

**EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN
EFL MODULE IN ENHANCING CRITICAL
THINKING, WRITING AND COLLABORATIVE
SKILLS OF OMANI EFL FOUNDATION
STUDENTS**

**MOUSTAFA MOHAMED ABDELMOHSEN
IBRAHIM**

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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by

**MOUSTAFA MOHAMED ABDELMOHSEN
IBRAHIM**

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**MENILAI KEBERKESANAN MODUL EFL DALAM MENINGKATKAN
KEMAHIRAN PEMIKIRAN, PENULISAN DAN KOLABORATIF
KEMAHIRAN PELAJAR OMANI EFL FOUNDATION**

ABSTRAK

Menulis dianggap sebagai salah satu kemahiran penting yang perlu dikuasai oleh pelajar kerana menuntut pengetahuan mendalam mengenai sistem tatabahasa dan konvensyen penulisan daripada kemahiran penerimaan yang lain. Atas sebab ini, pelajar Oman dikehendaki memiliki penguasaan penulisan untuk memenuhi kehendak tahap penulisan pendidikan tinggi di mana penulisan dianggap kaedah penilaian yang paling sesuai untuk kemajuan akademik pelajar. Walaupun begitu, pelajar Program Asas Am tidak dapat menjana dan menyusun idea, menulis pernyataan tesis yang baik, menggunakan kosa kata yang luas, atau mempertahankan kesatuan, kesatuan, dan koheren perenggan. Masalah lain adalah berkaitan dengan kekurangan kemampuan berfikir kritis dan kemahiran kolaboratif dalam penulisan pelajar. Untuk tujuan ini, kajian semasa mengembangkan modul penulisan untuk meningkatkan penulisan, pemikiran kritis, dan kemahiran kolaboratif pelajar Oman Foundation Program menggunakan model ADDIE. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kuasi eksperimen pra-ujian dan pasca-ujian. Kajian ini menggunakan tiga instrumen: ujian pra dan ujian pasca, jurnal reflektif pelajar, dan wawancara separa berstruktur. Peserta terdiri daripada 70 pelajar Oman dan 2 guru EFL. Pelajar dibahagikan kepada kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan. Kumpulan eksperimen ini menggabungkan 35 pelajar dan kumpulan kawalan turut melibatkan 35 orang pelajar. Kedua-dua kumpulan belajar bahasa

Inggeris di dua institusi yang serupa di Oman. Kumpulan eksperimen diajar oleh seorang guru, sedangkan kumpulan kawalan diajar oleh guru lain. Kumpulan kawalan mempelajari sukatan menulis konvensional, manakala kumpulan eksperimen mempelajari modul penulisan. Analisis ujian statistik Kovarians (ANCOVA) digunakan untuk membandingkan skor min ujian kedua-dua kumpulan. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data kualitatif yang diperoleh dari jurnal reflektif pelajar dan wawancara separa berstruktur. Penemuan kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa terdapat perbezaan min yang signifikan secara statistik antara skor eksperimen dan kumpulan kawalan dalam ujian pasca dan pemikiran kritikal. Kumpulan eksperimen mendapat skor min yang jauh lebih tinggi daripada kumpulan kawalan. Penemuan kualitatif yang diperoleh dari jurnal reflektif pelajar mengesahkan bahawa kemahiran kolaboratif pelajar telah dipertingkatkan. Pelajar juga mempunyai pengalaman positif dalam menggunakan modul. Kajian ini mempunyai implikasi penting. Modul tersebut mengesahkan bahawa perancah, yang digunakan untuk mengajar anak-anak, dapat digunakan untuk orang dewasa juga. Selanjutnya, kajian ini memberi implikasi kepada guru EFL di Oman. Ia mengesahkan bahawa modul tersebut dapat meningkatkan kemahiran pelajar kerana mengambil kira keperluan pembelajaran, pengetahuan latar belakang dan persekitaran pembelajaran pelajar. Kajian ini mendorong pengembangan modul untuk meningkatkan kemahiran pelajar.

**EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EFL MODULE IN
ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING, WRITING AND
COLLABORATIVE SKILLS OF OMANI EFL FOUNDATION STUDENTS**

ABSTRACT

Writing is deemed one of the salient skills that students need to master since it demands a more substantial in-depth knowledge of the grammar system and writing conventions than other receptive skills. For this reason, Omani students are required to have a mastery of writing to satisfy the requirements of higher education writing level where writing is deemed the most suitable assessment method of students' academic progress. Nevertheless, the General Foundation Program students are unable to generate and organize ideas, write a sound thesis statement, use a wide range of vocabulary, or maintain paragraphs unity, cohesion, and coherence. Another problem is related to students' dearth of critical thinking ability and collaborative skills in writing. To this end, the current study developed a writing module to enhance the writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills of the Omani Foundation Program students using ADDIE model. The study used a pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental design. The study employed three instruments: the pre-test and post-test, students' reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews. The participants were 70 Omani students and 2 EFL teachers. The students were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group incorporated 35 students and the control group involved 35 students as well. The two groups studied English at two similar institutions in Oman. The experimental group was taught by one teacher, whereas

the control group was taught by another teacher. The control group studied the conventional writing syllabus, while the experimental group studied the writing module. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistical test was used to compare the mean scores of both groups' tests. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data obtained from students' reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative findings revealed that there were statistically significant mean differences between the experimental and control groups' scores in both the writing and critical thinking post-tests. The experimental group scored considerably higher mean than the control group. Qualitative findings obtained from students' reflective journals confirmed that students' collaborative skills were considerably enhanced. Students also had positive experiences in using the module. The study has pivotal implications. The module confirmed that scaffolding, which is used to teach children, can be employed for adults too. Further, the study has implications for the EFL teachers in Oman. It confirmed that the module can improve students' skills as it takes into account students' learning needs, background knowledge and learning environment. The study encourages module development to improve students' skills.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Study

English is the language of international communication, informal and formal: both in commercial and political contexts and intercultural exchanges, as bonds amid people who cross-cultural boundaries or who like to enhance their lives with media productions from abroad (Hjarvard, 2017; McKay, 2018). Further, English has become the language of scientific research as it can effectively deal with terms and concepts of modern technologies and sciences (Foyewa, 2015). Even though many countries still publish journals in their native tongue, English is at present the best way to share one's research findings with scholars and scientists in other parts of the world (Rao, 2018). Further, English language is the official language of science because all activities in technology and science are carried out in English (Drubin & Kellogg, 2012).

Learning English as a foreign or second language has progressively become a ubiquitous and omnipresent demand (Estliden, 2017; Gavran, 2013). Numerous countries all over the world have dedicated themselves to hone their students' English language skills to be able to cope with their education requirements and to make well-educated individuals who can productively contribute to the advancement of their countries (Drbseh, 2013; Waterworth, 2016).

Oman has acknowledged the significance of English, a lingua franca and the only official foreign language in Oman, as a method that meets its requirements locally and globally (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). It is a pivotal, all-important, and indispensable

language that is deemed a means of globalizing, modernizing, and internationalizing its health, economy, and education system (Al-Jardani, 2017). Oman has striven to develop strategies for internationalizing its educational programs (Al-Ani, 2017). Therefore, Omani students learn English at schools at basic and post-basic levels where the English syllabus is introduced to sharpen students' English language skills with an emphasis on writing (Al-Issa, 2014). This is because writing is deemed the salient skill that learners need to master since it demands a more substantial in-depth knowledge of the grammar system and writing conventions than other receptive skills (Mourssi, 2013). Nevertheless, the depth and breadth the school addresses to the students' writing skills are scant and deficient (Al Barwani, 2017). The school does not permit students to satisfy the requirements of higher education writing level where English is employed as a medium of instruction for most of the degree programs (Al Seyabi, 2017; Burns, 2013). Hence, Oman has introduced the General Foundation Programs to help students meet the higher education requirements, hone students' English language skills for further studies, and boost their cognitive skills and linguistic proficiency (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, 2017).

The Foundation Program in the Omani Ministry of Health is no exception. Writing is dealt with as an extension for other language skills. To illustrate, writing adopts process and product approaches. These approaches are employed at lower levels of English to coach students to imitate diversified model texts, initiate and organize ideas and practice highlighted features (Omani Ministry of Health-Foundation Program Course Overview, 2017).

Although the foundation program students are provided with numerous facilities to help improve their writing skill, the students encounter many problems in writing such as inability to generate ideas, lack of vocabulary knowledge, committing many grammar and spelling mistakes, and inability to maintain paragraphs unity, cohesion and coherence (Abu-Faraj, 2015; Thyab, 2016). Another problem is related to students' dearth of critical thinking ability in writing especially higher-order critical thinking such as evaluation of ideas, reasoning and argument. Students' writing, for instance, lacks argument, reasoning, and analysis and evaluation of ideas (Al-Kindi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2017).

The present writing syllabus adopts the individual writing approach (Al Ajmi & Holi, 2014). This approach limits itself to certain content as suggested by the instructor or teacher. Students acknowledge the authorities of the teachers or instructors on any content. As a result, students master specific sets of knowledge through rehearsal formulae without improving their collaborative skills. The individual writing approach does not facilitate students' high-cognitive skills such as evaluation of information and ideas (Schraw & Robinson, 2011). Further, the individual writing approach does not enhance students' meta-cognitive skills which include the questioning about the validity and justification of arguments (Barrows, 1992). The approach does not also allow students to share knowledge and learn from others but, on the contrary, students are only corrected and assessed by teachers depriving them from sharing learning experiences with peers collaboratively (Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2016). In Arab classroom context the individual writing approach caused students to have high anxiety (Mohammed, 2015; Al-Saraj, 2014), poor autonomy (Alrabai, 2017), poor motivation

(Alrabai, 2014) and consequently poor performance (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Khairi, 2013). The absence of collaborative activities in the present writing syllabus does not encourage students to use L2 which negatively affects their writing quality (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). This badly affected the caliber of students' explanations in group interaction and the quality of group discussions, and also limited students' ability to adjust to collaborative work (Al Tai, 2015). Since research has shown that collaborative learning helps enhance students' academic performance as well as strengthen self-esteem, increase motivation and reduce anxiety, promote literacy skills and encourage student bonding (Rao, 2019; Calderon, Sanchez & Slavin, 2011), the present study aimed to hone students' collaborative skills via a developed writing module.

Hence, there was a dire need to conduct the study at foundation program. The study aimed to enhance students' writing, collaborative and critical thinking skills via developing a writing module. The module aimed to address students' problems which the current writing syllabus couldn't deal with.

1.2 Background of the Study

English language in Oman has the status of a foreign language, nevertheless, the government recognizes its significance in the growth of Oman's economy as it is utilized in increasing Omanization percentages or the replacement of expatriates by Omani citizens (Al Seyabi & Al Rashdi, 2016). English has institutionalized sectors such as mass media, education, technology, science, and business. Consequently, English teaching has received substantial attention and considerable support from the Omani government (Al-Mahrooqi, & Denman, 2016). This is because the English language in

Oman is adjudged a pivotal means of communication between Oman and other countries and also between Omanis and non-Arabic speakers working in Oman (Tekin, 2015).

Omani Students learn English from the primary level to the secondary level (Sivaramann, Al Balushi, & Rao, 2013). At the tertiary level, English plays a vital role in shaping Omani students' future as it is the medium of instruction of most of the degree programs in both private and government educational institutions. This is because tertiary education requires students to have a good mastery of English to meet its requirements (Al-Shoaibi, 2015).

1.2.1 The Higher Educational Institutions of The Ministry of Health

There are eight Higher Educational Institutions which function under the auspices of the Omani Ministry of Health to offer professional training and education in nursing and some allied health disciplines. They select secondary school leavers from different regions in Oman and place them in an intensive General Foundation Program. Students are selected based on their scores in the high school final examination.

1.2.1(a) The General Foundation Program

The General Foundation Program in Oman has been adopted by private and government higher educational institutions on the recommendations of the Higher Education Council decision number (13/2008) and also the Ministerial Decision number (72/2008) which was issued by His Excellency, The Minister of Higher Education (Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programs, 2008). Accordingly, more than 80% of Omani students entering Higher Educational Institutions have to attend the General Foundation Program.

The General Foundation Program aims to provide students with essential knowledge and skills needed to help them perform effectively in their academic disciplines. On the successful accomplishment of the course, students obtain the required proficiency degree in four major areas: Computing, English language (3 levels), General Study Skills, and Mathematics.

1.2.2 Writing at the General Foundation Program

The General Foundation Program aims to hone students' English language skills such as writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Nevertheless, the extra emphasis has been placed on the writing skill. Writing in the General Foundation Program is deemed one of the salient skills students have to master to enhance their academic success and professional development. This is because they are required to demonstrate perfect writing skills during their coursework and formative and summative assessment (Oman Academic Standards, 2010). Specifically, learning to master writing for the foundation students can enable them to successfully cope with their academic requirements and perform competently in their disciplines and professional context (Al-Badi, 2015). Students of the General Foundation Program are expected to produce certain writing genres such as reports, summaries, and essays (Busaidi & Al-Jamal, 2019). Further, students are required to be cognizant of some writing formal facets such as correct spelling, neat handwriting, acceptable grammar, and proper use of vocabulary and punctuation (Baporikar & Ali Shah, 2012). Writing is also pivotal for students' professional development. When students do their nursing study, they are required to write various reports and case studies. Students' inability to write well negatively affects their progress in their specialty courses. This badly affects their grades in their study.

Oman Academic Standards (2010) specified some certain writing activities students of the General Foundation Program have to effectively carry out. For instance, students are required to organize and develop personal responses and descriptive summary; write well-organized and well-formed essays between 150-250 words in an appropriate format and a variety of styles such as cause/effect, analysis, argumentative, and opinion essays. The objectives of the writing component differ from a level to another. Each of the English three levels has its objectives concerning writing as follows:

1.2.2(a) English Level 01

On the successful accomplishment of this level, the students are expected to be able to plan to organize ideas before writing; make outlines/idea maps/timelines; write descriptive / narrative / informative / opinion paragraph(s); demonstrate the use of coherence and cohesion in writing and write paragraph(s) of 120-150 words using a topic sentence, supporting details, and concluding sentences.

1.2.2(b) English Level 02

On the successful accomplishment of this level, the students are expected to organize and develop paragraphs, write descriptive objectives, write summaries and personal responses, and state reasons and giving examples; write well-formed and well-organized essays between 150-200 words in an appropriate format - introduction, body, and conclusion - in a variety of formats like opinion, narrative, analysis, cause & effect, and argumentative essays.

1.2.2(c) English Level 03

On the successful accomplishment of this level, the students are expected to produce a well-organized written work in about 250 words establishing a point of view or defending or opposing an opinion supported by facts or examples; the number of hours allotted for teaching each skill varies. For example, writing and reading are adjudged to be more crucial than speaking and listening in governing students' accomplishments in academic studies (Pysarchyk, & Yamshynska, 2015), hence, writing is sometimes given more heft in the teaching schedule as shown in the table below.

Table 1.1 Distribution of Hours Allotted for Teaching Writing Per Week.

Level	Number of hours allotted for teaching writing per week	Total number of teaching hours per week
English 01	5 hours	25 hours
English 02	4 hours	20 hours
English 03	4 hours	20 hours

(Foundation Program - Academic English & Introduction to Health Sciences Course Overview FND 103, 2018/2019, p.4)

As can be seen above, the learning objectives of the writing syllabus principally focus on improving students' writing skills disregarding the significance of higher-order critical thinking and collaboration in writing. The present study assumes that higher-order critical thinking and collaboration have a crucial role in L2 writing. Specifically, EFL learners need to acquire higher-order critical thinking skills, master them, analyze English texts, and linguistically and culturally build their content (Hyland, 2002). Though higher-order critical thinking plays a crucial role in the construction of the writing process, it is still broadly neglected in the writing classroom, which generally aims attention at grammar teaching and hinders students from writing effective essays or long paragraphs (Zhang, 2017).

Condon and Kelly-Riely (2004) argue that writing is a thinking method. This statement draws our attention to the pivotal relationship between higher-order critical thinking and writing. According to Sorrell et al. (1997), writing demands a connection between ideas from external and internal sources, thinking critically about those ideas and then making a generalization that provides the disconnected pieces of information a coherent and logical verbal form. Bean (2001) mentions that writing necessitates argumentative or analytical thinking which is distinguished by a controlling statement and hierarchical logical structure. In the same vein, Schafersmen (1991) states that writing requires students to systemize their ideas, think deeply about their topics, logically evaluate their information, and convincingly draw their conclusion. Hence, good writing is a reflection of good effective higher-order critical thinking. The sources of ideas or notions can be from various texts which are based on observation, experience, and reflection (Vardi, 1999). Thus, higher-order critical thinking in the process of writing is the demonstration of the writer's capability to comprehend and analyze ideas, assess and combine the argumentation before concluding, and then introducing them explicitly to the reader. The present study aimed to enhance students' critical thinking via generating, organizing, and linking ideas in well-written paragraphs as well as maintaining paragraphs unity, cohesion, and coherence.

The current study believes that collaboration is indispensable in the writing process. This is because studies and research have claimed that students' writing skills can be honed when they are engaged in collaborative writing. The plurality of research and studies have indicated that collaborative writing makes students' writing production far beyond expectations (Chen, Xie & Loui, 2012; Dobao & Blum, 2013; Ong &

Maarof, 2013). Students' interaction with peers, specifically during feedback and editing, enables them to see the significance of their writing production. This helps students apply the same group of skills when they write individually. Therefore, improving Omani students collaborative skills can contribute to sharpening their overall writing skills. Since, the current writing syllabus adopts the individual writing approach which doesn't help improve students' writing skills, the present study aimed to develop students' collaborative skills to avoid the individual approach drawbacks and encourage students to write collaboratively. This would improve both their writing and collaborative skills.

Collaboration in the writing classroom has been found to be an effective method that can improve students' social and linguistic skills as it supports student-student interaction with considerable input and output in an encouraging atmosphere (Ahangari & Samadian, 2014). Collaboration contributes to improving students' writing performance in five writing areas: vocabulary (choice of proper vocabulary), grammar (proper use of grammar and sentence structure), organization (maintaining coherence and order of ideas) and content (expanding of ideas that are written via facts and opinions, illustration and personal experience) (Yusuf, Jusoh & Yusuf, 2019). Collaboration creates an environment of exploratory and involved learning since it helps students to share and exchange ideas and information, search for additional supportive information, make decisions about their writing and present their final draft to peers in the classroom. Further, students with low achievement can improve their performance when they work with students with good achievement. The act of success enhances both the group's and individual's self-esteem (Munawar, 2019). Since students work

collaboratively in groups, anxiety is minimized as the writing tasks are distributed to group members and the results correspond to the entire group. Using collaborative learning in writing classroom helps students to generate ideas, write the first draft, share their writing with classmates, edit their writing and present the final draft (Aldana's, 2005). Collaborative learning helps students to think and develop thoughts creatively, maintains coherence because it makes students' writing easy to read and comprehend as the supporting statements are logically ordered and linked and improves students' spelling through sharing writing with the teacher and peers and getting feedback (Chamisah, 2015).

It is claimed that learners are inclined to be enthusiastic to carry out collaborative writing activities since they support their writing and collaborative skills. This was pinpointed in some studies in which students' collaborative and writing skills improved (Dobao, 2012; Yeh, 2014). Specifically, peer feedback enhances the quality and quantity of peer discussion and maximizes students' negotiation and interaction in the process of writing. Further, collaborative writing helps students to generate ideas and also improves their understanding of text cohesion and coherence (Chittooran, 2015; Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; Nixon & McClay, 2007; Storch, 2002). Moreover, collaborative writing enables students to advance their writing achievement and critical thinking skills (Neumann & McDonough, 2015). It also helps students to develop their writing organization and convention (Silby & Watts, 2015; Wette, 2014). For these reasons, the current study assumes that improving Omani students' collaborative skills can hone students' writing skills as well.

1.2.2(d) Assessment

The Ministry's assessment scheme for writing and other skills aims to gauge students' academic achievement. Marks are obtained based on students' performance in continuous assessment, mid-term examination, and final examination. The table below displays the distribution of marks in the General Foundation Program English levels.

Table 1.2 English Course Assessment Scheme

Level	Continuous Assessment (Quizzes and Assignments)	Mid Term Ass. (Writing and other components)	Final Exam (Writing and other components)
English 01	Writing and other skills 10%	20%	70%
English 02	Writing and other skills 10%	20%	70%
English 03	Writing and other skills 10%	20%	70%

(Foundation Program - Academic English & Introduction to Health Sciences Course Overview FND 103, 2018/2019, p.9)

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite the great effort which has been made by teachers to help the Foundation Program students to improve their writing ability, they commit innumerable errors in their writing productions. The Foundation Program students commit many grammatical errors in their writing such as the wrong use of adjectives, nouns, verbs, prepositions, tenses, pronouns, word order, possessive pronouns, subject-verb agreement, auxiliaries, and coordination as well (Alami, 2016; Nouraey, Cuarteros & Khemiri, 2016; Sabtan & Elsayed, 2019). Further, students commit tremendous spelling errors and they cannot use vocabulary appropriately (Al-Bereiki & Al-Mekhlafi, 2015). Moreover, students make many punctuation errors such as incorrect use of commas, full stops, question marks, and capital letters (Ancheta & Simagala, 2017).

Another problem is that Omani students of the GFP are incapable of generating ideas and expressing the ideas systematically and logically (Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). That results in a very poor writing production that lacks purpose and meaning and does not conform to the foundation program writing criteria (Khalil & Yassin, 2015). The foundation students do not convey their ideas or messages explicitly, they, however, presume that it is the teachers' responsibility to understand these messages or ideas. Students respond to the writing tasks vaguely so the EFL teachers are unable to comprehend what students try to express (Bakhshayesh, 2015). In general, the foundation program students encounter tremendous difficulties developing clear and deep-in-depth paragraphs in terms of content and organization, fluency and accuracy, cohesion and coherence and the use of proper vocabulary (Al Siyabi, 2019; Faller, 2018; Sivaramana, Al Balushi & Rao, 2014).

There is a strong bond between writing and higher-order critical thinking (Heaton, 1989). Critical thinking can be defined as the ability to hold a view, defend it, or alter it according to arguments and evidence and understand the causes of problems and suggest proper solutions. Higher-order critical thinking incorporates some cognitive skills such as evaluation, analysis, inference, augmentation, interpretation, making decisions based on the context, and being flexible and adaptable about changes (Pinda, 2004). Since language mirrors thinking (Chaffee, 2009), writing does not only necessitate mastery of linguistic elements such as punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary but also necessitates notional judgment and critical thinking (Heaton, 1989). The foundation students lack basic critical skills. They, for instance, are unable to differentiate between opinions and facts and provide evidence and reasons to support

their argument (Al-Kindi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2017; Mehta et al., 2018; Samarasinghe, 2017).

According to Emilia (2010), writing requires students to think critically about their choices of words, paragraphs clarity and organization, cohesion and coherence, and the purpose and topic of writing. Although critical thinking is a skill that is developed via practice, the current writing syllabus does not develop students' critical skills. The present writing syllabus requires students to write paragraphs based on given reading comprehension. The reading comprehensions provide students with vocabulary and ideas needed for their writing. Another problem, which demonstrates students' lack of critical thinking skills, is associated with the brainstorming process. Students generally do not brainstorm ideas before they embark upon writing (Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014). In this stage, students should think about, analyze, and evaluate ideas that need to be put on paper. Failing to brainstorm ideas logically results in using irrelevant ideas that do not support the topic of writing.

The condition of Omani foundation program students' higher-order thinking skills calls for concern (Al-Kindi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2017). Research and studies in the field of critical thinking have generally reported that Omani foundation program students significantly lag behind their international counterparts in the development of critical thinking skills (Kumar & James, 2015; Naqvi et al., 2018). The foundation program students lack higher-order critical thinking skills such as reasoning which refers to supporting the argument with reasons and logical organization of ideas which refers to the clarity of the reasonable flow of ideas (Neisler et al., 2016). Further, the foundation students are unable to provide unity between essay paragraphs and cannot provide facts

and opinions to support their arguments (Naqvi et al., 2018). The foundation program students' writing also lacks clarity with which a paper presents and maintains a clear main idea, viewpoint and logical themes (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2020).

One of the most substantial 21st-century writing skills that need to be embedded in effective and successful writing materials are collaborative skills. Most studies and research have pinpointed the advantageous outcomes of collaborative writing (Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Collaboration is the process of two or more students working together to complete a writing task or achieve a writing goal.

Collaboration during the writing process helps students to mimic and learn from their classmates' writing (Corcelles & Castelló, 2015) and also promotes critical reflection (MacArthur, Schwartz, & Graham, 1991). Hence, collaboration is deemed to have a substantial influence on students' writing as it helps them to produce better and correct texts (Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2005). Although collaborative writing is very significant in honing students' writing skills, the current writing syllabus, however, does not promote students' collaborative skills (Al Tai, 2015). The present writing syllabus focuses utterly on individual writing production. Students write individually without interacting or collaborating with other classmates (Al Ajmi & Holi, 2014). The non-existence of collaboration in the writing syllabus does not stimulate the Foundation Program students to work in pairs or groups to construct and develop different ideas for the writing tasks (Ginosyan & Tuzlukova, 2014). The students are not allowed to interactively work with their peers as the writing syllabus fosters individual writing which does not allow the students to learn from others (Ahmed & Abouabdelkader, 2016). The absence of collaborative skills in the writing syllabus does not encourage

students to use L2 which negatively affects their writing quality (Al-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Research and studies have shown that students have faced many challenges during collaborative work such as lack of collaborative skills (Barron, 2003; Janssen & Wubbels, 2018; Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003). Another problem which is encountered by students is the caliber of students' explanations in group interaction (Ross, 2008) and the quality of group discussions (Popov et al. 2012), and also students' inability to adjust to collaborative work (Gillies, 2006; Webb, 2009).

Due to students' poor writing skills, many of them get very low grades in writing assessments and some others get failing grades (Alami, 2016). Students' failure has a negative impact on EFL teachers' careers in the ministry (Maats & O'Brien, 2014). Omani Ministry of Health makes many EFL teachers redundant every academic year. This is because the ministry believes that students fail the foundation program due to teachers' incompetence.

Thus, the current study is going to develop a module that aims to enhance Foundation Program students' collaborative skills, critical thinking, and writing skills. The module is contextualized to students' learning needs. Contextualization bears upon the process of linking the teaching materials to a particular situation, setting, or application area to make the competencies useful, meaningful, and relevant to all students (King, Bellocchi & Ritchie, 2007). The developed module is contextualized to the foundation students' learning needs, realities, and experiences and is also linked to the students' culture and language level (Nunan, 1988). To increase the meaningfulness and usefulness of the developed module, it takes into account the students' learning environment and their educational and cultural context (Lam, Hew & Chiu, 2016;

Marulanda & Martínez, 2017; Purwanto, 2016). The module incorporates miscellaneous writing tasks that are germane to Omani culture, heritage, customs and tradition, national and social celebrations. Further, the developed module is also contextualized to the writing topics which provide purposeful and meaningful use of the language (Bell & Gower, 1998). The writing topics of the developed module have been rigorously chosen by the researcher based on their appropriateness and relevance to the students to assure optimal personal engagement and to motivate them to drip further into the module (Block, 1991). Further, grammar in the module is taught in context. Teaching grammar in context enables students to form grammatical structures correctly and also utilize them to convey meaning (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019; Amin, 2015; Mart, 2013; Richards & Reppen, 2014).

To enhance students' collaborative skills, the developed module provides miscellaneous writing activities which demand students to interact with other students to accomplish the tasks. The plurality of writing tasks necessitates students to work in small groups or pairs to produce well-formed texts (Harsono, 2007). Additionally, the module provides opportunities for peer-evaluation. Peer-evaluation or peer-editing enhances students' writing skills as they can explicitly or implicitly comment on their peers' writing production so they can reinforce their writing skills and contribute to developing other students' writing as well.

Hence, there is a dire need for the study module for some valid reasons. The module addresses the writing problems encountered by students. Since the ministry's writing syllabus encourages the individual writing approach, the module introduces collaborative writing which helps students to share ideas and learn from other

classmates. Moreover, the module enhances students' critical thinking skills via addressing their inability to generate ideas, use proper and relevant vocabulary, and maintain paragraphs unity, cohesion, and coherence. In short, there is some justification for the study module to enhance students' writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills.

1.4 Research Objectives

The current study aimed to develop a writing module to enhance students' writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1.4.1 To develop a writing module to enhance the writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills of Omani General Foundation Program students.
- 1.4.2 To compare the mean of the writing and critical thinking post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.
 - 1.4.2(a) To find out if there is any significant difference in the mean of the writing post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.
 - 1.4.2(b) To find out if there is any significant difference in the mean of the critical thinking post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.
- 1.4.3 To compare the mean of the writing and critical thinking pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group.
 - 1.4.3(a) To find out if there is any significant difference in the mean of the writing pre-test and the post-test scores of the experimental group.

1.4.3(b) To find out if there is any significant difference in the mean of the critical thinking pre-test and the post-test scores of the experimental group.

1.4.4 To investigate whether the module has enhanced the students' collaborative skills.

1.4.5 To explore the students' experiences in using the module.

1.5 Research Questions

This study was underpinned by the following research questions:

1.4.2 What is the mean of the writing and critical thinking post-test scores of the experimental and control groups?

1.4.2(a) Is there any significant difference in the mean of the writing post-test scores of the experimental and control groups?

1.4.2(b) Is there any significant difference in the mean of the critical thinking post-test scores of the experimental and control groups?

1.4.3 What is the mean of the writing and critical thinking pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group?

1.4.3(a) Is there any significant difference in the mean of the writing pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group?

1.4.3(b) Is there any significant difference in the mean of critical thinking pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group?

1.4.4 To what extent has the module enhanced students' collaborative skills?

1.4.5 What are the students' experiences in using the module?

The above research question (1.4.5) aims to explore students' experiences in using the module. It aims to identify if the students have positive or negative experience and the challenges that students encountered in studying the module. This will provide data about the usefulness and effectiveness of the module.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses of the current study are as follows:

Null hypotheses

The present study uses null hypotheses rather than directional hypotheses for a reason. The null hypothesis suggests that there is no difference between the variables being compared or that any difference that does exist can be explained by chance. A directional hypothesis is a prediction made by the researcher regarding a positive or negative change, relationship, or difference between two variables of a population. This prediction is typically based on past research, accepted theory, extensive experience, or literature on the topic. The null hypothesis is useful because it can be gauged to conclude whether or not there is a relationship between two measured phenomena. It can inform whether the results obtained are due to chance or manipulating a phenomenon. Since the current study proposes that there is no difference between the variables before the commencement of the treatment, the null hypothesis is used.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean of the writing post-test scores of the experimental and control groups (RQ 1.4.2a).

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean of the critical thinking post-test scores of the experimental and control groups (RQ 1.4.2b).

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the mean of the writing pre-test and the post-test scores of the experimental group (RQ 1.4.3a).

H₀₄: There is no significant difference in the mean of the critical thinking pre-test and the post-test scores of the experimental group (1.4.3b)

1.7 Significance of the Study

The dire need for a writing module which addresses students' critical thinking, collaboration, and writing problems is best recommended by Chen (2006), Dudley-Evans and Johns (1998), and Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who stress the necessity to design learning materials based on students' needs. This can help improve students' language skills in general including writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills. It is hoped that the current study will be of significance to the EFL teachers, the Foundation Program students, and the Omani Ministry of Health policymakers in many ways which can be itemized as follows:

EFL Teachers: The findings can be very crucial to EFL teachers as they will be able to pinpoint the reasoning behind students' critical thinking and writing difficulties. Furthermore, it is hoped that the study will provide teachers with an interesting writing module that is expected to help teachers arouse students' interest in writing. It is hoped that the module will help teachers to improve students' critical thinking skills via miscellaneous writing tasks which start with basic writing activities to argumentative essay writing. Additionally, it is hoped that the module will enable teachers to engage, stimulate, and inspire students to write. For instance, it is hoped that the teachers will be able to inspire uninterested students to become engrossed in L2 writing. This is because the module provides clear instructions and guided writing activities that are expected to help teachers to teach writing easily and interestingly. Besides, it is hoped that the module will help teachers to effectively assess students' writing progress and suggest

suitable teaching strategies to appropriately deal with weak students. Further, it is hoped that the current study will enable teachers to hone students' collaborative skills by encouraging them to work in pairs and small groups. Hence, it is hoped that teachers will be able to improve students with low achievement via working with those with good academic performance.

Students: It is hoped that the present study will allow the students to voice their learning needs, learning habits, preferred learning styles, and their expectations from the module. Taking these needs into account, the students hopefully will be able to write about activities and tasks that arouse their interest and conform to their wants. Moreover, the instructional design of this study hopefully will help students hone their writing ability. This is because it provides students with a wide variety of stimulating and compelling writing activities that go beyond sentence manipulation tasks as students are expected to generate ideas and talent for the L2 writing process. Further, it is hoped that the study will help students think critically about their choices of words, paragraphs organization, cohesion and clarity, and the purpose and topic of writing. The study hopefully will enable students to think critically about the writing activities and analyze and evaluate information. In addition, it is hoped that the study will allow students to increase their lexis and their grammar knowledge too. One of the ways to develop students' level of comfort with writing tasks under a deadline, such as during writing assignments or tests, is to provide students with several writing tasks that are timed. Consequently, it is hoped that the study will help students to manage their time in writing via providing timed-writing activities. Eventually, the study hopefully will help students to work with peers to accomplish writing tasks, so they can improve their collaborative skills.

Ministry of Health: It is hoped that the study findings will be of importance to the policymakers and curriculum designers in the Omani Ministry of Health. Since the instructional design addresses students' collaborative, critical thinking, and writing problems, students are expected to obtain good grades in writing. Hence, the module could be utilized to supersede the existing writing component which has been introduced by the Ministry of Health. Further, it is hoped that the study findings will apprise the ministry curriculum designers of the importance of identifying and addressing students' learning needs in the curriculum. Further, it is hoped that the study will provide the curriculum designers with in-depth data about the designed materials so they can develop and update them in the future to effectively address the writing problems of future students.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The present study aimed to develop a writing module to enhance the writing, critical thinking, and collaborative skills (2Cs) of Omani students who study at the General Foundation Program under the auspices of the Omani Ministry of Health. The study is underpinned by the sociocultural theory of human learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The study employs ADDIE model which guided the researcher during the entire process of designing the module. Espousing from the theory of Vygotsky and the ADDIE model, the conceptual framework demonstrates the relationship among the students' writing skills, critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, and the module.

There are two prime concepts in Vygotsky's theory. The first concept is that social interaction is very significant in developing cognition. A similar concept is adopted by the present study which is collaboration. Collaboration refers to learning via

social interaction in the classroom when students work with their classmates in small groups or pairs (Storch, 2013). The second concept in Vygotsky's theory is that social interaction can develop learners' cognizance of knowledge domains or the evolution of complicated cognitive skills such as scaffolding and modeling. This concept is referred to by the present study as critical thinking. Critical thinking incorporates some cognitive skills such as evaluation, analysis, inference, augmentation, interpretation, making decisions based on the context, and being flexible and adaptable about changes (Pinda, 2004). The figure below demonstrates four variables: the writing module is the independent variable, while students' collaborative skills, critical thinking skills (2Cs), and writing skills are dependent variables.