

INVESTIGATION OF THESIS STATEMENT DIFFICULTIES IN TRADITIONAL, ARGUMENT ESSAYS WRITTEN BY SAUDI, UNDERGRADUATE, MALE STUDENTS: CASE STUDY OF PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN FAHD UNIVERSITY (PMU)

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ABSTRACT

This case study explored the writing difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing thesis statements for traditional, argument essays they wrote for a core-writing course they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. Using document review data collection technique, purposive sampling was utilized to collect students' traditional, argument essays. MAXQDA 2020 was utilized to help in data analysis which was accomplished using open coding. Data analysis process continued until saturation was reached as a result of the investigation of thirty thesis statements. The students' writing difficulties were identified, classified, and recorded. The findings fell into four themes of problems. The first was lack of orientation, which included failure to state essay topic, failure to state thesis statement main ideas, and gender bias. The second theme was grammatical problems, which included sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, nonparallel main ideas, inconsistent viewpoint, part of speech, definite article, indefinite article, and prepositions. The third was lack of precision and concision, which included word-choice and redundancy problems, successively. The fourth theme was mechanics problems, which included difficulties with capitalization, the comma, and the hyphen. The significance of this study stems from the fact that, to this researcher's best knowledge, it was the first of its kind. It was also the first of its kind to be conducted on Saudi, undergraduate, male students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU). Finally, since this was a qualitative study, it is recommended that future studies of this topic be conducted using quantitative approach.

Keywords: Case Study, Traditional Essays, Thesis Statement, Main Ideas, and Saturation.

INTRODUCTION

Writing well is a demanding, intellectual process that involves different recurrent activities that require focus, persistence, perseverance, discipline, and critical thinking. Explaining this demanding nature of writing, Zinsser (2001) stated, "Good writers know that very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time or the fifth time" (p. xi). Also, Grami (2010, p. 9) explained this challenging nature of writing saying, "Writing could be a difficult skill to be learnt or taught due to the fact that it is not a simple cognitive activity; rather, it is believed to be a complex mental production which requires careful thought, discipline and concentration" (Al Badi, 2015, p. 65). At college levels, good writing constitutes a major requirement for academic success. According to Rai and Lillis (2012), "Effective academic writing is vital to success in higher education and in professional life beyond the university" (Mudawi & Mousa, 2015, p. 2). Addressing college writing students to create awareness in them about the significance of writing, Arlov claimed, "In any field, those who stand out are usually good writers. They write clearly, they

state their ideas completely, and they don't embarrass themselves with poor grammar or misspelled words" (2010, p. xvi). Griffiths (2016) took the significance of good writing to even a higher level of importance in modern life. He argued, "Especially, in the current period of modern technology development, the exchange of information is largely done on the keyboard, making it essential for people to be able to communicate coherently and effectively in writing (Anh, 2019, P. 75). Today, English writing for academic purposes at college levels, however, represents a considerable challenge for even native speakers, let alone non-native ones who are engaged in learning this skill throughout the globe for this purpose. Because of its challenging and demanding nature, writing as an academic skill has been identified as a problem not only for undergraduate students but also for those involved in graduate studies (Bailey, 2011). Instructors who teach writing to EFL/ESL students in tertiary levels and below noticed the difficulties their students encountered in mastering the craft of academic writing, starting with sentences and paragraphs, and ending with essays and research papers. Their observation of this problem led to many research investigations aimed at the identification of the types of difficulties EFL/ESL students encountered in English writing. Some of these studies looked at this issue at stages below college, namely preparatory levels, where English writing was taught as a major skill. Al Badi (2015), for example, reported, "Mohan and Lo (1985) confirm that, generally speaking, a lot of ESL learners find academic writing problematic" (p. 66).

A considerable quantity of research in this area was conducted on Saudi students' academic writing problems. It shed light on various areas of weaknesses they encountered in their writing. Vocabulary, spelling, grammar, word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure problems were repeatedly highlighted in different research studies. As Alhaisoni (2012) indicated, "The majority of [Saudi] students have difficulty with writing composition" (p.1). This observation was also supported by Al-Khairi (2013) who stated, "Saudi English-major undergraduates are very weak in writing skills and commit lots of errors in their academic writings and are usually engaged in sentence-level" (p 1). Peter (2008, p. 3), in addition, observed, "Differences in genre are one reason to explain why writing in English is so difficult for speakers of other languages including Saudi students" (Ankawi, 2015, p. 15). Similarly, Barzani (2016) claimed, "Arab EFL learners in general and Saudi students in particular are facing a lot of difficulties when writing in English" (p. 2).

Thus, the need for more investigation and better understanding of the difficulties Saudi college students encounter in academic, English writing as well as the identification of the underlying factors of such difficulties are both important and urgent. To this researcher's best knowledge, one of the unexplored areas of EFL/ESL college writing is the difficulties that Saudi college students encounter in writing traditional essays. This study, therefore, attempted to explore the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students faced in writing thesis statements for traditional, argument essays.

Statement of the Problem

As indicated earlier, good writing constitutes a milestone in academic success. Different research on EFL and ESL students' academic writing, however, revealed numerous difficulties these students encountered in different aspects of academic writing. An intensively researched EFL/ESL college student population were the Saudi students. Research showed that, like all other EFL/ESL students of other cultures, Saudi college students encountered various writing difficulties. Alanazi

(2017), for example, identified many grammatical weaknesses in their writing. Some of these areas of weakness were tense, articles, the be-verb, conjugation, and the auxiliary verb do. AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) identified difficulties concerning structure, unity, development, coherence, and inconsistency of point of view. They also spotted 234 spelling errors that constituted 14.81% of the total mistakes committed by their Saudi subjects. Ahmed, in addition, spotted punctuation and “wrong [word] choice” errors (2018, p. 14). Further, besides sentence structure, Mudawi and Mousa claimed that these students revealed word order problems (2015). Another difficulty reflected on these students’ writing was poor vocabulary (Alharbi, 2019) as well as lack of revision (Alhaisoni, 2012). While the existing body of research identified various aspects of difficulties in Saudi college students’ writing, there remains a gap that includes other aspects of academic writing that need investigation. One of these unexplored facets is difficulties they encounter in writing traditional essay thesis statements.

Purpose of the Study

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

Research Question

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of difficulties in Saudi students’ English writing at college levels has been under empirical investigation for a long time. This investigation shed light on different areas of writing problems that this specific population of studies reflected on its writing. Problematic aspects of writing that researchers were able to identify in this issue included a broad range of EFL/ESL writing skills. These skills are, precisely, grammatical, spelling, vocabulary, sentence structure, word choice, punctuation, cohesion, and coherence. The uniqueness of this study, however, was that it looked at these writing difficulties from the perspective of the traditional essays written by PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students who wrote them to meet the requirements of a core college writing course titled Written Communication (COMM 1311). The full name of this university is Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University, which is located in Al Khobar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The study, in addition, attempted to find out the factors underlying these students’ writing difficulties. Further, the population of the study, interestingly, is virgin and has never been investigated in previous research, an issue that represents a conspicuous gap in research (Creswell, 2014).

EFL Writing Difficulties as a Universal Phenomenon

The English writing difficulties is not confined to Saudi students; it is, in fact, an academic phenomenon that learners of English as a foreign and second language (EFL/ESL) encounter wherever they are. Therefore, the next paragraphs shed little light on this problem from an international point of view, represented by the difficulties in the writing of Egyptian, Sudanese, Pakistani, and Chinese EFL students.

In a study he conducted on Egyptian students who were studying to become teachers of English as a foreign language, Ahmed (2011) spotted different essay writing difficulties. In particular, he identified difficulties in planning, organizational, coherence, cohesion, lexical, stylistic, and mechanical. In another more recent study, Ahmed investigated Egyptian students essay writing difficulties, and he found similar difficulties in these students writing, such as planning, coherence, cohesion, style, unity, and mechanics. Ahmed attributed these writing difficulties to socio-political and socio-cultural challenges. According to him, “Findings of the current study indicated two socio-political challenges: namely, suppression of students’ voice in writing and the lack of accountability” (2016). Ahmed findings were in line with Marghany who reported similar problems in the writing of Egyptian college students in freshmen levels (2015).

Mubarak (2017) examined Sudanese college students’ writing to discover that they encountered grammatical, structural, lack of consistent point of view, and punctuational difficulties. Adam conducted a study on ESL Sudanese graduate students’ expository writing. He claimed that these students’ writing difficulties included logical organization, topic sentences, paragraph unity, cohesion, and coherence (2004). Mabyou, in addition, found that Sudanese senior high school students (eight graders) had a serious problem writing compound sentences. He reported that “50.27% of the students are able to write a good academic compound sentence, whereas 48.66% of them are not able to do so” (2017, p. 56). Like students of other nationalities, Pakistani students’ too face different writing difficulties. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) reported that Pakistani EFL students had many writing difficulties: topic sentences, syntax, coherence, idea expansion, content, rhetorical conventions, organization, incorrect use of vocabulary, and mechanics. Also, Haider (2012) classified Pakistani students’ writing difficulties into linguistic, cognitive, and process-related. He also reported that they have serious lack of vocabulary. Further, Al-Khairi (2013) observed spelling difficulties in these students’ writing, and he attributed such difficulties to the fact that they spelled English words the way they sound. Finally, in a study they conducted, Sajid and Aqeel (2014) classified Pakistani students’ writing difficulties into consistent point of view, syntax, and capitalization.

Also examining Chinese EFL students’ writing, Yu reported the students’ thought pattern that they reflected on their writing was intuitive, subjective, spiral, and circular. He also claimed that compared to their listening and reading skills, these students’ writing abilities in general were weak. He also mentioned that in their writing practice, these Chinese students had different grammatical, spelling, and organizational difficulties, which, were, again, influenced by first language thought pattern. According to this researcher, “Some research reveals students’ EFL writing process has bilingual features” (p. 200). Similar observations were reported by Liu (2004) who reported that Chinese native thought pattern accounted for 80 % in process control and over 50% in content and structure conception of their EFL writing. Yu’s and Liu’s observations were partially supported by Wang and Zhang (2017) who reported that Chinese students’ writing was influenced by their native

language. He also noticed that their writing showed difficulties in vocabulary, discourse, sentence structure, and format.

English Background and Its Significance in Saudi Arabia

In 1950, the Saudi Ministry of Education introduced English as a compulsory subject of study in public schools, but it was taught in only the intermediate and secondary levels. This policy continued until 2010 when the Ministry of Education in this country started to teach English to students in grade four, five, and six. These students received four hours of English lessons every week; the lessons focused on the teaching of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To ensure success of teaching and learning of this language, the Saudi Government poured huge amounts of money on this project.

The awareness of the importance of the English language and the fundamental role it plays in different walks of life today reflected on the Saudi Ministry of Education's recognition of its importance and rapid spread awareness of its importance among Saudis. Thus, being a major source of problem solving and predictor of future needs, different Saudi universities established colleges and departments that offer English language programs to address the rapidly increasing Saudi people's need for the acquisition and usage of this language. At these universities' students today can obtain different degrees in English studies.

Imam Abdurrahman Ibn Faisal University, which is located in Dammam, for example, has programs that offer bachelor degrees of arts in English, master degrees of arts in English, and PhD degrees in English language and literature. Other Saudi universities that offer English language degrees are King Saud University, in Riyadh; Arab Open University, in Dammam; and Umm Al-Qura University, in Makkah. In addition, Saudi cities, such as Riyadh, Jeddah, Madinah, Dammam, and Al Khobar, teem with English language centers that Saudi children, men, and women attend to learn and earn the four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Also, because huge body of knowledge in different field and subjects is written in English, many Saudi universities, like many other universities in Arabic speaking countries, started to use English as the teaching and learning language in many of their colleges and departments. Examples of studies offered in English are medicine, pharmacy, engineering, and computer sciences. Further, major local and foreign companies, such as Aramco and Sabic have adopted English to be the language of business and communication in them. Furthermore, job openings in different specialties announced by at different companies and organizations state that applicants are required to have strong English communication skills. Finally, as it is the case in many countries, the conspicuous presence and number of expatriates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds rendered this language the only lingua franca in the Kingdom. Through it, they communicate with each other in different settings.

Saudi Writing Difficulties

As previously mentioned, EFL and ESL learners around the world experience various types of writing difficulties. Being parts of the EFL/ESL learning community, Saudi students are no exception. They, too, were found to face English writing challenges. The following are major difficulties in the Saudi students' English writing identified by previous research studies. In his

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

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

Javid and Farooq (2013) conducted a comprehensive study on Saudi students' writing. Their investigation was concerned with this population's academic writing problems as well as gender-based writing errors. The study included 194 Saudi EFL learners (108 males and 86 females). Their findings came in full agreement with previous studies that indicated Saudi students' serious problems in academic writing. In addition to their failure to use appropriate lexical items and to organize ideas, these Saudi EFL learners had different problems of grammatical nature: verb tense, articles, prepositions, and irregular verbs. Alanzi (2017), in addition, conducted a quantitative study to find out about the consistent errors in the writing of Saudi male students at Northern Border University. According to him, the highest number of errors that his subjects committed were grammatical. These errors included verb tense, articles, the be-verb, conjugation, the auxiliary verb do. They also revealed confusion of the present simple, present progressive, and simple past. Similarly, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) carried a quantitative study to find out the types of errors committed by EFL Saudi male and female students in the preparatory year at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. Their study aimed to also find the differences between the errors committed by the male and female students as well as whether or not native and non-native teachers have a significant role in such errors and in their frequency. Their subjects wrote 80 descriptive paragraphs for analysis. The result was that Saudi male and female university students committed various types of errors with different frequencies in sentence structure, unity, development, coherence, and inconsistency of point of view. Also, as far as the element of grammar is concerned, they found that 42.15% of their subjects' errors were grammatical. Such errors included fragments, articles, verb tense, plurality, prepositions, pronouns, infinitive, gerund, third person singular, and conjunctions.

Using SST Surface Structure Taxonomy (SST) of errors, Gaudel and Al-Zuoud (2016) conducted a qualitative study in which they were interested in the identification of the types of errors that

Saudi EFL students in preparatory year program committed. The study also aimed at analyzing these students' mistakes in English articles. The study involved 150 EFL students who were randomly selected from six levels. These students had been learning English for at least six years; 40.8% of them were male students, and 59.2% were females. These students wrote 150 descriptive essays for this study. Further, Morgan (2018) examined the effectiveness of the provision of specific input on the use of verb conjugation and tenses to preparatory students at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Interestingly, his findings were also grammatical problems: verb conjugation, subject-verb agreement, and tenses consistent problems. Further, Ahmed (2018) conducted an analytical descriptive research study on Saudi EFL students at College of Science and Arts, Tanumah at King Khalid University. His objectives were to discover the type of grammatical, punctuation, lexical, spelling, and discourse errors committed by these students and the reasons underlying them. His findings revealed that 52% of the total number of errors were grammatical. Precisely, his subjects revealed problems in the usage and omission of the copula "be" and omission of third person singular marker "s." They also revealed errors in the different grammatical issues: tense and verb forms, nouns, pronouns, articles, prepositions, adjectives, and adverbs. Further, Ankawi (2015) conducted a qualitative study on the academic writing challenges that Saudi students face in New Zealand. He found that these students faced different challenges; grammatical difficulties were some of them. Though his findings could be said in line with previous studies concerning this type of difficulties that Saudi students faced in academic writing, he, unfortunately, did not specify the type of grammatical difficulties they faced.

Finally, Alfaqiri (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the difficulties that male and female Saudi students in the US experienced in academic writing. His sample included 114 student participants. Their English proficiency levels were from "beginners to Ph.D. students" (p.7). He found that these students encountered difficulties in the process of writing, especially those who were aware of the challenge associated with the English grammar in the writing process. In fact, with the exception of this grammatical challenge, Alfaqiri didn't specify the kinds of difficulties his participants experienced. Writing as a genre of communication depends heavily on the element of word and its usage. As a result, writers need to be careful and intelligent in choosing and using their written word so that they can deliver their written messages accurately and successfully. Because of the significant role the issue of word choice plays in writing, research conducted in this subject dedicated a lot of effort investigating the question of word choice in writing and its effects on the quality of communication. Within the field of writing, in fact, sufficient quantity of studies was conducted in the area of EFL/ESL writing. However, little research was conducted on the Saudi English students' writing. The following is a brief review of what has been highlighted about the difficulties of these students' EFL and ESL writing. In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2018) reported that his subjects committed 72 lexical errors. According to him, 40 of these errors were related to "wrong [word] choice" (p. 14). In other words, from 72 lexical errors, the subjects of his study committed 32-word choice errors, such as "He travelled to Makkah to take Omrah" as opposed to "He travelled to Makkah to perform Omrah." Again, although the issue of word choice is extremely important in writing and although Saudi EFL/ESL students encounter serious difficulties in this matter, little research was conducted in it (Mudhi, 2019).

Alharbi (2019) conducted a study investigating the difficulties faced by Saudi students who were learning English as a foreign language in the undergraduate level. According to him, students' weak writing skills were the result of poor knowledge of grammar rules and poor vocabulary

background. He claimed that these students' weaknesses were also due to ineffective teaching pedagogy. He also argued that students writing weakness should be diagnosed first; then syllabi should be designed according to the analysis results of such diagnosis. Alharbi, in addition, suggested that students be given many writing courses each of which should concentrate on only one aspect of writing, such as mechanics, vocabulary, organization, and content. Alfaqiri, however, attributed [learners'] strong and weak vocabulary background to social factor, namely "lack of close contact between students and the primary users of the language" (2018, p. 4).

Alhaisoni (2012) conducted a study investigating the strategies that Saudi male students used in revising compositions they wrote in Arabic, their first language (L1), and strategies they used in revising their EFL compositions (L2). He used the think-aloud reporting to understand the thinking process that his subjects used in writing composition in their first language and in the second language. He also conducted semi-structured interviews with them to aid the thinking-aloud data he generated. He found that his subjects used these writing revision strategies more when they wrote in English than when they wrote in Arabic. He argued that good writers use their first language to generate ideas and organize their writing, while poor writers use their first language to deal with language problems such as vocabulary. In the analysis of 80 paragraphs written by EFL Saudi students, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) identified 28% coherence errors in their study Paragraph Coherence Errors. These errors, according to this study, were committed because of ineffective or illogical organization of the thoughts in paragraphs. They were also due to the lack of using connecting adverbs/adverbials, such as transitions and other signal words.

In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016) reported that 12% of his study's subjects had punctuation problems: using the wrong punctuation marks and failing to use necessary punctuation marks. More specifically, 39.5% of the punctuation errors were specified as using the wrong punctuation mark, 37.5% as omitting punctuation marks, and 23% as inserting unnecessary punctuation marks. These students' punctuation problems were also confirmed by the EFL instructors in the same department. When these instructors conducted structured interviews with their students for the same study, they found that 90% of their students have problems with English punctuation.

Also, in their previously mentioned study, AlTameemy and Daradkeh found that in the 80 paragraphs that their students wrote, they found that the students committed 255 punctuation errors, which constituted 16.14% of the total errors they spotted. However, the researchers didn't specify the type of punctuation mistakes their subjects committed. It could've been helpful had they mentioned these types of punctuation mistakes.

Mudawi and Mousa (2015) carried an analytical descriptive study of the writing of Saudi students at College of Education in Zulfi. They used two tools to collect their samples: questionnaire and experimental task. Their questionnaire sample included 20 teachers from the English department and graduate students for the written task. Their objective was to identify the writing difficulties these students encountered and to suggest suitable solutions. Compared to previous similar studies, their findings were limited in vocabulary and spelling problems as well as difficulties to express themselves in writing. Though the underlying reasons for students' writing problems were not part of their objectives, they found that the existed academic writing curriculum did not cover the writing techniques. Further, in addition to different grammatical errors he spotted in his previously

mentioned quantitative study, Sawalmeh (2013) found his Saudi student participants had problems with word order. According to him, all these errors were a result of the influence of these students' first language—Arabic. In his previously mentioned study, Ahmed (2016) reported that the number of spelling errors was 222, constituting 27% of the total errors committed by his subjects. He classified these spelling errors into 7 categories: (1) omission of letters, (2) insertion of letters, (3) wrong choice of letters, (4) spelling of two words as a single word, (5) single words spelled as two words, (6) double letters, and (7) missing or overuse of capital letters. Ahmed speculated that one possible reason for the insertion of letters was either due to the way students pronounced those words or to bad memory. An example of this is “driveing.” I suggest such spelling errors could also be the result of ignorance of the rule—dropping the “e” before adding the “ing” suffix. Also, in their previously mentioned study, AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) spotted 234 spelling errors which constituted 14.81% of the total mistakes committed by their subjects. Again, the researchers haven't specified the types of spelling mistakes they identified in this study. Further, Alanazi (2017) found that his subjects had a variety of spelling problems, such as dropping the letter “e” in final position, such in “before,” “these,” and “therefore,” which could probably be due to the fact that the “e” in these situations is pronounced. Other spelling errors, according to him, were attributed to wrong pronunciation and to the influence of the subjects' mother tongue (Arabic). An example of such spelling errors is the replacement of “p” with “b.” According to Alanazi, this error is “preeminent in terms of receiving errors” (p. 7). This, in fact, supports Ahmed's previously similar spelling mistake observation that was indicated above. Alanazi has also indicated replacement of the “c” with “s.” According to him, “Limited access and exposure to the L2 vocabulary stock and strong L1 influence are the two main factors responsible for the highest production of spelling errors in the learners' written tasks” (p. 8)

METHODOLOGY

This case study attempted to investigate the difficulties that PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing thesis statements for the traditional, argument essays they wrote to meet one of the requirements of a core course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. This section explains the sampling technique, data collection technique, participants, and data analysis used for this study.

Sampling Technique

This case study investigated the difficulties Saudi, undergraduate, male students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) encountered in writing thesis statements for traditional, argument essays they wrote for a core writing course they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. According to Kumar (2005), “The case study method is an approach to studying a social phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case. The case may be a person, group, episode, process, community, society or any other unit of social life” (p. 113). This investigation adopted the case study method because case studies, in general, have the following advantages: (1) they are drawn from people's experiences and practices and thus represent reality, (2) they provide data from which further analysis can be made, (4) these data can also be used as archives for further research studies, and (5) because case studies are based on actual experiences and practices, they are more persuasive and can help in making policies and taking actions (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight., 2010).

The instrument used to collect the required data was the participants' argument essays they submitted to Blackboard for plagiarism check and grading. Argument essays were chosen for this study because the participants learned how to write this type of essay in the last three or four weeks of the semester. That is, when they were taught how to write this genre of essay, these participants had already written three different types of essays, received instructors' feedback, and became familiar with different writing issues, such as the traditional essay structure, its components, three English sentence structures, plenty of grammar skills, punctuation skills, as well as cohesion and coherence skills. The students were, therefore, expected to reflect the accumulation of these skills much better on this final essay they wrote for the course. The purposive sampling was chosen in collecting the essays. Researchers use the purposive technique when they realize that participants can provide the best information required for the study (Kumar, 2005). Since this study was interested in the writing difficulties in the thesis statements, thesis statements were identified and extracted from their essays and uploaded to MAXQDA 2020 for analysis.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection technique used for this study was document reviews. Participants signed an informed consent form in which the objectives of the study and the participants' right to withdraw from it were explained. Subsequently, forty-five soft copies of their traditional, argument essays were collected. As mentioned earlier, participants wrote these essays for a writing core course (COMM 1311) that they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. This number of these collected essays was expected to be more than needed to reach data saturation, which refers to the fact that researchers would continue collecting and analyzing data until they reach a point at which they can't receive any new information (Kumar, 2005). Reaching saturation after the analysis of thirty thesis statements, data collection and analysis were concluded.

Participants

The participants in this study were 30 Saudi, full-time, undergraduate, male students who were between 19–22 years old. They are currently students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU), which is located in Al Khobar, the Eastern Province, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These students came from different Saudi cities and towns, such as Al Khobar, Al Damam, Al Qassim, Al Jubail, Abqaiq, Al Qatif, and Al Riyadh. They had different majors, such as Engineering, Business, Human Resource Management, Management, Accounting, Finance, Computer Sciences, Management Information System, Law, and IT. Further, all these students were Arabic native speakers who learned English as a foreign language (EFL). The overwhelming majority of them spent between one to three semesters learning English as a foreign language at PMU Preparatory Program, where they took intensive communication (listening and speaking) and intensive writing (reading, writing, and grammar) courses. In addition to the intensive English courses they took in this program, they took two non-credit courses titled Theories and Application of Learning I (Study Skills I) and Theories and Application of Learning II (Study Skill II). These courses aimed at helping students develop skills conducive for their academic success. Further, a small percentage of these students, though Saudis, speak English like native speakers because they attended English speaking schools adopting western style of education. All of them commute daily to and from PMU

driving their own vehicles. They were also aware of the significant role the English language could play in their education and in their future professions.

Thesis Statement Data Analysis

Thesis statements were collected from participants' essays and uploaded into MAXQDA 2020, the most current version of this program. MAXQDA is a software program designed to assist in qualitative data analysis. It only helps organize the process of data analysis, but it does not analyze data. The analysis was carried out as follows. Writing difficulties were identified in each thesis statement. Then each identified difficulty was coded using open coding, which is also called "data driven coding" (Gibbs, 2018). For coding consistency, I kept writing memos within the system (MAXQDA) about each code that I developed. These memos were meant to indicate the meanings of the codes and the concepts they represent, so that I would remember the situations to which each code could be applied while I was coding each thesis statement. The data analysis process continued until saturation was reached as a result of the investigation of writing difficulties in thirty thesis statements. After finishing the first round of reading and coding, I went back again to check if any writing difficulties were overlooked or coded incorrectly. Having done with this round, I went back again to check and verify that the data I had coded were "consistent with the code name[s] and description[s]" (Gibbs, 2018, p. 65). With assistance of my memos, I discovered some lack of consistency among the codes I had created. Accordingly, I eliminated the issue of inconsistency by renaming them. Then I organized each group of similar codes under a new category. This led to the generation of three major themes. (See Appendix A, page 30. This appendix shows the themes and subthemes resulting from data analysis. It also shows the different notes taken during the analysis and coding process.)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the analysis results of the participants' thirty thesis statements they wrote in their traditional, argument essays. The writing difficulties the analysis revealed were (1) failure to state the essay topic, (2) failure to state the thesis statement's three main ideas, (3) gender bias, (4) sentence fragments, (5) subject-verb agreement, (6) verb tense, (7) nonparallel main ideas, (8) inconsistent points of view, (9) part of speech, (10) definite article, (11) indefinite article, (12) prepositions, (13) word choice, (14) redundancy, (15) comma, (16) hyphen, (17) capitalization. These writing difficulties were then categorized into four major themes: (A) lack of orientation problems, (B) grammatical problems, (C) precision and concision problems, and (D) mechanics problems. In the following, each of these writing difficulties will be stated and explained using one students' thesis statement as an example. Here it should be noted that some of the thesis statements discussed in this section have multi-writing problems. However, whenever a thesis statement is used as an example representing a specific writing problem, then only that writing problem was considered in the discussion. That is, the other writing problems in the same thesis statement were discussed under another category of the writing difficulties.

Themes and Subthemes

1. Lack of Orientation	Subcode	Number of Occurrence
1.1 Failure to State Essay Topic		8
1.2 Failure to State Thesis Main Ideas		6
1.3 Gender Bias		2
2. Grammatical Problems		
2.1 Sentence Fragment		5
2.2 Subject-Verb Agreement		3
2.3 Tense Problems		2
2.4 Nonparallel Main Points		8
2.5 Inconsistent Point of View		7
2.6 Part of Speech Problem		1
2.7 Definite Article Problems		4
2.8 Indefinite Article Problems		6
2.9 Preposition Problems		4
3. Precision and Concision Problems		
3.1 Word-Choice Problems		5
3.2 Redundancy Problems		10
4. Mechanics Problems		
4.1 Capitalization Problems		15
4.2 Comma Usage Problems		3
4.3 Hyphen Usage Problems		3

Figure 4.1 shows the four themes and the 17 subthemes resulted from the analysis of thirty thesis statements using MAXQDA 2020.

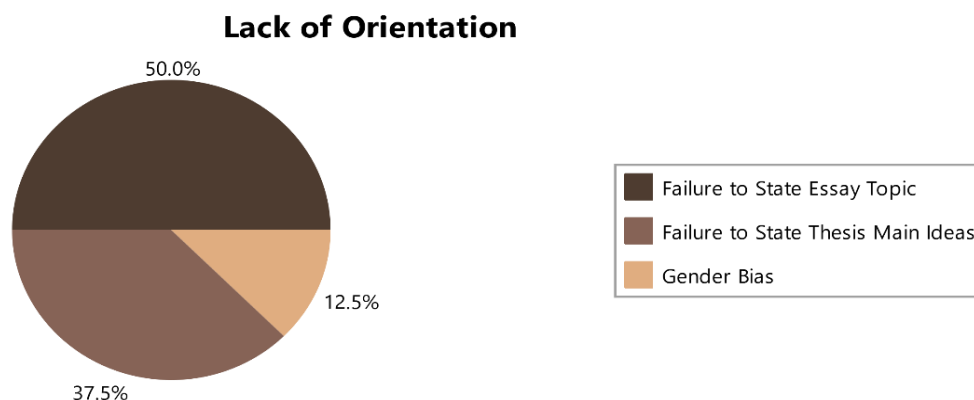


Figure 4.2 shows the three elements of lack of orientation (failure to state essay topic, failure to state the thesis main ideas, and gender bias) and the percentage of each in thirty thesis statements.

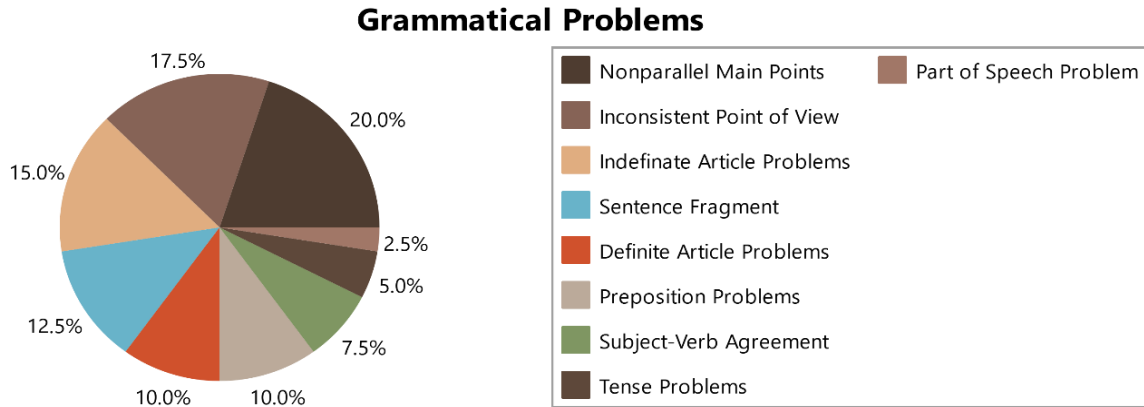


Figure 4.3 shows participants’ grammatical difficulties and the percentage of each difficulty in thirty thesis statements.

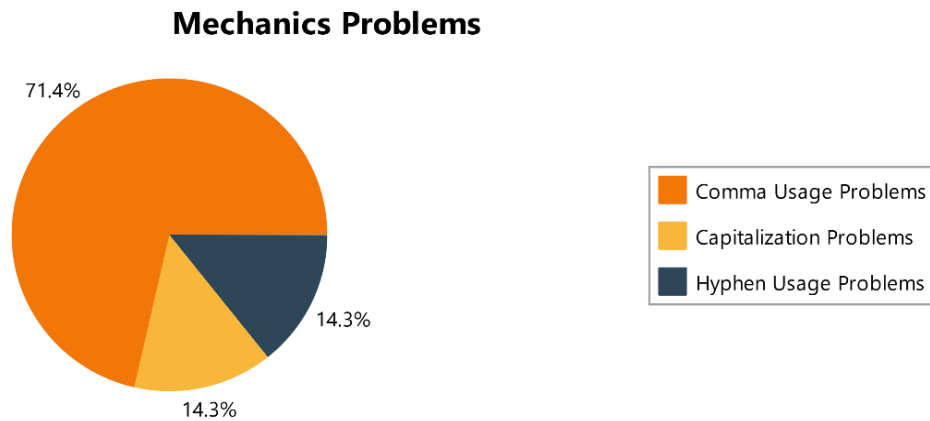


Figure 4.4 shows participants’ mechanics difficulties and the percentage of each difficulty in thirty thesis statements

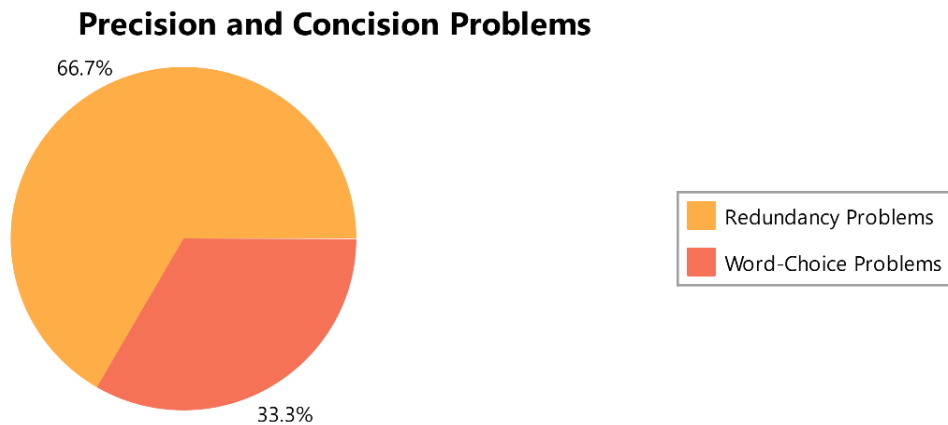


Figure 4.5 shows participants' difficulties of lack of precision and lack of concision as well as the percentage of each difficulty in thirty thesis statements

Lack of Orientation

Lack of orientation refers to students' failure to state the essay topic, failure to state the thesis three main ideas, and failure to avoid gender biased language. This title was chosen because stating the essay topic in the thesis statement and stating the thesis statement's main ideas provide a sense of orientation for both the writer and the readers. In addition, addressing one gender and ignoring the other in situations that involve both genders create the impression that the writer is not interested in the overlooked one.

Failure to State the Essay Topic

Stating the essay topic in the thesis statement is crucial, for it communicates to the reader what the thesis statement is all about. For example, if an essay topic is Principal Elements of a Business Success, the thesis statement should include this topic. Ideally, the thesis statement in this case should be written as follows: "The principal elements of a successful business are product quality, reasonable prices, and good customer service." The analysis of these thirty essays revealed that some students failed to state the essay topic in their thesis statements. As mentioned earlier, the topics of the participants' essays were different because they were given different topics to choose from. The following is an example of thesis statements in which the essay topics were not stated.

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences"* (Essay 22).

Discussion: This student failed to state the essay topic in his thesis statement. After adding the essay topic, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: College students should not be punished for being absent because *there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences*. It seems that this problem was a result of failure to understand the importance of stating the essay topic in the thesis statement. It could also be the result of lack of one or more of the following: planning, developing a review checklist, revising, editing, and proofreading.

Failure to State Thesis Statement Main Ideas

According to Arlov (2010), "The thesis listing points of development has a long tradition in college writing. Listing thesis points provides a road map that lets the reader see where the essay is headed." (p. 40). The students' essay analysis revealed that some of them failed to state the thesis statement main ideas. Below are examples of students' thesis statements without main ideas.

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"I believe that the attendance policy is too strict and should be revised"* (Essay 3).

Discussion: This thesis statement does not include the three main ideas. As a result, readers would not be able to know the plan that the writer chose to address the essay topic. One way to rewrite this thesis statement with three main ideas is to identify them in the first, second, and third body paragraphs. Subsequently, they could be added to the thesis statement. It seems that this problem was a result of failure to understand the role of stating the thesis main ideas in the orientation of both the writer and the readers. It could also be resulting from lack of planning (creating an outline), developing a review checklist, revising, editing, and/or proofreading.

Gender Bias

The analysis revealed that a couple of students were involved in gender bias language. This term indicates that some participants referred to the male gender in contexts that required addressing both genders. The following is one example of this writing problem.

Essay Topic: Why College Students Should Be Punished for Absence

Thesis Statement: *"However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences"* (Essay 22). (Thesis Statements, Pos. 24)

Discussion: As the essay topic indicates, the issue of punishing college students for absence is supposed to involve both the males and female students. However, this thesis statement confines the punishment to the male students and ignores the female ones. This writing problem could be a result of the students' culture and first language. In Arabic, for example, "when a message concerns a group of males and females, the male gender takes over. Another situation in which the male gender dominates occurs when the message concerns an indefinite reference" (Yassin, 2016). It must be mentioned that in thirty thesis statements, only two of them have this writing problem. However, this observation cannot be used to conclude that this writing problem lightly exists in this population's written texts, for the study investigated only the thesis statements, not the full essays. Another reason for this problem could be lack of students' awareness to avoid sexist language and lack of revising.

Grammatical Difficulties

According to Pence and Emery (1963), "Grammar is the science of language that treats of the constructions, forms, and usages of words" (p. 3). In this analysis, grammatical difficulties refer to the students' violations of the English language rules that native speakers follow and consider acceptable in specific situations (Kolln & Funk, 2002). The analysis of the participants' thesis statements revealed that they encountered the following grammatical problems: sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, nonparallel main ideas, inconsistent point of view, part of speech, definite article, indefinite article, and prepositions.

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment refers to group of words that the writer mistakenly treats as a full sentence, whereas it is not, for it may lack either a subject or a verb or both (Arlov, 2010). The thesis statements analysis revealed that some participants had difficulties writing complete sentences. The following is an example.

The Essay Subject: Why Countries Shouldn't Go to War

The Student's Thesis Statement: *In my opinion, war brings a bound to happen effect on our human wellbeing. As well as, the disruption of relationship between nations, and untimely the economy* (Essay 5).

Discussion: The second and third main ideas of this attempt of thesis statement were written in a fragment sentence that is missing both the subject and the verb. If these two main ideas are added to the first complete thought "*In my opinion, war brings a bound to happen effect on our human wellbeing*," this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *In my opinion, war brings a bound to happen effect on our human wellbeing as well as the disruption of relationship between nations, and untimely the economy.*

The problem of writing fragment sentences could be resulting from failure to understand that the English sentence has two major elements, without which a group of words cannot express a full thought. These two elements are the subject and the predicate. The subject is what the sentence speaks about, and the predicate is what is said about the subject. The most important element the predicate is the verb that connects the subject with the rest of the predicate (predication). This writing problem could also be a result of lack of editing and proofreading. In addition, it could be resulting from the interference of the participants' first language, Arabic, with the English language, for the Arabic sentence could be produced with or without a verb, depending on the nature of the sentence. According to Bashir, Yusof, Sadiq, and Omar (2016), "Arabic interference and intra-lingual interference are the sources of the errors among tenth-grade students of Ajloun schools, Jordan" (p 998).

Subject-Verb Agreement

Good writing requires writers establish agreement between the subject and the verb in their sentences. The analysis of participants' essays revealed that they had difficulties observing this grammatical rule. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Male and Female Students Should Work Together

The Student's Thesis: *"The reasons why men and women should work together is to remove gender discrimination, to enhance their self-esteem and to improve families' financial conditions"* (Essay 27).

Discussion: The subject in this thesis statement is "reasons," which is a plural noun. Thus, it requires a plural verb. Instead of using the plural form of the be verb "are," this student used the singular form "is." When only this problem is corrected, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *The reasons why men and women should work together are to remove gender discrimination, to enhance their self-esteem and to improve families' financial conditions.* These findings echo that of AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) and Morgan (2018). The students' failure to establish agreement between the subjects and the verbs in their sentences could be a result of

lack of understanding the grammatical concept of subject-verb agreement. It could also be a result of lack of developing a review checklist, lack of editing, and failure to proofread.

Verb-Tense Problem

A verb tense is “a grammatical feature of verbs and auxiliaries relating to time” (Kolln & Funk, 2002, p 365). The analysis revealed that a couple of participants’ encountered difficulty with verb tense, as in the below example.

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

The Student’s Thesis Statement: “*English language become popular language in the world, because there are many reasons to make English the instruction language at PMU*” (Essay 13).

Discussion: In addition to the other writing difficulties that this student reflected on this thesis statement, he also failed to use the correct tense of the verb “become.” More specifically, since he was speaking about the influence of the English language today, then he should have used the perfect tense “has become,” instead of become. When only this problem is corrected, his thesis statement could be rewritten thus: *English language has become popular language in the world, because there are many reasons to make English the instruction language at PMU*. This problem could be resulting from lack of understanding that in English “Three verb forms indicate tense: the base form and the -s form (present) and the -ed form (past)” (Kolln & Funk, 2002, p. 365). It could also be a result of the students’ failure to revise, edit, and proofread.

Nonparallel Main Ideas

Good writing requires establishing parallel structures throughout a written document. Since the traditional essay thesis statement has three main ideas, they are supposed to be parallel. “A structure is parallel when all the coordinate parts are of the same grammatical form. The conjunctions must join comparable structures, such pairs of noun phrases or verb phrases or adjectives” (Kolln & Funk, 2002, p. 218). The analysis of thirty participants’ essays revealed that some of them encountered difficulties writing parallel main ideas. The following is an example.

The Essay Topic: Why Learning a Second Language is Important?

The Student’s Thesis Statement: “*Learning a second language can provide better opportunities, perks of travel and leisure also enables the person to experience new culture*” (Essay 1).

Discussion: The three main ideas in this thesis statement are (1) better opportunities, (2) perks of travel and leisure, and (3) enables the person to experience new culture. In addition to the other problems these three main ideas have, they are nonparallel because the first and second are noun phrases (opportunities and perks), whereas the third main idea is a verb phrase, which is “enables the person to experience new culture.” Notice that this main idea begins with the verb “enables.” One way to make these main ideas parallel is to rewrite this thesis statement as follows: *Learning a second language provides opportunities, perks of travel, and experience of a new culture experience*. The participants’ failure to write three parallel main ideas could be a result of lack of planning, lack of understanding how to establish parallel structures, lack of applying grammatical rules taught to them to help them establish parallel structures, lack of developing a review checklist, lack of revising, and/or lack of proofreading.

Inconsistent Point of View

According to Arlov, “If a sentence has problems with pronoun reference, then either a pronoun has no antecedent or it has more than one possible antecedent” (210, p. 389). The analysis of the students’ thesis statements revealed problems with antecedent-pronoun relationship. More specifically, some thesis statements included pronouns that do not refer to an existing noun. They also included unjustifiable shifts from the third person singular or plural to the second person “you.” Here is an example.

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

The Student’s Thesis Statement: “*However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences*” (Essay 22).

Discussion: The antecedent of the pronoun “he” in this thesis statement is “students.” Since this antecedent is a plural noun, the correct pronoun to refer to it is “they,” not “he.” When only this mistake is corrected, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because they might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences.* This finding is in line with Al Tameemy and Daradkeh (2019). These students’ failure to establish a consistent viewpoint could possibly be a result of lack of understanding how to establish consistent points of view. It could also be resulting from lack of developing a review checklist, revising, editing, and proofreading.

Part of Speech Problems

Part of speech writing problems refer learners’ usage of the wrong part of speech in a given context. For instance, instead of using an adverb, the learner may use an adjective. The analysis reveals the existence of this writing difficulty in the participants’ thesis statements, as in the below example.

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

The Student’s Thesis Statement: “*English makes students confidence in the second language, the English is an International Language, and PMU will receive more students with different nationalities main reasons to why should English be the instruction language at PMU*” (Essay 8).

Discussion: Only one student reflected this writing problem in his thesis statement. Instead of using the adjective “confident,” he used the noun form “confidence.” This is grammatical problem could be a result of lack of revising, editing, and proofreading. It could also be resulting from the student’s unawareness that “confidence” is a noun, not an adjective. In fact, this pattern of the English sentence is classified as “the transitive verb patterns,” the formula of whose is NP1 + Transitive Verb + NP2 + Adjective (Kolln & Funk, 2002). As the formula indicates, the last slot in this pattern of sentence is supposed to be an adjective or an adjectival, not a noun.

Definite Article Problems

The definite article has specific situations that call for it, and when it used in the wrong contexts, it could be confusing. The analysis indicated that a few participants encountered this writing problem, as in the example below.

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"Hence, the student should be punished for absence in college as his academic performance affects badly, starts the habit of wasting time on irregular activities and promote a culture of laziness" (Essay 24).*

Discussion: As the essay topic indicates, the issue of punishing college students for absence is supposed to be discussed generically. In this thesis statement, however, the participant's usage of the definite article "the" in "the student should be punished for absence" suggests that this student was specific, a one that the writer and the readers knew. It seems that this mistake resulted from lack of understanding the different situations in which the definite article could be used. It could also be a result of lack of reviewing, editing, and proofreading.

4.3.8 Indefinite Article Problems

The indefinite article is used before singular count nouns to indicate, in that context, such nouns refer to unspecified ones. The analysis revealed that some students experienced difficulties using this article. The following is an example.

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences" (Essay 22).*

Discussion: In this thesis statement the word "job" in the phrase "part time job" is a count noun used in the singular form. Hence, it should have been preceded by the indefinite article "a." Because the noun phrase "part-time" modifies this singular count noun--job, the indefinite article should have been written before this modifier. When only this mistake is corrected, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *However, there are sometimes when students need to get absent because he might get sick, stuck in a part time job or in any personal issue due to which student must not be punished for absences.* The participants' failure to use the indefinite article with singular count nouns could be a result of lack of understanding the rule governing this grammar issue. It could also be a result of lack of editing and proofreading.

Prepositions

Prepositions are words used before noun phrases (nouns and pronouns) to show the relationship between them and the other words in the sentence. Examples of frequently used prepositions are "in," "on," and "for." EFL and EFL students in general experience many problems with the English prepositions. The analysis showed that participants faced difficulties using prepositions. Examine the below example.

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"Hence, the student should be punished for absence in college as his academic performance affects badly, starts the habit of wasting time on irregular activities and promote a culture of laziness" (Essay 24).*

Discussion: This student used the preposition "in" in "the student should be punished for absence in college." Obviously, people get absent "from" things or events, but not in them, of course. The Saudi students' difficulties with prepositions were repeatedly supported by previous research, such as Sawalmeh 2013, Javid and Farooq 2013, and Tameemy and Daradkeh 2019. These students' incorrect usage of prepositions suggests that they did not understand how to use them. It also suggests that they didn't consult the dictionary to see how and when to use them.

4.4 Lack of Precision and Concision

Lack of precision refers to writers' usage of the wrong or inaccurate word, whereas lack of concision refers to being verbose—using more words than needed. The analysis of participants' essays revealed that some of them were not careful in choosing the words that would accurately help express their intended thoughts. They were also wordy. Consider the two examples below.

Word Choice Problems

The Essay Topic: Why Male and Female Students Should Study Together

The Student's Thesis Statement: *"In my opinion This is the right thing, and I agree with that" (Essay 7).*

Discussion: The word "thing" in this thesis statement is inaccurate; it reflects either the student's poor vocabulary background or his lack of revising and editing. The word "thing" can refer to countless things. This student, therefore, should have looked for a more accurate word that would help express his position in this issue, which is controversial in his culture. One most suitable word to substitute the word "thing" in this thesis statement is "decision." When this word-choice problem is solved, the thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *In my opinion This is the right decision, and I agree with that.*

Redundancy Problem

The Essay Subject: Why Countries Shouldn't Go to War

The Student's Thesis Statement: *In my opinion, war brings a bound to happen effect on our human wellbeing. As well as, the disruption of relationship between nations, and untimely the economy (Essay 5).*

Discussion: In this thesis statement, the phrase "war brings a bound to happen effect on our wellbeing" could be replaced with shorter expression that can be even more accurate in expressing this student's intended message. For example, he could've written it as follows: "war harms us" or "war threatens our well-being." Accordingly, instead of using 11 words, he could have used only three, or he could've used only four, as in the first and second consecutively suggested solutions. Lack of concision could be resulting from limited vocabulary and failure to use the dictionary to verify meanings and usages of words, whereas verbosity could be a result of lack of rigorous revising, lack of intellectual perseverance, and/or failure to explore different ways to express ideas.

Mechanics Difficulties

Writing mechanics refers to a wide range of rules that writers should observe. They include punctuation, such as the period, the comma, the semicolon, the colon. Mechanics, in addition, include spelling and capitalization. The analysis of participants' essays revealed that they had trouble with capitalization and with the comma. Below are examples of participants' capitalization and punctuation problems.

4.4.1 Capitalization Problems

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

The Student's Thesis Statement: *“English makes students confidence in the second language, the English is an International Language, and PMU will receive more students with different nationalities main reasons to why should English be the instruction language at PMU” (Essay 8).*

Discussion: The words “international” and “language” in this thesis statement are improper nouns occurring in the middle of the sentence. Accordingly, they should have been written in the lower case, instead of being written in the upper case. It seems that these students capitalized some words or phrases, such as “International Language,” because they thought they were proper nouns. This problem could also be a result of lack of editing, proofreading, dictionary consulting.

Punctuation Problems

The importance of the application of punctuation rules in writing is similar to that of traffic rules for driving. As traffic signs help drivers drive safely and arrive at their destinations without getting lost, good punctuation helps readers understand the writer's intended message easily and without confusion.

4.4.2.1 Difficulties with the Comma

The Essay Topic: Elite Sports Players Deserve Their Income

The Student's Thesis Statement: *“Some people say that they do not deserve that much money but I do not agree with them” (Essay 21).*

Discussion: This thesis statement is a compound sentence in which the second clause contrasts with the first one. Accordingly, the coordinating conjunction “but” should have been preceded by a comma. When only this mistake is corrected, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *Some people say that they do not deserve that much money, but I do not agree with them.* These students' difficulties with the comma are supported by previous research (Ahmed, 2016; Al Tameemy & Daradkeh, 2019). They could be a result of failure to understand the rules governing the usage of the comma, lack of editing, and lack of proofreading.

Problems with the Hyphen

The analysis revealed a few students had experienced difficulties applying the hyphen in context that called for it. The following is one example.

The Essay Subject: Why Countries Shouldn't Go to War

The Student's Thesis Statement: *In my opinion, war brings a bound to happen effect on our human wellbeing. As well as, the disruption of relationship between nations, and untimely the economy* (Essay 5).

Because the phrase “bound to happen” is made up of three words, and it is used to modify the noun “effect,” it should be hyphenated using two hyphens as follows: bound-to-happen. Accordingly, with the correction of only this problem, this thesis statement could be rewritten as follows: *In my opinion, war brings a bound-to-happen effect on our human wellbeing. As well as, the disruption of relationship between nations, and untimely the economy.* Most probably, this problem is a result of lack of understanding the rule that calls for the usage of the hyphen when two or more words act as an adjective before a noun. In addition, it should be mentioned that confining these students' punctuation difficulties to the comma and the hyphen could be strongly misleading, for writing thesis statements in this level mostly requires the use of the comma and the period. In other words, the other punctuation marks are rarely needed in writing thesis statements in this level.

CONCLUSION

This case study investigated the difficulties PMU Saudi, undergraduate, male students encountered in writing thesis statement for traditional, argument essays they wrote for a core-writing course (COMM 1311) they took in the fall semester of 2017/2018. Using document analysis data collection technique, the purposive sampling was employed to collect thirty traditional, argument essays. MAXQDA 2020 was utilized to assist in the data analysis that was accomplished using open coding. The findings revealed that the students' writing difficulties fall into four themes. The first was lack of orientation, which included failure to state essay topic, failure to state thesis statement main ideas, and committing gender bias. The second theme was grammatical problems, which included sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, nonparallel main ideas, inconsistent viewpoint, part of speech, definite article, indefinite article, and prepositions. The third theme was lack of precision and concision, which included word-choice and redundancy problems, successively. The fourth theme was mechanics problems, which included difficulties with capitalization, difficulties with the comma and with the hyphen. The significance of this study stems from the fact that, to this researcher's best knowledge, it was the first of its kind. It was also the first of its kind to be conducted on Saudi, undergraduate, male students at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU). It is recommended that writing instructors explore and adopt effective teaching pedagogies that help students avoid these writing difficulties. Finally, since this was a qualitative study, it is recommended that future studies of this topic be conducted using quantitative approach.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Thesis Statements 2017-2018.mx20

9/26/2021

Code System

1 Lack of Orientation	
1.1 Failure to State Essay Topic	8
1.2 Failure to State Thesis Main Ideas	6
1.3 Gender Bias	2
2 Grammatical Problems	
2.1 Sentence Fragment	5
2.2 Subject-Verb Agreement	3
2.3 Tense Problems	2
2.4 Nonparallel Main Points	8
2.5 Inconsistent Point of View	7
2.6 Part of Speech Problem	1
2.7 Definite Article Problems	4
2.8 Indefinite Article Problems	6
2.9 Preposition Problems	4
3 Precision and Concision Problems	
3.1 Word-Choice Problems	5
3.2 Redundancy Problems	10
4 Mechanics Problems	
4.1 Capitalization Problems	15
4.2 Comma Usage Problems	3
4.3 Hyphen Usage Problems	3

1 Lack of Orientation

This code refers to students' failure to state the essay topic and failure to state the thesis main ideas. This code is chosen because stating the essay topic in the thesis statement and stating the thesis statement's three main point provides orientation for both the writer and the readers. The issue of gender is also considered an aspect in this this matter.

1.1 Lack of Orientation >> Failure to State Essay Topic

This code refers to students' failure to state the essay topic in their thesis statement.

1.2 Lack of Orientation >> Failure to State Thesis Main Ideas

This code refers to thesis statement in which the students haven't stated the thesis three main ideas.

1.3 Lack of Orientation >> Gender Bias

This code refers to the students' reference to one gender (usually the male gender) in a context that required addressing both genders.

2 Grammatical Problems

This code refers to different grammar difficulties that the students reflected on their essays.

2.1 Grammatical Problems >> Sentence Fragment

This code refers to incomplete thoughts, which result from failure to write a subject or failure to write a verb.

2.2 Grammatical Problems >> Subject-Verb Agreement

This code refers to students' failure to establish subject-verb agreement.

2.3 Grammatical Problems >> Tense Problems

This code refers to using the wrong verb tense.

2.4 Grammatical Problems >> Nonparallel Main Points

This code refers to thesis statement's main idea that are nonparallel.

2.5 Grammatical Problems >> Inconsistent Point of View

This code refers to using a pronoun that refers to the wrong word, concept, or one that doesn't have an antecedent.

2.6 Grammatical Problems >> Part of Speech Problem

This code refers to the students' usage of words' wrong part of speech. For instance, in a context requiring a noun, a student may use an adjective or vice versa.

2.7 Grammatical Problems >> Definite Article Problems

This code refers to students' wrong usage of the definite article or their failure to use it when it is required in a specific context.

2.8 Grammatical Problems >> Indefinite Article Problems

This code refers to students' failure to use the indefinite article before singular count nouns.

2.9 Grammatical Problems >> Preposition Problems

This code refers to students' incorrect use of prepositions.

3 Precision and Concision Problems

This code refers to students' usage of the wrong or inaccurate word. It also stands for verbose language.

3.1 Precision and Concision Problems >> Word-Choice Problems

This code refers to the students' usage of words that are inaccurate or unspecific.

3.2 Precision and Concision Problems >> Redundancy Problems

This code refers to using a word or more that are not needed to express an idea. In other words, the idea that the student intended to express has already been communicated without the redundant word or words.

4 Mechanics Problems

This code refers to students' problems with spelling, and capitalization, and punctuation.

4.1 Mechanics Problems >> Comma Usage Problems

This refers to using a comma in a context that doesn't call for it or failing to write a comma where it was needed.

4.2 Mechanics Problems >> Capitalization Problems

This code refers to students' wrong application of English capitalization rules. Specifically, the students either uses the lower case and/or the upper case incorrectly.

4.3 Mechanics Problems >> Hyphen Usage Problems

This code refers to a missing one or more than one hyphen.