:

*Before I get any assignments, one of the students would volunteer to read her essay in front of the class and we will start commenting together asking the student to repeat her introduction and see how it is related to the body of her essay. I ask her to choose one paragraph as an example and then we start asking questions about the topic sentence and its relevance to the whole topic.*

Dr. Azza pinpointed that students need to be taught how to structure their essays as follows:

*First of all, the most important objective of the essay writing course is to teach students how essays are written because they already have good ideas themselves, and they can improve their writing and organise their thoughts on paper. Anyone can write an essay, but their ideas are usually mixed up and disorganised.*

The teacher here is aware that her students can write, but they need to know how to organise and present their ideas in a better way. However, observing the three different essay writing teachers, only one of them addressed paragraph and essay structure in a theoretical way. She talked about the parts of an essay (introduction, body and conclusion) and the characteristics of a topic sentence.

There are varied reasons behind teachers' emphasis on teaching students how to structure a paragraph or an essay. First, teaching students different examples of good paragraph and essay structures are believed to help students better organise their writing. Having a good structure can help students write coherently and cohesively according to the patterns of a certain style. It also helps students present their written essays as unified pieces of writing with a smooth flow of ideas. Second, university teachers think that essay structure may help students make links between the main idea and its sub-ideas. Third, Egyptian students of English do not read much authentic English texts, which might result in not knowing how an essay is well-structured. Therefore, this is a kind of training for students to understand the process used by expert writers. Moreover, structuring the essay well can help students with their revision and editing more efficiently and effectively. Finally, a good essay structure can help students be away from redundancy in style. Thus, paragraph and essay structure is important for Egyptian

students of English to avoid the numerous problems that they may encounter in their English writing.

Analysis of qualitative data revealed that essay writing teachers teach essay structure theoretically. Results from the questionnaire, as shown in Table 5.1 indicate that 61% of students and 70% of teachers claimed that this focus forms part of their essay writing teaching. These percentages represent more than half of the participants which are compatible with the views of some students and teachers as mentioned below.

Teaching writing in a theoretical way is reported by six students, five teachers and the two observers. In reference to students, Amal said:

*Sometimes, she read some theoretical parts from the book and asked us to do the activity individually.*

Moreover, four students complained about the frequent theoretical teaching of essay writing as shown in the following extracts which clearly illustrate how the frequent teaching of this focus negatively affects their learning experiences.

*Banan: She taught us this structure in a theoretical way as she was explaining from the book..... Sometimes, she read some theoretical parts from the book and asked us to do the activity individually, but we were not able to do it because we don't understand her teaching.*

*Rasha: There are other classmates of mine who attended all her lectures and the result is the same; they didn't understand what the teacher is talking about. She is talking more theoretically rather than practically.*

Different perceptions about teaching essay writing theoretically were held by teachers. Some teachers preferred to teach part of essay writing theoretically; others preferred to practise writing and some other teachers liked to mix between both theory and practice in their teaching of essay writing. Supporting the notion of teaching essay writing theoretically to students, five teachers revealed that it is beneficial to students' learning of essay writing. For example, a good justification was given by Dr. Esraa in the following quote:

*This year I had to photocopy theoretical materials from books to tell them that what they are doing doesn't exist in essay writing I*

*always start my essay writing course with a theoretical part about teaching essay writing because students without a theoretical frame would feel that they would be totally lost. And then, I go step by step..... After that we discuss the introduction referring to the theoretical frame that we discussed earlier.*

Opposing the use of theoretical materials, Dr. Lamiaa preferred summarizing theoretical knowledge on the board herself to giving it to students in the form of book chapters. She commented on this issue as follows:

*I do not give them [students] much theoretical materials to study. If for example, I want to talk about what to include in a descriptive essay, I would give points on the board and explain them and students take notes to give them the impression that these are just points not to focus. But, if I give them for example a chapter from a book, they will think that they have to study this and memorise it for the exam or even in order to write which would hinder their performance.*

In reference to the time allocated to teaching essay writing theoretically in the essay writing course, Dr. Azza gave the following quote:

*I do give students theoretical knowledge about the different aspects of the essay writing course, but it is only 40% theoretical and 60% practice writing itself.*

In relation to the teachers who were supportive of blending theoretical and practical knowledge, Dr. Alaa expressed this view in the following lines:

*In designing the course, the materials I use are not confined to teaching essay writing theoretically, but I would rather blend essay writing with some bits and pieces of grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and vocabulary rather than giving them theoretical knowledge about writing. I think that all these skills are necessary for my students in order to be able to write.*

In harmony with this, only Dr. Azza among the other two teachers observed was found to be teaching students theoretical knowledge about the different types of writing an essay such as descriptive, narrative, argumentative and expository. Not only did she give students some theoretical knowledge about how to narrow essay titles, how to write an introduction, developmental paragraphs and a conclusion, but she highlighted the characteristics of a topic sentence theoretically as well.

I think that teachers, who discourage teaching essay writing theoretically, believe that students might resort to memorization instead of comprehending the theoretical part. I can argue here that this is true of Egyptian students who are the

outcome of an educational system that encourages students' rote learning more than comprehension. This has an adverse effect as students unconsciously form this habit when they are young at school and they get used to it even until they graduate. That is why, I am supportive of reducing the teaching of essay writing theoretically and focusing more on practice. However, these pieces of theoretical knowledge should be understood and not memorised. Moreover, theoretical knowledge must not be much in quantity as this reduces the opportunities students can get to practise what they have studied theoretically.

### **5.2.3.2 Coherence Skills**

The second sub-focus of the structure and layout category of essay writing focuses is the coherence skills. Two teachers and one student have reported that writing coherently is one of their focuses in the essay writing course. Dr. Lamiaa referred to this saying:

*I ask her to choose one paragraph as an example and then we start asking questions about the topic sentence and its relevance to the whole topic.*

In agreement with Dr. Lamiaa's comment, Manal highlighted that their 2<sup>nd</sup> year teacher taught them:

*how to write an introductory paragraph, a topic sentence, supporting sentences, relevant ideas and a conclusion.*

Another teacher called Dr. Alaa was observed focusing on only one of the many coherence skills in one of his classes by extracting the main idea and finding relationships between sentences in the paragraph.

### **5.2.3.3 Essay Types**

Observing the teaching techniques carried out inside classrooms as well as the teaching materials, essay types were found to be one teacher's focus in the essay writing course. Dr. Azza was focusing on teaching students about the different essay types according to the book such as descriptive, expository, argumentative and narrative.

In reality, it would have been better for this teacher to ask students to practise what she was teaching theoretically. She was just asking them about the title of the essay and what type of essay could they use to develop it. She never went around

the class to address students' problems and read their written paragraphs and essays and give them feedback.

Egyptian university teachers focus on structure-related skills in their essay writing classes for some reasons. First, teachers want to make students aware of the writing conventions, rules and mechanics. Second, teachers believe that giving students some structure principles and definitions about the different writing concepts will help them understand how to proceed with their essay writing. Moreover, it helps students to know how to structure their written essays. Furthermore, students of English are in need of gaining some theoretical knowledge about essay writing to support their future teaching at school. In addition, gaining a strong and solid theoretical knowledge will help students understand how to practise different writing skills. Also, it unifies the frame of reference between students and their teachers. Above that, understanding good structure enables students to differentiate between poor and good quality written essays. Furthermore, students' written essay as a final product is the practical application of their accumulated prior and theoretical knowledge. Finally, students need to be competent in using the structure-related terms to evaluate written essays and to advise their future students about the quality of their written pieces of composition.

#### **5.2.4 Practising Writing**

Data revealed that practising writing is the last category of focuses of Egyptian essay writing teachers. It entails two main sub-focuses. First, it sheds light on the analysis of written essays that was reported by students and observed in the essay writing class. Second, it spotlights the writing practice that is lacking in the essay writing class.

##### **5.2.4.1 Analysis of Written Texts**

Analysis of this questionnaire item in Table 5.1 signifies that 87% of the students and only 41% of teachers showed that analysis of written essays is taught frequently as one of the focuses in the essay writing course. This suggests that analysis of written essays is carried out by teachers infrequently despite its different meanings. However, students confirm what was observed where essay writing teachers analyse written essays irrespective of the different practices adopted.

Analysis of written essays was found to be another focus, as advocated by nine students and two essay writing teachers in the interviews as well as the two non-participant observers. Nine students have indicated their views about their teachers' analysis of written texts differently from their teachers. Taught by the same essay writing teacher, these students critically viewed analysis of written essays as a matter of translation rather than essay writing. For example, Eman said:

*I think the teacher was not analyzing the written essays in terms of the essay structure, cohesion and coherence, but he was just translating the text and picking up some difficult words and expressions. That's it. I personally did not get any benefit except knowing the meanings of new words.*

Other students have indicated in the interview that their 3<sup>rd</sup> year essay writing teacher was mainly analysing essays in the form of explaining the difficult vocabularies in the written text in English and sometimes translating them into Arabic. I think that the teacher is doing this for two reasons: first, he is a teacher of translation to the same students, and second, he thinks that students do not have a strong repertoire of vocabulary. The following quote expresses what Khalid said in this regard:

*..... After that, he starts to translate the difficult vocabulary in each paragraph and he gives us many expressions and idioms and translates them into Arabic.*

Another three students have underscored that their teacher is overusing translation in the essay writing course. A sample example of this view is what Manal said about this:

*The teacher is teaching me this essay course as if he is teaching us translation more than anything else.*

Two of the teachers interviewed, advocated analysing written essays. It is worth referring here that the process of analysing written texts is used to mean different things by different teachers: analysis of text features; analysis of the ideas provided in the text, analysis of linguistic errors, and analysis of text grammatical mistakes<sup>4</sup>. As an example of analysing text features, Dr. Lamiaa clarified her view in the following words:

*I don't prefer giving materials about writing styles. What I could*

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<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, I'm using the word 'mistakes' and "errors" alternatively.

*give them is example of a descriptive essay or a narrative essay. Then, I ask them to get things out of it to direct their attention that these are features of a narrative essay for example or the use of tenses.*

Differently, Dr. Alaa referred to the analysis of written essays in terms of the ideas provided. In this regard, he said:

*The fourth and final step is to analyse writing. This process of analysis is twofold: study the structure of essays and prepare them or give them the chance to experience drawing an outline. We read essays about different topics and we analyse writing by studying the ideas provided.*

In reference to analysis of linguistic errors, Dr. Esraa said: *And then at the end we start working on the language.* For Dr. Mohammed, analysis of written essays means focusing on students' grammatical mistakes. He referred to this issue as follows:

*Sometimes, when I discuss students' most common mistakes on the board, I refer to the many grammatical mistakes that they make. I highlight this as students' grammatical ability is very important to help them write well.*

Additionally, two teachers have clarified the reasons behind their analysis of written essays. For example, Dr. Lamiaa illustrated that she asks her students to analyse their classmates' written essays to help them improve their essay writing skills. The following extract clarifies her view:

*Before I get any assignments, one of the students would come and read her essay in front of the class and we will start commenting together asking the student to repeat her introduction and see how it is related to the body of her essay. I ask her to choose one paragraph as an example and then we start asking questions about the topic sentence and its relevance to the whole topic. What I'm doing here is that I'm helping students to evaluate their colleague so that they could acquire the different essay writing skills..... I depend on when students evaluate each other, they become more aware of their mistakes. I don't say much during this phase as I keep my comments on the read essays till the very end to get students the opportunity to get out what they have in mind.*

Furthermore, observation as a research tool revealed another meaning attached to text analysis by only one of the three teachers observed. This teacher mostly analysed written essays in terms of translating new vocabulary and its derivations. He was very skilful in doing this, but there was little analysis involved in terms of the different essay writing skills.

Generally, essay writing teachers focus on analysing written essays for several possible reasons. First, it develops students' awareness of the different coherence and cohesion skills required for developing a well-written essay. Second, it develops students' awareness of the different strategies used for word choice. Third, it helps students pinpoint the essay structure of the written essays. Moreover, it shows students how the writer expresses his voice in writing. In addition, it gives students a real example of the conventions of writing in practice. Additionally, it shows how a writer is following the conventions of writing in a certain mode or genre such as descriptive or narrative...etc. Furthermore, it exposes students to different writing styles. Above that, it might help students analyse essays grammatically and lexically. Finally, it can help students spot the difference between good and bad examples of writing style.

However, the Egyptian context depicts a completely different picture of the ideal one. According to Egyptian students' views about their essay writing teachers and what has been observed in class, they focus on the analysis of two main things: extracting the main idea of the paragraph, and translating difficult words. In this regard, it is suggested that Egyptian essay writing teachers extend their analysis of written texts to include coherence, cohesion, style, unity, lexical, technical as well as different text types and learning strategies to help students be competent in analysing any written text. This will help Egyptian students of English produce better pieces of English writing.

#### **5.2.4.2 Writing Practice**

In relation to analysing this questionnaire item, Table 5.1 confirms that 83% of students considered practising writing as an infrequent teaching focus in the essay

writing course. In contrast, 75% of teachers considered practising writing as a frequent teaching focus in the essay writing class. It is noteworthy here that the difference in the percentage of both students and their essay writing teachers might be attributed to the gap between theory and practice. In other words, essay writing teachers might not want to appear lacking knowledge in front of me as a researcher.

In reference to teaching essay writing at the university level in Egypt, it is worth mentioning here that five students and four essay writing teachers contradicted in their views about practising writing whether in or out of class. In relation to students, five of them have claimed that they do not practise writing whether in class or at home. Students of different teachers have reported in their interviews how they do not practise writing in class. Mahmoud stated:

*The teacher did not ask us to write about any topics during the course, but she emphasised that we should avoid writing about religion, sex and politics in the exam.*

Moreover, Eman summed up the reality of not practising writing as follows:

*I feel that his teaching method confused us much. I think that first year teacher was very much better than this one. This current teacher has been teaching us now for two years and the benefit we get from him is very little. This teacher never asked us to write an essay about any topic to the extent that we started to forget what we were taught in the first year. He worked quite well on developing the reading skills and translation more than anything else.*

On the other hand, three teachers have declared that they ask students to practise writing in class. An example of this is given by Dr. Esraa who said:

*I ask them to write me an introduction and then we discuss it together. I try to divide them into groups and each group submits an introduction. After that we discuss the introduction referring to the theoretical frame that we discussed earlier. I apply the same procedures for the body paragraphs and the conclusion.*

Another example is illustrated by Dr. Alaa concerning the gradual development of practising writing:

*The third step is to write short passages: first, we start with writing one paragraph and then we move to writing a two paragraph essay.*

In reference to observing essay writing classes, no writing practice activities were carried out which confirmed what students said about that issue. None of the three essay writing teachers observed asked students to do any sort of writing practice

whether as an in-class activity or as a homework. This means that students are more accurate in their account of writing practice than that of their essay writing teachers. Teachers might not have told the truth in the interview because they do not want to lose their face.

Unfortunately, no practice was carried out or referred to, in any of the sessions observed. This means that teachers do not show examples of practical knowledge and do not turn theoretical knowledge into practical one. After collecting my research data, I kept in touch with some of the participants via online chat and e-mail exchanges and all of them assured that no practice took place during the course, indicating that teachers do not offer opportunities to apply the theoretical knowledge that they teach to their students in class. This might be due to some possible reasons. First, teachers are not trained on how to monitor students' progress and give feedback on students' written essays. Second, teaching large classes in Egypt is a major problem that essay writing teachers face. Third, teachers do not have time to mark students' essays due to their busy schedules. Fourth, teachers are not accountable for what they do in class as there is no real accountability. Finally, teachers are not trained on the different classroom management techniques and the revision strategies that could help save time and relieve their workload.

Having presented the focuses of teaching essay writing within the Egyptian context, I can argue here that the essay writing teachers paid insufficient attention to other important focuses. First, teachers gave little attention to the planning of writing and its different strategies of which students are in need. Second, slight attention was given to some organization skills such as cohesion, style and unity. In addition, spelling as a technical skill was not found among the many focuses of Egyptian essay writing teachers. Moreover, most teachers were not aware of the different revision strategies, such as peer review and therefore did not use them in the essay writing course. Finally, Egyptian teachers regarded the role of reading in the development of students' essay writing skills as minimal. The next section of this data analysis will shed light on Egyptian teachers and their students' different perceptions of the current teachers' practices used in the essay writing course.

### 5.3 Teachers' Practices

#### *Research Question (2)*

2- *How do EFL essay writing teachers and their students perceive the current teaching practices used in the essay writing course in Egypt?*

- a) *How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers view their teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?*
- b) *How do Egyptian students view the teaching practices used in the essay writing classroom?*

This research question looks into the different pedagogical practices of teaching essay writing at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. This section deals with the current teachers' practices in the essay writing course as perceived by the Egyptian essay writing teachers, their students of English and as observed by the non-participant observers. Data analysis of this part is presented sequentially as follows: teachers' views, students' views, and observation field notes. Data revealed four main themes representing these practices: planning, teaching, feedback and assessment practices. Figure (5.2) below represents these themes and clarifies their relationships.



Figure (5.2) Egyptian essay writing teaching practices

Planning procedures pinpoint teachers' selection of teaching materials. Teaching practices refer to the teaching procedures and classroom interaction techniques. Teaching procedures include activating students' prior knowledge, brainstorming,

topic-based teaching of writing and using different teaching techniques. In relation to the classroom interaction techniques, they are limited to question and answer, discussion and lecturing. Feedback practices consist of teachers' different types of feedback: rare occurrence of written feedback, discussing students' most common mistakes in writing orally and seldom use of peer review. Finally, assessment practices refer to the pre-course assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment and marking criteria.

Table (5.2) below presents percentages of the most commonly used and the least commonly used essay writing teacher practices. These percentages are arranged sequentially from the highest to the lowest percentages according to students' views.

TABLE (5.2) Percentages of essay writing teachers and their students vis-à-vis the current teaching practices

<b>Teacher Practices in relation to Essay Writing</b>	<b>Sub-practices</b>	<b>Students' Percentage</b>	<b>Teachers' Percentage</b>
<b>The most commonly used teacher practices</b>	Teachers often use lecturing	97%	62%
	Teachers often discuss students' most common mistakes in writing	85%	100%
	Teachers often activate students' prior knowledge of the writing topics	45%	83%
	Teachers often use brainstorming	44%	92%
	Teachers often use topic-based teaching of writing	42%	87%
	Teachers often select appropriate teaching materials	42%	87%
<b>The least commonly used teacher practices</b>	Teachers rarely use peer review	93%	32%
	Teachers rarely give students individual oral feedback	91%	80%
	Teachers rarely assess students' written essays during the course	87%	18%
	Teachers rarely give students written feedback	79%	22%
	Teachers rarely pre-assess students' essay writing skills	25%	2%
	Teachers never use a list of criteria to mark students' essays	97%	7%
	Teachers never ask students to self-assess their written essays	100%	100%

### 5.3.1 Planning Procedures

The first teaching practice used by Egyptian essay writing teachers is planning. Data revealed that teachers' selection of teaching materials is the only focus of the planning stage.

### 5.3.1.1 Selection of Teaching Materials

In reference to the teaching materials used in the essay writing course, Table 5.2 indicates that only 42% of students showed that their teachers select appropriate teaching materials, while 87% of teachers pinpointed that they often select appropriate teaching materials. This inconsistency might be due to the teachers' use of their power in choosing the course materials.

With regard to teachers' selection of the teaching materials, they have reported using a number of teaching materials which are mostly essay writing books as exemplified by Dr. Mohammed who reported using one book as follows: *"I use a book by L.G. Alexander, entitled Essay and Letter Writing."* Another two teachers reported using different extracts from different books. A sample example of this is given by Dr. Esraa who clarified her view as follow:

*I use (1) materials about theoretical knowledge from different books, (2) Grammar materials from different books and (3) The Essay Writing Section in a book called "Preparation for TOEFL."*

Additionally, Dr. Alaa was different from other teachers in terms of his teaching materials. When asked about this, he commented thus:

*The teaching materials I use with my students are articles downloaded from the internet.*

All essay writing teachers have commented that they prefer some teaching materials to others. They have given various reasons for their preference. For example, Dr. Mohammed who liked an essay writing book written by L.G. Alexander, said:

*What I liked most about the book I use in class is that it teaches both essay writing and letter writing as well. It gives you an idea about the main characteristics of a paragraph. What you should do and what you shouldn't do.*

In the same context, a number of essay writing teachers pointed out that they like using different teaching materials in their essay writing course. For example, Dr. Esraa illustrated her preference of mixing different materials as follows:

*This year I had to photocopy theoretical materials from books to tell them that what they are doing doesn't exist in essay writing. I also gave students grammar materials from different books to strengthen their grammatical level. I use "Preparation for TOEFL" to teach students how to write an essay. It is the best book I use because it is concise, and it follows systematic steps in teaching the essay writing.*

Moreover, Dr. Atiyat, who advocates using different materials, highlights why this is good for her students as follows:

*It was an excellent book, simple, to the point and actually I feel that they have developed a lot in their writing skills after finishing this book I think this was the second part of this book to introduce them to paragraph writing and then the third part was mainly concerned with introducing them to how to write an essay.*

Another different reason for using different teaching materials was given by Dr. Azza who said:

*I use three very good books written by Christine Zaher which teach them [students] the basics. If there is no possibility for discussion and class interaction or even correcting their essays, because of the large number of students, they can read the books and try to practise at home by themselves if they want to improve their writing skills.*

It is worth mentioning here that Dr. Alaa is the only teacher who reported taking his students' needs into consideration before designing his course materials. He commented on this issue thus:

*I start by asking students about the books that they have studied last years to grasp their ideas about teaching essay. I began to understand that some topics and units may suit their needs and their skills whereas others do not.*

Despite this, none of the teachers interviewed referred to allowing students to take part in the selection of supplementary or additional teaching materials. This might show that teachers are aware of what should be done, but they do not do it due to some probable reasons. They might believe that students themselves are not sufficiently capable of choosing the right materials and they still need someone who is more knowledgeable and experienced to choose the best materials for them. Moreover, they might not be well-trained on involving students in the selection of teaching materials. Finally, they might be socio-culturally affected by the image of the teacher as a source of power in his/her classroom, not allowing his/her students even to interfere with the selection of teaching materials.

In relation to Egyptian students, they viewed the teaching materials used by their teachers in the essay writing course differently. This was shown in the complaint of ten students from the difficulty of the course books. For example, Amal said in this regard:

*The teacher usually used to give us a lecture of 30-45 minutes in which she read from a book that was very difficult for us to understand.....The teacher said that this book is very easy for us and she asked us to buy Part III which was very difficult and we didn't make any sense of it.*

In the same vein, five students were not quite satisfied with the teacher's lack of organization of the course materials. For example, Khadiga said:

*After the teacher taught us "Weaving it together" Part II, she said at the end the course, this book is cancelled; you have to study another book.*

In the same context, four students expressed their concern about the shallowness of the course materials as they think that these materials are not solid enough to help them write better essays. For example, Ahmed commented on this saying:

*I did not have any essay writing curriculum. I did not have an essay writing book for three years now. They were just superficial internet search that we bring to the classroom. The curriculum consisted of some handouts about idioms and phrasal verbs, and some grammar units to photocopy.*

Thus, the teaching materials used in teaching essay writing as reported by the essay writing teachers and the two observers, are one or more of the following: essay writing books, extracts of essay writing books, articles taken from local newspapers in English, grammar books, internet articles and handouts about idioms and phrasal verbs. However, students' complaint of the teaching materials with regard to its difficulty, superficiality and teachers' different attitudes towards the chosen course materials brings to our attention that teachers need to professionally develop themselves in terms of course planning.

### **5.3.2 Teaching**

Data analysis indicated that Egyptian essay writing teachers did not adopt or adapt any specific procedures for teaching essay writing reviewed in the literature such as the product approach, the process approach, the genre approach or the post process approach. However, there are bits and pieces of each approach that I will pinpoint later. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, as well as the semi-structured observation were the research instruments used to come up with an accurate description and analysis of the characteristics of Egyptian teachers' procedures of teaching essay writing. I have combined data from the three tools together to give a deeper and rich analysis of the teaching procedures followed in teaching essay writing. This will help the reader better understand the whole context as seen from different angles.

Teaching, the second main theme that emerged from the data analysis, comprises two sub themes: the teaching procedures and classroom interaction techniques that took place in the Egyptian essay writing course. In reference to the teaching procedures reported in the current study, four sub categories emerged: activating students' prior knowledge of the writing topics, brainstorming, topic-based teaching of writing and differentiating instruction. In relation to the classroom interaction techniques reported by teachers, they are limited to three sub-categories: question and answer, discussion and lecturing. Discovering classroom interaction through students' eyes, different findings were reported. The following section will shed light on these procedures in more detail.

#### **5.3.2.1 Teaching Procedures**

##### **5.3.2.1.1 Activating Students' Prior Knowledge**

In reference to Table 5.2 above, only 45% of students stated that their teachers often activate their prior knowledge of the writing topic, whereas 83% of the teachers highlighted that they often activate their students' prior knowledge of the writing topics. Moreover, none of the teachers observed activated students' prior knowledge of the essay writing topics. This corroborates students' views in response to this questionnaire item. This suggests that topics of writing, as a teaching focus, receive little attention in the essay writing class.

In relation to activating students' prior knowledge, two essay writing teachers reported that they use two different strategies; surfing the internet and reading model texts. For example, Dr. Esraa said:

*According to my teaching experience, I see that Egyptian students have poor prior knowledge about everyday life. Therefore, I ask students to choose an interesting topic and to surf the internet to know more about it and to take notes of what they have read.*

In addition, Dr. Atiyat commented on students' reading of model texts saying:

*So, they have to read model paragraphs in the book in order to gain prior knowledge that will enable them to write about any topic later on.*

### **5.3.2.1.2 Brainstorming**

In contrast with teachers' views about preparing students for their essays, data from the questionnaire reveals a different picture. Only 44% of students indicated that their teachers often use brainstorming strategies to help them generate ideas. On the other hand, 92% of the teachers reported that they often use brainstorming strategies. While observing the essay writing teachers, only one of them was found showing students how to brainstorm ideas to plan an argumentative essay.

Another teaching procedure used by six essay writing teachers is brainstorming ideas based on the teacher's suggested writing topic. In this respect, Dr. Lamiaa commented: "Today, we give a hint about a topic and students start the brainstorming." Referring to the same point, Dr. Alaa said:

*I don't mind spending a lot of time with them [students] to discuss and brainstorm. In choosing the ideas, I try to ensure simple ideas that can be elaborated.*

In reference to teachers who use brainstorming, two accounts were given. First, Dr. Atiyat said:

*At the beginning, I have to brainstorm with my students on the board about a certain topic to teach them how to get ideas out of their minds.*

Second, Dr. Alaa said:

*First, I think that brainstorming and all the other kinds of discussion are essential because students at the secondary schools are given a topic to write about without guidance. This is like throwing someone into the sea and asking him/her to swim although s/he has no knowledge, skills or experience. The first step is to think carefully about the topic and to form ideas and sometimes to do some research. Other times, I ask them to go the library and to surf the internet about the topic under discussion in order to understand what others have said about this topic.*

Students' views about brainstorming varied. Some students considered brainstorming an uncommon teaching procedure in essay writing. With regard to this, Eman said:

*Our essay writing teacher has never taught us how to use brainstorming. I encountered the word 'brainstorming' for the first time in the teaching methods course.*

Other students who were taught by a different teacher explicitly stated that brainstorming ideas took place in their essay writing class. The coming extract reveals what Ali said about this: *"The teacher taught me how to brainstorm to get ideas out of my minds."*

### **5.3.2.1.3 Topic-Based Teaching**

Table 5.2 shows that 87% of the teachers considered using topic-based teaching of essay writing as a frequent teaching practice, whereas only 42% of students indicated that topic-based teaching often takes place in the essay writing class. However, different findings are presented below.

First, all teachers have stated that their teaching procedure is based on topics of writing. The following extract by Dr. Mohammed summarises one view of topics-based teaching:

*Once I start teaching, I suggest or they suggest a topic. We agree on it as we find it useful and then we start making it for the public, for everybody to think of it in terms of how they are going to reach the topic from this angle or from that angle, what are the ideas? What's relevant and what's irrelevant? and so on. So, it is one topic for the whole class and then I see how they think of that topic, but not necessarily that I have only one topic for one lecture. I can have one topic for an hour, I finish it and then, I suggest another topic in the same lecture.*

In addition, Dr. Lamiaa commented on the collaborative nature of her topic-based teaching saying: “*We [students and the teacher] can work on a particular topic for two weeks.*” Moreover, other teachers commented on the nature of the topics of writing. An example of this is shown in what Dr. Atiyat said about working on interesting and relevant topics of writing with her students:

*I have to pick up topics that are very interesting for them because if I choose traditional or worn out topics, they are going to write poor ideas that are not going to be challenging any more. That’s why I have to look for topics that are updated, real life expressing what’s going on and so on.*

Egyptian essay writing teachers have justified their use of topic-based teaching in different ways. For example, Dr. Mohammed indicated that the topics of writing he is suggesting in class should be relevant to the current issues and problems. In the following extract, he clarified why his teaching techniques are based on topics of writing:

*Normally, I relate the topics to everyday life or the current issues, problems politically, socially, economically and so on. So, we present the topic and then it is the turn of the learners to start thinking about it to get the ideas. And then I try to help students modify their ideas and reshape them and so on. So, they make use of that and this is how I teach them.*

Another teacher dealt with the issue of topic-based teaching to signify being away from abstract topics and relating them to students’ lives and interests. This view is represented in what Dr. Alaa said as follows:

*One of the difficulties in teaching essay writing is to give students abstract topics to write about such as justice, courage, the importance of sacrifice, all of which are very general. On the other hand, when you discuss a topic about the importance of having a clean house, or what makes you happy or what makes you laugh or the relationships between boys and girls. These are topics which they are naturally concerned with and usually discuss among themselves. I try to avoid abstract topics. I try to avoid the familiar topics like the spring or the mother’s day.*

Unlike what was reported by some essay writing teachers in relation to topics of writing, students voiced their concern about the same issue differently. For example, Eman's comment below implies that writing about any topics in the essay writing course is scarce:

*..... . This teacher never asked us to write an essay about any topic to the extent that we started to forget what we were taught in the first year.*

In relation to which topics are allowed and which are not, Mahmoud in the following quote critically presents his view as follows:

*Expressing my view in essay writing is very big challenge for me. She [the teacher] told us that there are three fields of knowledge that you should avoid writing about in the exam: religion, sex and politics. She suppressed our opinions and we have to obey, or otherwise, she would give me a very bad mark that will fail me in this course.*

Despite the teachers' awareness of the importance of topic-based teaching, none of the three teachers observed used it in their essay writing classes. This concurs with students' responses to the questionnaire where topic-based teaching is given a slight attention.

The previous section shows a discrepancy in the views of teachers and their students in relation to topics-based teaching. While teachers explain that interesting, relevant, and concrete topics are addressed in class, students report the lack of writing topics in class. Students' views are more accurate than those expressed by teachers because no topic-based teaching was observed during the data collection phase of the current study. In addition, students of different essay writing teachers revealed via online chat with me that no topic-based teaching took place throughout the essay writing course. This indicates that essay writing teachers may need to be more realistic and honest about their teaching. This could take place through using reflective practice on their teaching.

#### 5.3.2.1.4 Differentiating Instruction

Differentiating instruction is another teaching procedure that is assumed to be used by one essay writing teacher. For example, Dr. Mostafa underscored that he uses more than one approach to match his students' learning styles. He justified this as follows:

*I use more than one instructional approach to meet the learning needs and styles of all the students. Some of the students are weak and some of them are fast learners. Some of them came from a background that can help them catch up quickly with your course. Some of the students get bored and want you to finish your class quickly, so, you have to change your method of instruction in class.*

On the other hand, students have reported different views about their teachers' teaching procedures in the essay writing courses. Their criticism of these procedures includes a general lack of different teaching strategies, and reading aloud of the course materials. First, they have highlighted that there is a general lack of different teaching strategies including ignoring students' different proficiency levels, neglecting students' needs and lack of different teaching strategies to meet all their needs. Three students have clarified that their teachers ignore their different EFL proficiency levels. For example, Amal highlighted this view as follows:

*The teacher treats us as if we have been trained very well in writing essays and she is just coming to class to revise what we have taken. This is very bad, as she did not notice our proficiency levels. This was very frustrating for me as I haven't studied these things before.*

In the same context, Banan stressed the same view; highlighting that she among many other students are in bad need of a teacher who pays attention to their different proficiency levels, saying:

*When I started the essay writing course at university, my essay writing teacher thought that we are perfect in writing an essay of a high level. On the contrary, we were waiting for our teacher to start from scratch, teaching us the basics and the rules of writing an essay. Instead of analyzing our essay writing needs and knowing our levels, the teacher wanted us to reach her level.*

Two students have voiced their concern about their neglected learning needs. Wafaa as a sample example shows that she is aware of the problem and eloquent in expressing how this might badly affect her love and commitment to the course.

*Frankly speaking, the essay writing teacher is the main cause of my hatred to the course because of her teaching practices. She did not think of us as learners. She did not consider our needs as students. She was just thinking of herself and the book. I also do not like to write about topics that the teacher decides or finds in the book. I want to write about topics that are relevant to my age and my interests. The teacher was very much adherent to the book.*

Moreover, other students have reported that their teachers do not use different techniques to meet their needs. In relation to this, three students have spelled out their views about their teacher saying that she is not differentiating her teaching to meet their needs. Khadiga is a good sample example illustrating this issue:

*.....The teacher used to work with those 10% of students who raise their hands to give the right answer. As for the rest of the class, she is very negligent to them. .... When the teacher wanted to see some written essays from the whole class, she chooses some students at a random and leaves the rest of students with no comments. Moreover, the teacher generalises all the common errors on all the students in class, which are not applicable to every student. This is not fair as our points of weakness are different from each other.*

Second, reading aloud of the course materials was another teaching technique from which some students, taught by different teachers, complained. Three examples of students' views about this technique are given. First, Asmaa critically evaluated her teacher's teaching as follows: "Actually, she was not teaching, but she was reading from the book most of the time." Moreover, Rasha commented on the lack of students' involvement in reading as follows:

*She was reading the book herself every time, not giving any chance for any student to take part.*

Finally, Wafaa insightfully referred to her teacher's useless teaching technique as follows:

*Reading is very easy for us and the teacher shouldn't have wasted too much time in it. He wastes the whole lecture in reading and translating parts of the articles.*

In relation to the three teachers whose classes have been observed by the two observers, they share some similar teaching procedures. First, teachers' reading aloud from the course books was a common feature among all three teachers. Second, explaining with examples on the board was also a common technique among the three teachers. Asking students to give answers orally to some questions raised by the teachers or found in the book was a third common technique used by teachers. In addition, these three teachers assigned homework to their students for different purposes: two teachers asked students to write answers to activities and exercises at home, whereas the third one assigned students some readings before coming to class. Moreover, homework correction took place orally among all teachers. The third teacher was different from the other two in his teaching procedures that focused mainly on translating the difficult vocabulary in the written texts. Occasionally, he asked students to extract the main idea of the paragraph and to find relationships between the different sentences.

I think that essay writing teachers resort to the above mentioned teaching procedures for a number of reasons. First, they might be unaware of the different teaching methods as they have not studied ELT methodology courses before. Second, they might be reading aloud to draw students' attention to focus on what the teacher is reading. Third, they might come to classes unprepared and reading aloud gives them a chance to think about what they are reading. Moreover, teaching large classes is a big problem for Egyptian essay writing teachers as they do not know how to manage them. Furthermore, insufficient time in the essay writing class could be another reason. Finally, they might be lacking content knowledge of what they are teaching.

To sum up, the teaching procedures highlighted above revealed that there are some areas of commonality among the research participants and the observers. Some of these areas include teacher and students' reading aloud of the course materials, and translating difficult vocabulary in the written texts. Furthermore, there are some other areas that were uniquely and individually prominent such as topic-based teaching, following one or two steps of the process writing approach, explaining with examples on the board, asking students oral questions and assigning homework to students. These procedures are teacher-centered, with little involvement from students. All these findings indicate that no single teaching approach with its teaching procedures was fully adopted.

### **5.3.2.2 Classroom Interaction**

As part of the teaching process, classroom interaction plays an important role in the teaching of Egyptian essay writing teachers. Classroom interaction refers to the ways in which teachers and their students interact in the essay writing classroom. Data revealed that the classroom interaction techniques used in the essay writing class are limited to question and answer, discussion and lecturing.

#### **5.3.2.2.1 Question and Answer**

Five teachers have reported using the question and answer technique. For example, Dr. Esraa recognised classroom interaction in terms of asking students questions and waiting for their responses. In this context she said:

*I always ask questions and give time to students to think and be able to interact. I always like to talk and then give some practice, a theoretical part and then practice. I think it is more suitable for me and for the students.*

Moreover, some students, taught by the same teacher, have underscored that classroom interaction was taking place in the form of artificial and prefabricated questions and answers that they have prepared in advance. The following extract given by Eman illustrates this view:

*She [the teacher] told us that the whole class should concentrate with the presenter and him/her ask questions. However, we were intelligent enough to prepare the questions and the answers in advance, without her knowing anything about it. It was an artificial and prefabricated questions and answers. We wanted to show her that we are participating to get a good mark.*

With regard to other students, classroom interaction is no more than text reading and translating the different meanings of vocabulary in the texts given to them by their teacher. They added that what happens inside the classroom is that the teacher asks two students to read the text aloud and then asks questions mostly about translating different vocabulary and their collocations.

#### **5.3.2.2 Discussion**

Moreover, three teachers have referred to using discussion as an interaction technique with their students. For example, Dr. Atiyat clarified this saying:

*Classroom interaction is excellent because we have to interact together, discussing topics first and then we move to work on them from the book. We make many interactions. Both the students and me give students feedback, state our opinions ...etc. It is through exchanging opinions and discussion that students learn. Students have to do their part as well as I have to do my part myself. When they do something by themselves, they are going to love what they do.*

In the same vein, Dr. Alaa thinks that there are different types of discussion as he says:

*First, when we do brainstorming together, we begin to speak about a topic. I give them [students] plenty of time to discuss their ideas about the topic with me and among themselves. We discuss both the technique, the structure of writing and the ideas expressed in an essay.*

For Dr. Mostafa, classroom interaction means discussion of writing topics whether suggested by the teachers or by his students. He expressed his view in the following quote:

*Sometimes I opt for a certain topic that I want to discuss it with my students and see how students react to that topic. In other times, you suggest 3 – 5 topics on the board and you discuss the ideas with smaller groups in the class and ask them to choose whatever they want.*

Additionally, Dr. Mostafa highlighted that he tries fairly to engage both male and female students in the discussion. In this regard, he said: “I normally elicit answers from boys and girls taking turns.”

### 5.3.2.2.3 Lecturing

Surprisingly, 62% of the teachers regarded lecturing as a frequent classroom interaction technique, while 97% of students indicated that lecturing is most frequently used teaching technique in the essay writing class. Furthermore, some students revealed that there was no place for discussion or co-operative learning in the essay writing class. A sample example of this is expressed in the revealing words of Khadiga as follows:

*She [the teacher] never used group work in class..... She didn't interact with us in terms of discussion or comments. It was a boring lecture.*

This suggests that students do not enjoy their learning of essay writing. This also pinpoints how the teachers' choice of interactive techniques affects their students' attitudes towards learning. This implies a call for teachers to be more aware and attentive to what makes their teaching more enjoyable and interesting to their students.

In harmony with that view, Table 5.2 shows that 85% of teachers viewed using oral discussion as a frequent classroom interaction technique in teaching essay writing to Egyptian students of English. In addition, 60% of students reported that their essay writing teachers often use oral discussion while teaching in the essay writing class.

Furthermore, only one teacher referred to using lecturing as an interaction technique. With regard to this, Dr. Azza said:

*Interaction between me and my students does occur, but to only a certain level. I think my approach will be teacher-centered because I can't manage 200 students in a four hour lecture per week. It is better to just lecture them because they haven't taken anything previously in the essay writing courses.*

In reference to what students said about this issue, Banan highlighted that the teacher's interaction with the clever students only and her book reading lecture left a very little space for the rest of students to interact either with her or with their classmates. This view is expressed in the following extract:

*There was very little interaction. She was working in class with those clever students who know the answer to the questions. She forgets totally about the rest of the class. She never asked us to work in pairs or in groups. I think she is just reading the book in front of her.*

In addition, students have pointed out that classroom interaction means shouting at them and making fun of them, and translating vocabulary. In reference to shouting at students, Soheir underscored this in the following extract:

*As for the interaction, I had many questions that I want to ask, but because of the limited time of the lecture, the big number of students and the teacher centred teaching style, I did not get the opportunity to ask. I mean she will shout at me if I ask about something we have already taken. There was little interaction with the teacher and I didn't grasp much of what she said.*

An example of making fun of students when they want the teacher to explain what she said is given by Amal who said the following words:

*Moreover, she became very annoyed when we asked her to explain again what she had said because we didn't understand. She always used to tell us that you are like babies and children who don't understand from the first time. ....She used to make fun of us because of our low proficiency level in English.*

Unexpectedly, some other students have stressed their teacher's active interaction with them in class. This interaction took place between the teacher and his/her students in the form of grammatical error analysis of students' sample of written essays by asking students to take turns in analysing these errors. Students added that the teacher used to help them occasionally to work in pairs.

Additionally, observing classes of three different teachers indicated that the mostly used classroom interaction technique is Question and Answer. For example, Dr. Alaa was mainly used to asking two students to read texts aloud sequentially. After they finish reading, he asks them questions about the meaning of certain words in the texts. Then, students in class start to give their answers to his questions. Another example is shown in Dr. Esraa who asked students to do a certain exercise in the book and then she asked for volunteers to give the answers. She chose some of those students, raising their hands, to give the answers to the different questions and exercises. With regard to Dr. Azza, she blended oral discussion with question and answer in addition to asking students to work in small group to narrow their essay titles and match them with the best possible essay type. This happened only once for about fifteen minutes in one of her three observed classes. It is worth noting here that different interaction techniques are reported by different participants. This might be ascribed to teachers' preference of the

techniques that work best for them according to their time, large classes and knowledge of teaching methods. Moreover, teachers might be affected by teaching in the same way they were taught as university students. In addition, students might have criticised these classroom interaction techniques because of being taught by better teachers in different courses. They might have also thought that the teachers are unqualified for teaching essay writing. These shortcomings make teachers' training, on the different classroom interaction techniques, an urgent need.

### 5.3.3 Feedback Practices

Feedback practices represent the third teaching practice used in teaching essay writing in Egypt. 56% of teachers stated that they frequently give students written feedback on their written essays. However, 79% of students illustrated that they rarely receive written feedback from their essay writing teachers (see Table 5.2).

The teachers reported using three feedback practices: giving written feedback to students, orally discussing students' most common mistakes in writing and the occasional use of peer review. Three teachers have reported giving written feedback to students. An example of these teachers is Dr. Mohammed who said:

*I give written feedback to students who want me to correct their written essays.*

This denotes that he does not correct each and every essay written by students in class. Moreover, this extract suggests that he does not ask all students to write essays and give them to him. Another example of this issue is given by Dr. Esraa who justifies giving students written feedback as mentioned below:

*Sometimes I give written feedback. When it comes to essay writing, I like it to be written feedback so that they can see what is in my mind, to which I always refer as the black box like that of the aeroplane, on paper. You can never know what is in this black box until you get it out on paper.*

In contrast, nine students revealed that they are unhappy about the lack of teachers' written feedback. For example, Manal said:

*I haven't received the only essay I wrote back from my teacher. I did not know my mistakes and thus, I made the same mistakes in the final exam.*

Another student, Mahmoud commented thus:

*No feedback was given to us by the teacher because no essays were written. I think that the teacher asked us once or twice to write an essay about certain topics during the lecture and collected the papers and didn't give them back to us. I think this was with the purpose of making us busy during the lecture while the teacher reads a book in her hands.*

The second feedback practice reported by all teachers is the oral discussion of students' most common mistakes in writing. Dr. Atiyat commented on this as follows:

*I ask students to write me an essay during the course and collect some random sample of the papers to mark them at home. After that, I come to class to discuss all the common mistakes on the board to help all students benefit from all these errors. I have to tell them some comments, instructions about their writing, not just the mark.*

Another expressive and detailed example of this feedback practice is given by Dr. Mostafa:

*I collect their written essays to correct them at home. Then, we come back to discuss the mistakes with them, not the linguistic common errors with the whole class, but whether they followed the steps that I have outlined before or not, whether they were good at the elaboration of certain idea, whether they killed a certain idea in the first paragraph by not expanding on it in the second or third paragraph in the body, and sometimes, we discuss the concluding sentences; whether the concluding sentence was good enough or not concluding anything at all, was it catching all the idea discussed or not. And also, we move from that to the common linguistic errors: the tenses, the vocabulary, phrases, subject-verb agreement and all these stuff.*

Moreover, Dr. Azza pointed out that she discusses students' common mistakes orally in class in order to "help students avoid them." In the same context, Dr. Alaa shed light on why he resorts to the oral discussion of students' most common mistakes as follows:

*Because of the many courses I teach and the limited hours allotted for each lecture, I try to write some comments on the sample essays that I collected from and returned to students. I check only 10% of the papers and hold a whole class session to discuss all the common mistakes that I have seen in their written essays.*

Despite being given oral feedback on their written essays, nine students have criticised it. For example, Amal highlighted the unhelpful nature of the feedback as follows:

*I'm not happy with the shouting that the teacher gave us in the course. It was a useless course because of the unqualified teacher.*

Furthermore, Asmaa disapproved of the general nature of the teacher's oral feedback:

*The teacher asked us to write two essays during the whole year, but she only collected samples of 10% of the class. ....She gives oral feedback to those whose essays were read and marked. This feedback was corrective and generalisable for all the students.*

100% of the teachers indicate (see Table 5.2) that they frequently discuss students' most common mistakes orally in a whole class discussion and 85% of students confirmed that oral discussion of their most common mistakes in writing takes place frequently. Additionally, 80% of teachers confirmed that they rarely give individual oral feedback to their students, with 91% of students confirming the lack of individual oral feedback.

When asked about the degree of satisfaction about the feedback given to their students, teachers reported different opinions. First, two teachers were satisfied about the feedback they give to their students. Dr. Mohammed, for example said: "So, I'm positively satisfied with my feedback to students." Second, two teachers have indicated being somewhat satisfied: with Dr. Alaa stating:

*I feel somewhat satisfied about the feedback that I give. Sometimes, I feel disappointed as I find the same mistakes repeated although I have highlighted them more than once.*

Finally, three teachers have stated that they are not satisfied about their feedback to their students.

*I'm never fully satisfied because I always feel that there are additional things to be done with my students. (Dr. Azza).*

Peer review was also mentioned as a form of feedback. Three teachers said that they use it occasionally. For example, Dr. Lamiaa said:

*The problem is with peer review or peer correction, I do it every now and then so that they become very interested, change the monotony of the class and develop their critical awareness of mistakes and so on, but I can't depend on this even I have to get them once more.*

On the other hand, only Dr. Alaa clarified his opinion frankly:

*With regard to peer review, I don't use it because I don't trust students. Sometimes, they are the same proficiency level. At other times, they deal with peer review from a psychological point of view and they don't pick up each other's mistakes so as not to bother each other. That's why I do the reviewing myself.*

On the other hand, four students have voiced their objection to the scarcity and the lack of instructions and materials needed for peer review in the essay writing course. An example of this is Amal who stated:

*The teacher asked us only once to peer review each other's written essays. This was fine, but the teacher did not guide us in how to review my classmate's essay. There were no criteria or checklists according to which we can review each other's essays as we are nearly the same proficiency level, so we were not able to spot each others' mistakes.*

Moreover, according to Soheir in a different class: *"There was no peer review of the essays written."* Indeed, 93% of students indicated that peer review rarely takes place although 52% of teachers have shown that they often ask students to peer review each other's written essays.

In relation to attitudes towards giving feedback, some teachers stated that it is a tiring task. According to Dr. Lamiaa:

*I think 100 times before choosing to teach the essay writing course, but once I have made up my mind, I have to do it the way I believe in, giving them [students] assignments every week to write. I correct assignments as I said before every two weeks, that's why, it is a hell. But I think if I wouldn't do this, there is no need to exert any effort in class at all.*

In relation to the observed feedback practices, only oral discussion of students' homework was used. The teacher gives students a certain exercise as homework, and in the next lecture s/he comes back to check the answers orally with the students and to discuss any errors.

There are some inconsistencies between what teachers said, what students said and what observers noted. There are a number of reasons why this might be the case. Teachers might not want to lose face in front of me as a researcher. They might have thought that I am evaluating their teaching of the course although I told them of the aims of the study. Despite the inconsistencies between the participants' views, it is important for Egyptian essay writing teachers to receive

training on how to use different strategies and techniques to give different kinds of feedback to large classes.

### **5.3.4 Assessment Practices**

Assessment is not a practice that takes place in isolation from every stage of teaching. It is assessment that feeds back into the teachers' practices. Therefore, assessment practices are the final teacher practice reported by Egyptian essay writing teachers. Data analysis revealed a number of assessment practices that have been used. These practices have been categorised under four sub-themes: pre-course assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment and assessment criteria with reference to the marking scheme.

#### **5.3.4.1 Pre-Course Assessment Practices**

25% of teachers indicated that they often pre-assess students in the essay writing course although 98% of the students indicated that they are rarely pre-assessed. This contradiction might be attributed to students' misunderstanding of the ways pre-assessment takes place. For example, when the teacher asks students at the beginning of the course to write an essay or to respond to a certain written essay, students might not regard this as a pre-assessment procedure, but rather as an in-class teaching activity.

In relation to the pre-course assessment, only two teachers have reported pre-assessing their students. Dr. Mostafa said the following:

*I assess students' level in the first class of the course by asking them to write one or two paragraphs on a certain issue and I do correct these paragraphs attentively to identify what problems they suffer from.*

In addition, Dr. Atiyat highlighted that her purpose of the pre-assessment procedure was to assess students' level in order to plan her essay writing syllabus. She was different from Dr. Mostafa in assessing her students. She said:

*I collect samples of these written essays to decide how I will work with them. Sometimes also at the beginning of the course, I give them an essay writing that is full of drastic mistakes and ask them to correct it and they tell me that there are no mistakes. So, I can tell their proficiency level from this pre-course assessment.*

With regard to students' views about pre-assessment, they said that they have never been pre-assessed. For example, Khalid said:

*The teacher in the first lecture always comes to ask us to buy a certain book from the library and prepare the first few pages. No writing assessment is involved at the beginning of the course.*

No pre-assessment was noticed during the observation as none of the teachers pre-assessed their students at the beginning of the course. When asked about this, Dr. Azza commented:

*They [students] have already passed their essay writing exam in the previous year. So, there is no need to pre-assess them.*

#### **5.3.4.2 Formative Assessment Practices**

76% of teachers reported that they often assess their students formatively in the essay writing course, while 87% of students showed that their essay writing teachers rarely assess them during the course (see Table 5.2).

Teachers have reported various practices for the formative assessment of their students' writing skills. For example, five teachers have reported collecting samples of students' writing and correcting them at home. Dr. Alaa, for example, stated: "I collect samples of the essays, take them home to mark and return them back to my students." In addition, Dr. Azza commented on this issue slightly different as she said:

*Sometimes, I ask students to write essays in class and I go around to see how they are progressing. Other times, I collect samples from what they have written and mark them at home. It is much better to assess during class because most of their essays are either copied from each other's ideas or from the internet or other resources.*

Furthermore, Dr. Mohammed indicated that he assesses his students collectively during the course as follows:

*I collect files of some students' essays at the end of the course to assess what students have doing during the course, but I cannot claim that I have a file for each of the 200 students. I work within my capacity.*

However, other teachers incorporate formative assessment practices into their teaching. For example, Dr. Mostafa shows how and why he assesses his students differently:

*Students' participation in class, their assignments, and personal and academic levels throughout the course of essay writing, and discussion and talking in class are the basics upon which I assess Intermediate to advanced level students in the same class. As for weak students, I force them to talk whether they even agree or disagree with the topic. I take a sample of these weak students' writing and try to discuss them in class with other students. I try to make them feel that they can do it. I try from time to time to increase the amount of encouragement to them to increase their self confidence.*

This suggests that this teacher links assessment to his daily teaching. However, he did not explicitly talk about the mechanics of assessing students formatively in terms of giving marks. In dealing with the weak students, this teacher stated that he “forces” students to talk, although there are other techniques that could be used with shy students such as individual teacher-student conference or the use of portfolios to collect students' written essays.

In reference to not using portfolio in the formative assessment of her students, Dr. Atiyat gave the following justification:

*I don't use portfolio assessment in the essay writing course because of the big number of students. I think portfolios are more appropriate to the advanced levels where students are asked to do research as part of their assessment.*

Students reported that the formative assessment practices used by their teachers were a variety of attendance, participation, homework, oral presentation, and assignments.

With regard to students' views about formative assessment, three students have highlighted that their teachers use invalid practices. For example, Amal indicated that their teacher's formative assessment practices do not measure the different writing skills, but rather focus on decontextualised vocabulary. She said:

*The teacher gave us a list of words that we should look up in the dictionary. We looked them up and we wrote them in a piece of paper and gave it to her. This is the basis for the years' works.*

Asmaa reported another invalid formative assessment practice: the teacher asks them to write an essay during the course and they did not get this essay back to know their mark or mistakes:

*The teacher asked us to write a descriptive essay once during the whole year and this is what the teacher based his year's works on. We did not get this written essay back from the teacher.*

In addition, Amal pointed out that the teacher is not able to place each student in the right level because of her invalid assessment practices:

*This kind of assessment doesn't need any skill. The teacher's assessment doesn't differentiate between the low level, intermediate and the high level students.*

Observation of essay writing classes did not reveal any formative assessment practices to record except in the case of Dr. Azza who used to put a tick (✓) in front of students' names who orally participated in the class discussion with her. These students will be given a mark for each time they participate and this will be added to their years' work marks. In addition, students' attendance was also taken into account every lecture.

The problem facing most Egyptian essay writing teachers is that they collect sample essays of few students only which does not give a chance for every student to be fairly assessed during the course. Consequently, teachers commented on the most common mistakes in the marked essays as if they apply to all students. Moreover, relying on a number of non-practical criteria for assessing students' writing skills formatively such as class participation, attendance and class discussion, might be unfair for some other students for two reasons: first, shy students would not get the chance to get a good mark even if their work might be of good quality; second, the purpose of formatively assessing students (i.e. improving their points of weakness and reinforcing their points of strength) is not fulfilled. Thus, the mark given to each student out of 20% is not objectively representative of his/her performance.

### 5.3.4.3 Summative Assessment

All teachers reported using the final essay writing exam as the only method of assessing students summatively. Concerning the components of the essay writing exam, it differed from one teacher to another. For some teachers, it meant only assessing students by writing an essay on a certain topic and a reading text with some comprehension questions. A sample example of this is shown in Dr. Atiyat who said the following extract:

*Because I always teach reading and writing course at the same time, so I get them a reading comprehension text that is neither easy, nor difficult, but a little bit long. I ask questions on this text that covers all what I covered in this course. The second part of my exam will be writing an essay on one of three topics and punctuating a paragraph with no punctuation marks.*

It is noteworthy here that the teacher allows her students to choose to write about one topic, but the time allotted for this essay writing is less than 90 minutes, in which students cannot manage to plan, write and revise and edit their essays. The teacher did not train students to write under time pressure during her classroom teaching practices. Therefore, it is suggested that students practise writing under time pressure before assessing them summatively to have a realistic picture about their writing performance.

For other teachers, essay writing exam means testing students in the essay writing skills that they covered in the syllabus during the course. Dr. Esraa said:

*Normally, the exam consists of an essay to which students should write an outline, a part of an essay to edit, the last thing is to ask students to write an introduction or a conclusion to a written essay.*

I think that this type of exams is somewhat fragmented in nature. It would be better if students were given the chance and the time to write a complete essay in which the teacher can easily assess her students' writing performance of the different essay writing skills. This would make assessment more meaningful and holistic.

Dr. Alaa clearly shows the components of the essay writing exam in a different way:

*Because the course is reading and writing, the final exam is composed of three main parts: a reading comprehension with some questions, a short essay to edit or to make its outline or to turn the essay into main points and secondary points, and a vocabulary question with special emphasis on idioms and phrasal verbs as you know the meaning is not quite clear or direct.*

This extract suggests that there is no actual writing in the essay writing exam. This might be connected to the teacher's teaching practices inside the classroom. He might not have asked his students to write an essay before. This suggests, as previously noted in section 5.1.4.2, a lack of actual writing practice.

Another two different examples were given to denote two different meanings of summative assessment. Dr. Mohammed clarified his view as follows:

*To me, summative assessment means the essay writing exam which includes testing students in grammatical structures, error analysis sentences, writing a topic, answer questions on a reading comprehension text, common mistakes, and some variations. 50% of the exam is for assessing composing and 50% for other language components.*

Dr. Lamiaa referred to matching the final exams to students' academic level as follows:

*It depends, for example, for first year, first semester, I would include some activities in the exam that would help with writing such as jumble sentences to organise, an exercise on cohesive ties, an exercise on punctuation, a paragraph to analyse in terms of the topic sentence, the major supporting sentences ...etc. Of course, students have similar activities during the course to the ones in the final exam. At the advanced level, usually the exam would be an essay to write plus the reading comprehension text with questions. Students know that everything they have studied during the course will be included in their assessment exam at the end of the course.*

The aforementioned extracts highlight that essay writing teachers in the same department use different summative assessment questions which might be due to the lack of a detailed table of specifications illustrating the skills to be assessed in each grade. This suggests that effort could be exerted to develop a detailed table of specifications for each grade.

Moreover, the quote given by Dr. Lamiaa indicates that she differentiates her summative assessment exams according to her students' level, but she may be asking for too much of her students as denoted by the sentence "*everything they have studied during the course will be included in their assessment exam*". With regard to assessment, it could be argued here that not everything needs to be included in the final exam, but teachers may selectively focus on testing students' learning of different aspects of the writing skills.

Concerning students' views about this issue, all of them confirmed that the summative assessment practices used by their teachers are repetitive, represented only in the form of final essay writing exams. This exam took the form of either a reading passage with some comprehension questions as well as writing on one of some suggested topics or a vocabulary exercise and a short essay writing question. A sample example is given by Banan who said:

*We are assessed summatively through the final exam: The exam is the same type of questions every year. It was two parts: A reading comprehension passage with some essay questions and three essay writing topics to choose one.*

This shows that students are aware of the summative assessment techniques that their teachers use. As a result, varying teachers' assessment practices to meet their students' needs is recommended. It is also suggested that teachers' awareness of the role and method of assessment can usefully feed into planning and teaching of essay writing.

#### **5.3.4.4 Assessment Criteria**

Table 5.2 shows that 93% of the teachers confirmed that they often have assessment criteria according to which they mark students' written essays; whereas, 97% of the students stated that they were never told about any assessment criteria used by their essay writing teachers. Surprisingly, 100% of teachers and students have stated that they have never practised self-assessment during any of the essay writing courses.

Assessment criteria were used differently by the four teachers. For example, Dr. Atiyat was dependent on two general criteria:

*The criteria I use for marking an essay are good ideas that are to the point and good English. I don't give them very high marks not to be unrealistic about their level. I try to be fair as much as I can. I give 2 marks for content, 2 marks for punctuation (I give ¼ a mark for each correct punctuation mark.) and 2 marks for grammar and so on.*

Similarly, Dr. Mostafa indicated that he has some criteria in mind while assessing students' essays. He clarified this in the following quotation:

*In the final exam, I give some scores to the technical skills of writing, the organization, the planning, mechanics, vocabulary and language. I mark the essay analytically with some criteria in mind. I feel very happy that students' level is progressing. They began to write better and produce more writing. What's really important to me is that you direct students' thinking to be more diverse and productive.*

With regards to Dr. Azza, she followed the assessment criteria listed in the book:

*I follow the assessment criteria found in the book, like abbreviations to help students understand their mistakes.*

On the other hand, Dr. Alaa was unclear about the assessment criteria he used:

*I try to evaluate them [students] on the basis of what we have studied during the course. I put in front of me an outline of the whole course while marking students' essays because sometimes I feel that a certain point needs to be revisited again. I think this might be out of a shortcoming on my part.*

It seems from the views mentioned above that essay writing teachers have not reached a consensus over the assessment criteria used, which is indicative of a number of issues. First, teachers are in need of regular communication with each other in terms of their assessment practices. Second, it is suggested that teachers read new published research related to their teaching and assessment. Third, the training university teachers receive should focus more on specific issues such as assessment and feedback. Finally, close teachers' observation is recommended to improve their assessment practices to help them learn from each other. Workshops and seminars could be held to enable teachers to exchange views and experiences in dialogical and constructive ways.

Despite teachers' use of assessment criteria, seven students indicated that their essay writing teachers do not relay the assessment criteria or the marking scheme used in the essay writing course to them. For example, Khadiga said: *"The teacher didn't tell us what assessment criteria she uses in marking the written essays."* In addition, Mahmoud justified why he thinks that the teacher has no assessment criteria as follows.

*I don't think the teacher marks the essays and thus, she doesn't have any criteria because all the students got excellent in her exam although we are of different levels. I finished the exam in half its time: an hour and half out of three hours.*

#### **5.3.4.5 Marking Scheme**

In relation to marking students' written essays, only two teachers have referred to it in their interviews. These teachers have indicated that they use an analytical method of marking. This is highlighted in the following extracts: Dr. Atiyat said: *"I give 2 marks for content, 2 marks for punctuation and 2 marks for grammar and so on."* Similarly Dr. Mostafa said *"I give some scores to the technical skills of writing, the organization, the planning, mechanics, vocabulary and language."*

Data analysis indicated that students described the assessment practices used by their essay writing teachers as lacking awareness of appropriate assessment strategies. This issue was the concern of four students. For example, Asmaa clearly indicated in the following quote that her teacher lacks knowledge of appropriate assessment strategies that cope with students' different abilities.

*I have not been trained on how to use any strategies or techniques that help assess my level in class such as dialogue journals or portfolios. I don't even think that the teacher is aware of any assessment practices. If s/he is knowledgeable about these practices, I think s/he would have used them in class.*

To sum up the findings related to the second research question, a number of inconsistencies were found between the different participants of the current study. For example questionnaire results might have contradicted the interview extracts or vice versa. Consequently, this underscores the importance of using methodological triangulation in which more than one research method is used to reveal the truth and to seek objectivity in the research findings. In the current study, member checking techniques were used such as having two observers, three

translators, sending the transcripts back to the participants to double-check them ensured trustworthy findings.

#### 5.4 Essay Writing Difficulties

*Research Question (3):*

*3- How do Egyptian student teachers of English and their essay writing teachers perceive the essay writing difficulties?*

- a) How do Egyptian student teachers of English perceive their essay writing difficulties?*
- b) How do Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers perceive their students' essay writing difficulties?*

This section addresses the essay writing difficulties as perceived by Egyptian students and their essay writing teachers. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and questionnaires were the research instruments used to answer this question. Figure (5.3) below clarifies the main themes of the different essay writing difficulties that Egyptian students of English encounter.



Figure (5.3) Essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student-teachers of English

Data analysis yielded six main themes representing the essay writing difficulties that students encounter: the prewriting difficulties focusing mainly on the topics of writing; the organisational difficulties including coherence and cohesion; stylistic difficulties; the lexical difficulties; the technical difficulties with special emphasis on grammar, punctuation, spelling; and revision and editing. Additionally, this section sheds light on two major emerging themes that are directly related to the teaching and learning of essay writing: psychological

challenges and some socio-cultural issues. Figure (5.3) above clarifies the main themes of the different essay writing difficulties that Egyptian students encounter.

Table (5.3) below shows the percentages of students and their teachers' responses concerning the essay writing difficulties encountered by students in their writing. These percentages are arranged sequentially from the most to the least difficult essay writing skills according to students' views.

TABLE (5.3) Students and their teachers' percentages of their essay writing difficulties

<b>Level of Difficulty</b>	<b>Essay Writing Skills</b>	<b>Students' Percentage</b>	<b>Teachers' Percentage</b>
<b>The most difficult essay writing skills from students' perspectives</b>	Expressing each main idea in	92%	97%
	Writing in an argumentative	88%	92%
	Writing in an expository style	84%	95%
	Using ellipsis	84%	89%
	Using genre related cohesive ties	83%	87%
	Developing paragraphs	82%	68%
	Relating the supporting details to	79%	89%
	Writing a good topic sentence for	79%	62%
<b>Mildly difficult essay writing skills from students' perspectives</b>	Writing a good thesis statement	76%	52%
	Using idioms and word	74%	81%
	Writing in a clear style	74%	87%
	Writing about unfamiliar topics	69%	88%
	Brainstorming the writing topic	67%	86%
	Writing grammatically correct	66%	72%
	Writing a good conclusion	63%	89%
	Writing a good introduction	59%	65%
<b>The least difficult essay writing skills from students' perspectives</b>	Writing in a descriptive style	56%	87%
	Using the correct punctuation	54%	63%
	Writing relevant topic sentences	53%	61%
	Using different cohesive devices	51%	60%
	Generating relevant ideas	50%	65%
	Writing a good concluding	47%	91%
	Using substitution	47%	62%
	Using word synonyms	46%	59%
	Writing in a narrative style	43%	55%
	Using word antonyms	43%	53%
<b>The easiest essay writing skills from students' perspectives</b>	Using the most appropriate	35%	47%
	Writing correctly spelled words	27%	28%
	Using semantically appropriate	83%	94%
<b>The easiest essay writing skills from students' perspectives</b>	Writing about interesting topics	80%	82%
	Using reference ties	63%	88%

#### 5.4.1 Prewriting Difficulties

Data analysis revealed that prewriting constituted some difficulties in students' learning of essay writing, related to the topics of writing, topic prior knowledge, and topic ideas. In the same context, essay writing teachers have reported some prewriting difficulties facing their students such as students' misunderstanding of the topic and students' lack of prior knowledge.

With regards to the topics of writing, a number of difficulties were revealed as shown in Table 5.3 above. First, 69% of students mentioned that planning an unfamiliar topic is difficult. In line with this, 88% of the essay writing teachers claimed that their students find planning an unfamiliar topic difficult. Similarly, an open response to this issue in the questionnaire highlighted the same response as follows: *"The outline becomes difficult when I have little information about the required topic."*

Four students clarified the difficulty they encounter when they plan an unfamiliar topic. A sample example of this is alleged by Amal as follows:

*When the topic is unfamiliar to me, it is not easy for me to get out relevant ideas. For example, if the topic is technical or specialised, like economic, political or medical topics, these ideas take a lot of time to be generated.*

Additionally, Wafaa associated unfamiliar topics with difficult topics:

*To plan an essay about a difficult topic about which I lack full prior knowledge and awareness is a difficult matter. When I'm assigned to plan such topics, I don't understand what to do and how to start. Examples of these topics are genetic engineering or the designs of cars. This is really difficult for me.*

Lack of topic focus was reported as another difficulty. Three students and four respondents to the questionnaire open-ended question shed light on this difficulty, for example, Ahmed said: *"focusing the perspective of the topic is a difficult issue for me while planning."* and another student wrote: *"I face difficulty in limiting open topics such as the internet."*

One student highlighted the importance of writing about interesting topics. Manal said: *"I couldn't write elaboratively about a topic that I'm not interested in."*

Two students also stressed the importance of topic choice in the essay writing course: Kareema wrote:

*The teacher always dictates some topics to write about when the chance permits. I'm not given the chance to choose the topics that I like.*

Table 5.3 indicates that 80% of the students and 82% of the teachers stated that writing about interesting topics is easy.

In reference to the difficulties that essay writing teachers reported about their students, Dr. Mohammed placed emphasis on students' misunderstanding of the assigned topics. He clarified his view as follows:

*One of the problems my students face while planning their essays is misunderstanding the assigned topics. I remember that I gave a topic to third year students, few years ago, entitled "Little education can be destructive", but they misunderstood it. All of my students got it in the sense that they are talking about levels of education such as a GCSE, BA ad so on, but what I meant was that you may have even a PhD but, your limited knowledge could be destructive. So, if you do not get the topic properly, they will have a big problem.*

In relation to the lack of topic prior knowledge, both students and their teachers recognise it as a source of difficulty. Three students admitted that lack of topic prior knowledge is an obstacle for them, including Mahmoud who said:

*Lack of topic prior knowledge is a big challenge for me. Academic essays are easy for me because the content I study enables me to write well, but writing an essay about a certain topic is problematic because I have no information about it and this blocks my ability to compose well.*

A response to an open-ended question explicitly suggested the same level of difficulty as follows:

*Limited information about the current events is my biggest difficulty while writing about a topic.*

With regards to teachers' views, three of them have voiced their concern about their students' lack of topic prior knowledge. Two of these teachers have shed light on the lack of reading as the source for students' poor topic prior knowledge. Dr. Mohammed said:

*I think students were educated whether at home or at school in a way that inhibits reading outside the curriculum. Students don't read for general knowledge or for pleasure. This is very sad, but this is a common reality among Egyptian students.*

Moreover, the third teacher pinpointed another common problem that is caused by students' misuse of the internet. Dr. Esraa said:

*My challenge here is to convince students not to copy and paste from the internet; I just want them to browse the internet to explore new ideas and express them in their own words.*

Topic ideas were a repeated concern for many students from different perspectives. First, four students and two respondents to an open-ended question underlined the lack of topic ideas. For example, Khalid related the lack of topic ideas to the lack of prior knowledge as she said: *"Because my knowledge of the essay writing skills is limited, my ideas for any topic are also limited."* Moreover, Eman referred to the challenge with topic ideas as *"Taking much time to come out of my mind."* Interestingly, three responses to an open-ended question confirmed the following: *"I lack ideas in Arabic."* This denotes that students might start thinking in Arabic and then translate their ideas into English. It also reflects that Egyptian students do not read well even in their native language, resulting in lack of ideas in Arabic.

From a different perspective, Khadiga complained about the abundance of ideas as follows:

*At other times, I suffer from too many ideas and I don't know how to be specific in limiting the topic. I think too many ideas in the same essay will make it boring for the reader.*

In relation to generation of ideas, six students have expressed that they encounter problems while doing this. For example, Ahmed referred to this as a problem in terms of *“generating consistent ideas and not contradicting ones.”* Moreover, Soheir linked the problem of idea generation to *“the big ideas of the topic.”* Moreover, Banan related the problem of idea generation to *“finding the relevant supporting details.”*

In the same context, the statistical results confirmed that students have difficulty in idea generation. This is confirmed by 50% of students and 65% of the essay writing teachers who reported that the ideas generated are not easily seen as relevant to their essay writing topics. In addition, 67% of students showed that brainstorming ideas for their essay writing topic is difficult. Similarly, 86% of the essay writing teachers agreed that students find brainstorming difficult.

Arranging ideas was problematic to four students in different ways. For example, Wafaa viewed *“priority of ideas and focusing on the main core idea as challenging task.”* Furthermore, Kareema viewed her challenge differently in terms of *“logical organization of ideas.”* Additionally, a response to an open-ended question stressed *“arranging ideas according to a chronological order as a hard job.”*

Three other students have underscored that development of ideas is not an easy task for them. For example, Eman referred to development of ideas as an area which she finds *“difficult.”* Similarly, Ali viewed the problem of developing ideas in *“elaboration and adding details.”*

In relation to the poor quality of ideas, three students have shown their worry about this. One example is given by Khalid who stressed lacking *“bright ideas about the topics”* as a main concern. Moreover, Kareema referred to this problem in relation to lacking *“the right ideas for the topic.”* Moreover, a response to an open-ended question was related to the problem of *“poor ideas while planning the essay.”*

Interestingly, four other different planning difficulties were reported by students' responses to an open-ended question. One response for example complained from "*understanding what the topic specifically wants.*" Another response pinpointed the difficulty of "*writing a focused and expressive title for my essay.*" A third student suffered from "*the lack of sufficient time in the planning.*" Finally, another respondent found saying what s/he wants to say in writing "*tough.*"

In the Egyptian context, little emphasis is placed on planning in the essay writing course. A number of reasons might justify this. First, there are no defined objectives for the essay writing course. Second, university teachers' schedules are crammed at all times because of the lack of staff at the English department, Faculty of Arts. Third, large classes constitute a very big problem for both students and their teachers. Students cannot learn in this overcrowded learning environment. Moreover, most university teachers lack the knowledge of the different prewriting techniques. Additionally, they lack how to put these different prewriting techniques into practice. In relation to students, university teachers consider that students' lack of reading authentic text a contributing factor to their poor topic prior knowledge. Finally, students are not trained on these prewriting strategies.

## **5.4.2 Organisational Difficulties**

### **5.4.2.1 Coherence Difficulties**

Writing coherently is the first organisational difficulty that Egyptian students encounter in their essay writing. Data analysis indicated that students encountered some coherence difficulties related to writing the introduction, the thesis statement, the topic sentences, writing relevant sentences to the topic sentence, relating the topic sentences to the thesis statement, writing about one main idea only in each paragraph, developing paragraphs, writing concluding sentences and writing the conclusion. In the same context, essay writing teachers have reported some similar coherence difficulties that face their students such as the difficulty in writing the thesis statement and the topic sentences, smooth transition between ideas, and sequence of ideas.

It is worth stating that eleven students and thirty two respondents emphasised that they have difficulty in writing coherently in different forms. A sample example of this is given by Khalid who said: *"I can write eligibly but not smoothly."* In accordance with what students have indicated about the coherence difficulties, six teachers have seen this area as problematic to their students as well.

The first coherence difficulty that students encounter in their English writing is writing the introduction. Two students and twenty eight respondents pinpointed that writing the introduction is a source of difficulty for them. A sample example of students is the extract given by Ali who said:

*In spite of being able to outline a conclusion, I find difficulty outlining the introduction. I always write artificial introduction or general clichés that I heard other people say or write. My introduction looks like the body paragraphs. When I write an introduction, I can't stop myself from writing.*

In line with this, the twenty eight responses highlighted different difficulties such as *"writing redundant introductions and conclusions"*, the difficulty of writing *"an attractive introduction"*, and *"linking the introduction to the rest of the essay."* In line with this, it was confirmed by 59% of students and 65% of their teachers that writing an introduction to an English essay is a difficult skill.

Second, 76% of students and 52% of their teachers showed that writing the thesis statement of an English essay constitutes a difficulty to Egyptian students. Five students and seventy two responses to the questionnaire pointed out that they have difficulty writing the thesis statement. For example, Amal found writing the thesis statement *"very puzzling"*; and Asmaa had difficulty understanding *"what a thesis statement means, where it should be located and how to write it appropriately"*.

In addition, two teachers referred to students' difficulty in writing the thesis statement and the topic sentences appropriately. A sample example is shown in the extract of Dr. Azza as follows:

*Despite my explanation of the characteristics of a good topic sentence and the qualities of a thesis statements and how to develop each one of them, students still find it difficult to write a good thesis and relevant topic sentences. Their thesis statements in most cases are not inclusive. It takes time to get a very clear line of thought in their essay writing process.*

Third, 79% of students and 62% of the teachers showed that writing the topic sentence of a paragraph constitutes a difficulty. Two students and forty three responses to the open-ended question stressed that they cannot write the topic sentence properly. For example, Kareema "could not differentiate between the thesis statement and the topic sentence." Similarly, Rasha found it difficult to "relate the topic sentences to the thesis statement." In the same context, the responses to the open-ended question supported the aforementioned difficulties and added students' difficulty in "formulating each main idea into a topic sentence."

In compliance with relating the ideas to the writing topics, 53% of students and 61% of teachers consider relating the topic sentences to the thesis statement as a difficult skill for their students. Two teachers have reported that this is an area of difficulty for their students. A sample example is given by Dr. Lamiaa who indicated that her students have problems writing ideas that are relevant to their topics. She clarified her view as follows:

*Students put for example a lot of ideas, some of which are not quite relevant. Sometimes, we choose two or three ideas that could make two or three different essays. How to choose the relevant ideas to make something coherent, this is the most difficult part at this stage.*

Unified writing is another coherence related difficulty that Egyptian students reported in their English writing. It refers to students' inability to address one main idea only in each paragraph and writing sentences that are irrelevant to the topic sentence. Seven students and eighty one responses to the open-ended question underscored that they have different problems in producing a unified piece of writing. Similarly, four teachers reported that their students have the same problem.

92% of students and 97% of the teachers clarified that students have difficulty expressing each main idea in one paragraph only. Three students have reported that focusing on one main idea in each paragraph they write is a hard job. A sample example is shown in the extract given by Wafaa who said:

*When I write a paragraph, I start writing many sentences about two or more different ideas at once. I mean I end up losing the main focus of the paragraph is lost.*

Moreover, teachers commented on students' fragmented paragraphs. An example of this is given by Dr. Mohammed:

*When students write a paragraph, most of them think of quantity rather than quality. In other words, students look after writing a number of sentences and you can tell that these sentences are disjointed and talking about different ideas.*

Two other students have emphasised that it is not easy for them to relate all the supporting details of the paragraph to the topic sentence. A sample example is shown in the extract given by Eman who said: *"At other times, I write sentences that are far fetched to the topic sentence of the paragraph."* This was also pinpointed by Dr. Azza who said: *"While reading students' written essays, I can easily find topic sentences that don't match the supporting sentences."* In accordance with this, 79% of students clarified that they have difficulty relating each of the supporting sentences to the topic sentence of the paragraph and 89% of the teachers underscored that students write irrelevant details that are not supportive of the topic sentence.

In reference to paragraph development, 82% of students and 68% of the teachers showed that students have difficulty developing their topic sentences into complete paragraphs with the relevant supporting details. One student and seven responses to the open-ended question illustrated that they have a problem in developing their paragraphs. For example, Asmaa said: *"I find developing each topic sentence into a whole paragraph hard to do."* Some of the questionnaire responses are: *"expressing their ideas clearly", "writing a sufficient number of sentences to cover their idea", and "using facts and statistics."*

In the same context, Dr. Mohammed shed light on students' sudden transition between ideas. In this regard, he said:

*This is an area where students get stuck in writing to some extent. Student's ideas are so loose. They are not up to the challenge here as they can't move smoothly from one idea to another.*

In harmony with that, Dr. Lamiaa referred to her students' difficulty in writing organised ideas. She said:

*They need to know exactly the application rules of writing. Anyone can write an essay, but their ideas are usually mixed up and unorganised.*

In relation to writing the concluding sentence, 47% students and 91% of teachers view writing the concluding sentence as a difficult skill. Twenty nine responses to the questionnaire open-ended question showed students' weakness in this skill: *"I don't know how to end a paragraph", "Concluding a paragraph is a nightmare.", "I always miss writing the concluding sentence as I don't revise.*

Writing a conclusion to their essays, 63% of students and 89% of their teachers indicated that this is difficult. Three students in the interview and thirty six responses to the questionnaire indicated that it is an area of difficulty. The three students have spelled out their difficulty in different forms as follows: Rasha *"I find myself repeating bits and pieces of what I have just written in the body and in the introduction."* Eman said: *"I cannot find anything useful to end up with."* Ahmed showed the difficulty in *"summing up the ideas in different words."* The thirty six responses to the open-ended item supported the claim that writing a conclusion is difficult. The following is a sample example: *"I feel that my conclusion is boring."*

According to individual differences, it should be noted that three students indicated that writing coherently is not a problem for them. For example, Eman said: *"Writing coherently is not a problem for me because I take enough time in planning my essay."*

There are some reasons accounting for Egyptian students' difficulties in writing coherently. First, it could be that students did not plan well before starting to write as many of them confirmed that they do not plan, but write what comes to their minds. Second, students might not be aware of the difference between the thesis statement and the topic sentence. Third, they might lack the strategy for producing unified writing. Finally, their teachers might not have taught them how to write in a coherent way. This is illustrated in what some students said about not knowing the meaning of coherence in English writing.

#### **5.4.2.2 Cohesion Difficulties**

Writing cohesively is the second organisational difficulty in essay writing from which Egyptian students complain. Not only did ten students and seventy seven responses to the open-ended question underscore that they have different problems in writing cohesively, but four teachers pinpointed that their students have problems in writing cohesively as well. These cohesion difficulties include using different cohesive devices, reference ties, substitution, ellipsis, genre-related cohesive ties, and semantically appropriate cohesive ties.

Many students emphasised that they have difficulty using the different types of cohesion. First, 63% of students and 88% of teachers highlighted that using reference in writing is an easy skill. For example, Soheir shed light on her problem in using cataphoric reference, whereas she found anaphoric reference easy to use. She said:

*I do not find it easy to refer to someone/something before identifying them at the beginning of the sentence. My mind doesn't work this way, but it works the normal way.*

The second cohesion difficulty from which some students complained is the use of ellipsis. 84% of students and 89% of teachers highlighted that using ellipsis in writing is difficult. Asmaa, for example, referred to her difficulty in doing so as follows:

*Cohesion is quite difficult for me because I'm not proficient in using ellipsis in writing. I don't know which words or phrases should be deleted to make the sentence cohesive.*

In reference to the use of cohesive ties, 51% of students and 60% of teachers pointed out that using cohesive ties in writing is difficult. Amal is a good example that incorporated some difficulties from which she suffers such as using limited number of cohesive ties and having some difficulties in the structure of these ties and their related punctuation marks. In this regard she said:

*I use only those simple linking words of which I'm sure because I don't know the rest of them. Sometimes, I find it difficult to use the punctuation marks related to these linking words. Other times, I don't know the grammatical structures of the linking words that I want to use such as Despite, However, Therefore ...etc.*

83% of students and 87% of teachers showed that the use of different genre specific cohesive ties in writing is a difficult skill. In harmony with this, Rasha added that using the genre related cohesive ties is a problem for her. The following extract emphasises her view:

*Writing cohesive paragraphs and essays is difficult for me especially because I don't know which appropriate cohesive ties to use with each type of essay.*

In corroboration with this, Dr. Esraa pinpointed that her students have difficulty in using the most appropriate genre related cohesive ties. She clarified her view saying:

*Students face manageable difficulties in cohesion in relation to each group of cohesive ties in the essay writing genres.*

Moreover, Ali highlighted his repetitive use of certain cohesive ties as follows:

*Sometimes, I regularly use the same linking words such as 'although' and 'because' in the same essay which are a problem for me. I know it is repetitive and redundant, but I have no other choice.*

In reference to teachers' views about students' difficulties in cohesion, four teachers broadly referred to some cohesive difficulties. For example, Dr. Mohammed highlighted students' difficulty in cohesion and attributed it to their proficiency level as he said:

*Students face difficulties in writing cohesively because they don't actually understand what cohesion means. This is one of the problems students face while writing and developing their essays. Again as I said, they are not very competent in the language.*

In addition, Dr. Lamiaa described most of her students' writing as lacking cohesion and shed light on another two problems in her students' use of cohesive ties: the gap between theory and application, and the overuse of certain cohesive ties. To clarify her view, she said:

*Cohesion is a problem for most of my students of English..... Although they also study cohesion as a separate course, but they do not relate it once they write which is a big problem. At other times, they overuse the cohesive ties thinking that this is something good. This is a problem.*

With regards to the use of substitution as a cohesive device, 47% of students and 62% of teachers pointed out that using substitution is difficult. Two students clarified that they have problems with substitution. For example, Wafaa showed that her problem with substitution as follows: "I find it difficult to replace one word by another such as using one and ones...etc". In the same context, Eman showed that she has problem with semantics as follows:

*Also, I might find some difficulty in not knowing the meaning of some new linking words and when to use them.*

89% of students showed that using semantically appropriate cohesive ties in their writing is easy; whereas 94% of teachers viewed this skill as difficult for their students. Three students expressed that they have no problems in writing cohesively. A sample example is shown by Ali who said:

*Cohesion is not a problem for me because I was trained on how to connect sentences with the right cohesive ties when I was in secondary school.*

There are some reasons behind the cohesion difficulties in the English writing of Arab students in general and Egyptian students in particular. First, lack of reading English texts can cause students' difficulty in writing cohesively. Second, studying lists of interchangeable cohesive devices might worsen the difficulty in using cohesive devices. The cultural differences between Arabic and English might account for the difficulty Arab students encounter in cohesion. Additionally, lack of cohesion knowledge was believed to be another factor causing students' difficulty in cohesion.

### 5.4.3 Stylistic Difficulties

In reference to the stylistic problems, both students and their essay writing teachers indicated that this is an area of difficulty. 74% of students 87% of their teachers pointed out that students have difficulty writing in a clear style. Twelve students, six teachers, and ninety three responses to the open-ended question claimed that writing style is a problematic area. Some of the stylistic problems that students encounter are writing in a simple style, and writing in different styles such as narrative, descriptive, argumentative and expository.

Twelve students revealed that there are four stylistic problems that they encounter in their essay writing. First, three students have difficulty writing in a proper simple style. A sample example of this is given by Amal who said:

*I avoid writing in a complex style by using very simple and short sentences. We have not been taught how to write in different styles if there are any.*

This extract also shows that the student is unaware of any writing styles.

Second, two other students complained from their awkward writing style. A sample example is shown in the words of Soheir below:

*I wish I could convey the message to the reader clearly, but I couldn't due to my weakness in vocabulary, grammar and punctuation which makes me incompetent in using the language appropriately.*

Additionally, two students have clarified that the quality of the writing style is dependent on sufficient topic knowledge and supporting details. This is expressed clearly in the following sample example of Asmaa who said:

*If I have enough information and relevant supporting details, I think that my style will be fine. I can adapt my style to the topic with no problem."*

In line with this, two other teachers attributed the poor writing styles of their students to the lack of sufficient vocabulary that students need in writing. For example, Dr. Azza commented on this thus:

*Style needs a large number of vocabularies in which students are limited. They don't have that much of a grip of the language that enables them to write in a good style.*

Moreover, two other teachers have capitalised on students' poor writing style due to their lack of reading authentic texts. A sample example of this is given by Dr. Alaa who said:

*Another problem is that students don't have the chance to read original and authentic texts in English which results in poor writing style in English. The lack of exposure to the authentic English texts weakens their style of writing. Although they study other linguistic and literary courses, their attitude towards them is passing the exam and not benefiting from this. That's why they read the simplified texts of novels and plays and avoid reading the original ones.*

Finally, four students showed their inability to distinguish between writing styles. A sample example of this is mentioned by Kareema below: *"I can't tell whether I have a difficulty in style or not because I don't know what it means and I haven't been taught how to do it."*

Analysis of statistical results was consistent with the above views. Students indicated that they have varied levels of difficulty in their writing styles: narrative style (43%); a descriptive style (56%); an argumentative style (88%) and an expository style (84%). In agreement with this, teachers pinpointed that their students experience similar level of difficulty in all the different writing styles: narrative style (55%); a descriptive style (87%); an argumentative style (92%) and an expository style (95%).

In relation to the responses to the open-ended question, students confirmed some of the previously mentioned stylistic problems, but added three more to them. One respondent wrote: *"I have problems using expressions"*, another respondent showed the following: *"I have difficulty in explaining my idea in a simple style"*, and finally, another respondent pinpointed the following: *"I don't know how to write concisely."*

Additionally, Egyptian essay writing teachers have revealed other five features of Egyptian students' poor writing styles including the use of informal style, colloquial language, formulaic expressions, repetition and overgeneralisations. First, Dr. Lamiaa referred to her students' use of the informal style and slang language in their writing. She clarified her view as follows:

*Students tend to use the chatting style with its abbreviations and slang that they normally do on the internet, especially in private universities where they have higher levels of the language proficiency, they use the computer and the internet more, they get slang words from movies thinking that the slang language that foreigners use in movies are the best. However, they study in their academic courses the difference between the formalities and the informalities of style. But once they write, they forget everything.*

Similarly, Dr. Atiyat clarified that her students use colloquial language in their written essays. She said: *"They use colloquial English instead of the formal one."*

Moreover, Dr. Esraa shed light on the use of formulaic expressions as another stylistic feature of her students' writing. She illustrated her view in the following words:

*Students always use formulaic expressions in their writing such as "No one can deny that ....., There is no doubt that .....or It goes without saying that ..... and then bla bla bla..... I even told them "whoever is going to use these clichés is going to lose half the mark specified for the essay and they still do it. Of course, I don't mark the essay in that way but I want them to stop using these formulaic expressions.*

Although using formulaic expressions gives students the feeling of safety in writing, they should learn how to write proper topic and concluding sentences. This also pays our attention to the teachers' role in teaching students how to write these sentences to help them avoid using formulaic expressions.

Furthermore, one teacher paid attention to 'repetition' as another stylistic problem facing his students. This was stated by Dr. Mostafa thus:

*Also, they [students] use repetition in their writing which weakens their writing style. Actually, this may be due to the Arabic influence on their English writing.*

Finally, two teachers have shared their view about their students' writing style saying that students resort to overgeneralisations as a main feature of their essay writing style. A sample example is given by Dr. Mohammed as follows:

*Overgeneralisation is very clear as a big problem in their writing style. .... Students tend not to use statistics or science as they usually say the majority of people are so and so. Where do they get these facts without using statistics? It is easy for them to overgeneralise because of what they have been taught at the secondary stage.*

Egyptian university teachers as well as their students have spelled out some of the reasons behind students' stylistic problems. For example, the use of formulaic expressions may be attributed to the influence of socio-cultural factors. Others such as overgeneralisation and repetition might be ascribed to the effect of L1 on EFL writing. Finally, other difficulties such as informal style and using colloquial language in writing came into being due to the use of modern technology such as chatting on the internet and watching English movies. In addition, teachers reported that students lack reading authentic English texts. They just read the simplified texts of any novels, plays or books. They are not used to reading for long hours and they are not ready to exert that effort. Consequently, they will not be proficient in English writing because the more one reads, the better one's writing style becomes. This lack of reading authentic texts results in shortage of sufficient vocabulary needed in writing. Moreover, students might lack theoretical and practical knowledge about the different writing styles. Furthermore, students are not given the opportunity to write except in rare circumstances. If they practise writing, they would consequently be aware that they have weakness in their writing styles and would be able to embellish it.

#### **5.4.4 Lexical Difficulties**

Data analysis revealed that Egyptian students experience some lexical difficulties while writing English essays. Students, many responses to the open-ended question, and some teachers affirmed that students go through some lexical difficulties. Some of these difficulties include using the appropriate vocabulary, using synonyms and antonyms, and using idioms and collocations.

Results of statistical analysis have shown that 35% of students and 47% of their teachers clarified that using the appropriate vocabulary in English writing is an area of difficulty. Ten students indicated that they have a number of lexical difficulties. For example, two students stressed that finding the appropriate vocabulary is *"Somewhat difficult"*. Moreover, three other students indicated that they have problems with polyseme *"vocabulary with more than one meaning"*; two other students underscored that they have difficulty in *"finding the appropriate vocabulary in the right context in writing an essay."*

Additionally, three other students have pinpointed that their lexical problems are represented in the difficulty in recalling some vocabulary they already know in time of need. For example, Ahmed said:

*Last year I found it very difficult in the exam to recall the word 'assistant'. That's why I wrote the people who help others. I think this is because I don't frequently use the vocabulary I know in writing.*

In harmony with this, 46% of students clarified that they experience some difficulty using word synonyms in writing. Similarly, 59% of teachers stressed that their students have difficulty using word synonyms in English writing.

Additionally, most students have linked the difficulty in vocabulary to their prior knowledge of the topics of writing. For example, Kareema said in this regard: *"This difficulty depends on my familiarity with the topic and the repertoire of my vocabulary."* Another example was given by Ali who related the difficulty of vocabulary to the difficult topics. He said:

*I don't have a problem in finding the appropriate vocabulary for easy topics such as communication and computer, but difficult topics such as American elections, it is very difficult to find the appropriate vocabulary.*

Most of the thirty five responses that were given to that open-ended question assured the difficulty in vocabulary. Two responses were different from the aforementioned extracts as follows: (1) *"Finding synonyms and antonyms is difficult."*, and (2) *"Finding expressive words to convey my message before writing is a challenge."* In the same vein, 43% of students indicated that they have difficulty using word antonyms in English writing. In line with this, 53% of teachers showed that their students have difficulty using word antonyms in writing.

In reference to students' use of idioms and word collocations in writing, it was reported that students encounter some difficulties. This is affirmed by 74% of students who reported having difficulty in using idioms and word collocations in writing. In addition, 81% of teachers showed that their students find using word collocations and idiomatic expressions a difficult task.

In compliance with students' views about their lexical difficulty, three teachers capitalised on this. For example, Dr. Esraa said:

*When it comes to writing, they lack the needed vocabulary. So, most of the students start with writing in Arabic and then they translate it into English.*

Similarly, Dr. Mostafa referred to vocabulary and structure as *"the most difficult skills that students face while writing."* Finally, Dr. Alaa attributed this difficulty to two reasons as he said: *"They also face problems in vocabulary which are related to the lack of reading and the absence of interest in it."*

In spite of teachers' awareness of these different difficulties encountered by their students, no clear teaching/learning strategies are put in place to tackle these different difficulties. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers could possibly plan, design and implement some learning strategies to help widen their students' repertoire of vocabulary. This could develop a lifelong study skill that students could use in their language learning. In addition, inefficient use of vocabulary learning strategies as well as studying wordlists out of context could negatively affect students' repertoire of vocabulary. Furthermore, the general lack of linguistic resources and linguistic knowledge might be another reason for students' lexical problems in Egypt.

#### 5.4.5 Technical Difficulties

This section sheds light on the technical difficulties in essay writing including four sub-sections: grammatical, punctuation, spelling and editing & revision. All these difficulties will be addressed through students as well as their teachers' views.

##### 5.4.5.1 Grammatical Difficulties

First, eight students and ten responses to the open-ended question have indicated that they encounter some grammatical difficulties in different forms. For example, Amal had difficulty using the tenses as she said:

*I find some difficulty in using the right tense. Sometimes, I get confused between using the past simple and the present perfect. I don't know when to use each one of them. Other than that, it is ok.*

In consistency with the grammatical difficulty that students reported, 66% of students indicated that they face grammatical difficulties while writing in English. Similarly, 72% of teachers have shown that their students experience some grammatical difficulties while writing in English.

Three students had difficulty in some grammatical rules. For example, Ahmed had difficulty applying the grammatical rules into practice. She said: *"I'm good at grammar rules, but I find it difficult to apply these rules into practice while writing."* Furthermore, Rasha pinpointed that she has problems learning the basics of grammatical rules. She said: *"I have a big problem in grammar because I did not learn the basics of grammar rules."* Similarly, Manal highlighted that her problem is related to learning grammatical rules out of context. In this regard, she said:

*I focus more on the idea and its development rather than the vocabulary and the grammar used to express it. That's why my grammatical usage in writing is not an easy task for me. We were taught grammar as separate rules out of context.*

Additionally, Kareema indicated that her grammatical problems are represented in the complex grammatical structures as she said:

*I use simple sentences not to make grammatical mistakes. I'm not good at the complex grammar structures that a good English teacher should master.*

Moreover, writing run-on sentences is another feature of four students' writing. For example, Wafaa said:

*My writing is run-on because I translate from Arabic into English. That's why my writing style is not that good.*

In reference to the responses of the open-ended questions, they supported the previously mentioned difficulties in grammar and added two more. One of them highlighted students' demand for grammatical correction and teacher's negligence of this. This was indicated in the following response: *"I'm in bad need of correction of grammatical structures as well as the new grammatical structures, but who cares."* The other response showed grammatical difficulty in terms of phrasal verbs as a respondent wrote: *"I have difficulty in using preposition, phrasal verbs, linking word, and so on."*

The phrase *'who cares'* suggests that students are aware that their essay writing teachers do not pay attention to their needs. In other words, essay writing teachers are oriented to what they want to teach, paying little attention to what students need in their learning of essay writing. This brings to our attention the need to examine students' learning needs because of their relationship to teacher's planning, teaching and assessment.

However, six students have revealed that the difficulty they encounter in English grammar is changeable. A sample example is given by Khadiga as follows:

*I don't suffer much of a difficulty in writing grammatically correct sentences. I can say that I face 15% difficulty in grammatical structures while I'm writing an essay. This is due to the mastery of the grammar in the secondary school.*

In reference to teachers' views, four teachers have indicated that their students have difficulty in grammar. Three teachers emphasised that students have a specific difficulty in grammar that is related to linking or applying what they learn grammatically to English writing. Dr. Lamiaa attributed this difficulty to two main reasons: their low proficiency level in the English language in general and their unwillingness to integrate all language skills together in particular.

She illustrated her view as follows:

*When I teach essay writing, I ask them about what they study in the grammar course for example or when I teach grammar, I ask them to link this to what they write. But, students are still not convinced, I don't know, or they do not want to exert this effort of linking things together. You can give them for example a grammar activity which they do it fine, but once they start writing they do not do this. This is a problem of not being taught how to link things together.*

Similarly, Dr. Alaa said:

*They have grammatical problems which are related to the separation that they create between grammar and its usage in essay writing. You can ask them about the rules of grammar and they will answer perfectly, but they don't apply these grammar rules in writing.*

In addition, Dr. Esraa confirmed the same claim about students' grammatical difficulties. In her view, she proposes that students write simple and grammatically correct sentences until they master the different structures. The following extract pinpoints her view:

*Vocabulary and structure are the most difficult skills that students face while writing. That's why I advise them to write short sentences that are simple and direct until you gain much vocabulary and correct grammatical structures that will help you in times of need and then I could start writing long correct sentences.*

In reference to Egyptian students' difficulty in English grammar, there are a number of reasons. First, despite being taught grammar as part of another course called 'Phonetics & Grammar', students reported that they were taught grammar superficially. Second, students might have mastered the grammatical rules, but they did not receive grammatical correction on their written essays. Moreover, lack of reading English authentic texts might justify not using complex structures in their writing. Arabic interference might also be one of the reasons for their difficulty in English grammar as sentence structures in both languages are completely different.

#### 5.4.5.2 Punctuation Difficulties

Punctuation errors constituted a more serious problem for Egyptian students more than spelling mistakes. 54% of students and 63% of their teachers indicated that using the correct punctuation marks in English writing is a problem. This is shown in that all fourteen students and thirty seven responses stressed that they have different problems with punctuation. For example, Ali said:

*I'm one of 95% of university students who miss the punctuation marks or misuse them. We are good at the ordinary basic ones, but the other sophisticated punctuation marks, I might not know their names in English.*

Some other students were concerned about their knowledge of the punctuation marks and rules. For example, Soheir said:

*I use the punctuation marks that I know to avoid any problems but I didn't know that there are many of them. The problem I'm suffering from here is the lack of knowledge of the punctuation marks.*

In the same context, Khalid said:

*This is an extremely difficult skill for me because I don't know how to punctuate paragraphs correctly. I don't know the difference between a hyphen and a dash.*

Similarly, Amal said: "I can't differentiate for example when to use the colon and the semi colon." Moreover, Asmaa paid attention to the problem of practising the punctuation rules saying:

*I face difficulty because some of the punctuation marks are new for me so, I don't know how and when to use them. These rules need practice because I'm just studying them theoretically.*

Finally, Manal claimed two problems with punctuation: using complex punctuation marks and positioning the appropriate punctuation marks that go with certain cohesive ties. The following extract highlights this view:

*I don't have deep knowledge of the different complex punctuation marks such as the colon, the semi colon, the dash, the hyphen ...etc. I'm just familiar with the simple ones such the comma, the full stop. Sometimes, I use the cohesive ties without knowing what punctuation marks should I use and where to place them.*

All the seven teachers showed that their students have different punctuation errors. They also showed different views about these errors and the reasons behind them. For example, Dr. Mohammed perceived spelling and punctuation as areas of difficulty for his students, but he thinks that they improve with the course of time and practice. He said: *"Students face some difficulties in punctuation and spelling, but the more they write, the more their mechanics of writing improve."* Furthermore, Dr. Lamiaa attributes her students' difficulty in spelling and punctuation to the lack of revision and editing. She capitalised on this as follows:

*Punctuation is one of the problems students face while writing because it is different from the Arabic system. This is a great problem. Spelling and punctuation mainly depend on the students' language proficiency and the editing stage which they rarely do.*

Additionally, Dr. Esraa spotted three main punctuation mistakes that her students often make. These errors are related to capitalization, misusing the commas, and lack of punctuation marks. She expressed her view in the following extract:

*I face a challenge in trying to overcome the bad habits of students who are used to write all their letters and words in capital letters. Students write run on sentences using commas thinking that comma replaces the use of a full stop. So, they have a misconception in this respect that is very difficult to erase. Some other students neither use commas nor do full stops and they leave it for me to figure it out.*

Surprisingly, Dr. Alaa pinpointed that his students underestimate the value of punctuation and spelling as he said:

*They [students] think that the punctuation and correct spelling are not important. I always tell them that when we evaluate their essays in the final exam, I pay very much attention to correct spelling and punctuation, but they don't care. They care more about content and ideas.*

Finally, Dr. Mostafa sheds light on the recurrent spelling and punctuation mistakes in his students' writing. He attributes this to the poor level of the secondary school teachers and their methods of teaching. In this regards, he said:

*But they are victims as they spend six years at schools with bad and unmotivated teachers. Students are trained for the final exams only. And when the exam is over, the skill is over.*

In response to the different punctuation errors that students make, two teaching strategies were in place. First, direct teaching was carried out by Dr. Atiyat who was observed teaching punctuation for some consecutive lectures. In relation to the other strategy, Dr. Lamiaa referred to giving students handouts full of punctuation rules to be self-studied.

Some of the reasons that might account for Egyptian students' weakness in punctuation are as follows: First, in-service Egyptian English language teachers do not pay attention to teaching punctuation in class as they consider it of little importance. Second, these teachers do not correct punctuation mistakes in students' writing as they focus on content rather than form. Third, Egyptian students are educated not to self develop their aspects of difficulty in language learning. They are used to being spoon-fed in whatever they learn at the pre-university stages. Additionally, most students do not revise what they write, which leads to punctuation errors. Finally, the fact that English punctuation system is very different from that in Arabic could be another reason.

#### **5.4.5.3 Spelling Difficulties**

Spelling, as one of the technical writing skills, constituted a minor problem for some students of English. 27% of students have difficulty in writing correctly-spelled words in English; as well as 28% of teachers indicated that their students have some difficulty in writing correctly-spelled words in English. For example, six students and fifteen responses indicated that they have some spelling difficulties. For example, Rasha underscored that she suffers from many spelling mistakes as she said:

*I make many spelling mistakes which is the reason why I got low score in my essays in the different courses because spelling can change the meanings of the whole sentence.*

Moreover, Soheir highlighted that she experiences some spelling difficulties such as double letter sequences as she said:

*There are some spelling problems that I face while writing such as the words 'certifies' or 'accommodation', 'commitment' where letters are doubled or the letters may sound the same like the /s/*

*and the /c/.*

Three more students have paid my attention to having problems with homophones. For example, Rasha said:

*I have problems in spelling words that are pronounced the same but have different spelling such as stare and stair.*

Another student pinpointed that her spelling difficulties are related to the new vocabulary only as Eman said:

*It does sometimes constitute a problem for me especially with new words that I have just seen them once or words which I have heard only. Moreover, the responses to the open-ended question supported the above mentioned spelling difficulties.*

On the other hand, the other five students rated their spelling skills as mostly good and they rarely make spelling mistakes. For example, Banan said:

*It is possible to misspell some words while writing. Other times, I miss letters while writing words in the exam but mostly, I'm good at spelling.*

Another example is given by Amal who said: *"I rarely make spelling mistakes*

In spite of these different spelling difficulties encountered by students, no teaching/learning strategies were reported by teachers to help students overcome them. Therefore, helping students decrease their spelling mistakes could develop a lifelong study skill that students could use in their language learning.

Some of the reasons that lie behind Arab students' difficulties in spelling are highlighted by Ibrahim (1978) who examined spelling errors in the written work of undergraduate students at a Jordanian university. He found out that most spelling errors are due to one or more of the following reasons: non-phonetic nature of English spelling, differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic, analogy errors, inconsistent spelling in English word derivation, and transitional errors resulting from ignorance or overgeneralisation of a spelling rule. This is somewhat true of Egyptian students. However, their difficulties in spelling are not as grave as those in coherence and cohesion.

#### 5.4.5.4 Revision and Editing Difficulties

There are a number of difficulties associated with revising and editing students' written essays. This is shown as 65% of students rarely revise grammar; 55% rarely revise punctuation; 44% rarely revise their word choice and 25% rarely revise spelling. Similarly, teachers indicated that 78% of students rarely revise grammar, 55% rarely revise their word choice, 69% rarely revise punctuation and 35% rarely revise spelling.

Seven students and thirty two responses to the open-ended question stressed some revision and editing difficulties. A sample example is given by Rasha who said:

*I have many difficulties in the editing and revision of my essay because (1) I don't have time in the exam to revise. (2) There were no revising criteria that the teacher gave us..... (4) There are no specific strategies that help us revise quickly and accurately.*

In the same context, various responses highlighted these problems as well as some other difficulties such as the exhaustion of writing: "Exhaustion of writing makes me unable to modify, edit or revise my essay in the exam.", inability to see one's mistakes: "I can't spot my mistakes.", completing the missing topic sentence and supporting details: "Revising missing details in my essay is a nightmare.", being worried about paper neatness: "I'm afraid of improving my essay so that there will be many mistakes that will make my exam paper looks unclean." and finally, lack of self-confidence: "I'm hesitant of changing ideas and words because I don't know where to go."

A number of students and responses to the open-ended question highlighted some specific revision difficulties that are related to revision of organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the inapplicability of the peer review. First, five students and eleven responses to the open-ended question indicated that they find revising the coherence of their writing difficult. A sample example is given by Wafaa who said:

*I face somewhat difficulty revising....., the introduction and the thesis statement because I haven't been trained to revise and I don't know the strategies used to revise efficiently.*

Although cohesion constitutes a problem for many students, only two students have referred to the difficulty in revising it. For example, Khadiga said:

*I face some difficulties in revising my written essays in the following: .....,.....,.....,..... and linking ideas.*

In the same context, results of statistical analysis pinpointed that 66% of students showed that they rarely revise the organization of their writing. Similarly, 73% of teachers indicated that their students rarely revise the organization of their writing.

In reference to revising grammar, spelling and punctuation, ten students and seventeen responses to the open-ended question clarified that they do it very quickly because of time limit. A sample example is given by Amal who said:

*Grammar, spelling and punctuation are problems for me while revising. Sometimes, I can't see my mistakes because of the limited time in the exam.*

In relation to vocabulary revision, three students and four responses to the open-ended question have clarified that they have difficulty replacing some vocabulary with others. This view is well-expressed by Manal who said:

*I find it difficult to replace certain vocabulary with more appropriate vocabulary.*

Moreover, three responses to the questionnaire open-ended question have shed light on the inapplicability of the peer review strategy in Egypt as follows. First, students are socio-culturally brought up and educated in a society that restricts the sharing and exchanging of learning and experiences. For example, one respondent wrote: *"My classmates don't want to show me their written essays."* Second, students' lack of the revision strategies was expressed by the following response: *"I don't have the ability to spot my friends' mistakes in writing. We were not trained to do this."* Finally, students attached peer review to a psychological factor as one of the respondents wrote: *"I can't criticise my classmates in my peer review because I don't want them to be upset."*

In reference to teachers' perceptions about their students' difficulty in revision and editing, they hold three different views. First, Dr. Mohammed implicitly stated that students' low proficiency level is the main reason behind not spotting their mistakes while revising. He said:

*Students do the same mistakes that they commit while writing, as they are revise their essays because when they write, they are not aware of the mistakes they make and in their review, these mistakes go unnoticed unless that was a slip.*

Dr. Lamiaa viewed her students' difficulty in revision differently. She attributed this to their premature readiness level. She said:

*I think reviewing and editing are the most difficult stage because they are not ready to reread and even if they reread it, they do it very quickly.*

Finally, Dr. Azza clarified that students are physically and mentally exhausted while writing and this results in considering revision and editing as insignificant. She stated the following extract to pinpoint her view:

*They face difficulties in the general organization of the essay while editing it. I don't know whether they know this or not. So, they don't edit it or they get tired of writing the whole essay and organizing it and then, they see editing as unimportant and that's why they do not exert much effort in it.*

The factors affecting the revision processes of students' writing were the concern of some other researchers (Scordaras, 2003; Kehagia, 2005; Sugita, 2006). First, prior knowledge and writing experiences seemed to affect students' revision processes more than any other factors. Time spent on revision and teacher comments are also believed to affect students' revision of their essays.

#### **5.4.6 Other Difficulties**

Data analysis revealed that there are three other difficulties, related to translation, resources and understanding. In reference to translation, there are a number of difficulties that students encountered. First, four students and three responses to the open-ended question highlighted that students have difficulty in translating their ideas from Arabic into English. A sample example is given by Eman who said:

*Also, translating my ideas from Arabic into English isn't an easy task as it takes much time to recall and get them. Sometimes I find difficulty in some specific terms.*

A sample example of the three responses was as follows: *“Translating ideas into English is a problem.”* Another problem in translation was related to vocabulary translation. This problem was well-expressed by Asmaa who said: *“Translation of some vocabulary that will enable me to write some ideas is challenging for me.”*

In addition, a response to the open-ended question highlighted difficulty in the translation technique as another problem that students face while writing. This was well-shown by the following response: *“I face difficulty finding the suitable ways in translation.”*

In relation to teachers, three of them have stressed that students have difficulty in translation. A sample example is given by Dr. Atiyat who showed how translation from Arabic into English can negatively affect their English writing style. She expressed her view as follows:

*They have to translate what they know about any topic in the English language and this actually results in many mistakes that make them get poor English style in their writing. They have to translate a lot from Arabic to English which is something that is not adequate for writing good English.*

In reference to resources, four students and two responses to the open-ended question voiced their concern about them. A sample example was given by Khalid who said:

*I don't have enough resources to plan my essay. Finding information about the topic through the internet is really time-consuming for me.*

Similarly, the two responses to the open-ended question confirmed that students have problems accessing the different resources that enable them to write well. For example, one wrote: *“Organizing the information from books or the internet is a problem.”*

Moreover, four students have indicated that they encounter some difficulties in understanding what the teacher is saying. This difficulty in understanding is not necessarily the result of a weakness in the students' intellectual abilities, but it might be due to the teachers' lack of different teaching strategies.

A sample example of this view is said by Rasha as follows:

*The course was very much frustrating for me. This kind of teaching made me reluctant to attend many of her classes because I ask my classmates which pages she read in class and consequently, I take private tuition in what she covered. There are other classmates of mine who attended all her lectures and the result is the same; they didn't understand what the teacher is talking about.*

#### **5.4.7 Emerging Themes**

Two major issues contributing to students' difficulties in writing emerged during the process of data analysis: psychological and contextual.

##### **5.4.7.1 Psychological Challenges**

First, some psychological challenges have been reported by both students and their teachers that affect students' learning of EFL essay writing. These challenges include lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence and writing anxiety.

###### **5.4.7.1.1 Lack of Motivation**

In relation to motivation, data revealed that students are not motivated to write English essays. This view was well-expressed by students in their interviews and in their responses to the open-ended question. For example, Ali said:

*Working with traditional teachers who are mostly reading from the book reduces our motivation to participate, exchange ideas or even to write. I personally feel reluctant to take part in the lecture or in any assigned activity if there are any.*

Another student linked her lack of motivation to the boring writing topics dictated on them. In this regard, Manal said:

*Whenever I'm assigned to write about a boring topic, I wish I had been at home sleeping at this moment rather than doing something that I don't want to do. I feel it is a waste of time more than learning a new skill. It is really a monotonous process that brings my learning motivation to zero.*

In the same context, essay writing teachers feel that students are not motivated to write or even to learn to write. This view is represented in what Dr. Lamiaa said about her students as follows:

*To be honest, students' low proficiency level and high apprehension from writing demotivate them. They need a strong psychological push to be able to work in any course, not necessarily essay writing. Students in class are marked by laziness, postponing, fear and hesitation. All these characteristics make them demotivated.*

#### **5.4.7.1.2 Lack of Self-Confidence**

With regard to self confidence, four responses to the open-ended question and two students confirmed that they lack self-confidence when it comes to English writing. For example, one respondent wrote: *"I'm always hesitant of changing ideas and words because I don't know where to go."* Another respondent wrote: *"I'm not confident enough to start brainstorming without the teacher."*

Another example was given by Rasha who said:

*Due to my hesitation and worry in writing, I feel that whatever I write will not be acceptable by the teacher. I haven't written many essays and my experience with writing essays is very limited. This is why I'm unconfident about my writing skills.*

In the same context, two teachers referred to their students' lack of self-confidence. For example, Dr. Atiyat said:

*Egyptian students lack self confidence. They think English is a troubling language. They don't know how to deal with it efficiently. They lack self confidence concerning the English language. .... So, I give them this self confidence in order to feel free about writing. So, when they are going to feel free, they are going to give me a good output. This is what I think I should do with them.*

Dr. Mostafa highlighted how 'weak students' lack self-confidence and how he deals with them to overcome this. He said:

*As for weak students, I force them to talk whether they even agree or disagree. I take sample of these weak students' writing and try to discuss them in class with other students to help them. I try to make them feel that they can do it. I try from time to time to increase the amount of encouragement to them to increase their self confidence.*

#### **5.4.7.1.3 Writing Anxiety**

Writing anxiety represented another psychological challenge for Egyptian students. Similarly, two students and one response to the questionnaire indicated that students feel anxious while writing. For example, a questionnaire response referred to how a student might feel while writing under pressure as follows: *"I get very tense when I write my essays under time pressure."* In addition, Ahmed showed how stressed he feels when he starts writing. He highlighted his view as follows:

*When I start writing, I feel stressed as I don't know how to start. In the back of my mind, I'm afraid that the teacher makes fun of my written essay in front of the whole class.*

In reference to teachers' views about anxiety, three have reported that students are anxious while writing. A sample example is given by Dr. Esraa who said:

*Some students are worried about their writing when they start planning. Others might get a writer's block when they start writing. This might be the consequences of fear to write off topic. They are also anxious about the comprehensiveness of the thesis statement. That's why they come to see me repeatedly in class to make sure they are on the right track.*

#### **5.4.7.2 Contextual Challenges**

Both teachers and students revealed that there are some socio-cultural issues that cause problems. These issues include pre-university learning experiences, students' culture of reading and L1 interference in EFL writing. In addition, opinion suppression was revealed as a socio-political challenge that affects students' EFL writing at the university level.

#### 5.4.7.2.1 Socio-Cultural Challenges

##### 5.4.7.2.1.1 Pre-University Learning Experiences

In reference to pre-university learning experiences, a number of issues emerged including the use of traditional topics of writing, the use of formulaic expressions, rote learning and lack of critical thinking, competitive learning environment, and the insignificance of composition writing at secondary school. First, two teachers have emphasised the use of traditional topics of writing at the pre-university stages. For example, Dr. Mostafa comments on the traditional topics of writing taught at the pre-university level as follows:

*..... In the pre-university stage, teachers used to give students worn out topics to write about such as Mother's Day, Spring, Summer Holiday...etc. It is deeply rooted in their [students'] minds that when they begin writing, they have to begin with a famous proverb, a quotation from Qur'an or a famous writer and to end your writing in the same way. These topics are very traditional and students copy each others' ideas. There is no place for engaging students in interesting and personal topics.*

Moreover, Dr. Alaa added that asking students to write about abstract topics at the university level is really challenging. He expressed his view as follows:

*...abstract topics such as justice, courage, the importance of sacrifice, are very abstract topics about which students cannot easily write. But, discussing topics like importance of having a clean house, or what makes you happy or what makes you laugh or the relationships between boys and girls are meaningful to students. These are topics which they are naturally concerned with and usually discuss among themselves.*

Second, the educational training students receive in their schools has become an established practice within the Egyptian educational system. An accepted practice in this society is the use of formulaic expressions in learning/teaching of writing. Four students have voiced their concern about this practice. A sample example is given by Eman who said:

*The secondary school teacher told us if one uses one or more of some fixed sentences to begin our paragraphs and some other concluding sentences to end our paragraphs, s/he will get at least 5 out of 6 in the writing section. Examples of opening sentences are: No one can deny that....., or It can't be argued that....., or It goes without saying that..... Examples of a concluding sentence is: Thus, the government should exert more effort to help improve/decrease/increase/uproot .....*

In the same context, three teachers have pinpointed that using formulaic expressions is a feature of Egyptian students' English writing. These teachers clarified that writing is seen as a subject to show one's proficiency rather than a process of idea generation and thought expression. This socio-cultural view is expressed by Dr. Alaa as follows:

*Secondary school teachers gave students formulaic expressions to memorise and imitate in any essay writing. This is very bad because it sees all students as the same. My students usually tell me that in the secondary school, they were told to begin with one of many formulaic expressions. I spend a lot of time trying to convince them not to use them. And of course, they don't have the chance to be trained in the secondary school on how to write a good essay or even a paragraph. We face these problems here because they are at the back of these students' mind.*

Rote learning and devaluing critical thinking skills form the third socio-cultural challenge at the pre-university level that has to do with the wider educational approach. This claim was supported by five students and four teachers. A sample example of what students perceived as a challenge was expressed by Manal who said:

*The teacher gave us some model paragraphs and he asked us to keep them by heart. He divided these paragraphs into three categories: Topics that have positive effect on the individual and society, topics that have negative effect on the individual and society, and topics that talk about advantages and disadvantages of any issue .....*

In reference to the four teachers, all of them have indicated that rote learning, lack of criticality and discussion are socio-cultural challenges that negatively influence students' quality of writing performance. For example, Dr. Lamiaa highlighted the absence of students' critical mind in writing as follows:

*Students are unable to focus on definite things while writing and reviewing their essays because they don't have the critical eye that makes them aware of their mistakes. Even when they correct things, they would correct things that are already correct and miss mistakes. Even when you give them editing checklist to correct mistakes on the macro level, vocabulary and structure, organization, they are reluctant to do it. I also think that this is the effect of the secondary school teachers that forced them to memorise and shut their minds.*

In addition, Dr. Atiyat added that students do not think well or are not used to discussing ideas in the planning stage due to their bad habit of memorization that they formed throughout their pre-university education. In this regard, she said:

*They don't think well before writing any piece of writing. I also think that these writing problems are not only confined to the school and what teachers teach them, but it is more of a socio-cultural problem than anything else. As Egyptians, the society and the culture in which we live don't give chance to discuss ideas, express opinions and to argue for or against certain topics.*

Furthermore, Dr. Mostafa highlighted that the exam-oriented educational system in the pre-university stages negatively impacted students' thinking skills. He expressed his perception as follows:

*.....In addition, they are taught for the exam. They are not taught to think. They tend to memorise pieces of English. They target certain issues and topics that they expect to come in the exam. Teachers also encourage this. So, they come to the English Departments at different universities without any appropriate background to catch up. They are not exposed as they should to the English language.*

Fourth, the Egyptian learning environment was viewed as competitive by both teachers and students. This competitive learning environment is regarded as one of the outcomes of the socio-cultural challenges affecting students' writing in English. Two students and ten questionnaire responses highlighted this challenge. For example, Wafaa said:

*Our university teacher asked us to collaborate as a group to help each other understand what we were not able to understand alone, but it is only me who attended and the majority of the group gave us silly excuses because they don't want to help each other. I think it is the Egyptian culture that is behind these non-sharing attitudes.*

In reference to the culture of not sharing acquired knowledge and skills, Amal said:

*I have a friend of mine whom I asked for her written lecture of the course that was given by our teacher and she made many excuses not to give it me.*

In addition, a sample example of the responses to the open-ended question was very expressive of the same view as follows:

*My parents told me never to give my assignments or written lectures to anybody because they might benefit from your work and get higher marks than me.*

In the same context, three teachers pinpointed the competitiveness of students' learning at the university level. For example, Dr. Esraa sheds light on students' unwillingness to co-operate or work in groups as follows:

*Students feel jealous of each other and this hinders any attempt for peer review. They don't want to show each other their written essays. In addition, they are reluctant to work in groups when the chance permits. Moreover, if they do group work, they don't want to share ideas or comments with each other. This is the influence of the family and school environment which taught them to hide knowledge and progress away from their colleagues.*

Moreover, Dr. Alaa added that students do not want to share or exchange ideas of their topics as follows:

*When I asked them to surf the internet about certain topics just to increase their prior knowledge about the topic, I found out that they hide the articles that they downloaded from the internet from each other for fear of their ideas being copied.*

Findings of the current study indicated that EFL composition writing is undervalued at the pre-university stages in Egypt. This is emphasised by Dr. Mostafa who gave the following quote to advocate his view:

*English writing is not a very important issue in the secondary school; they are asked to write only one paragraph and they are not exposed to the techniques or the skills.*

Composition writing is just one of seven sections in the English exam of the General Certificate of Education (GCE). Based on a personal experience, in the marking process of composition writing, Egyptian teachers of English look for the formulaic expressions they have taught to their students. Once these expressions are found, teachers give students high scores. If these expressions are not found in students' writing, they do not waste their time in reading the written piece of composition, but they give a randomly average score.

There are some psychological, economical, and social reasons behind students' unwillingness to share learning. First, students believe that knowledge is the power by which they can excel over their classmates. Psychologically, students do not trust each other as their ideas might be easily stolen and they are worried about the mark that they will get as well. Economically, due to the limited resources, inability to access the internet, and old library resources, students

compete intensely. Socially, they have not been brought up either at school or at home to share ideas, projects or experiences.

At the level of planning, Dr. Azza showed how Egyptian university students are greedy for higher marks at the expense of the learning culture.

*Moreover, on the level of planning, students don't want to show their outlined ideas for an essay. I think that this is culturally related to the competitiveness of learning. Students are competing because they want to get higher marks and at the same time, they don't want anybody else to get higher scores in the course than them. I have told them that this is not good for their learning, but it can't be solved as they have been brought up doing this since they were young pupils.*

#### **5.4.7.2.1.2 Students' Culture of Reading**

Lack of reading habit is another socio-cultural concern for both teachers and students. Three students and nine questionnaire responses have highlighted this argument. A sample example is given by Rasha who said:

*Also, I'm not used to reading much in general which results in poor prior knowledge about any essay writing topic.*

In the same context, two teachers have shed light on the lack of reading as the source for students' poor prior knowledge. In this respect, Dr. Mohammed said:

*I think students were educated whether at home or at school in a way that inhibits reading outside the curriculum. Students don't read for general knowledge or for pleasure. This is very sad, but this is a reality among Egyptian students.*

#### **5.4.7.2.1.3 L1 Interference in L2 Writing**

Finally, four teachers have referred to the interference of L1 (i.e. Arabic) in students' learning of the English language in general and in EFL writing in particular. For example, Dr. Mohammed said:

*So, I find interference of L1 into L2 and overgeneralisations are very clear as big problems in their writing. For example, one student wrote once, "I cut my beard" to mean I shaved. Another example is "To go to the water room" meaning to go to the bathroom. These are clear examples of literal translations from Arabic into English without using the right words.*

Additionally, Dr. Atiyat referred to students' run-on sentences as a result of their Arabic influence as follows:

*They [students] always write run on sentences without any pause or stops. I think this is due to the Arabic influence on their learning of the English language as we are accustomed to write very long sentences in Arabic, but I keep telling them to write simply and specifically.*

Finally, Dr. Azza indicated that students' repetition in writing is a stylistic feature that they transferred from the Arabic language. The following extract, given by Dr. Azza, places emphasis on this issue: "Also, they use repetition in their writing which may be due to the Arabic influence on their English writing."

#### **5.4.7.2.2 Socio-Political Challenge**

##### **5.4.7.2.2.1 Opinion Suppression**

Opinion suppression was revealed as a socio-political challenge influencing students' writing performance in English. Thirteen students and twenty one questionnaire responses clarified that they cannot express their opinions freely within the Egyptian university educational system. For example, Asmaa highlighted how she is unable to express her view as follows:

*The teacher was very much dictatorial in saying that my opinion as a student writing an essay is not important for her. The most important thing is to develop your ideas into a whole essay. That's why I'm unable to express my opinion freely and clearly. I can express my view in a novel, a play or in a poem in the exam, but not in essay writing.*

Likewise, Mahmoud showed which topics of writing are allowed in the essay writing course and which ones are not as follows:

*Expressing my view in essay writing is a very big challenge for me. She [the teacher] told us that there are three fields of knowledge that you should avoid writing about in the exam: religion, sex and politics. She suppressed our opinions and we have to obey, or otherwise, she would give me a very bad mark that will fail me in this course.*

Apart from that, Ali pinpointed how he is politically unable to express his opinion as follows:

*We are in Egypt. So, we are used to write what is consistent with the policy of the teacher, the university and the whole country. I can state my opinion in general matters such as why the underground is out of order. Politically speaking, we are used to be passive and not active participants.*

In the same context, a response to an open-ended question showed how the cultural view of the teacher as the source of knowledge negatively affected students' ability to innovate and express their interests freely.

*Our minds have been automated to obey what the teacher says as if it were something sacred. We blindly follow what the teacher says because we know that he is the only experienced person in this course.*

Similarly, four teachers advocated that students are culturally bound not to express their opinions. A sample example is given by Dr. Lamiaa who said:

*They are not confident enough to express their opinions. I think that our society and secondary educational system is opinion suppressing. I try sometimes to direct their attention to assume that there other readers to convince them. But they can never forget at they are students writing for a teacher.*

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to provide a descriptive and interpretive analysis of the collected data from different perspectives based on the research questions of the current study. Findings of the thematic content analysis as well as results of statistical analysis have been combined where appropriate to present the study findings integratively and to avoid repetition. Many factors were found to hamper students' mastery of the different essay writing skills. These difficulties and challenges that encounter Egyptian students in their essay writing are emphasised by their essay writing teachers at university. However, students attributed these difficulties to a number of factors, whereas teachers attributed the same difficulties to other factors. There was a mismatch between teachers' views and their observed practices. These inconsistencies will be discussed and interpreted in more detail in the following discussion and implications chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part discusses the key findings of the current study and those factors which have contributed to the different EFL essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student teachers of English: learning factors, instructional factors, institutional factors, and contextual factors (see Fig 6.1 below). The second part of this chapter deals with the theoretical and pedagogical contribution to knowledge and their implications. Firstly, a theoretical model has been devised in the light of the study findings, the reviewed literature in relation to the process and the genre approaches to teaching L2 writing and social constructionism as the theoretical framework informing the current study. Secondly, a pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL writing in Egypt has been proposed. Finally, a number of areas for further research are suggested.

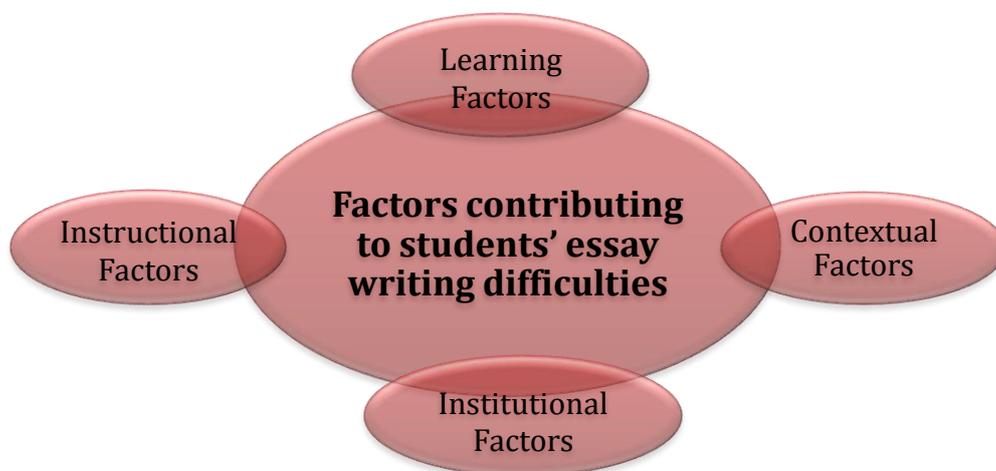


Figure (6.1) Factors contributing to students' EFL essay writing difficulties

## 6.2 Learning Factors



Figure (6.2) Learning Factors

### 6.2.1 Psychological Challenges

The psychological challenges reported by both Egyptian students and their university teachers which affect the learning/teaching process of EFL essay writing include lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence and writing anxiety.

#### 6.2.1.1 Lack of motivation

In relation to motivation, data suggests that some Egyptian student teachers of English are not motivated to write English essays. This might be attributed to a number of reasons. First, they are taught in a large class characterised by physical as well as intellectual distance between teachers and students. Second, Egyptian university teachers tend to use traditional teaching techniques such as lecturing, reading aloud, and book reading; they are frequently indifferent to students' communication in class; and students report negative attitudes towards essay writing as a difficult course. These factors are similar to those reported by Holliday (1996: 86-104) such as "signs of boredom", "passive watching" and "teaching spectacle". Recently, Abdollahzadeh (2010) has referred to the impact of students' passive listening on their learning in general and creative writing in particular. Finally, this lack of motivation can have a strong negative effect on students' development in essay writing as confirmed by Bacha (2002). She further claims that Arabic speaking students are known to face such problems in compulsory English composition courses at the university level. Furthermore, another study

has corroborated that students' low motivational intensity contributed to students' vocabulary problems in writing (Al-Akloby, 2001).

#### **6.2.1.2 Lack of self-confidence**

Another psychological factor is lack of self-confidence. This was clearly stated in the participants' responses as well as their reluctance to peer review each other's written essays. In the same context, university teachers reported that their students lack self confidence as they fear to talk or to express their opinions freely in writing.

This lack of confidence could be ascribed to a number of socio-cultural issues. First, parents' culture of control and power might be a contributing factor as they indirectly implant a lack of self-confidence in their children by marginalizing their opinion and voice in the family. Students fear their parents; this is common in the Egyptian context where many parents are ready to punish their children when the need arises. This punishment could be psychological in most cases and physical in some cases. Furthermore, students frequently have a culture of dependence on someone else to tell them what to do. It is widespread among many Egyptians that they depend totally at home on their parents or elder siblings. Independence in study is an uncommon phenomenon in the Egyptian culture. Another important factor is the unrealistic academic/scholastic expectations that families place on their children's shoulders. Parents might expect their child to achieve high expectations beyond his/her intellectual abilities. In reference to the educational system in Egypt, students in classroom are not given the opportunity to argue or negotiate meaning with their teachers. This might be due to the fear of the teacher's strong authority in the classroom. Moreover, Egyptian teachers tend to attract students to their private tuition where they can get all content knowledge summarised and memorised. All these factors might be the original source of lacking self-confidence among most Egyptian students.

Most learning environments at Egyptian governmental universities do not tend to promote students' self-confidence. This is magnified by the fact that highly confident students are not provided with the learning opportunities at university that enhance their confidence and abilities due to the lack of time and teachers' awareness of these psychological aspects in promoting students' learning as well as scarcity of teachers' feedback on students' writing performance. In reference to students' writing, Tyson (1997) underscored that writing multiple drafts, putting emphasis on the "publication" of students' work, and teacher's comments that focused more on content and organization than on grammatical errors helped them produce better pieces of written composition and develop more self-confidence in writing. Similarly, Albertson (2006) claimed that when students are self-confident/competent in their reading and writing skills, they are able to adapt to new teaching/learning methods quickly. Therefore, a psychologically supportive and nurturing learning environment is needed within the Egyptian context to boost students' self-confidence and alleviate their psychological challenges.

#### **6.2.1.3 Writing anxiety**

Egyptian university students reported that writing anxiety represented another psychological challenge for them while writing. Writing anxiety is said to negatively influence both the learners' motivation (Cheng, 2002) and their academic achievement (MacIntyre et al., 1997) on one hand and their attitudes towards writing (Atay & Kurt, 2006) on the other hand. Research has shown that high apprehensive writers, in comparison with other low apprehensive ones, tend to stop more while composing (Hayes, 1981) and are less concerned with planning the overall structure of their essays (Selfe, 1984).

In the Egyptian context, data analysis revealed a number of factors that might have contributed to Egyptian students' writing anxiety such as lack of written feedback, negative oral criticism, working under time pressure, and writing about difficult topics. Hassan (2001) highlighted that Egyptian students with low apprehension wrote better quality pieces of written composition and had higher self-esteem than those with high apprehension. In addition, Rose (1985) pinpointed that students' writing anxiety is caused by their prior negative evaluations or by more complex psychodynamics. In reference to feedback, Kurt & Atay (2007) showed that the peer feedback group of prospective teachers experienced significantly less writing

anxiety than the teacher feedback group as they received opinions from their classmates to elaborate on, and this collaboration helped them look at their essays differently and lessen their writing anxiety. Moreover, Lee (2006) implied that writer's block that leads to their anxiety in writing may be due to students' writing under time pressure. Finally, it was reported that students with high apprehension selected topics that were more familiar to them and avoided unfamiliar topics (Lee, 2006).

### **6.2.2 Proficiency in English**

Findings of the current study highlighted that Egyptian students' low proficiency in English is an influential factor contributing to their writing difficulties. This is clear in two aspects: first, university teachers reported that their students join university with a poor proficiency level in English. This foreshadows the numerous difficulties students are expected to encounter in the various academic courses in general and in EFL essay writing in particular. Second, students themselves voiced their concern about not peer reviewing each others' written essays because they think that they share a low proficiency level which would not enable them to spot each others' mistakes.

In consistency with the findings of the current study, some researchers argued that proficient learners of English are said to produce good quality pieces of writing (Edelsky, 1982; Larios, Marin & Murphy, 2001; Ito, 2004; Cumming, 2006). For example, Edelsky (1982) stated a number of factors including student writers' L2 proficiency might influence students' level of knowledge and writing in English. In a similar vein, Larios, Marin & Murphy (2001) revealed that L2 higher proficiency participants devoted less time to formulation, concentrated formulation in the central stages of composing in English. In addition, Cumming (2006) proved that second-language proficiency is a significant factor in developing the overall quality of students' written products. However, he added that proficiency did not obviously influence the processes of composing.

### 6.2.3 Students' Prior Knowledge

Prior knowledge plays an important role in one's comprehension and composition (Heller, 1999). Gaining prior knowledge about general issues enables students to compose an essay about a topic in which they might be interested. Ferris & Hedgcock (2004) highlighted that prior knowledge and experience that students bring to the composition classroom are major distinctive characteristics between native and non-native speakers of English. They add that background knowledge and strategic proficiency can be clearly seen in ESL/EFL students' responses to texts and topics, in their reactions to the activities of ESL writing classrooms, and in their familiarity with the rhetorical patterns of academic and professional discourse communities.

Findings of the current study revealed that Egyptian student teachers of English lack topic prior knowledge. This was supported by the views of both students as well as their university teachers. In agreement with this, Langer (1983) claimed that there is a strong and consistent relationship between topic-specific background knowledge and the quality of students' writing. She further found out that different kinds of knowledge were predictive of success in different writing tasks. In the same vein, prior knowledge and writing experiences seemed to affect students' revision processes more than any other factors (Scordaras, 2003). Prior knowledge about written English is thought to be one among other influential factors in students' success (El Mortaji, 2001). Moreover, Reid (1993a) highlighted that "when content and form are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy. But when one or the other (or both) are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic" (p. 63).

Within the Egyptian context, students lack prior knowledge for a number of reasons. First, Dr. Atiyat, one of the Egyptian university teachers, clarified why students lack sufficient prior knowledge about most topics as follows:

*I want to help students gain some prior knowledge about the topic under discussion because they lack prior knowledge due to their unwillingness to read.*

Not only are Egyptian students unwilling to read in English, but also they are unwilling to read in Arabic as their L1. This was confirmed by some students who implied that they lack ideas in Arabic when they start to generate ideas. Reading in L1 or FL is not probably encouraged by most Egyptian parents or teachers. Reading for study purposes is the direction for which most students go, whereas reading for pleasure has a little space in their free time. Another possible reason for this is that teachers do not activate students' prior knowledge before engaging in the writing tasks. Furthermore, teachers might not be methodologically aware of the prewriting phase of the process writing approach.

### 6.3 Instructional Factors

The findings of the current study indicate that the teaching practices used in the Egyptian essay writing classroom at the university level are not the optimal ones. A number of factors discussed here are believed to affect students' EFL essay writing development (see Fig. 6.3 below). Three of these factors are related to the essay writing teachers: qualifications and experience, attitudes towards teaching, professional development; the fourth factor is the course description and assessment.

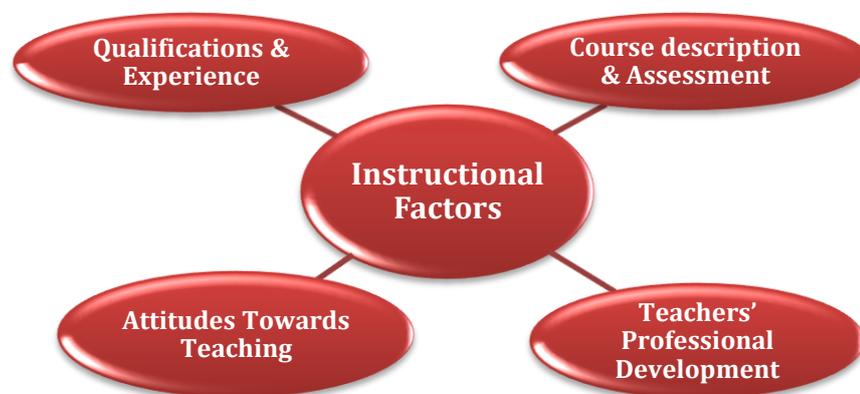


Figure (6.3) Instructional Factors

#### 6.3.1 Teachers' Qualifications and Experience

There are a limited number of university teachers and teaching assistants available to teach at the English department, Faculty of Arts, in an Egyptian university. Neither the teachers nor the teaching assistants hold a teaching qualification. Teaching assistants are holders of either Bachelor or Master's degrees, whereas university teachers are holders of Ph.D. degrees in English literature or linguistics. The lack of experienced teaching staff is a common problem that many universities

(Bijlani & Rangan, 2008) including the concerned faculty of education in Egypt face.

In addition, essay writing teachers are mostly not experienced in teaching essay writing. The essay writing course is assigned to junior members of staff (i.e. teaching assistants) who are recent graduates from the English department, Faculty of Arts. Thus, any teaching expertise is not in essay writing, but rather in English literature or Linguistics, which may explain the traditional teaching methods they use. As Royse (2001) states: "Faculty tend to teach as they themselves were taught" (p. 5). The professional development opportunities offered to Egyptian essay writing teachers are limited due to some reasons, such as their overloaded schedules. This is similar to Ballantyne et al. (2000) whose participants reported that their limited professional development opportunities affect their work efficiency. Therefore, teachers' knowledge of teaching techniques and strategies could be enhanced through ample professional development opportunities at different times that suit all their teaching schedules.

### **6.3.2 Teachers' Negative Attitudes towards Teaching EFL Essay Writing**

According to Güneyli & Aslan (2009), teachers' attitude towards teaching is considered a contributing factor to their success and effectiveness in teaching. Egyptian essay writing teachers' attitudes towards their work is mostly negative, with six participants commenting on it as 'difficult', 'hard', and 'challenging'. This attitude might have resulted from some reasons: large classes, the lack of essay writing syllabus, lack of good collegiality, lack of experience and knowledge and the multi-componential nature of essay writing.

### **6.3.3 Teachers' Professional Development**

Staff development refers to providing teachers with opportunities to reflect considerably on their practice and to acquire new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Holliday (1996) referred to Egyptian lecturers' lack of training not only in classroom management techniques, but also in syllabus planning, design, classroom interaction techniques and teaching methods. This is also true of the lecturers in this study, who, as mentioned above, may not have received appropriate training. Professional development could take place through special programmes or

through encouraging greater teacher collegiality, which is important for two reasons (Jarzabkowski, 2001): it may enhance better working relationships that may yield quality teaching and learning and, it encourages through social interaction a better emotional health environment among staff, which decreases emotional strain and burnout.

Egyptian essay writing teachers are assumed to be developing themselves professionally and academically. However, not all of them do so regularly in their areas of expertise. In reference to post-doctoral research, they are supposed to produce five research papers every five years. They rarely conduct studies that are related to their classroom teaching practices because they are graduates of English literature and linguistics, but not applied linguistics. They lack research productivity for a number of reasons including lack of time, teaching support, collegiality, financial and institutional resources, as well as limited salaries, family commitments and daily routines.

Teacher educators' work as researchers is advantageous for three reasons (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Firstly, teachers can relate research to practice in a significant way that would positively affect teacher way of thinking and teaching practices, and student achievement outcomes (Blomquist, 1986; Halsall et al., 1998; Ross et al., 1999; Fox, 2000; Knight et al., 2000; Simm & Ingram, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2009). Secondly, it will enable teacher educators to question policies affecting teacher education. Additionally, it will lead them to find out new problems continuously and enhance their research productivity (Hong et al., 2007). In this way, they would be leaders in researching their disciplines and pioneers in promoting more critical and creative students.

There are socio-economic reasons that might impede university teachers from reading the latest periodicals and books in their area of expertise: namely, low monthly salaries, high living expenses, the high cost of books and the expensive periodical subscription. Second, they do not have time to do research as most of them work in other private universities in Egypt to increase their limited salaries. Moreover, using deficient libraries (Richards, 1992) that are full of outdated books in different specializations is another reason for not reading regularly.

Furthermore, the post-doctoral research experience that requires them to produce only five research papers in five years, to be promoted to a higher position of assistant professor or professor might contribute to their limited reading. Finally, from a personal experience in buying books for the faculty of education library, the annual limited budget to buy new books is not enough to buy ten books in English at most, in different specializations.

#### **6.3.4 Course Description and Assessment**

Understanding the institutional context of any educational establishment makes us aware of the mechanism within which it works. Moreover, it is important to be cognizant of the culture, the goals and the mission within this institution. The vision of this faculty of education in Egypt reads: “Faculty of Education is a pedagogic and academic institution that seeks to enhance the pedagogical knowledge and its implications in order to serve the whole society and the world as well as formulating the world of education and learning. The mission of the Faculty of Education is represented in developing the different perspectives and making decisions related to formulating the educational human power and developing education at all its stages. Thus, the faculty of education aims to prepare pre-service teachers professionally and academically. It also aims to enhance the educational research to produce pedagogical knowledge”. Moreover, the main aim of this faculty of education is to prepare efficient teachers according to the current educational trends to work as teachers in the primary, preparatory and secondary schools.

Grossman (1990) summarised five general features leading to a successful teacher education course: a sound vision of teaching a specific course; collaboration among tutors, mentors and students; a mutual sense of ownership; proper scaffolded learning; and teacher educators’ reflection about their teaching practices and their students’ learning. I can argue here that many of these features do not exist among Egyptian essay writing teachers at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. First, there is no clear vision for teaching specific courses. However, teachers might have something in mind that is not communicated to their students. Second, teachers are busy teaching which results in having no opportunities to collaborate together. Furthermore, mentor-student relationship is not to be found in most Egyptian universities due to the large number of students and the limited number of staff.

Moreover, teachers do not give students the chance to mutually own learning and teaching which might be owing to not studying teaching/methodology courses. Despite being uncommon, some teachers might be able to scaffold their students' learning using different techniques. Finally, using reflective practice is most unlikely to take place because of the lack of accountability and lack of training on using such practice.

In reference to the Egyptian context, there are other factors related to the course that added to the challenges lecturers encounter in their teaching of essay writing. First, there are neither course description, clear course objectives nor course structure to guide students and teachers. This leads to the varied teaching focuses of the different teachers involved in the writing course, as well as the range in materials selected and used, which include essay writing books, extracts of books, internet articles and essays, grammar extracts, idioms and collocations...etc. These factors result in an essay writing course lacking in coherence, structure and guidance.

According to Fink (2003), a good course should involve active forms of learning, good system of feedback, assessment and grading. The course assessment at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt lacks clear-cut criteria. It is based on the general rules of course assessment set by the Faculty of Education (i.e. 80% of the mark is for the written test and 20% of the mark is based on the year's work). When asked about how they mark students' essays in the final exams, each teacher referred to his/her own marking scheme. None of the teachers has pointed out that they use an assessment rubric while marking students' essays. This suggests that essay writing teachers are rather subjective and arbitrary in their marking schemes.

## 6.4 Institutional Factors

The institutional factors are concerned with issues such as teaching workload, teaching large classes, course duration, resources, and facilities (see Fig. 6.4).

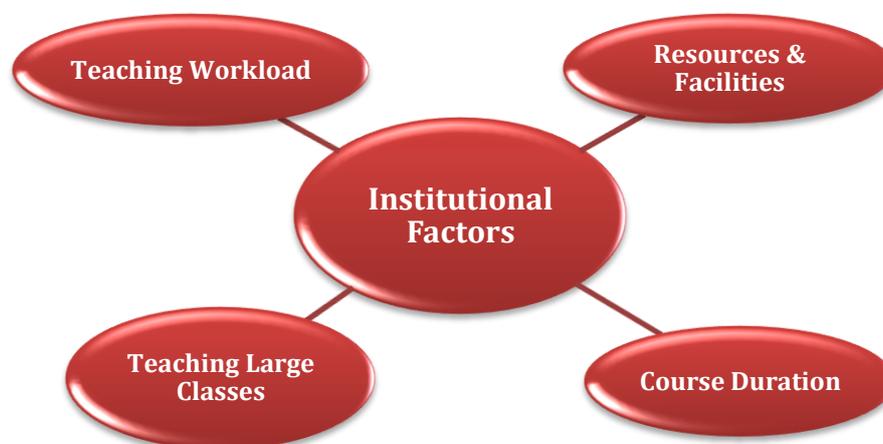


Figure (6.4) Institutional Factors

### 6.4.1 Teaching Workload

Teaching workload is one of the factors affecting essay writing teachers' performance and quality of teaching. Academic and general English language courses are taught by English Department teachers or teaching assistants who are employed by the Faculty of Arts. These are few in number compared with other departments and faculties, but they have to teach many academic English courses for all English departments at the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education. Furthermore, they are responsible for teaching general English courses to all the different departments at the twenty faculties at university, often in different places. This results in over workload. Ramsden et al. (2007) highlighted that an appropriate academic workload is one among other factors that contributes to efficient learning and teaching: when workload increases, learning and teaching might not be as efficient as it should be. In addition, Abdollahzadeh implied that heavy teaching loads might hinder students' involvement in different writing activities (2010). Similarly, the issues of workload and pupil behaviour are two of the most important factors that discourage teachers from joining the profession or push them to leave teaching (Barmby, 2006).

#### 6.4.2 Teaching Large Classes

Teaching large classes is one of the major problems facing pre-university and higher education systems in many developing countries including Egypt. In the Egyptian pre-university education, there are up to 80 students per class with one teacher. At the university level, there are faculties where class size ranges from 450-1000 students per lecture. One reason behind this problem may be attributed mainly to one of the major socio-economic problems that Egypt faces: namely, overpopulation. Experts predict that the population will reach 105 million by 2025 and 130 million by 2030. This problem was recently stressed in Mrs. Mubarak's discussion of the population challenges as they negatively affect the quality of life by diminishing access to many facilities, especially education (Leila, 2010).

The English department classrooms at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt are crammed with 160-250 students in a small class that does not accommodate all of them. This is similar to another EFL context where large classes made the teaching of writing at the university level a difficult job for the teachers (Abdollahzadeh, 2010). This reality was well- described by Holliday's study (1996) in which he visited some Egyptian Faculties of Education. In his findings and observation notes, he implied that Egyptian large classes are problematic in relation to a number of factors. First, he pointed out that the large number of students in one lecture resulted in overcrowding and poor acoustics. In 2008, 12 years after Holliday's study, I found out that overcrowding is still a problem in the classes of the concerned faculty of education, but poor acoustics is no longer a problem as there are microphones and speakers in each classroom. He also highlighted how physical conditions and seating might affect the classroom culture. Throughout my personal experience in 2008, I can claim that this is true of the concerned faculty of education in Egypt where there is a shortage of classes and, even when they are available, the seats are uncomfortable and insufficient to accommodate all students. As one participant in my study said:

*In the essay writing lecture, we used to sit on the floor and the teacher cannot see us. Therefore, we used to either chat with each other or put the headphones in our ears to listen to music.*

As Holliday (1996) claimed, the distance that large classes environment created can result in a loss of rapport between the teacher and his/her students. He also suggested that large classes affect Egyptian students' linguistic ability, which he described as "declining". Both points may relate to students at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt students who have many difficulties in EFL essay writing.

#### **6.4.3 Course Duration**

The lectures on the essay writing course are scheduled to last for two hours a week for each year at the faculty of education. Throughout the classroom observation of the three different lectures, it has been noted that the lecture time is short, ranging from 50-90 minutes, according to the lecturer. Moreover, all teachers combine the two lectures that are supposed to be in different days in only one lecture because they want to find times to teach other courses in other campuses. This reflects the lack of administrative organization and lack of accountability. This issue has also been noted in other international research studies and led to a call for greater accountability and improvement in the quality of teaching in higher education (Ramsden, 1991; Wilson et al., 1997; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Ballantyne et al., 2000).

#### **6.4.4 Resources and Facilities**

In relation to facilities, the participants in this study reported that their classes and labs are not well-equipped to accommodate all students and lack modern facilities. There are additional problems with the learning resources and facilities: the library resources are outdated, the inter-library loan service is unavailable, the photocopying services are unusable, and the dedicated places for reading were rarely available due to the big number of students. Richards (1992) reports that, in Egypt, libraries are deficient mainly because of the inadequate budgets; similarly, inadequate library facilities, resources and insufficient funding were reported among many factors leading to poor student performance and hindering students' learning opportunities and access to resources and facilities (Legotlo et al., 2002; Manjunath & Mallinath, 2007; Oyewusi & Oyeboade, 2009). Thus, it is recommended that adequate library resources and services, physical facilities, supportive reading environment should be available to enhance students' intellectual, cultural, and technical development.

## 6.5 Contextual Factors

Contextual factors or the 'external' factors in the wider context refer to two main issues that contributed to students' difficulties in EFL essay writing; namely, the socio-political context and the socio-cultural one (see Fig. 6.5). First, the socio-political factors entail two sub factors: suppression of students' opinions and lack of accountability. The second set of factors is grouped under socio-cultural factors including students' previous learning experiences, students' reading culture, and L1 interference in L2.

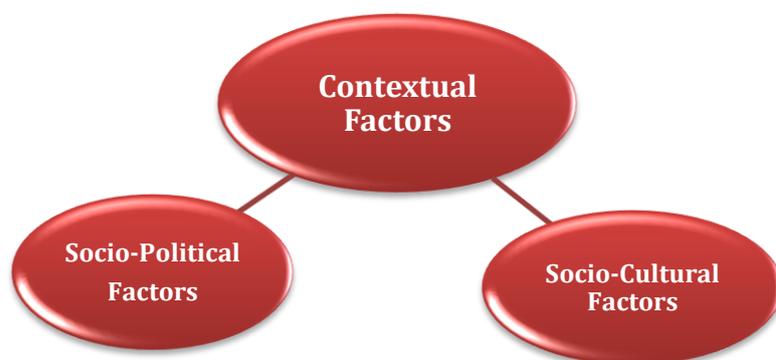


Figure (6.5) Contextual Factors

### 6.5.1 Socio-Political Context

#### 6.5.1.1 Suppression of Students' Opinion

Socio-politically, the Egyptian constitution granted each citizen the right to express his/her opinion freely and clearly. This is well-expressed in article (47) of the Egyptian constitution as follows: "Freedom of opinion is guaranteed. Each individual has the right to express his/her opinion and to publicise it verbally or in writing or by photography or by other means within the limits of the law. Self-criticism and constructive criticism are the guarantees for the safety of the national structure" (Eid et al., 2007).

Due to the lack of freedom to express one's opinion, the teaching and learning in higher education have been negatively affected. EFL essay writing is also affected by this opinion suppression. The effect of this lack of freedom of expression is seen in the essay writing course, for example, in the case where a university teacher asked her students to avoid writing their essays about sensitive issues such as religion, politics or sex. There may be a number of reasons including the difficulty

of addressing 'taboo' subjects, the concerns of the teacher about doing anything against the regime and which might put her job at risk.

In compliance with the above mentioned example of the essay writing teacher, there are two other student-related examples in writing that took place at the pre-university level in Egypt. The first one tells of a final year technical secondary school male student in Luxor called Safwat Ahmed Mohamed who criticised in writing in the essay section of an Arabic exam the Egyptian regime and defended the Egyptian poor people. As a result, the young man has been deprived from continuing his studies for two years. When asked about this, his friends at school said that he is poor and he could not afford to pay bribes or buy gifts to the exam vigilants to let him cheat in the exams like what most of his rich friends did (Gouma, 2008). The second example narrates the story of a first year secondary school female student in Cairo called Alaa Farag Moujahed who criticised in writing in the essay section of an Arabic exam the Egyptian regime and accused the USA and Israel of polluting the environment. Unlike Safwat, the president intervened asking that Alaa's exam paper to be remarked, resulting in passing the exam successfully and being transferred to second year secondary (Shawky, 2006). The above two examples show how dangerous it is to express your opinion frankly in writing. This might result in capturing students' critical and creative thinking skills which are required for better graduates who could lead future generations.

#### **6.5.1.2 Lack of Accountability**

Accountability means "the obligation to report to others, to explain, to justify, to answer questions about how resources have been used and to what effect" (Trow 1996, p. 310). In relation to the advantages of accountability to teaching, it is believed that it promotes better teaching practices and enhances professional collaboration among teachers (Louis et al., 2005).

Accountability is an issue to which Egyptian university teachers need to pay attention. It is believed that they enjoy a visible power in their educational institutions. They are the only course designers, teachers, evaluators, examiners and exam markers. This is the case with all the essay writing teachers at a the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. In addition, second marking of exam papers is done in a superficial and marginal way. University teachers decide what

to teach and how to teach it irrespective of any considerations. This lack of quality assurance and evaluation measures might result in teachers' inappropriate pedagogical decisions about teaching. It is also unfair for students to be taught by teachers who are, to a great extent, not accountable for what they do. This lack of accountability leaves Egyptian university teachers and their students behind the international standards. This claim was supported by other research studies that called for the need for greater accountability and improvement in the quality of teaching in higher education (Ramsden, 1991; Wilson et al., 1997; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Ballantyne et al., 2000). To be centres of excellence for teaching as well as research, universities and higher education institutions require regular and ongoing reviewing of the ways in which they are managed (Umashankar & Dutta, 2007).

### **6.5.2 Socio-Cultural Context**

Some researchers advocate that "culture and language are inseparable" (Hinkel, 1999, p. 6). Supporting this view, it is believed that the development of EFL writing is influenced by a number of socio-cultural factors such as students' rhetorical patterns, expressing social values in writing, L1 transfer into L2 and the incomplete understanding of the socio-cultural background of the target language (Momani, 2001; Al-Khatib, 2001; Lee, 2003; Fernsten, 2008; Uysal 2008; Hinkel, 2009). Similarly, other researchers argue that the cultural, rhetorical and linguistic background of Arabic is presented as variables affecting students' performance in writing in both Arabic and English (Qaddumi, 1995; Mohamed & Omer, 2000). Findings of the current study support the claim that culture has a great effect on Egyptian students' writing development. A number of socio-cultural factors have emerged from the data analysis process to indicate that writing is socio-culturally influenced. These factors include students' pre-university learning experiences, students' reading culture, and L1 interference in L2.

### **6.5.2.1 Students' Pre-University Learning Experiences**

Students' pre-university learning experiences shed light on issues related to teaching in general within the Egyptian pre-university education and EFL writing in particular. Rote learning and memorization, lack of critical and creative thinking, competitive learning environment, and exam-oriented education system were revealed as factors affecting EFL writing development in the Egyptian context. Features of teaching EFL writing at the pre-university level in Egypt such as traditional writing topics and the use of formulaic expressions have also been reported as relevant factors in the current study.

#### **6.5.2.1.1 Rote Learning and Lack of Critical Thinking**

Rote learning is one of the features characterizing the Egyptian pre-university educational system. Students are encouraged to memorise what they study rather than engage in critical and creative thinking processes. Culturally, Egyptian students who memorise what they study are regarded as cleverer than those who do not. This is reinforced by most exams in the different educational stages in most courses which ask students questions that mostly require them to recall what they have memorised during their study. This leaves no place for the development of critical or creative thinking skills. Schooling is thereby driven exclusively by the need to score high grades in national examinations, which determine access to university places. These exams do not only engender a culture of fear and frustration, but also reinforce rote memorization and suppress critical thinking and creative expression (Cochran, 1986; Dhillon, Fahmy & Salehi-Isfahani, 2008).

Another reason might be that memorization is a successful learning strategy with some students. This might date back to the time when children were enrolled in what was called at that time 'Kottab', referring to a place where students used to memorise the Holy Qur'an under the instruction of a religious teacher called 'Sheikh'. Furthermore, many Egyptian preparatory and secondary school teachers lack the knowledge and the skills of using differentiated teaching strategies that help them develop students' critical and creative thinking skills.

Additionally, the gap between what Egyptian teachers learn at university and what they practise inside the classroom might help explain why memorization and rote learning are still encouraged. Experienced in-service teachers transfer their experience to the newly-graduated teachers by telling them what works in teaching and what does not work. From a personal experience as an EFL teacher for one year and a supervisor of student teachers of English at different schools for many years, I was told that I should forget all about the teaching techniques that I learnt at university and follow what experienced teachers do in their classrooms by helping students memorise list of words and grammar rules without understanding them. Furthermore, teachers used to train students to memorise steps for answering exam questions correctly. This suggests that learning that is based on memorization and rote learning is soon to be forgotten. This justifies why teachers' awareness of and attention to using a number of different teaching techniques could help widen their students' minds to think critically and creatively. This might cultivate a better learner who is adaptable to the rapidly-changing education worldwide.

Holliday (1996: 94) also highlighted that Egyptian student teachers of English "were never in a position to negotiate what the lecturer put on the blackboard." This denotes that they are lacking the opportunity to discuss or negotiate meaning in what they learn. This could be attributed to the broader political concept of the so-called 'democracy' where democratic slogans are not put into practice. In other words, the decisions made by the government in relation to certain issues in Egypt are unquestionable. The same thing applies to the small classroom in the Egyptian educational system where 'a democratic class' in which meaning is co-constructed and equal participation is everyone's right, is rare to be found.

#### **6.5.2.1.2 Competitive Learning Environment**

The Egyptian educational system, at both the pre-university and at the university level, is believed to encourage competitive learning environment (Abdellah & Taher, 2007). In an Egyptian classroom, students are ranked according to achievement that is based on competition. This has resulted in teachers' making some challenging exams that allow only smart students to pass and require other students to resit some exams or repeat the whole scholastic year. Students compete due to some socio-cultural factors such as teachers and parents'

encouragement of such kind of learning in classroom and at home. The learning of essay writing in such a competitive learning environment explains the lack of peer review and co-operative learning, as students are afraid of their ideas being stolen and losing their unique thoughts. This is also confirmed by a research study in another EFL context at the university level which reported students' unwillingness to share their writing with their peers in Iran (Abdollahzadeh, 2010).

Egyptian students seem to be the product of an educational system that does not encourage cooperative learning or interaction between learners. Data analysis revealed that students have no access to recent books in the libraries. As a result, they have acquired a number of psychological traits that encourage selfishness, jealousy of other competitors, love of self and monopoly of knowledge. The lack of resources and facilities makes competition more fierce which might justify the lack of co-operation. An example of this can be found in the experience of Prof. Zewail, the Egyptian Nobel Laureate for Chemistry, who narrated on an Egyptian TV programme that he used to hide his laboratory materials and results in a locker when he started his PhD studies in the USA. Astonishingly, when he arrived the next day, he found out that his laboratory colleague has left him a note saying that these are the latest laboratory results to which he reached. His American colleague did this to ask Prof. Zewail to start where he ended and co-operate as one team. This draws our attention to the bad psychological effects of this kind of competitive learning environment that should be eliminated from our Egyptian educational system by looking ahead at how more developed countries with their ample resources and facilities nurture a supportive environment that encourages knowledge dissemination and stresses collaborative work that leads to ongoing productivity and progress.

#### **6.5.2.1.3 Exam-Oriented Education System**

The exam-oriented nature of the Egyptian educational system (Hargreaves, 1997; Hannah, 2008) contributed greatly to the current deteriorated status of EFL writing at the pre-university stages. Both students and their teachers appear to consider that the most important thing is not how to write, but how to get a high score irrespective of teaching/learning. This resulted in private tutoring where students are trained on the different exam-taking skills (Elbadawy et al., 2006).

Exams are the only way reported by university teachers and students to assess students summatively. All courses are mostly evaluated through written tests (20% years' work and 80% written test) with a slight difference in the phonetics course in which 40% of the final mark is based on oral exam and 60 % is based on written exams. The use of traditional essay writing exams among nearly all essay writing teachers at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt contributed to students' poor level in EFL essay writing. Students answer questions on a reading comprehension text and then start to write an essay about one of three essay writing topics.

#### **6.5.2.1.4 Features of English Writing at the Pre-University Education**

Findings of the current study revealed that teaching of EFL writing in Egypt is marked by three characteristics. First, it receives little attention at the pre-university stages. Second, Egyptian teachers of English use a number of traditional writing topics in their English lessons. Third, formulaic expressions (i.e. writing some fixed phrases at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of pieces of writing) are commonly used in the Egyptian pre-university educational system and have been transferred to the university level.

These characteristics of the way EFL writing is taught at the different pre-university stages might be attributed to a number of reasons. First, Egyptian in-service teachers have not been adequately taught how to teach EFL writing well to their students. Therefore, they resort to teaching them formulaic expressions and traditional writing topics. Second, EFL teachers might lack the content knowledge about the different composition writing topics because they do not have time to read in English whether at school, as they are busy teaching, or after school when they start giving many private lessons to increase their limited salaries that hardly suffice their basic needs. Moreover, teachers do not have time to read students' pieces of writing and give them written feedback. Finally, teachers' marking scheme of students' written pieces in the final exams is rather subjective depending on their personal evaluation only.

In addition, teachers resort to commercial textbooks (i.e. books written by experienced teachers of English to accompany the school books, giving students more exercises, tips and exam questions with answers). These books were used by the English teachers since they were students learning English at secondary schools. Therefore, they have transferred their culture of learning to their students by asking them to buy these books and memorise the readymade topics of writing.

Moreover, students' previous use of learning techniques that proved successful is another contributing factor to the current condition of their English writing. They have experienced that the use of formulaic expressions as a successful learning technique guaranteed them high scores in their final English exams. Students resort to using these expressions for two reasons: first, they save their time in the exam because they just recall what they have memorised; second, they lack self-confidence to write in English because they have not been well-trained to do so.

Socio-culturally, colleagues, parents and students regard teachers who teach students formulaic expressions and traditional topics of writing as experienced teachers. Teachers' good reputation is an important factor in distinguishing between good and bad teachers. Those who know how to teach their students to get high scores in English generally and English writing specifically are regarded as good teachers. Consequently, parents seek these teachers to give private tuition to their children to guarantee a high score.

#### **6.5.2.2 Students' Reading Culture**

Findings of the current study highlighted that university teachers have voiced their concern about their students' lack of reading authentic English texts resulting in considerable challenges with regards to topic prior knowledge, coherence, cohesion, style, range of vocabulary, and grammatical structures and punctuation. Moreover, teachers reported that students frequently read the simplified texts of novels and plays. They are not used to reading for long hours and they are not ready to exert that effort. This is likely to impact on English writing because the more one reads, the better writing style and vocabulary one develops.

To highlight how strong and close the relationship between reading and writing should be, Zamel (1992) concluded that the teaching of reading and writing are inseparable. Pedagogically, it was suggested that L2 reading would help improve L2 writing at the beginners and the advanced levels (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Bell, 1998). In line with this, Ferris & Hedgcock (1998) have confirmed that reading for pleasure and mandatory reading affect developing composing skills positively. In reference to the Egyptian context, EL-Koumy (1997) shed light on the importance of reading to enhance students' prior knowledge. He added that the teaching of reading and writing should be integrated to better prepare English teachers to read like writers and write like readers.

There may be a number of reasons for this lack of extensive reading, including lack of encouragement from parents, lack of financial resources, lack of sufficient and well-equipped libraries, lack of interest in collecting books and keeping them in a home library and associating reading with homework or study.

#### **6.5.2.3 L1 Interference in L2**

It has been acknowledged that producing a coherent, cohesive, well-organised piece of writing is a challenging task. This is magnified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts such as the structure, organization, lexis and grammar—differ from those in other languages (Leki, 1991) and particularly in Arabic (Santos & Suleiman, 1993). With special reference to EFL/ESL students in general and Arabic speaking students in particular, learning English essay writing is not easy due to the difference between the two languages in phonological, morphological, transfer, lexicogrammatical and structural aspects that allow problems in students' writing to arise (Ibrahim, 1977, 1978; Mitleb, 1982, 1985; Suleiman, 1987; Chan, 2010). Thus, these differences need to be recognised and managed.

In line with the findings of the current study in relation to Arabic interference in students' English writing, a handful of other studies have revealed how Arabic negatively interferes in EFL writing. First, the contrasting features between Arabic and English have been identified as potential contributors to observed error production and weaknesses in some reading skills, but most particularly in writing

skills (Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983). Second, weakness in mastering one's native language such as Arabic in the current study might account for their weakness in EFL writing skills (Doushaq, 1986). Third, the interference of Arabic in the English writing might justify the errors in English grammar and punctuation as confirmed by Mourtaga (2004) in his study about Palestinian students.

Egyptian students might find English writing difficult owing to some differences between Arabic and English. The cultural differences between Arabic and English speech communities account for the different use of cohesive devices in both Arabic and English (Mohamed & Omer, 2000). Arabic cohesion is marked by being context-based, generalised, repetition-oriented, and additive. In contrast, English cohesion is described as text-based, specified, change-oriented, and non-additive (Ibid). In my view, Arabic affects the cohesion of Egyptian students' writing as reported by students in relation to their many literal translations and uses of formulaic expressions in writing. In addition, writing the run-on sentences and repetition were another two features of Egyptian students' poor writing style.

In conclusion, the difficulties encountered by Egyptian student teachers of English are not only caused by one category of the aforementioned factors, but they are caused by the interaction among all the four categories of factors related to learning, instruction, institution and the other different contexts. Furthermore, there might be other factors that could have caused these essay writing difficulties to students in different international contexts, but I limited the addressed factors to those common in Egypt where students share the same language, religion and cultural background. Finally, discussion of these contexts was crucial in providing the reader with an interpretive portrayal of the factors that might lie behind the deficiency in the Egyptian educational system in general and in EFL essay writing in particular. According to this discussion of the key findings, the next section will shed light on some pertinent theoretical and pedagogical implications of the current study and some suggestions for further research.

## 6.6 Implications and Contribution to Knowledge

This section is divided into two main parts: theoretical and pedagogical contribution to knowledge in EFL writing. In reference to the theoretical contribution, a theoretical model has been presented. In relation to the pedagogical contribution, a pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt is proposed. Some implications arising from this approach have been put forward to overcome the numerous essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student teachers of English.

### 6.6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study has provided further evidence of a number of factors which have an impact on students' EFL writing process. This is in line with the focus on readers and discursive communities as one of the trends in ESL writing theories and social constructionism as the theoretical framework of the current study. The proposed model consists of three main components: the student as a co-writer, the teacher as a co-writer and a reader and the context of the study, each of which interacts with together to shape my theoretical proposition about EFL essay writing in Egypt. Therefore, I now propose a theoretical model that is appropriate to research EFL writing in the Egyptian context, as set out in Fig. 6.6 below.

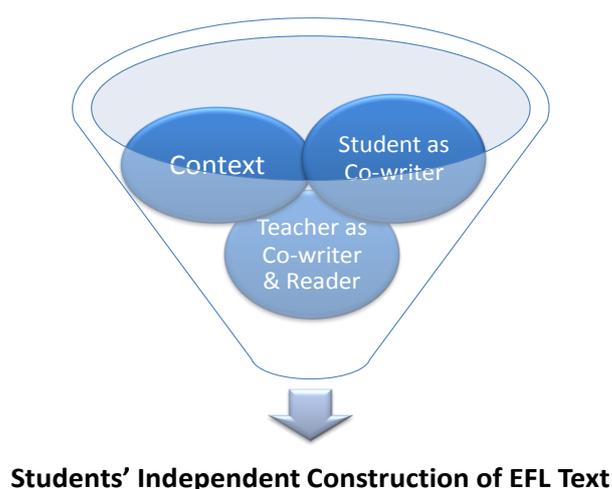


Fig. (6.6) Ahmed's Theoretical Model of EFL Essay Writing in Egypt

From the perspective of the participants, I have come up with a number of elements which emerged from the data. Looking at the diagram, findings of the current study highlighted that EFL essay writing is composed of three dimensions: student as a co-writer, teacher as a co-writer and a reader, and the context.

The first dimension, yielding from the current study, relates to the factors relating to the student as a co-writer. These factors are students' EFL proficiency, students' previous learning experiences and students' psychological challenges. In reference to proficiency, Egyptian students join the English department at the concerned faculty of education with a low level. This might be attributed to the nature of their pre-university exam-oriented education which views the English subject as the only one taught and assessed in English, whereas most of the other subjects are taught in Arabic, students' L1. Therefore, students' proficiency level needs to be taken into account as one of the contributing factors affecting their writing process.

Secondly, Egyptian students bring a number of previous learning experiences to the essay writing classroom. These experiences which include rote learning and memorization, lack of critical and creative thinking, competitive learning environment, and exam-oriented educational system were revealed as influential factors contributing to Egyptian students' EFL writing difficulties. Moreover, features of teaching English writing in the pre-university education in Egypt such as writing about traditional topics and the use of formulaic expressions were reported as relevant factors that affect student's writing difficulties in the current study. Thus, awareness of students' previous learning experiences needs to be taken into consideration when planning and teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt.

Finally, students' psychological challenges in writing were reported by both Egyptian students and their university teachers to be negatively affecting the writing process. These include lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence and writing anxiety. Students feel that they are not motivated to write about different writing topics. Teachers believe that students lack self-confidence in their writing abilities. Finally, students indicated that they suffer from some features of writing anxiety when they start planning, writing or even revising.

The second group of factors relates to the teacher's role as a co-writer and a reader. These factors refer to teacher's knowledge of students, teaching techniques and professional development. There is evidence in the data to show that teachers' lack of knowledge and pedagogical practices impact on students' writing process. First, teachers' knowledge and experience of teaching EFL writing is an issue that is noteworthy. Teachers are not essay writing specialists and it could be assumed that they teach writing in the same way they were taught. They are graduates of English literature/linguistics which means that they are not methodologically qualified to teach writing. Second, teachers are unaware of their students' EFL proficiency as they have to teach students who joined the English department at the concerned faculty of education irrespective of their low proficiency level.

Third, teachers' knowledge of students' psychological challenges in writing should be deeply explored so as to help students overcome them. There is evidence in the data to show that teachers' practices were demotivating, increasing their students' writing anxiety and diminishing their self-confidence in EFL writing. Moreover, teachers' techniques such as lecturing and oral discussion of the most common mistakes in writing are mostly traditional which could be worsening students' writing development. Furthermore, the support teachers offer to their students is scarce. There are hardly any learning opportunities in class. Finally, teachers' professional development is of a serious concern. Teachers' chances to develop themselves professionally are limited. The chances are either very rare and when arise, teachers are most likely to be busy teaching. Theoretically, these teachers-related factors are bound to impact on students' writing development.

If the Egyptian educational system is to improve, a number of questions need to be raised. Writing is part of the whole picture/cycle of learning and the educational experience in Egypt. The issue of teacher effectiveness is not limited to writing, but starting with writing in my current study, I am to raise questions about it. Having looked at the EFL teacher preparation programme at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt in general and essay writing in particular, it is worth questioning the quality of such programmes. Lacking course description, clear assessment criteria, teaching materials, scope and sequence matrix in the essay writing course of EFL teacher education at the concerned faculty of education in

Egypt, there is a strong need for solid EFL teacher education programmes to prepare tomorrow's teachers in Egypt. In addition, the different teaching practices reported in the essay writing course make the quality of teaching writing and the overall proficiency of the future EFL teachers in Egypt other serious concerns that need to be addressed effectively and efficiently. Moreover, there should be a strong link between EFL teacher preparation at university level and primary, preparatory and secondary EFL writing. Furthermore, the need to look at EFL curriculum in Egypt in terms of teacher preparation and pedagogical practices is also another concern that needs due attention.

Within the factors, a third category about context has now been included. As became clear during the interviews, there is evidence that educational, socio-cultural, and socio-political contexts affect students' writing development. Educationally, large classes and traditional exam-based assessments are two elements that can easily impede students' writing development. Socio-culturally, L1 interference in L2 as well as lack of reading in L1 and L2 has been documented in the findings of this study. It is a serious issue that needs to be addressed not only at the university level, but also at the pre-university level in Egypt. Socio-politically, students reported that they have been denied the right to express their opinions freely in their written essays. If these different contexts had been taken into consideration, many of the reported students' EFL essay writing difficulties would have vanished.

## **6.6.2 Pedagogical Contribution**

### **6.6.2.1 Justification of the approach**

Review of the literature on the process and the genre approaches along with the discussion of the key findings of the current study have yielded in the proposed pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt (see fig. 6.7 below). This approach is based on three main dimensions: key findings of the current study, social constructionism, and a synthesis of the process and the genre writing approaches. First, the key findings of the current study are addressed in relation to the instructional practices of Egyptian EFL essay writing teachers, students' essay writing difficulties as reported by students and their teachers with special emphasis on students' contextual challenges that emerged from the data (see section 5.4.7.2). Second, the main tenets of social

constructionism as the theoretical framework adopted for the current study were taken into consideration (see section 4.2.2.1). Third, a synthesis of the process and the genre writing approaches established in the literature and in practice in many EFL contexts but not in Egypt is highlighted in the proposed pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt. Together these three dimensions provide a conceptual overview in the form of the proposed pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt, as set out in Figure (6.7) below. This figure explains students' process of writing that is situated within an Egyptian context which includes a number of factors, in this diagram 6, which impact on that writing process. There is no sequential order to those contextual factors and they may all impact together or individually at different times on students' writing.



Figure (6.7) Ahmed's Proposed Pedagogical Process Genre Approach to Teaching EFL Essay Writing in Egypt.

### **6.6.2.2 Principles of the proposed approach**

According to the findings of the current study, I came up with the following principles. These principles suit the Egyptian context in particular and many of them suit EFL writing in the Arab and EFL context in general. They attempt to find solutions to the various writing problems that Egyptian students encounter whether due to educational, psychological, socio-cultural or socio-political problems.

- Student-driven learning
- Extensive reading of authentic materials in EFL
- Developing writing skills in a stress-free writing classroom
- Shared construction of text
- Gradual development of writing
- Critical and creative writing skills
- Less reliance on memorised formulaic expressions
- Written feedback
- Diversified assessment practices
- Well-equipped and well-resourced classroom
- Freedom to express opinion

### **6.6.2.3 Description and Implications of the Proposed Approach**

#### **6.6.2.3.1 Students' Proficiency**

Data revealed that Egyptian university students join university with a low proficiency level in most English language skills irrespective of their mark in the GCE exam in general and English language in particular. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to expose students to models of the target genre before they start their planning and construction of text. Moreover, it is important for teachers to change their roles in the writing class from teachers to co-writers and readers to help students with their low proficiency level in English.

#### **6.6.2.3.2 Materials and Resources**

It may be possible for essay writing teachers to choose students' teaching/learning materials with caution. In other words, materials could be varied and derived from students' interests in a way that will engage students in what they learn. Therefore, I suggest replacing the teacher-centred topics with a variety of topics from students' choice or interest. Students could be given the chance to search for and read about their preferred genres of writing before starting to plan their essays. This could be achieved through browsing the internet, reading magazines,

newspaper articles or chapters from books. Using the internet will help students increase their schemata about the topic and the genre of writing through listening, reading, watching and critically analysing the information they collect. Discussing and analysing the models of the target genre with their classmates and their teachers will also help be aware of the different rhetorical features required when writing. Once this is done, they can plan their topics of writing easily and smoothly. In addition to planning, encouraging students to write creatively and imaginatively is also important. This will help them get away from the traditional writing topics that could be boring and demotivating and trigger their imaginative and critical talents that need to be explored simultaneously.

If Egyptian student teachers of English are to plan their essays effectively, a number of prewriting techniques that have proved successful in engaging students' minds before writing their essays, could be used. For example, Myhill & Amer (2004) highlighted the use of invention techniques in their study to help Egyptian student-writers generate ideas for writing. They are varied in form, including free association, cubing, or brainstorming, and more structured formats such as lists, or matrices of questions to answer about the topic. Besides, Amer and Preece (2001) have shown that the use of cubing increases students' scores on the various categories of the composition writing test (writing content, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanics). Brainstorming is also a helpful tool in the EFL classroom in generating ideas and promoting students' learning skills (Ike 1990; Bobb-Wolff, 1996; Bejarano et al., 1997).

#### **6.6.2.3.3 Reading Culture**

One of the main problems reported in the findings of the current study is that students are not in the habit of reading in both L1 and L2. Therefore, reading in the proposed approach is paid due attention to increase students' prior knowledge about various issues which will in turn involve them in discussion and critical thinking: a needed issue in the Egyptian community. It is also recommended that students read about their chosen topics and genres of writing before they start their joint planning and construction of their essays. Reading is also encouraged in the drafting stage through peer-reviewing: this will increase students' knowledge about other topics. Finally, in the post-writing stage, critical reading is also encouraged through reading each other's writing posters and commenting

anonymously on their classmates' written essays not to upset them as students might take it personally.

The findings of L1 and L2 literacy research have generally demonstrated that “when content and form are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy. But when one or the other (or both) are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic” (Reid, 1993a, p. 63). This implies that texts and topics of a course should be accessible—cognitively, culturally, and educationally (Ediger, 2001; Moran, 2001). These goals can be achieved by selecting reading materials and writing tasks that allow learners to capitalise on their prior experience. Teachers can likewise devise in-class activities that develop and expand students' schemata.

#### **6.6.2.3.4. Instruction**

##### **6.6.2.3.4.1 Instructional Techniques**

The proposed approach recommends a number of instructional techniques that I think would be valuable for overcoming the essay writing difficulties that Egyptian students encounter in writing. First, topic-based writing (Shih, 1986; Leki, 1991) that is centred on students' own interests and needs would encourage students to write about topics of interest to them. Second, using corpora of written texts (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004; badger & White, 2000) and different monolingual/bilingual dictionaries (Christianson, 1997) would help students with their lexical and grammatical problems as well as increase their confidence .

Third, using model genres written by previous students would help students with the layout and organisation of their essays. It may also help overcome any coherence and cohesion problems in their writing. (Shih, 1986). Moreover, teachers' explicit instruction in the different writing skills (MacArthur et al., 1995; Pressley et al., 1997; EL-Koumy, 1999; Ghonaim, 2005; Lee & Muncie, 2006; Rao, 2007) would help students overcome any stumbling blocks in their writing. In line with this, a number of scheduled parallel support sessions could be run by qualified and experienced essay writing teachers. These support sessions would pay particular attention to training students in the different essay writing skills with which they have some difficulties. This would be organised among essay

writing teachers who would volunteer to repeat the same session three times per semester. It is the students' responsibility to book their names on these sessions.

Furthermore, poster writing (Tyson, 1997; Buchanan, 2010) with a suggestion box encourages students to read and think critically as well as share the learning process. This also helps them produce better pieces of writing and develop more self-confidence in writing (Tyson, 1997). Finally, teachers' discussion of students' posters would help students reflect about what they learn and make learning a memorable experience. The use of instructional practices such as those mentioned above is believed to encourage students' English writing, and help them overcome their fear of criticism and high apprehension to become better writers of English essays (Hassan, 2001; Abdel Latif, 2007).

#### **6.6.2.3.4.2 Opportunities for joint construction of text**

Providing students with opportunities to co-construct text is an important recommendation of the proposed process genre approach as it overcomes many of the psychological problems students encounter while writing. The proposed approach makes use of some joint writing opportunities such as joint planning of text, joint construction of text by the students and their teacher, peer review and poster writing and critical reading. Peer feedback is helpful for students as they received opinions from their classmates to elaborate on, and this collaboration helped them look at their essays differently and lessen their writing anxiety (Kurt & Atay, 2007).

Second language writing students find feedback of all types important and helpful. Three significant generalisations are implied by the findings of previous research (Ferris, 2003). Firstly, L2 writers feel strongly about receiving feedback about their language errors. Secondly, students clearly prefer teacher feedback, whether written or oral. Finally, students feel that a combination of feedback sources (teacher, peer, self) can also be useful to them. Similarly, it is useful to involve students actively in the feedback practices through self assessment and peer review, and taking part in developing assessment criteria for marking written essays (Lee, 2008b). It is highly recommended for Egyptian university teachers to try to explore the value of different feedback modes such as using feedback forms with clearly stated criteria, and other feedback modes like audio feedback and

computer based feedback. Within the Egyptian context, Seliem & Ahmed (2009) have proved that using electronic feedback is effective in developing students' quality of writing. This in turn is believed to enhance their learning experiences.

#### **6.6.2.3.4.3 Teacher Support**

The support essay writing teachers could provide to their students can take many forms. First, introducing and analysing models of the target genres with their students could be useful. Second, in the joint planning of text stage, teachers can explicitly teach students about the different planning strategies - to generate ideas, text structure, and language - and how to use them effectively and make the actual writing more manageable (Silva, 1993). In particular, it is likely that L2 writing teachers will need to devote more time and attention across the board to strategic, rhetorical, and linguistic concerns.

Teachers' more extensive treatment of textual concerns would be of a vital use to Egyptian student teachers of English. At the discourse level, L2 writing teachers may need to familiarise their students with audience expectations and provide them with strategies for dealing with potentially unfamiliar textual patterns and task types they are likely to produce (Silva, 1993).

Teachers can also critically evaluate students' written plans before starting to write. In this way, teachers can direct students to modify their plans to ensure their smooth writing later on. Once students have co-written their first drafts with their teachers, the teacher can provide them with models of the target genres to help them improve their first drafts. After submitting their written essays, it might be suggested that teachers read these essays and provide constructive/corrective feedback when necessary. In the post writing stage, it might be useful for teachers to discuss students' reflection about the posters that they have written and read.

They may need to ask their students to draft in stages, for example, to focus on content and organization in one draft and on linguistic concerns in a subsequent draft or to separate their treatments of revising (rhetorical) and editing (grammatical). In essence, teachers need to provide realistic strategies for planning, transcribing, and reviewing that take into account their EFL students' rhetorical and linguistic resources. Finally, it is recommended for Egyptian essay

writing teachers to use other useful and effective teaching methods that are appropriate for large classes such as interactive lectures, cooperative learning groups, jigsaws, games, constructive controversies and online considerations as suggested by Kelly (2008).

#### **6.6.2.3.5 Diversified Assessment**

According to the findings of the current study, assessment is paid little attention. Therefore, formative assessment is recommended to be ongoing and marked. This could be in the form of assignments, portfolios, individual/group presentations, or poster writing. Giving students a sheet of revision criteria, according to which they can peer-review each other's essays is most likely to be a good idea. In addition, giving students an assessment rubric including all the assessment criteria used might be useful. Furthermore, providing students with a clearly-written marking scheme could help them understand how their written essays are marked. Finally, taking into consideration the teaching materials covered and varying the topics and tasks in the final exam would probably help give a more accurate description of students' improved skills in their summative assessment.

#### **6.6.2.3.6 Teachers' professional development**

University teachers are in need of better preparation to meet their students' needs (Roettger et al., 2007). This preparation could take the form of instruction for entry-level professors, faculty meetings that allow teachers to talk and exchange their best teaching practices, and training in curriculum development, a range of teaching and assessment strategies, and technology. Once the quality of teaching is improved, the quality of students' learning opportunities will improve as well.

Teachers' knowledge of their students, teaching context and practices, assessment, and feedback practices constitutes a major element in teachers' professional identities. In this respect, Carter (1993) highlighted the significance of teachers' knowledge of many aspects especially pedagogical content knowledge and practical knowledge including personal practical knowledge, the wisdom of practice, classroom knowledge and the folkways of teaching. Thus, it would be important for teacher educators' professional development programmes to investigate these various aspects of teachers' knowledge and update them regularly to keep teacher educators in the continuum of ongoing professional progress.

In the same context, Guskey (2003) suggested a number of recommendations to develop university teachers' professionally. First, teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge should be enhanced as they are vital to their effective professional development. Second, providing teachers with sufficient time and other resources are badly needed to deepen their understanding, analyse students' work, and develop new approaches to instruction. The time used in developing teachers' professionally should be well-organised, carefully structured, and purposefully directed. Third, promoting collegiality and collaborative exchange help teachers to work together, reflect on their practices, exchange ideas, and share strategies. This collaboration should be structured and purposeful, working according to clear goals for improving student learning. Finally, evaluation procedures are also stressed to gather regular formative information to guide improvement efforts.

#### **6.6.2.3.7 Wider Context**

The context in which the learning takes place is vital to the development of students' learning processes. The socio-political and socio-cultural challenges seem to affect students' learning of essay writing negatively. The proposed approach attempts to give some recommendations to address many of these challenges. For example, providing students with models of the target genres written by previous students helps increase their self-confidence. Allowing students to choose their own topics overcomes the problem of being constrained by topics imposed by teachers and may prove more motivating. Encouraging peer-review and poster reading and discussion attempts to overcome the challenges of the competitive learning environment and memorisation. Finally, the idea of a suggestion box may be an appropriate cultural alternative to a more direct peer review.

#### **6.6.2.4 Possible challenges of the proposed approach**

Despite the potential benefits of the proposed approach, it can encounter a number of possible challenges that might hinder its use within the Egyptian context. First, the Egyptian educational system might be a stumbling block to using diversified assessment practices for which this approach calls. Second, the lack of funding to make full use of the proposed approach might be another possible challenge. Third, the university could not afford to prepare well-resourced and well-equipped classrooms which might need more specialised teachers and administrative staff. Moreover, lack of qualified staff to teach essay writing using the proposed approach could hinder the implementation of this approach. Finally, it is probable that essay writing teachers might prefer not to use the proposed approach for any reason. Some teachers for example might be resisting change because they want to adhere to the way they have been teaching for several years.

This proposed approach is my pedagogical contribution to knowledge as far as the teaching of writing in Egypt is concerned. However, I do not claim by any means that this is the one size fits all solution to the problem of teaching writing in Egypt. The solution is much bigger than this. It requires much more intervention at different levels. First, essay writing teachers need to be professionally and methodologically qualified. They are likely to need some methodology courses in which they learn how to teach writing. They may also need to be professionally developed by having free time to receive some training courses to update their content and pedagogical knowledge about writing.

Second, the current students at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt are the future teachers of Egypt tomorrow. It is most likely that they are going to teach in the same way they were taught. Even if we improve the quality of teacher education programmes at the university level, most students join university lacking proficiency in EFL in general and in writing in particular. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be some interventions at the primary, preparatory and secondary stages where students are taught the basics of composition writing based on which university teachers can develop students' writing development.

Third, some concepts such as independent study, free reading and shared learning could be introduced at the pre-university level where students can acquire lifelong learning skills. This will take time as students are used to be spoon-fed. However, it is a good idea for teachers of different subjects to spend some time to equip their students with the different study skills that will enable them to be better learners.

At the level of in-service English language teachers, they need to professionally develop themselves in terms of ELT methods and knowledge base. They need to be involved in some training sessions and workshops that could help them update their knowledge base and pedagogical practices. In this way, they could do without the teaching of formulaic expressions and teach students how to write. This will make in-service teachers good sources of updated knowledge that can benefit their students and student teachers at their teaching practice schools.

Socio-culturally, efforts need to be done to encourage Egyptian children and students to read in their first language and to read for different purposes other than study. This could help students generate ideas that they can use when they write. It could be useful to launch campaigns in each governorate to encourage students to go to the libraries in their free time to make them used to reading. This also requires qualified library staff who could make students' use of the library a pleasant experience that motivates them to love reading in different fields of knowledge in Arabic and English.

### **6.7 Suggestions for Further Research**

The current study suggests a number of areas that need further investigation. First, it investigated the current teachers' practices in relation to the different essay writing difficulties that Egyptian student teachers of English encounter. In relation to the cohesion and coherence writing difficulties, conducting a quantitative study to further explore the effect of different teaching techniques on developing students' organisational skills in writing is needed. This will highlight the teaching techniques that could be effective in developing Egyptian students' cohesion and coherence skills in more detail.

Having yielded in a proposed pedagogical approach to EFL essay writing in Egypt, it is suggested to conduct a study that explores its effectiveness. If successful, this approach could contribute to the development of Egyptian students' essay writing skills and overcome the various difficulties that are currently available. It could also be adopted at the pre-university levels.

Some studies have come up with contradictory results about the effectiveness of grammar teaching in writing courses. Hence, it is worth studying this further to investigate the role of grammar teaching in essay writing development in Egypt. The main question that this study could help answer is: Will grammar teaching in the essay writing course make any difference in developing Egyptian students' essay writing skills?

Findings of the current study showed that revision and editing receive very little attention in the Egyptian essay writing classroom. Therefore, I suggest measuring the effectiveness of a number of revision and editing strategies on the development of essay writing. This will indicate the revision strategies that could be more influential than others in the Egyptian essay writing classroom.

Due to the lexical problems that students reported in the findings of the current study, analysing students' vocabulary learning strategies in respect of essay writing development is needed. This suggested study is expected to give an insight into the most successful and the least successful vocabulary learning strategies.

The current study has explored students' perceptions about their written difficulties from different perspectives; therefore, it is worth conducting a study that could analyse samples of Egyptian students' written essays to investigate the different writing errors in their EFL writing. This will help compare and contrast what they say to what they actually write.

In reference to the current study, it has explored students' essay writing difficulties and their teachers' practices. However, it did not evaluate the essay writing course. Thus, it is suggested to carry out an evaluative study of the essay writing course at

the English Department, at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt from different perspectives.

Another study could be carried out to explore the relationship between Egyptian student teachers' learning of essay writing at university and their teaching of composition writing at different teaching practice schools. This will pinpoint the transfer of what they have learnt to their future students. Additionally, this study will reveal the different skills that they have already mastered and those that need more attention.

Teaching creative essay writing to Egyptian student teachers of English is another suggested study. This study is highly recommended as today's student teachers of English are the future teachers of tomorrow who should be able to direct and guide their students to write creatively in different topics. This study is expected to shed light on the different teaching techniques that could be used to develop students' creative writing.

Another issue that is worth investigating is Egyptian essay writing teachers' feedback practices. More specifically, future research can specifically address teachers' feedback strategies of low-proficiency versus high-proficiency students and measure its effect on their motivation, self-esteem and quality of their writing. Moreover, examining students' active role in feedback practices such as self-assessment and peer review is also an important area for investigation. Finally, future research can investigate the feasibility of alternative feedback modes such as audio-feedback and electronic feedback on improving students' performance in writing.

Examining the quality of the current assessment practices of Egyptian essay writing teachers and their relation to developing students' written performance is a suggested area for future studies. It is also worth identifying the rationale behind their use of the holistic, analytical or any other alternative assessment techniques. Exploring the gap between Egyptian university teachers' beliefs and practices of teaching essay writing is an area worth of investigation. This study is expected to

highlight teachers' sources of beliefs, pedagogical practices and factors hindering or supporting any required change.

Another study is needed to explore Egyptian university teachers' professional development from different perspectives: university teachers, trainers and administrators. This study could possibly lead to identifying the factors that hinder or support Egyptian teachers' professional development programmes at the university level.

The findings of the current explored the pedagogical practices of Egyptian essay writing teachers. However, another study is needed to explore Egyptian university teachers' knowledge base in the essay writing. This will help draw a comprehensive picture about knowledge base and pedagogical practices.

### **6.8 Reflection on my PhD Journey of Research**

As an Egyptian student, I came to study in the UK with a belief that I will build on my knowledge, skills and experience that I acquired so far. I did my MA in TESOL in Egypt using the most dominant approach of quantitative research. Since I started studying the MPhil Modules at Graduate School of Education, Exeter University, I started to learn about qualitative research for the first time. I was a bit worried about it at the beginning and it took me some time to understand it fully. I learnt a lot about the Nature of Educational Enquiry, Interpretive Methodologies, Communicating Educational Research and Scientific Methodologies.

Having finished my MPhil modules, I started to think about a topic for my PhD that will sufficiently interest me for three years of study. After few weeks of research and reading, I came up with the idea of investigating the essay writing difficulties of Egyptian student teachers of English whom I teach methodology courses at the concerned faculty of education in Egypt. This topic came to my mind as a result of suffering a lot as an undergraduate student while writing in English. I proposed this topic to my first supervisor who welcomed the idea and started guiding me on how to write a good PhD conversion paper. Few weeks later, I finished the first draft on which my supervisor gave me feedback. It took us a while to reach a stage where he said that it is now ready to go to the conversion board to examine it. The

good news is that the conversion paper was successfully accepted with no corrections.

I went to the library to explore a number of PhD theses to get a rough idea about its structure and layout. I also talked to some PhD colleagues who were in the middle of their PhD or in the writing-up status. After that, I had a tutorial meeting with my first supervisor to show him my PhD outline for the next three years. We discussed it and we reached a consensus after some negotiations. At that time, I was left with a strange feeling about the day in which I see this outline complete. I worked hard to achieve this goal within the time frame specified. I really liked the way I was supervised because it changed me totally from a supervisor-dependent researcher to an autonomous researcher who can explore his PhD topic independently. Once I finished my first chapter, my second supervisor got involved in supervising me. Every time I had a meeting with them, read their feedback on a certain chapter, consult them via e-mail; I was illuminated with new ideas and skills. My first supervisor used to hold a tutorial meeting with me before starting to write any of my thesis chapters and a joint meeting with my second supervisor to discuss their feedback on any completed chapters. I was really lucky to have my two supervisors in TESOL as I learnt a lot from their different views on my thesis chapters. However, their different views were not conflicting, but rather complementary.

During my PhD study, I acquired a number of skills from the four MPhil modules, supervisors' feedback and tutorials, and effective researcher workshops at Exeter University. In reference to the MPhil modules, I learnt how to compare and contrast two published papers of different research paradigms with a special focus on ontology, epistemology and methodology. I also learnt how to critique an interpretive study, how to design a small-scale quantitative study, and how to communicate my research findings, present them in conference, and reflect on them. Finally, I learnt how to make a PowerPoint presentation that is unique, how to analyse data using Nvivo software. In 2010, I presented two research papers at two international conferences: one at Harvard University, USA and the other is at Toronto, Canada.

With regards to the skills acquired from my two supervisors, I learnt a number of other skills. Firstly, I learnt how to read and write critically. In addition, I learnt how to make an argument in a proper academic writing style and how to write cohesively, coherently and concisely. Finally, I learnt how to have a voice in writing using academic caution and hedging style.

From the effective researcher workshops offered at Exeter University, I learnt a number of skills. I learnt how to present data visually, read rapidly, use SPSS to analyse data statistically. In addition, I learnt how to use Nvivo software to analyse qualitative data. Furthermore, I learnt how to exploit the different online and offline resources.

I faced a number of challenges during my PhD study. First, the research culture in the UK is different from the one I used to in Egypt. Due to the lack of resources and facilities in Egypt, I was not a wide reader. Therefore, it took me some time to get into the habit of regular reading in the library or at home. In addition, it took me more time to understand the interpretive research and how to do it because I have never done it before in Egypt. Second, time management was another challenge for me as I was not used to writing assignments and meeting deadlines in Egypt. However, I succeeded in overcoming this challenge while doing my MPhil modules. Sometimes, it was difficult to get my two supervisors in a joint meeting together due to their different academic commitments and timetables. Furthermore, learning to read and write critically, making an argument in a proper academic writing style and producing coherent, cohesive and concise pieces of writing were other challenges. Finally, getting to understand the interpretive methodologies was not an easy thing to do.

In the light of the above mentioned reflection, I think my future research will take a different form from the one I was used to in Egypt. This does not mean that I will give up conducting quantitative studies, but I will tend more to do mixed methods studies to explore different topics in teacher education in general and in TESOL in particular.

## 6.9 Conclusion

The current study investigated the essay writing difficulties and the essay teachers' practices at a pioneering faculty of education in Egypt. Findings revealed that students encountered many difficulties in their essay writing before they even start planning their essays until they finalise them. These difficulties ranged from planning, cohesion, coherence, lexical, stylistic, mechanical, socio-cultural, psychological to socio-political. In addition, teachers' practices have been referred to as mostly traditional and outdated. A number of factors have accounted for these findings: learning factors, instructional factors, institutional factors, and contextual factors. In the light of the findings, the current study has contributed theoretically and pedagogically to knowledge in general and to EFL writing within the Arab world and the Egyptian context in particular. The theoretical contribution is represented in proposing a theoretical model that suits the Egyptian context. In relation to the pedagogical contribution, a pedagogical process genre approach to teaching EFL essay writing in Egypt has been devised.

It is expected that this study will make a change in the teaching/learning of EFL essay writing in Egypt at different levels. At the teacher education level, the current study is hoped to improve English language teacher education in a number of ways:

- a) Providing an understanding of the difficulties faced by student teachers of English in essay writing could help teacher educators in their planning, syllabus design and assessment.
- b) Bringing to Egyptian teacher educators' attention the different essay writing practices in relation to planning, teaching, feedback and assessment of essay writing. This could help them reinforce the good practices and improve the other inappropriate ones.
- c) Developing students' academic achievement in other courses due to their ability to express their ideas in well-organised essays. This will help better prepare highly qualified teachers of English who could write coherently and cohesively in English.

- d) Raising teacher educators' awareness of the contextual factors affecting their students' learning of essay writing. Consequently, they would be able to facilitate their students' learning and eliminate all the obstacles that might encounter their students' learning of essay writing, leading to better learning opportunities.
- e) Helping essay writing teachers to understand students' psychological challenges while learning essay writing which would help them provide the most appropriate support for their students.

At the level of educational research, the current study made a significant contribution summarised in some respects:

- a) Using the interpretive-constructivist research framework could serve as an example for further studies in education. This approach has been totally neglected in Egypt, no previous study having used an exploratory approach to investigate the writing difficulties faced by Egyptian student teachers of English.
- b) Adopting a sequential mixed method research design to combine both quantitative and qualitative research in the form of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation, has not been extensively used in Egypt before and lays the ground for further research.
- c) Adopting flexible research agendas in approaching educational research which is essential for collecting realistic data that defend against the researchers' subjectivity.
- d) Adding to the worldwide research on EFL/ESL writing in general and to the EFL essay writing research within the Arab and the Egyptian contexts in particular.
- e) Using the key findings of the current study as a solid basis for conducting other intervention studies that could help improve Egyptian students' EFL essay writing skills at the university level.

With reference to essay writing curriculum planning and instruction, the current study is potentially significant as it proposes an approach to teaching EFL writing in Egypt which helps curriculum planners and designers take the following issues into consideration:

- a) Planning the course objectives to meet students' needs and interests.
- b) Designing writing tasks that suit students' different proficiency levels.
- c) The diversity in the choice of teaching materials to be used with EFL students in the essay writing classroom.
- d) The different EFL essay writing teaching techniques.
- e) The available opportunities for collaborative learning/writing such as pair work and group work.
- f) Paying due attention to the different socio-cultural and psychological issues in planning and teaching essay writing.
- g) The varied feedback practices that could be used in the essay writing classroom.
- h) The multiple assessment practices available at the different stages of teaching essay writing.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix (1)**

#### **The Preliminary Essay Writing Questionnaire**

##### **Introduction**

This questionnaire is designed with the aim of investigating the EFL essay writing difficulties of student teachers of English. I kindly request you to answer this questionnaire fully. All the answers you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

Please respond to the following statements by putting a tick (√) into the box that best expresses your opinions about EFL essay writing.

Categories	No	Statements	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Pre Writing Stage	1	I plan my essay using pre writing activities such as brainstorming, webbing, semantic mapping ...etc.					
	2	The topics I write about express my own interest.					
	3	I share the tutor in the choice of topics before the course starts.					
	4	I'm given a copy of the essay writing assessment criteria and writing rubric.					
	5	I'm taught how to write the different parts of an essay (i.e. introduction, body and conclusion).					
	6	I'm taught how to write different genres of essays (i.e. descriptive, expository, argumentative, and narrative).					
	7	I'm taught how to organise my essay coherently through well-written examples.					
	8	I'm taught how to organise my essay cohesively through well-written examples.					
	9	I'm given a copy of the self-correction code and know how to use it.					
	10	I'm given a copy of peer editing worksheet.					
	11	I'm given a handout of the punctuation and spelling rules					
During Writing Stage	12	I use dictionaries to help me while writing					
	13	I get formative feedback during my essay writing					
	14	I use the computer to assist me in editing the essay (i.e. word processor, spelling checker...etc)					
	15	I use dialogue journals to comment about my learning and ask my tutor questions.					
	16	I use the handout of the punctuation and spelling rules.					
	17	My tutor gives mini-lessons on aspects of difficulty in writing					
	18	My tutor uses Modelling strategy to teach us how to write well.					
Post-Writing Stage	19	I get immediate tutor's feedback after writing my essay					
	20	My classmate reviews my essay.					
	21	My tutor holds individual conferencing to comment on my essay.					
	22	My tutor discusses the most common essay writing mistakes among the classmates in a group conference.					
	23	I use punctuation and mechanics guide after writing					
	24	I collect all my marked pieces of essay writing in a portfolio till the end of the year.					
	25	My portfolio is assessed at the end of the course.					
Classroom Organization and Management	26	I practice essay writing once a week					
	27	Desks are arranged in a way that allows pair and group discussion					
	28	My essays are peer edited					
	29	My essays are discussed among group					
	30	My tutor uses classroom lecturing to teach me how to write essays					
	31	My tutor uses classroom discussion to teach me how to write essays					
Instructional Aids	32	My tutor uses chalk board and white board					
	33	My tutor uses Audio Aids (cassette recorder tapes)					
	34	My tutor uses Visual Aids (transparencies)					
	35	My tutor uses Audio-visual aids (television, videos and computers)					
	36	My tutor uses Peripheral Aids (Aids that are hung on the classroom wall).					
	37	My tutor uses computer technologies such as e-mails and chat rooms to answer my queries.					

## **Appendix (2)**

### **Students' Questionnaire**

Dear Students,

The aims of the current study are to investigate the focuses of teaching/learning essay writing at your faculty of education; to investigate the different teaching practices used in the essay writing course and; to explore the essay writing challenges that you face when you write your essays in English. There are a number of questions, grouped into four sections: the focuses of teaching essay writing, the essay writing teachers' practices, and the essay writing challenges and difficulties. I would be grateful if you would answer this questionnaire fully. All the information you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

#### **The researcher**

Abdel Hamid Ahmed

PhD Candidate,

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**Section (A): Focuses of Teaching and Learning Essay Writing**  
**How often does your teacher focus on each of the following in his/her teaching of Essay Writing?**

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
1	English Grammar					
2	Idioms and collocations					
3	Essay structure and layout					
4	Theoretical knowledge of essay writing					
5	Analysis of written essays					
6	Activating your prior knowledge of the topics of writing					
7	Topics of writing					
	If you would like to add any other focuses, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- ----- -----					

**Section (B): Essay Writing Teachers' Practices**  
**How often does your essay writing teacher do each of the following procedures?**

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
8	select appropriate teaching materials					
9	activate your prior knowledge of the topic					
10	use brainstorming					
11	use topic-based teaching of writing					
12	use lecturing					
13	give you oral feedback					
14	give you written feedback					
16	hold a whole class discussion to pinpoint the most common mistakes in written essays					
17	allow you to peer-review each other's work					
18	assess your writing skills before the start of the course					
19	assess your written work during the course					
20	ask you to self-assess your written essay					
21	mark written essay according to a list of criteria					
	If you would like to add any other practices, please do so in the space below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

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**Section (C): Essay Writing Difficulties**

This part of the questionnaire asks you to respond to the following phrases related to the difficulties that you face in the essay writing course. This section is divided into six sub-sections: prewriting difficulties, coherence difficulties, cohesion difficulties, stylistic difficulties, lexical difficulties, technical difficulties and revision and editing practices. Think about your essay writing process and choose the response that best suits your opinion to each item. Please tick (✓) the response that best suits your opinion.

**I) Prewriting Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to you while writing your essay?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
22	Brainstorming the topic of writing					
23	Generating relevant and consistent ideas to my topic					
24	Planning interesting and relevant topics					
25	Planning unfamiliar topics					
	If you would like to add any other difficulties that you face in the prewriting stage, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**II- Coherence Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to you while writing your essay?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
26	Writing a good introduction to the essay					
27	Writing a good thesis statement to the essay					
28	Writing a good topic sentence for essay paragraphs					
29	Writing relevant topic sentences to the thesis statement					
30	Developing topic sentences into complete paragraphs					
31	Expressing each main controlling idea in ONE paragraph only					
32	Writing a good concluding sentence for each paragraph					
33	Writing a good conclusion to the essay					
	If you would like to add any other coherence difficulties that you face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- -----					

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### III- Cohesion Difficulties

How difficult are the following to you while writing your essay?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
34	Linking sentences and paragraphs using appropriate cohesive devices					
35	Using reference ties in their writing					
36	Using substitution to make the written text cohesive					
37	Using ellipsis smoothly while writing in English					
38	Using genre related cohesive ties in English writing					
39	Using cohesive ties that in semantically appropriate sentences					
	If you would like to add any other cohesion difficulties that you face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### V- Stylistic Difficulties

How difficult are the following to you in writing your essay?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
40	Writing in a clear and simple style					
41	Writing in a narrative style					
42	Writing in a descriptive style					
43	Writing in an argumentative style					
44	Writing in an expository style					
	If you would like to add any other stylistic difficulties that you face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**VI- Lexical Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to you in writing your essay?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
45	Using the most appropriate vocabulary in writing					
46	Using word synonyms in English writing					
47	Using word antonyms in English writing					
48	Using idioms and word collocations in writing correctly					
	If you would like to add any other lexical difficulties that you face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**VII- Technical Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to you in writing your essay?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
49	Writing grammatically correct sentences					
50	Applying the correct punctuation rules in writing					
51	Writing correctly spelled words					
	If you would like to add any other technical difficulties that you face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**VIII- Revision & Editing Practices**  
**How often do you do each of the following?**

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
52	Revise the coherence of writing					
53	Revise the cohesion of writing					
54	Revise the unity of writing					
55	Revise the clarity of writing style					
56	Revise the word choice of writing					
57	Correct any grammatical mistakes in writing					
58	Spot any punctuation errors and correcting them					
59	Correct spelling mistakes after writing					
	If you would like to add any other revision and editing practices, please do so in the space below. ..... ..... ..... .....					

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Would you please fill in the following personal details?

Name:..... (Optional)

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Grade:.....

E-mail:.....

Mobile No: .....

## **Appendix (3)**

### **Teachers' Questionnaire**

Dear Teachers,

The aims of the current study are to investigate the focuses of teaching/learning essay writing at your faculty of education; to investigate the different teaching practices used in the essay writing course and; to explore the essay writing difficulties that you face your students when they write their essays in English. There are a number of questions, grouped into three parts: focuses of essay writing teaching, teachers' practices, and essay writing difficulties. I would be grateful if you would answer this questionnaire fully. All the information you provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. Thanks very much in advance for your help and collaboration.

#### **The researcher**

Abdel Hamid Ahmed

PhD Candidate,

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**Section (A): Focuses of Essay Writing Teaching**

**How often do you focus on each of the following in your teaching of Essay Writing?**

Please tick (√) the response that best suits your opinion.

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
1	English Grammar					
2	Idioms and collocations					
3	Essay structure and layout					
4	Theoretical knowledge of essay writing					
5	Analysis of written essays					
6	Activating your prior knowledge of the topics of writing					
7	Topics of writing					
	If you would like to add any other focuses, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**Section (B): Essay Writing Teachers' Practices**

**How often do you do each of the following procedures?**

Please tick (√) the response that best suits your opinion.

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
8	select appropriate teaching materials					
9	activate your students' prior knowledge of the topic					
10	use brainstorming					
11	use topic-based teaching of writing					
12	use lecturing					
13	give your students oral feedback					
14	give your students written feedback					
16	hold a whole class discussion to pinpoint the most common mistakes					
17	allow students to peer-review each other's work					
18	assess your students' writing skills before the start of the course					
19	assess your students' written work during the course					
20	ask students to self assess their written essay					
21	mark written essay according to a list of criteria					
	If you would like to add any other practices, please do so in the space below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**Section (C): Essay Writing Difficulties**

This part of the questionnaire asks you to respond to the following phrases related to the challenges that your students face in the essay writing course. This section is divided into six sub-sections: prewriting difficulties, coherence difficulties, cohesion difficulties, stylistic difficulties, lexical difficulties, technical difficulties and revision and editing practices.

Please tick (√) the response that best suits your opinion.

**I) Prewriting Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to your students while writing their essay?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
22	Brainstorming the topic of writing					
23	Generating relevant and consistent ideas to my topic					
24	Planning interesting and relevant topics					
25	Planning unfamiliar topics					
	If you would like to add any other difficulties that your students face in the prewriting stage, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**II- Coherence Difficulties**

**How difficult are the following to your students while writing their English essays?**

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
26	Writing a good introduction to the essay					
27	Writing a good thesis statement to the essay					
28	Writing a good topic sentence for essay paragraphs					
29	Writing relevant topic sentences to the thesis statement					
30	Developing topic sentences into complete paragraphs					
31	Expressing each main controlling idea in ONE paragraph only					
32	Writing a good concluding sentence for each paragraph					
33	Writing a good conclusion to the essay					
	If you would like to add any other coherence difficulties that your students face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### III- Cohesion Difficulties

How difficult are the following to your students while writing their English essays?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
34	Linking sentences and paragraphs using appropriate cohesive devices					
35	Using reference ties in their writing					
36	Using substitution to make the written text cohesive					
37	Using ellipsis smoothly while writing in English					
38	Using genre related cohesive ties in English writing					
39	Using cohesive ties that in semantically appropriate sentences					
	If you would like to add any other cohesion difficulties that your students face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### IV- Stylistic Difficulties

How difficult are the following to your students in writing their essays?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
40	Writing in a clear and simple style					
41	Writing in a narrative style					
42	Writing in a descriptive style					
43	Writing in an argumentative style					
44	Writing in an expository style					
	If you would like to add any other stylistic difficulties that your students face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### V- Lexical Difficulties

How difficult are the following to your students in writing their essays?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
45	Using the most appropriate vocabulary in writing					
46	Using word synonyms in English writing					
47	Using word antonyms in English writing					
48	Using idioms and word collocations in writing correctly					
	If you would like to add any other lexical difficulties that your students face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### VI- Technical Difficulties

How difficult are the following to your students while writing their essay?

No.	Item	Very Difficult (5)	Difficult (4)	Neither difficult nor easy (3)	Easy (2)	Very easy (1)
49	Writing grammatically correct sentences					
50	Applying the correct punctuation rules in writing					
51	Writing correctly-spelled words					
	If you would like to add any other technical difficulties that your students face in writing, please do so in the space provided below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

### VII- Revision & Editing Practices

How often do your students do each of the following?

No.	Item	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Rarely (2)	Never (1)
52	Revising the coherence of writing					
53	Revising the cohesion of writing					
54	Revising the unity of writing					
55	Revising the clarity of writing style					
56	Revising the word choice of writing					
57	Correcting any grammatical mistakes in writing					
58	Spotting any punctuation errors and correcting them					
59	Correcting spelling mistakes after writing					
	If you would like to add any other revision practices, please do so in the space below. ----- ----- ----- -----					

**DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

**Would you please fill in the following personal details?**

Name:..... (Optional)

Age:.....

Gender:.....

Grade:.....

E-mail:.....

Mobile No: .....

## Appendix (4)

### Students' Semi-Structured Interview

#### Categories of Enquiry:

- A. Your experience/memories of learning essay writing
- B. Essay writing teaching practices
- C. Essay writing difficulties

The interview has been designed to further explore some of the categories of enquiry from the questionnaire in more depth. This interview aims at getting your spontaneous views and perceptions about the Essay writing challenges and difficulties that you encounter in your learning of the essay writing course.

#### A) Your Experience/Memories of Learning Essay Writing Course

Q1. Can you tell me about your experience/memories in learning how to write English composition/essays?

- Do you like to write in English? Why? Why not?
- What are the things that you like most about writing in English?
- What are the things that you don't like about writing in English?
- Did anyone encourage you to improve your writing skills in English?
- What are the topics that you like to write about?
- Do you write about topics outside the curriculum?

#### B) Essay Writing Teaching Practices

Q2. What do you think is your teacher's focus in teaching essay writing?

Q3. What are the teaching practices that your essay writing teachers do in class?

Q4. What kind of teacher support do you receive in the essay writing course?

Q5. What kind of feedback do you receive?

**Probes.** *Oral/Written - formal/Informal – Tutor's Comments- Peer-Review-*

*Dialogue Journals Individual/Pairs/Group/Whole Class-Justified/Unjustified Feedback.*

Q6. Is the feedback you receive corrective or constructive?

**Probes.** *Correction focused or suggesting improvements, changes, rather than informing you of what is wrong.*

Q7. How do you feel about the feedback given?

**Probes.** *Satisfied- needs change – Unsatisfied.*

Q8. What are the assessment practices used by your teacher in the essay writing course?

**Probes.** *Diagnostic Assessment- Formative Assessment – Summative Assessment Self assessment- Other assessment techniques.*

Q9. What criteria are used for the course assessment?

**Probes.** *No Criteria, General Guidelines, Essay Writing Rubric.*

### **C) Essay Writing Difficulties**

Q10. Which stage is most difficult in writing an essay – the planning, writing or reviewing stage?

Q11. What Difficulties do you encounter in your English writing?

**Probes.** (1) Difficulties in planning your essay- *Essay Structure – Ideas Generation – Mind Mapping*

**Probes.** (2) Difficulties while developing your essay:  
*Cohesion – Coherence – Style – Voice - Language Use – Mechanics- Audience*

**Probes (3)** Difficulties while revising and editing your essay:

*Cohesion – Coherence – Style – Voice - Language Use – Mechanics*

## Appendix (5) Teachers' Semi-Structured Interview

### Categories of Enquiry:

- A) Experience in teaching essay writing
- B) Teaching practices
- C) Essay writing difficulties

The interview has been designed to further explore some of the categories of enquiry from the questionnaire in more depth. Categories A, B, C and D have been based on the questionnaire's questions. This interview aims at getting your detailed views and perceptions about the Essay writing challenges and difficulties encountering your students of English.

### A) Experience in Teaching Essay Writing

Q1. Can you tell me about your experience in teaching essay writing?

**Probes:** - How long have you been teaching this course?

- Do you like teaching this course?
- What is it that you like most about teaching this course?
- What is it that you don't like about this course?

### B) Teaching Practices

Q2. What do you think is the focus of teaching essay writing?

Q3. Can you explain your teaching approach in the essay writing course?

Q4. What kind of teacher support do you give to your students in this course?

Q5. What kind of feedback do you give?

**Probes.** *Oral/Written - formal/Informal –Comments - Peer-Review- Dialogue Journal- Individual/Pairs/Group/Whole Class- Justified/Unjustified Feedback.*

Q6. Is the feedback you give corrective or constructive? Why?

**Probes.** *Corrective- Constructive- Critical.*

Q7. How do you feel about the feedback given?

**Probes.** *Satisfied- needs change – Unsatisfied.*

Q8. What are your assessment practices in the essay writing course?

**Probes.** *Diagnostic Assessment- Formative Assessment – Summative Assessment Self assessment- New assessment techniques*

Q9. What criteria do you use to assess students' written essays?

**Probes.** *General Guidelines, Essay Writing Rubric.*

### **C) Essay Writing Difficulties**

Q10. Which stage do you think is most difficult to your students in writing an essay?

– The prewriting, writing or reviewing stage?

Q11. What Difficulties do you think students encounter in their writing?

**Probes.** (1) Difficulties in planning their essays:

*Essay Structure – Ideas Generation – Mind Mapping*

**Probes.** (2) Difficulties in developing their essays:

*Cohesion – Coherence - Language Use – Mechanics*

**Probes** (3) Difficulties in revising and editing their essays:

*Cohesion – Coherence - Language Use – Mechanics*

## Appendix (6)

### Semi-Structured Observation Sheet

<b>Grade:</b> .....	<b>Duration of the lecture:</b> .....
<b>Place of the lecture:</b> .....	
<b>Objective of the lecture:</b> .....	
<b>Teaching/ learning Materials:</b> .....	

No	Main Categories of Observation	Sub-categories	Descriptive Notes	Preliminary Analytic notes
1	Focuses of teaching essay writing			
2	Essay writing teachers' practices	a) Planning		
		b) Teaching Techniques		
		c) Classroom Interaction		
		c) Feedback Practices		
		d) Assessment Practices		
3	Essay Writing Difficulties			
4	Unexpected emerging events			

**Appendix (7)**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Graduate School of Education**

**University of Exeter**

I have read and understood the research aims and purposes. I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw my participation at any time. I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me. All the information I provide will be confidential and for study purposes only. I am also aware that my participation in the study will be anonymous.

(Signature of participant) ..... (Date).....

(Printed name of participant) .....

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher.

Contact phone number of researcher(s): 0103616509

If you have any concerns about the research that you would like to discuss, please contact: Mr. Abdel Hamid Ahmed                      E-mail: aha202@exeter.ac.uk

## Appendix (8)

### Idioms and Collocations Handout

#### Compound Adjectives:

Describing people: like:

{well known, well off, good looking, easy going, a short sleeved, a brand new}

"Well" and "badly"

-{A well organised, well equipped, well written, well known, well paid}

-{badly behaved, badly dressed}

-A" five minute" walk

{ten minute walk, four star hotel, twenty pound note, two hour delay, ten year old girl, fifty euro fine}

Common compounds

{part time, full time, right handed, left handed, first class, second hand}

#### Collocation

##### Verb + noun

Star {a car, a lesson}

Tell {a story, a joke, the truth}

Miss {a person ,a lesson}

Get on a bus\ get off a bus

Waste time /money

##### Adjective +noun

A soft {drink, voice}

Dry {wine ,weather}

Heavy {traffic, rain, smoker}

A great {success, time}

A strong accent/ a slight accent

A strong coffee/ a weak coffee

Hard work

A hard question

##### Adverb +adjective

-terribly sorry to bother you

- well aware of the problem

-vitally important

-fast a sleep

-wide a wake

##### Idioms and fixed expressions

-changed my mind

-getting nowhere

-take it in turn

-keep an eye on

- a late night /an early night

- all over the place

- make it

- feel like + ing

-get rid of  
-on the tip of my tongue

- get on my nerves

### **Pairs of idioms**

on the one hand /on the other hand  
in the short term /in the long term  
in theory /in practice

### **Common idioms:**

( hang on ,what's up, never mind, if you like, go a head, make up your mind, I haven't a clue, It's up to you)

### **Verbs or Adjectives + prepositions**

#### **1) Verb + preposition: like**

"listen to , agree with, depends on, suffers from, get married to, apologise for, applied for, waiting for, worry about, satisfied with, complained to- about, spend on, belong to, translate into, thinking of"

#### **2) Prepositions that change the meaning:**

shouted to /shouted out  
threw to / threw at

#### **3) Adjectives + preposition**

-good at / bad at  
-afraid of  
- keen on  
- similar to / different from  
-interested in  
- surprised at or by  
- aware of  
- tired of  
- full of  
- wrong with

### **Prepositions +noun**

#### **-common patterns**

- a book by / a song by / a film by  
-on the radio / on TV/ on the phone /in the news paper  
-for a walk/ for a swim / for a drive /for a run  
- in the morning / in the afternoon /in the evening/ at night  
-by car /by train /by plane /by bus / on foot

#### **-Fixed expressions**

-by mistake  
-by myself / on my own  
-made my hand  
- on strike  
-by chance  
-on holiday

- out of work
- in love with
- on fire
- in a hurry
- by accident
- on purpose

(the difference between "in time" and "on time")

(the difference between "in the end" and "at the end")

(the difference between "in business" and "on business")

(the difference between "in a moment" and "at the moment")

*"\_Expressions for greetings, farewells and special expression"*

*-"expressions for special situations:"*

-excuse me      -sorry      -cheers

-good luck      -bless you

*- things we make: "a mistake, a meal, money, friends, a decision, a noise, progress, a difference"*

*- things we do: "homework, the housework, a subject, a course, the shopping, research, sb a favour, well, something/ anything /nothing"*

*- things we take: "an exam, a photo, a break, a decision, a shower, a bus / train / plane /taxi, periods of time, a seat, time off"*

## **Appendix (9)**

### **Revision/Editing Checklist**

Dear Students,

Before submitting any of your first or final drafts, please make sure you have thoroughly checked each of the following questions stated in the checklist below:

#### **I- Structure & Layout**

- 1- Does your essay have the following structure:
  - a) Introductory paragraph
  - b) 2-5 Developmental paragraphs
  - c) Conclusion

#### **II- Coherence & Unity**

Have you used any of the following to make your essay coherent?

- a) a good introduction to the essay
- b) a good thesis statement
- c) a number of topic sentences that are relevant to my thesis statement
- d) a good topic sentence for each paragraph in my essay
- e) logically developed paragraphs
- f) expressing each main idea in one paragraph only (Paragraph Unity)
- g) a good concluding/transitional sentence for each of the developmental paragraphs
- h) an effective conclusion--one that emphasises the main idea and provides a sense of completeness?

#### **III- Cohesion**

Have you used any of the following to make your essay cohesive?

- a) different cohesive ties
- b) reference ties (Pronouns, demonstratives, comparatives, definite articles...etc)
- c) substitution /ellipsis

#### **IV- Mechanics & Accuracy**

- 1- Are your sentences free from grammatical mistakes?
- 2- Have you corrected all your punctuation mistakes?
- 3- Have you checked all your spelling mistakes?

## **V- Style & Lexis**

1. Is your essay written in a clear style?
2. Is your essay written in a proper academic style by avoiding the use of slang or informal language?
3. Are the words in your essay clear and precise?
4. Do you use a variety of repertoire?
5. Does your essay maintain a consistent tone?
6. Are your paragraphs balanced in length?

## Appendix (10) Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



School of Education and Lifelong Learning

### Certificate of ethical research approval

**STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS**  
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, then have it signed by your supervisor and by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guides.php> and view the School's statement in your handbooks.

---

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter).  
**DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

---

**Your name:** Abdelhamid Ahmed

**Your student no:** 560026858

**Degree/Programme of Study:** PhD

**Project Supervisor(s):** 1- Dr. Salah Troudi  
2- Dr. Jill Cadorath

**Your email address:** A.H.Ahmed@ex.ac.uk

**Tel:** 075151 23341

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**Title of your project:**

Investigation into the EFL Writing Challenges of Egyptian Student Teachers of English: Implications for Pre-Service Teacher Education (Curriculum Planning and Design)

**Brief description of your research project:**

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
last updated: September 2007

EFL essay writing of Egyptian student teachers of English has been undervalued resulting in encountering some challenge. Taking the EFL writing needs into consideration, the proposed study will attempt to (1) explore Egyptian EFL student teachers' views about the challenges posed by their essay writing learning experiences, (2) explore Egyptian EFL lecturers' views about the challenges of teaching and assessing essay writing, (3) develop a suggested framework to overcome the challenges of EFL student teachers in their essay writing learning/teaching (4) provide implications for EFL pre-service teacher education programmes.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

The participants of this study will be eighty third year Egyptian student teachers of English at Helwan Faculty of Education, and ten essay writing lecturers at Helwan Faculty of Arts (as the Faculty of Education does not appoint essay writing lecturers) in Egypt. These lecturers will be selected according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility (Silverman, 2001). That is to say, the students will be participating in a B.Sc. Degree in TEFL education programme at the time the study is being conducted and will represent half of the student teachers of English at the faculty. The lecturers will be teaching essay writing to all four years of the programme. The sample of the study will consist of both male and female students. As for the lecturers, the researcher will make use of the faculty available, whether male or female. The students will share some common characteristics as they will be in their early twenties, from the same Egyptian culture, but with different background knowledge, and will be starting their first year in teaching practice at the preparatory schools in Cairo and Giza Governorates. Both students and lecturers will be asked to fill in the questionnaire. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, eight students and five lecturers will be interviewed. In relation to the semi-structured observation, both students and lecturers will be asked to be observed during their essay writing learning/teaching.

**Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs)** a blank consent form can be downloaded from the SELL student access on-line documents:

All students' personal details and data will be kept confidential and anonymous. All students will be asked to fill in a consent form to tell us that they are happy to volunteer in the research.

**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

The methods to be used are a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, a semi-structured observation. All data will be stored safely away from any misuse by anybody.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

All recorded data will be stored securely. All completed questionnaires will be used for study purposes only.

**Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

There are none of which I'm aware.

---

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you below and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

---

**I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given above and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis** (delete whichever is inappropriate) **to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.**

**I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.**

Signed: Abdelhamid Ahmed ..... date: 12.15.2008.....

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

---

This project has been approved for the period: Sept 2008 until: December 2009

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature): Sabah Drouali ..... date: 13/05/2008

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.*

SELL unique approval reference: ..... D/07/08/27.....

Signed: Sabah Drouali ..... date: 13/05/2008  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

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This form is available from  
<http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/students/index.php> then click on On-line documents.

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
last updated: September 2007

## **Appendix (11)**

### **A suggested example of an essay writing course description in Egypt**

#### **I- Course Description**

The essay writing course at the concerned Faculty of Education will help you acquire the different essay writing skills needed to produce a well written essay. The course is taught for all four years of study. In the first two years of study, it is taught throughout the academic year, but the second two years of study, it is taught for one semester only.

#### **II- Course Objectives**

The course description should include the course objectives for each of the four years of study. The essay writing course at the concerned faculty of education should develop sequentially students' writing skills. By the end of the essay writing course, English majors should be able to:

- 1- Incorporate various prewriting, writing, and revision strategies in writing an essay at the university level.
- 2- Plan an essay using one or more of the essay writing planning techniques. (Planning)
- 3- Write a specific thesis statement for each of the assigned essays. (Coherence)
- 4- Write three or more topic sentences relevant to the thesis statement of the essay. (Coherence)
- 5- Write an inviting introduction to the whole essay.
- 6- Develop each of the topic sentences into a complete paragraph of not less than five sentences each. (Paragraph Development)
- 7- Develop each paragraph about one central idea. (Unity)
- 8- Use transitional words to link sentences and ideas together cohesively.(Cohesion)
- 9- Write a concluding sentence for each of the developmental paragraphs. (Coherence)
- 10-Write in an appropriate style. (Style)
- 11-Write using appropriate lexis. (Vocabulary and word choice)
- 12-Write using a number of correct grammatical structures. (Grammar)
- 13-Write well-punctuated sentences and paragraphs. (Punctuation)
- 14-Write correctly-spelled words. (Spelling)

- 15- Write a good conclusion to the essay.
- 16- Revise and edit one's written essay according to the revision checklist.
- 17- Develop competence in discourses such as description, narration, expository, and argumentative.
- 18- Read essays written by authors representing various cultures and values and make appropriate responses.
- 19- Develop critical reading and responding skills, specifically those of critical analysis, synthesis, and assessment.
- 20- Demonstrate proficiency in Standard Written English skills.

### **III. STUDY TOPICS**

The teacher might refer to the study topics to be covered each year such as planning an essay, organization of an essay, paragraph and essay development, writing cohesively, writing coherently, writing in a good style, unity of writing, using appropriate vocabulary, using different grammatical structures, punctuation and spelling, revision and editing, reading critically, responding to reading, writing discourses (i.e. descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentative)...etc.

### **IV- Course Calendar**

In this section, teachers are recommended to state clearly the dates, times and places of their classroom sessions, excluding any holidays.

### **V- Course Textbooks and Reading List**

In this section, teachers are advised enlist the titles of the course textbooks, price and address of the bookshops. In addition, teachers may like to refer students to any useful websites and other resources that would help them enrich their prior knowledge.

### **IV. Instructional Procedures**

1. Reading and responding to texts and assigned readings
2. Writing at paragraph and essay levels
3. teacher-students conferences
4. Self evaluation, peer evaluation and collaboration
5. Revising and editing papers
7. Teacher's explicit Instruction
- 8- Classroom Discussion of written posters

## **V. Students' Responsibilities**

1. Regular attendance and class participation
2. Weekly writing activities as required.
3. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students should submit 3 written essays of different discourses per semester: description, narration, definition, example, process, comparison/contrast (850-1000 words).
4. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students should submit 3 different essays in one of the following modes: argumentative, expository, narrative or descriptive (1200-1500 words each).
5. All students are required to peer review their classmates' essays as assigned and write their names in the peer-review sheet.
6. All students should write a poster of each written essay once a month.
7. All students are responsible for attending the parallel support sessions in their areas of weaknesses.

## **VI- Course Assessment:**

### **A- Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment marks are out of 20 marks that are distributed according to following criteria:

#### **1- Classroom Attendance (30 marks).**

You also need to attend at least 75% of the course sessions; otherwise, you will not be eligible to set for the final exam.

#### **2- Submission of Assignments (60 marks).**

Course assignments should be submitted only once on or before the specific deadline electronically to the teacher's e-mail address with a cover page clearly stating your name, year of study and course title. Late assignments will be marked out of 50% of the assignment final mark as long as they have not been extended. Extension of assignment submission is to be permitted, by the teacher for an acceptable excuse, at least one week before the submission date. Teacher will acknowledge the receipt of your e-mail and it is the student's responsibility to make sure that this has been done successfully.

### **3- Essay Writing Posters (20 marks).**

Students are required to write three posters per semester of the final essays that has been marked by their teachers. These posters should be written clearly and legibly on a big sheet of paper, accompanied by a suggestion box attached to them.

### **4- Mid-Term Exam (40 marks).**

In this exam, students will be asked to write an essay in 90 minutes about one of five open topics.

### **B- Marking Criteria: 20 marks for each assignment**

- 1- Essay Outline (2 marks)
- 2- Essay structure and layout (2 marks)
- 3- Use of conjunctions and linkers (2 marks)
- 4- Thesis statement and topic sentences (4 marks)
- 5- Style (2 marks)
- 6- Word choice (2 marks)
- 7- Grammar (2 marks)
- 8- Punctuation (1 mark)
- 9- Spelling (1 marks)
- 10- Completed peer-review sheet (2 marks)

### **C- Summative Assessment**

The summative assessment will be in the form of final exam. It will be marked out of 80 marks. This exam will include reflective questions about what students have learnt during the course. It will also ask students to write about one topic out of five options. The essay writing topics will be open in nature to allow students the freedom to write about any topic from any perspective they like. The exam will last for three hours. To pass this course successfully, your final mark (a combination of the formative assessment marks and the summative assessment marks) and should be no less than 50% of the total mark. The following scale will show the different grades students might get in their final course result.

100- 85 (Excellent)

84- 75 (Good)

74- 65 (Good)

64- 50 (Pass)

49 or Less (Fail)

**Teacher's Contact details**

Name:

Work address:

E-mail address:

Office Hours:

## Appendix (12)

### Analysis of a Teacher's Interview

#### **1. Can you tell me about your experience in teaching the essay writing course?**

I taught essay writing courses here at Helwan University. These courses were run for large number of students, approximately 200 [**Problem of Large Classes**]. I also taught essay writing courses for Non-specialist teachers of English. I taught essay writing at different places such as private universities, private institutes, with small number of students, but maybe different levels of English [**Different English Language Proficiency Levels**]. Of course, the essay writing problems differ from one place to another. I have been teaching the essay writing course for about ten years or something like this [**An Experienced Teacher**]. Usually, the essay writing courses are combined with reading courses in one course.

#### **2. Do you like teaching this course?**

What I like about this course is the creativity of writing, plus the idea of the discussion of reading texts and critical thinking and so on. The thing that I don't like about this course is that it requires a lot of work; a lot of correction, a lot of effort before deciding on the topics and choosing reading materials and so on [**Teacher's Attitude towards Teaching Essay Writing**].

#### **3. Can you describe a typical essay writing class?**

Focusing on the situation in the governmental universities, I have been teaching essay writing courses for 200 students sitting in a lecture theatre. So, it is very difficult to monitor, to move around which is a big problem. The place where I teach is a lecture theatre with fixed benches with narrow spaces between rows of benches. This is very difficult for students to move in and out of it as it is a very long bench including about 12 students. Sometimes, I do group work, but it is not performed in the way it should be due to lack of space in the lecture theatre and the narrow long benches [**Lack of Facilities**].

#### **4. What about classroom interaction?**

As for classroom interaction, I think that faculty of education students especially can be motivated to work because of the year's works. My class is more interactive in the sense that I start my writing class by giving hints about organization or something which would not take much time and then we start doing topic brainstorming, semantic mapping, clustering. I just give students prompts and students respond in this case. After doing the brainstorming, students got the ideas and then we start thinking about the introduction and writing it, the thesis statement. Then, I get some students to read what they have written and discuss whether the thesis statement fits with the introduction or not and things of the sort. So, mostly, it is application and they do most of the activities **[Teaching Approach]**. As for the learning facilities in the classroom, there is nothing whatsoever, except the white board. Even, I would like to use the lab in my essay writing course, no lab would be able to accommodate 200 students **[Lack of facilities]**. Another problem is my inability to divide the whole class into four or five groups of students because of my lecture time limit **[Limited Lecture Time]**. The only thing that is available is the board and sometimes I go through the bureaucratic procedures to get permission to get the Overhead Projector which would not help much in this case **[Bureaucratic Equipment Loan]**.

#### **5. What teaching materials do you use?**

I use different books in the essay writing course and the other thing is that I do not give them much theoretical materials to study **[Teaching Materials]**. If for example, I want to talk about what to include in a descriptive essay, I would give points on the board and explain them and students take notes to give them the impression that these are just points not to focus. But, if I give them for example a chapter from a book, they will think that they have to study this and memorize it for the exam or even in order to write which would hinder their performance. That's why, I put it in the form of points on the board telling the students that these points are just hints that you are going to apply **[Memorisation of Learning Materials]**. I don't prefer giving materials about writing classes. What I could give them is example of a descriptive essay or a narrative essay. Then, I ask them to get things out of it to direct their attention that these are features of a narrative essay for example or the use of tenses. Of course, these things will be more successful

with smaller number of students and not with large classes especially if they are student teachers because they are going to teach their students this stuff later on. Working with small classes makes you sure that everybody is working. In large classes, I wouldn't do this because you could be wasting their time and my time, students are looking at the paper and waiting for you to say I finished **[Large Classes]**.

#### **6. Can you explain your teaching approach in the essay writing course?**

When I have an example of 200 students, I would divide them into four groups. Each time, I will get assignment from one group, not in a particular order **[Lack of Written Feedback]**. We can work on a particular topic for two weeks **[Topic-Based Teaching]**. Today, we give a hint and students start the brainstorming, followed by writing the introduction. Then, the next time, before I get any assignments, one of the students would come and read her essay in front of the class and we will start commenting together asking the student to repeat her introduction and see how it is related to the body of her essay. I ask her to choose one paragraph as an example and then we start asking questions about the topic sentence and its relevance to the whole topic. What I'm doing here is that I'm helping students to evaluate their colleague so that they could acquire the different essay writing skills. Sometimes, after that, students can do peer reviewing **[Occasional use of Peer-review]**. At the end of the lecture, I ask group (B) for example to hand me their assignments. Every two weeks, I mark from 70-80 essays **[Marking Load]**. I was happy because more students get more enthusiastic to get their assignments back. Of course, this was more successful with faculty of education students because they have year's works. Students who do not have year's works, they will not write at all **[Lack of Writing Practice]**. So, this was successful for two reasons: (1) students' motivation (2) I depend on when students evaluate each other, they become more aware of their mistakes. I don't say much during this phase as I keep my comments on the read essays till the very end to get students the opportunity to get out what they have in mind. Of course, you can't force the majority of students to talk and comment if you have 200 students, but if you have 20 students, you can make sure that nearly every student participates, even if not in every class but in every other class for example. I check my students' comprehension by doing activities for example on mechanics of writing and

exercises on how to punctuate, but this was not very successful with large number of students. It is much more successful with smaller number of students [**Lack of students' talking in classroom**].

#### **7. What is the nature of your feedback to students' written essays?**

I give oral feedback, not to each and every student in the sense that you put your comments on the papers and then I would give at the beginning of the lecture, the common mistakes on the board so that everybody learns from them [**Teacher's Discussion of the Most Common Mistakes in Writing**]. What I don't do although it might be a good idea to train students to use coding such as P for punctuation, S for spelling...etc. I did not do this fearing that students get confused, don't want to exert the effort, forget using the coding so that they just get the paper and keep it for themselves. I am not quite sure that students would exert the efforts to understand the codes. What I normally do is that I write the mistakes and comments in the paper beside the final mark. If students want to discuss it with me, they would come individually [**Lack of Coding System**]. I can't tell everyone why I have given him or her this mark. If they feel confused or not quite convinced, they would come and ask me.

I would imagine that the feedback I give would be both corrective and constructive. Maybe on the paper, it could be more corrective, but orally or in the class, it is more constructive [**Type of Teacher's Feedback**]. You will never be satisfied all the time with way you give feedback to your students. I can get it from students' faces through my experience whether they got it or not. Sometimes I could divert or allocate the lesson or part of it into a grammar class because there are problems that are repeated and so on. So, I explain these problems well to overcome them [**Teacher's Focuses on One Writing Skill According to Students' Assessment**]. You are not always quite sure about the feedback because there are always mistakes from students.

If we have small number of students and a dedicated tutor, we could do a lot even if the students are very weak, you can motivate students, so that they could benefit and improve their level. There are reasons why we don't do this; either the faculty

says no, we don't have enough time, place or tutors to divide the 2 hour class into 6 or 8 classes [**Institutional Obstacles, Lack of Staff, Time**].

### **8. What type of formative assessment techniques do you use in the essay writing course?**

Assignments: I think 100 times before choosing to teach the essay writing course, but once I have made up my mind, I have to do it the way I believe in, giving them assignments every week to write. I correct assignments as I said before every two weeks, that's why, it is a hell [**Teacher's Attitudes towards Teaching Essay Writing**]. But I think if wouldn't do this; there is no need to exert any effort in class at all. The problem is with peer review or peer correction, I do it for the sake every now and then so that they become very interested, change the monotony of the class and develop their critical awareness of mistakes and so on, but I can't depend on this even I have to get them once more [**Teachers' Rationale for the Occasional Use of Peer review.**]. What I do is that I divide the class into groups and then I ask every student to write and I would correct one or two groups. For example, I give them the topic for two weeks. This week I get group (b) and next week group, I get group (c). And then, other students would give you their written essays as well to correct. So, it will always end doing a lot of corrections and this was a problem correcting all the time [**Marking Load**]. By the way, there is no teaching assistant to help me with this huge number of correction. Otherwise, you can feel it once I finish the course that there is a development in their level as students would have written 10-12 essays by that time. If you look vertically or horizontally in their essays, you will find that there is a kind of development [**Lack of Teaching Assistants**]. I have never used portfolios in my essay writing course because of the applicability with large number of students. When I collect their essays, I sometimes do common mistakes session for all the students. I write notes and marks in my notebook next to each student name [**Teacher's Discussion of Students' Most Common Mistakes**].

### **9. What about summative assessment? How does it look like?**

It depends, for example, for first year, first semester, I would include some activities in the exam that would help with writing such as jumble sentences to organize, an exercise on cohesive ties, an exercise on punctuation, a paragraph to analyze in terms of the topic sentence, the major supporting sentences ...etc. Of course, students have similar activities during the course to the ones in the final exam. At the advanced level, usually the exam would be an essay to write plus the reading comprehension text with questions. Students know that everything they have studied during the course will be included in their assessment exam at the end of the course **[Teacher's Summative Assessment]**.

This includes organization, vocabulary, grammar, structure, style, coherence, ideas, and everything. To be very objective in my marking, I divide the marks. If we say, the whole essay will be marked out of 20, I give 4 marks on organization, 3 marks on content...and so on. I do not mark students' essays impressionistically **[Analytical Marking]**. However, after I correct 10 or 15 papers, I can give a mark on the whole essay and then I start to check whether my general mark is more or less the same. I just do this at the beginning to be sure that I'm following standards.

I do not follow checklists from books while marking students' essays. More or less, what I do is similar to them or based on them. While marking, I'm looking for organization, coherence of ideas or content, vocabulary, grammar, structured sentences, spelling, punctuation, and style. I put them all in a sheet of paper and then I start to divide the marks on these categories Teacher's use of her own marking criteria **[Lack of Assessment Rubric]**.

### **10. Which stage in the essay writing do you think is the most difficult for your students: Prewriting, writing or reviewing?**

I think reviewing and editing is the most difficult stage because in the prewriting stage, I give much time to practice. More or less, students could do this unconsciously, or without organizing it. Students can grasp it easily. The writing stage would be affected by the proficiency of the language **[Writing-Proficiency Relationship]**. The scheme of writing, once you tell them how to do it, they can do it themselves generally speaking.

But once you come to the reviewing and editing stage, they are not ready to reread and even if they reread it, they do it very quickly [**Students' Unwillingness to Review their Work**].

This makes them unable to focus on definite things. (1) Low language proficiency level could hinder them from realizing their mistakes. (2) Uncritical eye that makes them unaware to look for mistakes. (3) Even when they correct things, they would correct things that are already correct and miss mistakes [**Reasons for Unwillingness to Review their Written Essay**]. Even when you give them editing checklist to correct mistakes on the macro level, vocabulary and structure, organization, I think they are not ready to do this [**Students' Readiness to Review**].

#### **11. What difficulties do you think students encounter in their prewriting?**

Of course, students face difficulties in the pre-writing stage. While brainstorming, they put for example a lot of ideas. Some ideas are not quite relevant. Sometimes, we choose two or three ideas that could make two or three different essays. How to choose the relevant ideas to make something coherent, this is the most difficult part at this stage [**Prewriting Related Difficulties**]. This problem occurs because they are not used to practice this kind of critical thinking. Our governmental schools before university educate our students in a way that doesn't make them think. When they write essays, whether in Arabic or in English, they just write whatever comes to their minds. They find difficulty even when they answer anything in the novel exam such as any essay question in any subject. This kind of organization and coherence is not quite easy for them [**Lack of Critical Thinking**]. It needs a lot of training to train them well so that they can practise this or master this [**Lack of Practice Writing**].

#### **12. What difficulties do you think your students encounter during writing?**

Cohesion is a problem for student teachers of English. Once, I was teaching study skills course. One of the sections of this course is about writing and one of the components of this writing section was the cohesive ties. It was a problem for them and they were third year students. Then, students were begging me not to get them a similar question in the exam. It was just a paragraph in which you should

supply the appropriate cohesive ties in a multiple choice form **[Students' Difficulty in Cohesion]**. Because of this, I changed the content of the course from study skills to a completely a reading and writing course. Although they study reading and writing courses in their first and second years, they also study cohesion as a separate course, but they do not relate it once they write which is a big problem **[Inability to Relate Theory to Practice]**.

Relating which ideas come together and which is irrelevant is an obstacle for student teachers while writing their essays **[Students' Coherence Problems]**. Students face difficulty in coherence, but sometimes they could do it unconsciously better than the cohesive ties. And once you direct their attention to cohesive ties, they could write you six or seven linking words in one paragraph. They think that this is something good, so, they overuse it. This is a problem **[Students' Overuse of Cohesive Ties]**.

Students tend to use the chatting style with its abbreviations and slang that they normally do on the internet, especially in private universities where they have higher levels of the language proficiency, they use the computer and the internet more, they get slang words from movies thinking that the slang language that foreigners use in movies are the best. However, they study in their academic courses the difference between the formalities and the informalities of style. But once they write, they forget everything **[Students' Stylistic Problems]**.

Students are sometimes very reluctant to express themselves. This differs from one student to another. It depends on their background **[Students' Reluctance to Express their Opinions]**. They are not confident enough to express their opinions **[Students' Lack of Self-Confidence]**. Are they brought up to do this whether at home or at school or they were brought up differently? I try sometimes to direct their attention to assume that there other readers to convince them. But they can never forget at they are students writing for a teacher **[Reasons for Lacking Voice]**.

Of course, they face difficulties in grammar and vocabulary [**Students' Difficulty in Grammar and Vocabulary**]. This depends on two things (1) their language proficiency (2) the idea of trying to block their minds not to integrate subjects together [**Reasons for Students' Difficulty in Grammar and Vocabulary**]. I'm not talking about myself personally, but many of my colleagues always say this. When I teach essay writing, I ask them about what they study in the grammar course for example or when I teach grammar, I ask them to link this to what they write. But, students are still not convinced, I don't know, or they do not want to exert this effort of linking things together. You can give them for example a grammar activity which they do it fine, but once they start writing they do not do this. This is a problem of not being taught how to link things together [**Students' Inability to Link Courses Together**].

Punctuation is one of the problems students face while writing because it is different from the Arabic system. This is a great problem [**Students' Problems in Punctuation and Spelling**]. Spelling and punctuation mainly depend on the students' language proficiency and the editing stage which they rarely do. When I discuss the spelling mistakes and the punctuation errors with small groups with small groups of students, [**Reasons for Students' Difficulty in Mechanics of Writing**] they can recognise the mistake they have made, but they say that they have done it quickly or they haven't edited their essays. So, this is the problem [**Lack of Revision**].

### **13. What difficulties do you think your students encounter while reviewing their essays?**

They face difficulties in the general organization of the essay while editing it. I don't know whether they know this thing, so, they don't have to edit it or they get tired of writing the whole essay and organizing it and then, they see editing as unimportant and that's why they do not exert much effort in it [**Reasons for Students' Lack of Revision**].

I usually work with the class and guide the whole class under my supervision [**Whole Class Teaching Approach**]. Sometimes, I do group support which is not always the case for time and facilities obstacles [**Scarcity of Group Work**]. With small groups, you can have peer or group support and then I just monitor students while they are writing.