

**TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN EFL
YEMENI CONTEXT: A QUALITATIVE CASE
STUDY OF STUDENTS' REACTIONS AND
UTILISATIONS**

OMER HASSAN ALI MAHFOODH

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2011

**TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN EFL YEMENI CONTEXT: A
QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' REACTIONS AND
UTILISATIONS**

by

OMER HASSAN ALI MAHFOODH

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

JULY 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praise goes to Allah the Lord of Universes.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciations to all those who helped make this study possible, including but certainly not limited to the following.

Very special thanks and sincere appreciations go to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Ambigapthy Pandian, for his effort and helpful suggestions. Without his guidance and support, this study would not have been possible.

I would like to acknowledge the financial support I received from my sponsor, Hodeidah University, Yemen, during my study. My appreciations also go to Universiti Sains Malaysia for offering me the chance to pursue my Ph.D.

My thanks and appreciations are extended to all staff members and students at the Department of English language in the Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University, for their support during data collection.

Last, but definitely not least, my thanks go to my family. I would like to thank my father and mother who have endlessly supported me emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Their patience and encouragement made my achievement possible. My deep gratitude goes to my grandmother for her sincere prayers. My thanks are also extended to my brother, Ibrahim, for his academic assistance during data collection and analysis. I thank him also for his tremendous non-academic support that helped me a lot during my study. I extend my thanks to my wife, Um-Amaani. Her words of encouragement contributed much to my determination to complete my study. I thank my daughters, Amaani, Geehaan, and Maryam, who have been a source of cheerful moments in my life. My gratitude is also extended to my brothers and sisters for always being there for me, encouraging me, saying prayers, and offering assistance whenever I needed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgments	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xv
List of Abbreviations	xvii
List of Publications	xviii
Abstrak	xix
Abstract	xxi

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1	Overview of the Study	1
1.2	Republic of Yemen	3
	1.2.1 Hodeidah Governorate	4
1.3	The System of Education in Yemen	5
	1.3.1 School Education in Yemen	6
	1.3.2 Higher Education in Yemen	7
1.4	English Education in Yemen	8
	1.4.1 English Education in Yemeni Schools	11
	1.4.2 English Education in Yemeni Universities	13
1.5	Hodeida University	15
1.6	Faculty of Education, Hodeidah	15
1.7	Department of English Language, Hodeidah	16
	1.7.1 EFL Writing Skills Courses	18

1.7.1.1	Writing Skills Course (1)	19
1.7.1.2	Writing Skills Course (2)	19
1.7.1.3	Writing Skills Course (3)	20
1.7.1.4	Writing Skills Course (4)	20
1.7.1.5	Advanced Writing Skills	20
1.8	EFL Learners in Arab Countries	21
1.9	The Importance of English Writing Skills	23
1.10	Background to the Study	27
1.11	Statement of the Problem	30
1.12	Objectives of the Study	34
1.13	Research Questions	35
1.14	Significance of the Study	36
1.15	Limitations of the Study	40
1.16	Definitions of the Key Terms	42
1.17	Overview of the Organisation of the Study	46
1.18	Chapter Summary	48

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1	Introduction	49
2.2	Approaches to Writing Instruction	50
2.2.1	Controlled Composition	51
2.2.2	Current-traditional Rhetoric	52
2.2.3	The Process Approach	53
2.2.4	English for Academic Purposes	54
2.3	The Emergence of the Process Approach	55

2.4	The Process Approach in ESL and EFL Writing Contexts	57
	2.4.1 Revision in the Process Approach	63
2.5	Criticism of the Process Approach	66
2.6	Writing in L1 and EFL Contexts	69
2.7	Feedback in Second Language Writing	75
2.8	Types of Feedback in Second Language Writing	76
2.9	Roles of Teacher Written Feedback	78
2.10	Studies on Teacher Written Feedback	80
	2.10.1 Students' Reactions to Teacher Written Feedback	82
	2.10.1.1 Surveys on Students' Reactions	82
	2.10.1.2 Other Studies on Students' Reactions	89
	2.10.2 Effects of Teacher Written Feedback	92
	2.10.3 Teacher Written Feedback and Students' Revisions	94
	2.10.4 Characteristics of Teacher Written Feedback	98
	2.10.5 Other Studies on Teacher Written Feedback	100
2.11	Contextual Factors and Teacher Written Feedback	102
2.12	Methodological Issues in Studies on Teacher Written Feedback	105
2.13	EFL Studies on Teacher Written Feedback	108
2.14	Theoretical Framework of the Study	112
	2.14.1 The Cognitive Process Theory of Writing and Teacher Written Feedback	112
	2.14.2 The Socio-cultural Theory of Learning	115
	2.14.2.1 Zone of Proximal Development	116
	2.14.2.2 Scaffolding	118
	2.14.2.3 Socio-cultural Theory and Teacher Written Feedback	119

2.14.3	Social Constructivism and Teacher Written Feedback	122
2.14.4	Revision Process Theory and Teacher Written Feedback	125
2.15	Explanation of The Theoretical Framework	129
2.16	Recent Published Studies on Teacher Written Feedback	132
2.17	Chapter Summary	135

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	136
3.2	Research Design of the Study	138
3.2.1	Rationale for the Research Design Selection	141
3.3	Selection of the Context	149
3.4	Sampling Techniques	150
3.4.1	Eight English Major EFL Students	152
3.4.2	Two EFL Writing Teachers	154
3.5	Permissions to Implement the Research	155
3.6	Data Collection	156
3.6.1	Students' Written Essays	158
3.6.2	Teachers' Written Feedback	159
3.6.3	Students' Think-aloud Protocols	160
3.6.4	Interviews	161
3.6.4.1	Interviews with Student Participants	164
3.6.4.2	Interviews with Teacher Participants	166
3.6.5	Students' Feedback Questionnaires	166
3.6.6	Classrooms Observations	168

3.7	The Roles of the Researcher	170
3.8	Procedures of Data collection	171
3.9	Time line for Data Collection	173
3.10	Data Management	173
3.11	Data Analysis	176
3.11.1	Corroboration and Consistency of Data Analysis	181
3.11.2	Analysis of Think-aloud Protocols and Semi-structured Interviews	183
3.11.2.1	Transcription	184
3.11.2.2	Segmentation	186
3.11.2.3	Coding the Segments	188
3.11.2.4	Categorisation of Codes	191
3.11.3	Analysis of Classrooms Observations	193
3.11.4	Analysis of Feedback Questionnaires	193
3.11.5	Analysis of Teachers' Written Feedback	194
3.11.6	Explanation of the Components of the Analytical Model	195
3.11.6.1	Types of Teachers' Written Feedback	196
3.11.6.2	Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback	197
3.11.7	Measurement of Success of Students' Revisions	199
3.12	Trustworthiness and Reliability	204
3.12.1	Reliability	207
3.12.2	Inter-coder Reliability	208
3.12.2.1	Inter-coder Reliability of Think-aloud Protocols and Interviews	209
3.12.2.2	Inter-coder Reliability of Coding Teachers' Written Feedback	210

3.12.2.3	Inter-rater Reliability of Rating Students' Revisions	211
3.12.3	Generalisability in Qualitative Research	212
3.13	Pilot Study	214
3.14	Ethical Considerations	216
3.15	Chapter Summary.....	217

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

4.1	Introduction	218
4.2	Student Participants' Profiles	220
4.2.1	First level Students Participants	221
4.2.2	Second level Student Participants	224
4.3	Teacher Participants' Profiles	229
4.4	Students' Affective Reactions to Teachers' Written Feedback	231
4.5	Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Written Feedback	242
4.6	Students' Preferences for Written Feedback	248
4.7	Students' Ways of Handling Teachers' Written Feedback	253
4.8	Teachers' Written Feedback on EFL Students' Writing	258
4.8.1	Types of Teachers' Written Feedback	261
4.8.2	Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback	264
4.9	Students' Understanding of Teachers' Written Feedback	267
4.10	Rating and Success of Students' Revisions	273
4.10.1	Results of Rating Students' Revisions	275
4.10.2	Results of Students' Success of Revisions	276
4.10.3	Students' Revisions and Types of Written Feedback	279

4.10.4	Students' Revisions and Areas of Focus of Written Feedback	281
4.11	Contextual Factors and Teachers' Written Feedback	283
4.12	Summary of the Results for all Cases	289
4.13	Chapter Summary	292
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION		
5.1	Introduction.....	293
5.2	The Purpose and the Research Design of the Study	293
5.3	Major Findings of the Study	296
5.4	Discussion of the Results	299
5.4.1	Affective Reactions to Teachers' Written Feedback	300
5.4.2	Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Written Feedback	303
5.4.3	Students' Preferences for Written Feedback	306
5.4.4	Students' Ways of Handling Teachers' Written Feedback	310
5.4.5	Characteristics of Teachers' Written Feedback	312
5.4.6	Understanding Teachers' Written Feedback	315
5.4.7	Students' Success of Revisions and Teachers' Written Feedback	316
5.4.8	Important Factors in the Context	319
5.5	Theoretical Framework and the Major Findings of the Study	322
5.6	Implications for Writing Instruction and Teacher Written Feedback	324
5.7	Recommendations for Future Research	327
5.8	Contributions of the Study	331
5.9	Chapter Summary	333

REFERENCES	335
-------------------------	-----

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Profiles of Revisers	355
Appendix B	Permission for Conducting the Research (USM)	356
Appendix C	Hodeidah University Permission for Conducting the Research	357
Appendix D (1)	The First Draft of <i>Dropout of School</i> , an Essay by Samiah	358
Appendix D (2)	The Second Draft of <i>Dropout of School</i> , an Essay by Samiah	360
Appendix E (1)	The First Draft of <i>Tourism in Yemen</i> , an Essay by Fatima	362
Appendix E (2)	The Second Draft of <i>Tourism in Yemen</i> , an Essay by Fatima	364
Appendix F (1)	The First Draft of <i>Dropout of Schools</i> , an Essay by Zahra'a	366
Appendix F (2)	The Second Draft of <i>Dropout of Schools</i> , an Essay by Zahra'a	368
Appendix G	Catalogue of Teacher s' Written Feedback on One of Moneer's Essays	370
Appendix H	Catalogue of Teachers' Written Feedback on One of Nadiah's Essays	372
Appendix I	Catalogue of Teachers' Written Feedback on One of Samiah's Essays	373
Appendix J	Prompts for Students' Semi-structured interviews	374
Appendix K	Prompts for Teachers' Interviews	375
Appendix L	Students' Background Structured Interviews	376
Appendix M	Feedback Questionnaire	378
Appendix N	Field Notes of the Second Observation	381

Appendix O	Examples for Codes in Think-aloud Protocols	383
Appendix P	Examples for Codes in Students' Semi-structured Interviews	384
Appendix Q	Rating of Fatima's Revisions	385
Appendix R	Rating of Shadiyah's Revisions	387
Appendix S	Students' Completed Questionnaires	389

LIST OF TABLES

		PAGE
Table 1.1	The System of Education in Yemen	6
Table 1.2	English Education in Yemen	14
Table 1.3	Courses in the Department of English Language	17
Table 2.1	Studies on Teacher Written Feedback in EFL Contexts	110
Table 3.1	Participants' Pseudonyms and Abbreviated Names	175
Table 3.2	Data Sources for Answering Research Questions	182
Table 3.3	Transcription Rules for Think-aloud Protocols	185
Table 3.4	Transcription Rules for Semi-structured Interviews	187
Table 3.5	Coding Scheme for Students' Think-aloud Segments	189
Table 3.6	Coding Scheme for Students' Semi-structured Interviews	190
Table 3.7	Coding Scheme for Teachers' Interviews	191
Table 3.8	Codes and Patterns for Think-aloud Protocols	192
Table 3.9	Codes and Patterns for Students' Semi-structured Interviews	192
Table 3.10	Analytical Model for Teachers' Written Feedback	196
Table 3.11	Description of Types of Teachers' Written Feedback	197
Table 3.12	Examples for Types of Teachers' Written Feedback	198
Table 3.13	Description of Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback	199
Table 3.14	Examples of Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback	200
Table 3.15	Rating Scale for Students' Revisions	201
Table 3.16	Examples for Rated Written Feedback Points	203
Table 3.17	Kappa Values for all Coding Schemes	212

Table 4.1	Demographic Data of the Student Participants	221
Table 4.2	First Level Students' Revising Categories and Responses to the First Part of the Background Structured Interviews	226
Table 4.3	Second Level Students' Revising Categories and Responses to the First Part of the Background Structured Interviews.....	226
Table 4.4	A Summary of Total Number of Students' Essays and Drafts	227
Table 4.5	Collected Qualitative Data and Questionnaires	228
Table 4.6	A Summary of the Total Number of Interviews and Observation Conducted with the Two Teachers.....	230
Table 4.7	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 1	231
Table 4.8	Students' Responses to the 1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd Questions, Part Two, Feedback Questionnaire	233
Table 4.9	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 2	242
Table 4.10	Students' Responses to Part One, Feedback Questionnaire	247
Table 4.11	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 3	249
Table 4.12	Students' Perceptions of Written Feedback on Aspects of Their Drafts	253
Table 4.13	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 4	254
Table 4.14	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 5	259
Table 4.15	Frequency of Written Feedback in all Catalogues	259
Table 4.16	Percentages of Written Feedback for all Students	260
Table 4.17	Frequency of Types of Teachers' Written Feedback: First Level Students	262
Table 4.18	Frequency of Types of Teachers' Written Feedback: Second Level Students	264
Table 4.19	Frequency of Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback: First Level Students	265

Table 4.20	Frequency of Areas of Focus of Teachers' Written Feedback: Second Level Students	266
Table 4.21	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 6	267
Table 4.22	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 7	274
Table 4.23	Results of Rating Students' Revisions	275
Table 4.24	Rating of Students' Revisions for Types of Written Feedback	276
Table 4.25	Rating of Students' Revisions for Areas of Focus of Written Feedback	276
Table 4.26	Success of Student Participants' Revisions	278
Table 4.27	Success of Students' Revisions and Types of Written Feedback	279
Table 4.28	Success of Students' Revisions and Areas of Focus of Written Feedback	282
Table 4.29	Data Sources for Answering Research Question 8	284
Table 4.30	Students' Reasons for not Understanding Teachers' Written Feedback	288
Table 4.31	High-level and Low-level Revisers' Successes of Revisions	291

LIST OF FIGURES

		PAGE
Figure 1.1	Map of the Republic of Yemen	4
Figure 2.1	Major Topics of Literature Review	50
Figure 2.2	Procedures Involved in Producing a Written Text	64
Figure 2.3	Major Aspects of Research on Teacher Written Feedback	81
Figure 2.4	Cognitive Process Model of Composing	113
Figure 2.5	Concept of Zone of Proximal Development	117
Figure 2.6	The Context of Writing Instruction	121
Figure 2.7	Cognitive Processes of Revision	128
Figure 2.8	Theoretical Framework of the Study	131
Figure 3.1	Research Process of the Study	148
Figure 3.2	Sources of Data Collection	157
Figure 3.3	Procedures of Data Collection	172
Figure 3.4	Levels of Data Analysis of the Study	179
Figure 3.5	Steps in the Analysis of Interviews and Think-aloud Protocols	183
Figure 3.6	Steps for Analysing Written Feedback	195
Figure 4.1	Frequency of Teachers' Written Feedback	261
Figure 4.2	Frequency of Types of Dr. Ahmed's Written Feedback	263
Figure 4.3	Frequency of Types of Dr. Shankar's Written Feedback	264
Figure 4.4	Frequency of Areas of Focus of Dr. Ahmed's Written Feedback	265
Figure 4.5	Frequency of Areas of Focus of Dr. Shankar's Written Feedback	266
Figure 4.6	Frequency of Students' Successful Revisions and Types of Written Feedback	280

Figure 4.7	Frequency of Students' Successful Revisions and Areas of Focus of Written Feedback	282
------------	---	-----

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DOEL	Department of English Language
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ECCFY	English Crescent Course for Yemen
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TWF	Teacher Written Feedback

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Mahfoodh, O., & Pandian, A. (2011). A qualitative case study of EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teachers' written feedbacks. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3):17-29.
- Mahfoodh, O., & Pandian, A. (2011). A proposed theoretical framework for studying teacher written feedback in EFL writing contexts. In A. Pandian, S. Ismail and T. C. Hiang (Eds.) *Teaching and learning in diverse contexts: issues and approaches* (pp. 114-126). Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia.
- Mahfoodh, O., & Pandian, A. (in press). Teacher written feedback in second language writing: a case study of EFL teachers' roles and the illocutionary acts of their written feedback. In M. Shuib, et al. (Eds) *Skills and competencies in education* (pp. 70-82). Penang: Universiti Sains Malaysia
- Pandian, A., & Mahfoodh, O. (2007). Investigating the EFL learners' reactions to teacher written comments. In A. Pandian, K. Y. Lie & P. Kell (Eds.), *Innovation and intervention in ELT: pathways & practices* (pp. 269-287). Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia.

**MAKLUM BALAS BERTULIS GURU DALAM KONTEKS EFL DI YEMEN:
SATU KAJIAN KES KUALITATIF TENTANG PENSUMBERAN DAN
TINDAK BALAS PELAJAR**

ABSTRAK

Maklum balas bertulis guru merupakan input daripada seseorang pembaca kepada seseorang penulis, dengan maklumat yang disediakan kepada penulis untuk rujukan. Kajian kes kualitatif ini bertujuan mengkaji lapan tindak balas afektif, persepsi serta pensumberan pelajar Yemen yang mengikuti kursus EFL, terhadap maklum balas bertulis guru mereka. Kajian ini diasaskan pada teori yang paling dominan dalam pembelajaran, penulisan, dan penyemakan. Teori ini adalah teori proses penulisan kognitif, teori pembelajaran sosiobudaya, teori pembelajaran konstruktivisme sosial, dan teori proses semakan. Kajian ini mempunyai sumbangan terhadap pedagogi penulisan EFL kerana dapatannya boleh memberikan wawasan terhadap maklum balas penulisan yang efektif, yang sepatutnya disediakan kepada pelajar bahasa Inggeris. Data dikumpul daripada esei pelajar, temu bual, sesi “think-aloud”, maklum balas bertulis guru, soal selidik, dan pemerhatian di bilik darjah. Data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis kandungan dan model analitik yang ditetapkan dalam penyelidikan penulisan L2. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Hasil analisis daripada maklum balas soal selidik menunjukkan bahawa maklum balas bertulis dikaitkan dengan kelemahan draf tulisan, pujian terhadap tulisan pelajar, pilihan kosa kata yang digunakan oleh pelajar, dan pembinaan idea dalam teks tulisan pelajar. Di samping itu, keputusan analisis ini juga menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan alasan yang dilaporkan kerana tidak memahami maklum balas bertulis guru, antaranya adalah disebabkan simbol yang digunakan, komen yang

diberikan terlalu umum, dan tulisan tangan guru yang tidak jelas. Tindak balas afektif pelajar terhadap maklum balas bertulis guru mereka mencakupi elemen positif dan juga negatif. Pelajar menganggap maklum balas bertulis guru mereka sebagai amat berguna serta dapat membantu dalam membangunkan kemahiran penulisan mereka. Di samping itu, mereka lebih menghargai sekiranya maklum balas berkenaan diberikan oleh guru mereka sendiri. Mereka juga mengharapkan agar guru mereka dapat memberikan tumpuan sepenuhnya dalam segala aspek penulisan mereka. Semasa memberikan maklum balas bertulis, di samping bertindak sebagai editor atau pemberi maklumat, kebanyakan guru kursus penulisan EFL di Yemen lebih menekankan tentang isu tempatan terutamanya dari segi tatabahasa, ejaan, dan tanda baca. Oleh itu, kejayaan pensumberan pelajar terhadap maklum balas bertulis dianggap ada hubung kait dengan maklum balas bertulis tentang isu tempatan. Faktor kontekstual yang berkaitan dengan pelajar, guru, dan maklum balas bertulis memainkan peranan yang signifikan dalam tindak balas pelajar EFL dan pensumberan daripada maklum balas bertulis guru mereka. Justeru, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa dengan memahami keperluan pelajar EFL serta melatih mereka tentang cara membaca dan memanfaatkan maklum balas bertulis guru adalah tatacara penting untuk menambah baik amalan memberi maklum balas bagi penulisan pelajar EFL. Dicadangkan bahawa maklum balas bertulis sepatutnya ditumpukan terhadap kandungan dan olahan teks dalam usaha membantu pelajar meneliti penulisan mereka serta membangunkan kemahiran menulis.

**TEACHER WRITTEN FEEDBACK IN EFL YEMENI CONTEXT: A
QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS' REACTIONS AND
UTILISATIONS**

ABSTRACT

Teacher written feedback is the input from a reader to a writer with the effect of providing information to the writer for revision. This qualitative case study attempted to investigate eight English major EFL Yemeni students' reactions to and utilisations of their teachers' written feedback. The study is built on the most dominant theories in learning, writing, and revision. These theories are the cognitive process theory of writing, the socio-cultural theory of learning, the social constructivism theory of learning, and the revision process theory. This study has its contribution to the pedagogy of EFL writing because its findings can provide insights on the effective written feedback that should be provided to English major students. Data were collected from the students' essays, interviews, sessions of think-aloud, teachers' written feedback, questionnaires, and classroom observations. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis and established analytical models in L2 writing research. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results of the analysis of the feedback questionnaires showed that the useful written feedback was related to weaknesses of the draft, praising students' writing, students' choices of vocabulary, and development of ideas in students' written texts. In addition, results of the analysis of the feedback questionnaires showed that most of the reported reasons for not understanding teachers' written feedback included using correction symbols, giving general written comments, and unclear handwriting of the teachers. English major students' affective reactions to their teachers' written feedback

included both positive and negative elements. The students perceived their teachers' written feedback as useful and helpful for developing their English writing skills. In addition, the students wanted their teachers to give written feedback on all aspects of their written texts. When giving written feedback, teachers of EFL writing mostly assumed the roles of editors and givers of information; they focused on local issues, such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. As a result of this, the students' successful utilisations of written feedback were considerably associated to written feedback on local issues. The contextual factors related to the students, the teachers, and the written feedback played very significant roles in EFL students' reactions to and utilisations of their teachers' written feedback. Thus, this study reveals that understanding EFL students' needs and training them on how to read and utilise their teachers' written feedback are important procedures for improving the practice of providing written feedback on students' writing. It is recommended that written feedback should be provided on the content and organisation of EFL students' written texts in order to help them revise their writing and develop English writing skills.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Study

Writing is a form of expression and a way of interaction between the writer(s) and the reader(s). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) defined writing as “a set of skills that must be practiced and learned through experience” (p. 6). Since people frequently have to communicate with each other in writing, developing writing skills is important. Besides, writing helps students learn because it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary (Raimes, 1983). Furthermore, good writing skills help writers to express their opinions, feelings, and thoughts. However, developing writing skills is a very difficult task even for native speakers of a language. For Second Language (hereafter referred to as L2) learners, writing is regarded a challenging task because it involves constant transformation and reworking of information (Myles, 2002). For learners of English as a Foreign Language (hereafter referred to as EFL), developing good writing skills is a long and complex process.

In EFL writing courses and programmes, teacher written feedback has been one of the most important constants. Furthermore, teacher written feedback on students’ writing is an integral part of teaching writing and a central issue in writing research (Sommers, 1980; K. Hyland, 1990; Keh, 1990; Ferris, 1995; Ferris, Pezone, Tade, & Tinti, 1997; F. Hyland, 1998; Ferris, 2003; K. Hyland, 2003; Diab, 2005). The importance of teacher written feedback cannot be denied because it is provided on students’ written texts to help them revise their drafts. In addition, teacher written feedback supports writing instruction, motivates students to learn, responds to

students' ideas, and encourages them to revise their written texts. When EFL student writers receive teacher written feedback on their written texts, they react affectively to it, try to understand it, and finally utilise it in their written texts.

The most important key concepts in this study are (1) written feedback, (2) affective reaction, (3) perception, and (4) utilisation. Written feedback in English as a Second Language (hereafter referred to as ESL) and EFL writing contexts may refer to what teachers of writing courses provide on their students' written texts in order to help them improve their written texts and develop their writing skills for future writing tasks. The concept of affective reaction includes emotional reactions to written feedback. Affect is considered to be a central component of cognitive processes; it is related to how learners perceive and think (Brand, 1989). It has been argued that affective factors refer to the writers' viewpoints or assessments of the state of affairs described in a particular discourse (K. Hyland, 1999). The concept of perception refers to students' views and evaluations of their teachers' written feedback. The concept of utilisation refers to the actual step that follows understanding of teacher written feedback. It is related to actions students do on their written texts based on their understanding of teachers' written feedback they receive. EFL students' utilisations of teachers' written feedback can be either successful or unsuccessful. The current study focused on these four important key concepts to investigate teachers' written feedback from the perspectives of English major students in EFL Yemeni context.

After providing a brief explanation of these four key concepts, this chapter gives an overview of Yemen, the education system, and English education in the

country. Next, it describes the profiles of both Hodeidah University and the Faculty of Education. In addition, the current chapter provides a description of EFL writing courses in the Department of English language, Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University. After that, this chapter moves on to describe the background to the study, which includes an overview on the importance of English writing skills and the importance of teacher written feedback for EFL student writers. This chapter also includes the statement of the problem, the research objectives, the research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of the key terms. This chapter concludes with an overview of the organisation of the study and a discussion on the limitations of the study.

1.2 Republic of Yemen

The Republic of Yemen is an ancient Arab land and it is located in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. Yemen occupies a strategic location because it overlooks Bab-el-Mandab, a channel that connects the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean in the Horn of Africa (Sharp, 2010). The strategic location of the country as a trading port has made the region wealthy throughout much of its history. As shown in Figure 1.1, the Republic of Yemen is bordered by Saudi Arabia on the north, by the Arab Sea and the Gulf of Aden on the south, by the Sultanate of Oman on the east, and by the Red Sea on the west (Bose, 2002; Khan & Chase, 2003; National Information Centre, 2006a).

Today, Yemen consists of both the former North Yemen and South Yemen. The re-unification was on 22nd May, 1990. Before the reunification, North Yemen was called Yemen Arab Republic and South Yemen was called People's Democratic

Republic of Yemen (Mahdi, Wurth, & Lackner, 2007). Yemen Arab Republic gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in November 1918, and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen became independent from Britain on 30th November, 1967. Today, the country is administratively divided into twenty-two governorates in addition to the Capital Secretariat, Sana'a (National Information Centre, 2006a).



Figure 1.1: Map of the Republic of Yemen (Sharp, 2010)

1.2.1 Hodeidah Governorate

Hodeidah, sometimes written as Al-Hudaydah, is one of the twenty-two governorates in the Republic of Yemen and it is located in the west of the country. It has been one of the most famous harbours on the Red Sea (National Information Centre, 2006b). It is widely known as a rich fishing region, and its history goes back

to the middle of the 14th century. Hodeidah Governorate constitutes a large part of Tihama coastal plain from Luhayya in the north to Khawkha in the south. Zabid is one of the historical places in Hodeidah Governorate, and it is regarded as one of the most important Islamic town in the world (ibid). After giving a brief description of the Republic of Yemen in the current section, the following sections are devoted for providing a description of the system of education, school education, and higher education in Yemen.

1.3 The System of Education in Yemen

The government of Yemen gives education the priority in the process of socio-economic development because it takes into consideration that education is the basis for both the development and the advancement of a society. The government of Yemen pays great attention to the development of education, and has increased financing for the sectors of education and training (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2004). Accordingly, there is a remarkable expansion in various areas of education: basic school education, secondary school education, vocational education, and university education. Due to the privatisation drive, private education has spread remarkably in the last few years, and there has been an increase in private schools and universities all over the country. Established and funded by professionals with great experience in public education, private universities, schools, and institutions supplement public education (Al-Abbasi, 2007).

The discussion of the education system in Yemen should include describing the system of education before and after the reunification that was in 1990 (see Table 1.1). Before the reunification, the system of education in Yemen Arab Republic

(South Yemen) had a different structure than it was in People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (North Yemen). After the reunification, the two systems of education were merged into one single system that consists of nine years of compulsory basic education, three years of secondary education, and two to six years of higher education (Shuja’a, 2004; Al-Tamimi, 2007; Mahfoodh, 2007). Upon completion of the nine years of basic education, students in Yemen can choose to continue secondary school education or choose to join either vocational education or technical training that are also provided at the secondary level (Al-Tamimi, 2007). Adapted from Mahfoodh (2007), Table 1.1 shows the structures of the systems of education in Yemen before and after 1990. After the reunification, the system of education in Yemen was revised, changed, and applied all over the country.

Table 1.1: The System of Education in Yemen (Mahfoodh, 2007)

Date	The country	System of education	
Before 1990	North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic)	Primary Education	Grades: 1-6
		Preparatory Education	Grades: 7-9
		Secondary Education	3 years
	South Yemen (People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen)	Primary Education	Grades: 1-4
		Preparatory Education	Grades: 5-8
		Secondary Education	4 years
After 1990	Republic of Yemen	Basic Education	Grades 1-9
		Secondary Education	3 years

1.3.1 School Education in Yemen

The system of school education in Yemen consists of nine years of basic education and three years of post-basic education (i.e., secondary school education) (ETF, 2004; Shuja’a, 2004; Al-Tamimi, 2007; Mahfoodh, 2007). In the Republic of Yemen, children are officially entitled to start basic schooling when they are six years old (Yuki, 2003; Al-Tamimi, 2007). According to EFT (2004), the post-basic

education in Yemen includes four branches: general secondary education, vocational secondary education, vocational training, and technical education.

The sector of technical education and vocational training in Yemen has witnessed continuous restructuring due to policymakers' growing beliefs of the importance of remarkable structural economic change in the country (EFT, 2004). As a result of such beliefs and growing support, there are 44 operational institutes and centres providing both technical education and vocational training. In addition, some more technical education and vocational centres are under restructuring in major cities in Yemen (ibid).

1.3.2 Higher Education in Yemen

Higher education at the university level in Yemen is provided by the governmental universities that are controlled by a central body and chaired by the Prime Minister of the country. These universities include Sana'a University, Aden University, Taiz University, Hodeidah University, Ibb University, Hadramout University, and Dhamar University (Al-Zubeiry, 2004). In addition, there are other private universities and colleges in different cities. In Yemen, higher education encompasses university education, teaching institutes, and community colleges (EFT, 2004). Admission to institutions of higher education in the country is based on the certificate of finishing secondary school education (Al-Zubeiry, 2004; Al-Tamimi, 2007).

There are also some other types of tertiary education in Yemen at the level of post-secondary schools. When Yemeni students finish their secondary school

education, they have the right to join universities, colleges, or any other institute (Al-Tamimi, 2007). In addition to universities that offer certificates in B.A and M.Sc in different fields of social sciences and applied sciences, colleges and institutes in Yemen offer programmes of two-year and three-year diplomas in fields of vocational education, medical sciences, and some other fields. Unlike the requirements of admission in universities in Yemen, these colleges and other institutes do not require high marks in the secondary school certificate.

Although the government of Yemen gives the high priority to education, the sector of education still faces many challenges, such as (1) high population growth rates, (2) an increase in school-age population, (3) the low quality and coverage of education, and (4) financial problems and inappropriateness (Al-Abbasi, 2007). In the current section, the discussion has been on the system of education, school education, and higher education in Yemen. The following section focuses on English education in Yemen.

1.4 English Education in Yemen

English is the most widely used language in the world today. It is used as a First Language (hereafter referred to as L1), an L2, and a Foreign Language (hereafter referred to as FL) all over the world (Bose, 2002; Shuja'a, 2004). Although English language plays an increasingly important role in communication between the various parts and groups in the world, it should be made clear that English is not the most widely used language in the world in terms of the number of its native speakers (Kitao, 1996). In other words, the importance of English language is not just in how many people speak or use it but in what it is used for. English

language is used today in most fields of our life all over the world (ibid). Accordingly, English language is so widely taught that the purposes for which it is learned are taken for granted (Richards, 2002).

English language is considered as an international language because it occupies an important role in our life in this era of globalisation. It is used by people from different nations to communicate with one another. One of the primary reasons for the spread of English language today is that it has a wide variety of specific purposes (McKay, 2002). Accordingly, for accessing different discourses at a global level including international relations, popular cultures, and academia, it has been confirmed that having knowledge of English is necessary. In addition, English is important for all people in most fields of life such as business, medicine, higher education, and sports. It is worth noting that an acceptable command of English is considered an indispensable imperative not only in Yemen but also in the entire world (Al-Zubeiry, 2004).

Almost all Arab countries have similarities that are related to religion, customs and values, history, and language (Aladwani, 2003). As in all Arab countries, Arabic language is the official language in Yemen and English language is taught as an FL (Bose, 2002; Shuja'a, 2004; Al-Tamimi, 2007; Mahfoodh, 2007; Batainah, Thabet, & Batainah, 2008). Moreover, Arabic is the language of instruction in almost all schools and universities in all Arab countries. In Yemen, Arabic language is the medium of communication, education, administration, discussion in the parliament, legal procedures, and mass media (Al-Zubeiry, 2004).

In Arab countries, the demand for English language increases more intensely, especially during the era of globalisation (Zughoul, 2003). In Arab universities, the departments of English language are considered the main language centres that provide Arab societies with teachers of English language as well as individuals who are expected to have a good proficiency of English language (Al-Haddad, 2005). Due to the fact that English language continues to play a key role in the job market and education, it continues to attract more students to select it as a major of studying. In its role as a global language, English has become one of the most important academic and professional tools. In most aspects of life in Arab countries, English language is considered necessary for communication with the world and for development in its widest sense (Zughoul, 2003).

Due to the importance of English language for Yemeni society, the introduction of teaching English as an FL in Yemeni schools and universities comes from the realisation of its growing importance in the world (Bose, 2002). In Yemen, English language has its crucial roles in international trade, private companies, tourism, and as a language of instruction in some scientific specialisations, such as engineering and medical studies. Moreover, in Yemeni society, English language has its importance in tourism, teaching, technology, and trade (Al-Fadly & Shuib, 2003).

For EFL Yemeni students at public and private universities, having proficiency in English language is also important and necessary for different reasons. When they are at the university level, EFL Yemeni students need English to communicate with their non-Arabic speaking lecturers. English major graduates need English after graduation for getting a job because it is true that employers in well-

paid organisations in Yemen expect their prospective employees to be proficient in English language skills (Bose, 2002). A large number of Yemeni employees need English language to understand their non-Arabic speaking colleagues at the offices, banks, tourism companies, hotels, and factories. The following sub-sections give brief descriptions of English education in schools and universities in Yemen.

1.4.1 English Education in Yemeni Schools

Yemeni students start studying English language formally when they are 12 years old. When Yemeni students start studying English formally, they have already spent six years of instruction in their mother tongue (Arabic language) (Bose, 2002; Mahfoodh, 2007). The objectives of English Language Teaching (hereafter referred to as ELT) in Yemeni schools focus on developing EFL Yemeni students' proficiency in basic English language skills, encouraging them to communicate in English with people who do not speak Arabic, helping them to develop English writing skills for academic purposes, and encouraging them to read English books and newspapers for acquiring information (Bose, 2002; Mahfoodh, 2007). Moreover, EFL Yemeni students are also taught English language in schools to motivate them to learn English when they pursue their higher education in any major of their choices (Bose, 2002).

The current EFL textbooks used in Yemeni schools are called English Crescent Course for Yemen (hereafter referred to as ECCFY); they were introduced in 1999 (Mahfoodh, 2007). ECCFY textbooks that have a variety of activities for English language use in daily communication replaced the Yemeni structural syllabus (i.e., English for Yemen) (Mahfoodh, 2007; Batainah et al., 2008). ECCFY

textbooks were written by two British authors in consultation with some local Yemeni experts in the field of Education in Yemen (Bose, 2002; Mahfoodh, 2007; Batainah et al., 2008). These textbooks were introduced because it was thought that their use in schools would improve the quality of ELT in the country. Although EFL teachers at Yemeni schools believed that ECCFY textbooks would improve the proficiency of EFL Yemeni students, these textbooks have received some criticism because they created problems and challenges for English education in Yemen (Batainah et al., 2008).

ELT in Yemeni schools have some problems and challenges that can be attributed to different factors. Al-Fadly and Shuib (2003) argued that the problems of teaching English at Yemeni schools can be classified into five major problems: (1) low number of hours given for teaching English per a week, (2) ineffectiveness of ECCFY textbooks, (3) lack of parental and societal encouragement for a wide use of English outside classrooms, (4) lack of in-service programmes for teachers, and (5) a delayed introduction of English as a school subject in the school curriculum. Most of EFL teachers in Yemeni schools face great difficulties while using ECCFY textbooks in classrooms; they claim that ECCFY textbooks are not suitable for the situation of EFL Yemeni students. In addition, EFL Yemeni teachers of ECCFY find it difficult to employ the communicative activities that are given in these textbooks (Batainah et al., 2008). These shortcomings of ECCFY textbooks have their effects on the suitability of these textbooks to Yemeni students at schools (Al-Fadly & Shuib, 2003). As a result of this, EFL Yemeni students finish their secondary school education with low proficiency in English. Thus, there have been different claims

from different teachers and researchers for evaluating ECCFY textbooks (Mahfoodh, 2007).

In response to the criticism of ECCFY textbooks, some studies (e.g., Murshed, 2005; Mahfoodh, 2007) were conducted to evaluate these textbooks. Focusing on evaluating ECCFY, Murshed (2005) and Mahfoodh (2007) confirmed that ECCFY textbooks have been unable to help Yemeni EFL students acquire a good proficiency in English language. Employing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, Mahfoodh (2007) investigated EFL Yemeni students' and teachers' views on ECCFY textbooks. He argued that ECCFY should be adapted to suit both Yemeni EFL students' proficiency and the culture of Yemeni society. Despite the criticism ECCFY textbooks have received, these textbooks are still in use.

The current sub-section has discussed briefly English education in Yemeni schools with a focus on the criticism of ECCFY textbooks and the major challenges of ELT in Yemen. The following sub-section focuses on English education in Yemeni universities.

1.4.2 English Education in Yemeni Universities

In Yemeni universities, English language is taught either as a prerequisite course or as a major of study (Al-Zubeiry, 2004). As a prerequisite course, English is taught in all faculties in Yemeni universities for two successive semesters. As a major of study, English is taught in the faculties of Education, Languages, and Arts. In faculties of Education, English is taught as a major in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (hereafter referred to as TEFL) programme for preparing teachers

to teach English in Yemeni schools. On the other hand, in faculties of Arts, English is taught with a focus on English literature; the programmes do not prepare students to teach English after their graduation. In addition, the English language programmes in the Faculties of Languages focus on training students to be professional translators from English into Arabic and vice versa.

To sum up the previous discussion on English education in both Yemeni schools and universities, Table 1.2 illustrates both the system of education and the English education in the curriculum of Yemeni schools and universities. The system of education in Yemeni schools includes elementary school education and secondary school education with the total of 12 levels. In Yemeni universities, the number of levels varies between four and seven years depending on the major a student selects.

Table 1.2: English Education in Yemen (Mahfoodh, 2007)

English Education	Number of years	Educational System
Medium of Instruction - Major = Faculties of Arts Faculties of Education Faculties of Languages - Prerequisite = Other faculties - Medium of instruction: Medicine, Engineering	4-7 years	Higher Education (B.A + B.Sc)
- English is taught as a school subject - Textbooks: ECCFY - Full introduction of ECCFY textbooks was in 1999.	3 years	Secondary Education
	3 years (Grade 7- Grade 9)	Elementary Education
- Instruction is in Arabic - English is not taught	6 years (Grade 1 - Grade 6)	

The discussion in the current section has focused on the system of education in Yemen, English education in Yemeni schools, English education in Yemeni universities, and other types of tertiary education. The following sections describe

the context of the current research through describing the profiles of Hodeidah University, Faculty of Education, and the Department of English language.

1.5 Hodeidah University

Hodeidah University, which is one of the eight governmental universities in Yemen, was established in the academic year 1996/1997. Before that academic year, there was only one faculty (i.e., Faculty of Education) which was one of the faculties of Sana'a University. Today, Hodeidah University is an independent university having eleven faculties and three centres (Hodeidah University, 2006).

1.6 Faculty of Education, Hodeidah

The Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University was established in the academic year 1987/1988. At that time, it was one of the faculties which belonged to Sana'a University. Today, the Faculty of Education contains eleven different departments including the Department of English language. According to Faculty of Education (2006), the goals of the Faculty of Education are:

1. Preparing school teachers according to both the education policy in Yemen and the philosophy of the Yemeni society.
2. Studying the educational problems in the Yemeni society and trying to find solutions for such problems according to both the Islamic culture and the modern educational methods.
3. Co-operating with the Ministry of Education in the country in the field of teacher training and other educational jobs.
4. Preparing qualified researchers in different fields of education.

5. Conducting educational research for the improvement of education in the country.

1.7 Department of English Language, Hodeidah

The departments of English language at Hodeidah University are found in three faculties: the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah city, the Faculty of Education at Zabid city, and the Faculty of Arts. The Department of English language in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah city is one the eleven departments. According to the Department of English language [DOEL] (2000), there are two programmes at this department: undergraduate TEFL programme and M.Ed programme. Similar to TEFL programmes in all faculties of Education in Yemen, the TEFL undergraduate programme in this department is a four-year undergraduate programme and it leads to the degree of Bachelor of Arts majoring in English and Education. Table 1.3 provides a list of the core subjects (English-English courses) in this TEFL programme. These courses are offered by the Department of English and taught by lecturers in the same department. Moreover, EFL students in this programme are required to take some other courses in education and psychology; these courses are taught in Arabic language by lecturers in the Departments of Educational Sciences and Psychology.

As stated in DOEL (2000), the courses in the TEFL undergraduate programme are classified into three components: (1) the component of English language skills, (2) the linguistics component, and (3) the English literature component. For each component, there are some courses and the total number of all courses in these three components is 37. All these courses are compulsory and the

students enrolled in this programme are required to pass all of them as one of the requirements of awarding B.A in English and Education. All these courses are of three hours per a week except three courses: Teaching Practice 1, Teaching Practice 2, and TEFL Methods 2. Each course of these three courses is given two hours per a week. As provided in Table 1.3, the component of English language skills is given the priority among other components.

Table 1.3: Courses in the Department of English Language (DOEL, 2000)

First Level		
First Semester		Second Semester
1.	Grammar and Usage 1	Grammar and Usage 2
2.	Spoken English 1	Spoken English 2
3.	Reading Skills 1	Reading Skills 2
4.	Writing Skills 1	Writing Skills 2
Second Level		
First Semester		Second Semester
1.	Grammar and Usage 3	Grammar and Usage 4
2.	Spoken English 3	Spoken English 4
3.	Reading Skills 3	Reading Skills 4
4.	Writing Skills 3	Writing Skills 4
5.	Introduction to Language 1	Introduction to Language 2
6.	-----	TEFL Methods 1
Third Level		
First Semester		Second Semester
1.	English Phonetics & Phonology	Morphology and Syntax
2.	TEFL Methods 2	Drama 1
3.	Advanced Writing Skills	Poetry 2
4.	Poetry 1	Novel 1
5.	Survey of English Literature	Teaching Practice 1
Fourth Level		
First Semester		Second Semester
1.	Contrastive Error Analysis	Testing and Evaluation in EFL
2.	Preparing TEFL Materials	Poetry 3
3.	Drama 2	Practical Criticism
4.	Novel 2	-----
5.	Teaching Practice 2	-----

The courses of English language skills are offered during all levels of the TEFL undergraduate programme. These courses have the general aim of enabling the students to develop their competence in English language skills including oral and

written communication through a learner-centered curriculum comprising aural/oral communication, study skills, intensive and extensive reading, written communication, and formal instruction in English grammar (DOEL, 2000). The following section focuses on giving some brief descriptions on the EFL writing courses in the syllabus of the Department of English, Hodeidah.

1.7.1 EFL Writing Skills Courses

There is no established writing programme in the department of English language. The TEFL programme at the Faculty of Education devotes a good number of courses for English language skills; there are five EFL writing courses in which the objectives and the syllabus are provided to the teachers. However, the choice of the content varies from one teacher to another based on their perceptions of the needs of the students and based on their experience in teaching English writing courses. In addition, the materials used for instruction and the types and numbers of the writing assignments are all controlled by the teachers of these EFL writing courses.

As shown in Table 1.3, there are five EFL writing skills courses in the TEFL undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University. Two of these courses are in the first level, two in the second level, and the last one is in the first semester of the third level. All of these EFL writing courses are of three hours per a week. The general objective of these five EFL writing courses is to help English major students to develop EFL writing skills to cope with different communicative needs in their academic studies and in their future careers (DOEL, 2000). For each course, there are some specific objectives but the teachers are free to

design the materials and to select the content of the course according to the objectives of the course (ibid).

1.7.1.1 Writing Skills Course (1)

Writing Skills Course 1 is the first EFL writing course for English major students. In this course, the students are also given some practices on the mechanics of writing including the rules of punctuation. According to DOEL (2000), the objectives of this course are:

- 1- To enable the students to write short discourses and informal English letters using suggested information and organisation.
- 2- To enable the students to make and use notes and schematic plans.
- 3- To enable the students to present information briefly while describing people and objects.
- 4- To enable the students to structure and organise ideas ensuring cohesion and coherence.
- 5- To enable the students to practice some strategies for developing themes, such as description and narration focusing on audience, purpose, and tone.

1.7.1.2 Writing Skills Course (2)

Writing Skills Course 2 is provided to the students in the second semester of the first level. The focus in this course is on training the students to narrate events, describe places, write short paragraphs, and develop the skills of note making. The students are taught and given some practices on how to write short messages and announcements; they are also trained on how to identify topic sentences in essays (DOEL, 2000).

1.7.1.3 Writing Skills Course (3)

English major students take Writing Skills Course 3 in the first semester of the second level. The course helps the students to develop writing essays in English, and the students are required to write essays that include expository essays and comparison and contrasts essays (DOEL, 2000). Besides, the students in this course are also given some practice on composing formal letters of enquiry, request, and complaint. In this course, cohesive devices are also taught to the students through the process of writing (ibid).

1.7.1.4 Writing Skills Course (4)

EFL students in the Department of English language are required to take Writing Skills Course 4 in the second semester of their second level. This course gives more focus on writing argumentative essays, cause and effect essays, and short reports. This course also focuses on helping students to develop the skills of writing English letters and filling applications forms (DOEL, 2000).

1.7.1.5 Advanced Writing Skills

Advanced Writing Skills course is the last EFL writing course in the TEFL undergraduate programme, and it is provided to the students in the first semester of the third level. According to DOEL (2000), the focus in the Advanced Writing Skills course is on stylistic acceptability that is given greater attention than grammatical correctness. In this course, EFL students are taught and given practice on writing informative, argumentative, and analytical prose. Developing appropriate organisational and stylistic techniques for writing effectively is another focus of this course.

1.8 EFL Learners in Arab Countries

English language is taught as an FL in all Arab countries. Due to the increase of using English language as a lingua franca all over the world and the recognition of the importance of English as an international language, governments in Arab countries have introduced English to their educational systems (Al-Khatib, 2000). In secondary school education in most Arab countries, a student study English language for at least eight years (ibid). However, in some Arab countries like Yemen, English is taught for only six years (Mahfoodh, 2007).

Although English language was introduced as an FL in schools and universities in 1920s, EFL Arab learners encounter different kinds of problems when they are engaged in oral communication or when they write essays and other types of written texts in English language (Al-Khatib, 2000; Rababah, 2005). Abbad (as cited in Rababah, 2005) focused on the weakness of the EFL Yemeni learners and found that most of the applicants for joining the departments of English in Yemeni universities were accepted in spite of their low proficiency. Accepting these applicants with their low proficiency to the departments of English language in Yemeni universities can cause a mismatch between the courses offered and the students' low level of proficiency (Al-Haddad, 2005). The low proficiency of the undergraduate students in the departments of English language in Arab universities has been noticed by some researchers. Worse than that, some researchers (e.g., Zughoul, 1987; Al-Haddad, 2005; Rababah, 2005) have argued that the graduates majoring in English language have some problems while communicating with others either orally or in written form. Investigating some Arab employers' views on English major graduates, Abu-Hamdia (as cited in Zughoul, 1987) argued against the

inadequacy of the preparation of English major EFL students in skills of communication. Focusing on English competence of the graduates at the University of Jordan, Ibrahim (as cited in Rababah, 2005) maintained that most faculty members were not totally happy with quality of English with which the graduates left. The low proficiency of the average graduate of the departments of English language in Arab universities is insufficient (Al-Haddad, 2005; Rababah, 2005). These findings on the noticed low proficiency of EFL Arab learners, especially English major students, can be applicable to EFL Yemeni graduates who finish their B.A programme majoring in English language without having the required proficiency in the basic English language skills (Bose, 2002; Al-Haddad, 2005).

There are different factors that may attribute to the low proficiency of the EFL students in Arab countries. These challenges and problems have been noticed and discussed by several researchers (e.g., Al-Khatib, 2000; Rababah, 2005; Fareh, 2010). The low proficiency of the EFL graduates in Arab countries can be attributed to the content of the courses and to the methods of instruction; the content of many courses in the departments of English language in Arab countries and the methods of instruction are not appropriate and do not match the EFL learners' future and present needs (Rababah, 2005). Other major challenges include the improper training of teachers of English, the ineffectiveness of textbooks used in Arab countries, students' motivation to learn English, the low exposure to English outside classrooms, and inefficiency of teaching methodologies used by teachers (Fareh, 2010). Rababah (2005) classified the factors that can be attributed to the low proficiency of EFL Arab learners into five factors: (1) lack of relevant information about school graduates when they join the university; (2) the curricula of EFL in schools and universities;

(3) the methodology of teaching; (4) lack of the target language environment; and (5) the learners' lack of motivation.

Most EFL programmes in Arab universities focus on developing EFL students' proficiency in the basic language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). The following section describes the importance of developing English writing skills for ESL and EFL students, showing that teaching English writing skills is given less attention in EFL Arab context.

1.9 The Importance of English Writing Skills

Although the four English language skills are interactive and cooperative, the command of good English writing skills is increasingly seen as vital to equip students for success in the 21st century as well as for communicating ideas effectively through the global network. According to K. Hyland (2003, p. xv), writing is considered to be "one of the most important skills that L2 learners need to develop". Moreover, writing is an important means for students to communicate with others, to develop their thinking skills for their academic success, and to be productive members in their societies (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). One of the major contributions of the research into the writing process is that the skill of writing is an essential tool for learning (Emig, 1977). The proficiency in English writing skills has the function of structuring our relations with others and organising our perception of the world. Thus, the mastery of written academic English should be a central aim of teaching English in Arab universities and institutes where English is the language of instruction (Al- Khuwaileh & Al-Shoumali, 2000). As a result of this, students in Arab universities need English writing skills for different academic writing activities,

such as taking notes, description, writing essays, and answering examination written questions. In addition, it has been recommended that EFL Arab students should be encouraged to reflect on the process of their writing to develop their thinking skills (Al-Hazmi, 2006).

English major EFL Yemeni students need to have a good command of all English language skills for their academic success and for their future careers after graduation. Similar to other English language basic skills, EFL writing skills are important for EFL Yemeni students during their academic life at universities and for their future careers. Exploring the needs of the English major Yemeni students, Al-Haddad (2005) recommended that EFL teachers in the departments of English language in Yemeni universities should pay more attention to the development of the four English language skills. Moreover, Al-Haddad emphasised that the ability of the EFL Yemeni students to construct English sentences correctly was unacceptable. However, EFL writing is the most important skill for the Yemeni learners of English, next only to reading because EFL Yemeni students have more opportunities to read and write than to communicate in English orally in their life after graduation (Bose, 2004). For English major EFL students in Yemen, the priorities should be reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Bose, 2005a). It has been confirmed that in many cases, writing overtakes reading in terms of their needs; for example, in office work as employees, in business transactions as business persons, and in filling up forms of various kinds (Bose, 2004). Developing English writing skills is also important for English major EFL students in Yemeni universities because they need English writing skills for writing notes, writing research papers, and doing other academic writing activities (ibid). Teachers of EFL writing courses in Yemeni universities

should, therefore, pay enough attention to implement different strategies for developing their students' writing skills.

However, composition is a skill that is not easily mastered because the task of the production of coherent, fluent, and extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult part in a language even for native speakers of a language. In the case of L2 learners, the production of any piece of writing is considered a difficult task because L2 learners "study a language that is not their own language" (Nunan, 1999, p. 271). The complexity of developing writing skills stems from the fact that writing draws on the writer's linguistic, social, and problem solving skills. Learning to write is not just a question of developing a set of mechanical orthographic skills. According to Tribble (1996), learning to write "involves learning and developing a new set of cognitive and social relations" (p. 12).

Although English writing skills have a place in most English syllabuses in L2 and ESL writing programmes and courses, teaching English writing skills in EFL contexts in Arab countries has been neglected over the last decades (Zughoul, 2003). This is because some arguments were made in favour of giving priority to teaching speaking and reading skills, especially in EFL contexts in schools and universities. Moreover, in some EFL contexts, a command of English speaking and reading skills is considered more important than developing writing skills (R. White, 1987). In addition, in the curriculum of traditional EFL teaching, writing was regarded as the most difficult part of the four basic language skills and postponed to the last stage in the language teaching programmes (Zamel, 1976). Zughoul (2003) argued that developing English writing skills has been given little emphasis, and the pedagogy of