The Impact of English Language Preparatory Programmes in a Saudi Arabian University: An Investigation of Students' Perceptions of their Language Difficulties, Experiences and Suggestions

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Dedication

To my beloved husband, Abdulrahman Al-Zharani, for his devotion, patience and encouragement during times of my study

To my dearest children, Rawan, Hassan, Rose and Layan, who patiently supported and encouraged me throughout this endeavor.

Abstract

This study reports on the findings of an investigation into the impact that English language preparatory programmes (ELPPs) had on students in the College of Pharmacy at Umm Al-Qura University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. To better understand how these language programmes provided students with valuable preparation for the academic demands required in their pharmacy courses, I designed a questionnaire and administered it to 105 second-year pharmacy students. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore students' perceived difficulties with academic reading, speaking, writing, and listening. The findings of the questionnaire indicate that students' difficulties centre on their lack of a rich, general vocabulary, which results in poor performance in academic reading, speaking, writing, and listening. I also found that students' difficulties occur in academic reading (particularly in reading academic genres), academic speaking (particularly in expressing ideas accurately and fluently, answering lecturers' questions, and asking for more explanations), academic listening (particularly in inferring the meaning of implicit information, listening to long stretches of English speech, and identifying the main lecture topic), and academic writing (particularly in writing essay-question answers). The results also reveal that these language difficulties are attributed to students' previous English learning and teaching experiences, linguistic differences between English and Arabic, a lack of context for using English, and a lack of confidence in using English.

To identify the English language preparatory programmes' (ELPPs) other areas of impact, I interviewed students. The results show that the ELPPs had both negative and positive impacts. The negative impact seemed to be associated with the poor quality of the learning experience, which results in limited English language development, particularly in vocabulary and in speaking, writing, and reading skills. The findings show that students' perceptions of how the language programmes contributed to their poor learning experiences were related to 5 factors: the length and intensity of the programmes, the lack of equal educational opportunities, the teachers and teaching practices, the assessment practices, and the poorly equipped classrooms. The positive impact, on the other hand, was mostly related to three areas: improved listening skills, adjustments for the heavy academic demands required in the subsequent field of

study, and enhanced awareness of the importance of English. To identify areas of improvement, I held four group discussions with the students. The discussion findings reveal a wide variety of suggestions that must be considered when planning for future language programmes.

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Abbreviations

A-ver.	The Arabic Version of the Questionnaire
CBI	Content-based Instruction
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EGP	English for General Purposes
EMI	English as a Medium of Instruction
ELC	English Language Centre
ELF	English as a Foreign Language
ELPPs	English Language Preparatory Year Programmes
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
E-ver.	The English Version of the Questionnaire
GPA	Grade Point Average
GTM	Grammar Translation Method
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
NNSs	Non-Native Speakers of English
NS	Native speakers of English
L1	First Language
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAP	Pre-administrative programme
PMP	Pre-medical programme
Pharm-B	Bachelor of Pharmacy
Pharm-D	Doctor of Pharmacist
PSP	Pre-scientific programme
PYP	Preparatory Year Programme
UK	United Kingdom
UQU	Umm Al-Qura University
US	United States

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Preview

In this chapter I present my personal background and my past learning and teaching experiences to show how my experiences as an English Foreign Language (EFL) learner and EFL teacher shape the way I carried out this study. Then I discuss the need for exploring students' perceptions of the value of the language programmes that are offered to students in Saudi higher education. Then, I address the aim of this study and pose research questions designed to obtain insights into the views held about the impact of language programmes provided by the English Language Centre (hereafter ELC) at Umm Al-Qura University (hereafter UQU) in Makkah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter KSA). I conclude the chapter by highlighting the significance of this study and describing the structure of this thesis.

1.2 My Background

In what follows, I draw upon my past experience of learning and teaching English language as a foreign language learner and teacher. I am as a person is a product of a combination of various influences, such as my beliefs, educational level, and background, and professional experiences. These influences create my identity and help develop the perceptions and vision I have as a researcher.

I am one of 12 children born in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, to illiterate parents. Although my parents had a humble background in education, they were very supportive parents as they devoted all their money and efforts to the view that each one of their children should be exposed to an adequate full education. Seven of my family members finished their secondary schools and left the family to pursue their higher education abroad, while the rest graduated from local universities.

Speaking about myself, I attended elementary school for six years and then attended intermediate and secondary school for another six years. The instructional language in schools is Arabic, and English is used only when teaching English language classes to students in the intermediate and secondary schools. During the summer time, my parents were interested in providing me with extra language learning courses. So, I

attended intensive English summer programmes that, to some extent, developed my English background. After I finished secondary school, I attended the Girl's College of Education (now Umm Al-Qura University) and graduated with a BA in English Language Literature and Education in 1999. A year after graduation, I took part in a national competition for the most eligible graduates for teaching English in local universities. I won the competition and was assigned to teach English in the College for Health Sciences for Females in Makkah for five years. After that, I was offered a position to teach English in the English Language Centre (ELC) at Umm Al-Qura University. After two years of working in the Centre, I was awarded a scholarship from Umm Al-Qura University to pursue my master's degree in English for Specific Purposes, and I graduated in 2011 from the University of Essex in the UK. Having the opportunity to gain my master's degree from the UK has allowed me to be fully immersed in the issue of teaching English as a foreign language and encouraged me to embark on research investigating the problems that English as foreign language Saudi undergraduate students may experience when studying the English language and when studying in English.

My previous work experience in teaching English at the tertiary education level has given me an important indication that Saudi undergraduates have an urgent need for a solid mastery of English. Their competency in the English language is far below the level that is needed to accomplish a successful academic life. It has been shown that English language learning seems to be a serious challenge to them and that English language-related difficulties appear to negatively affect their academic performance (Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Harbi, 2015; Al-Sghayer, 2014, 2011; Rahman & Al-Haisoni, 2013).

This poor English competence is an essential factor affecting students' motivation to learn English, and thus they come across as reticent and inactive in class, even when prompted to answer short questions. Acknowledging that these students have a minimal level of the requisite English proficiency encouraged me to learn about their experiences and to investigate what is going on inside their classrooms. It has become difficult for me to remove myself from their experiences and from capturing the unique nature of their personal stories. I feel committed both to my students and to the institution in which I work, and I have begun to prioritise my own intentions for

becoming involved in a project that can discover the nature of the challenges students may experience at the tertiary level.

1.3 Positionality

Positionality and subjectivity are related to each other. As asserted by Allen (2007), subjectivity is based on:

> …the social and personal identity of the fieldwork self to be constantly open to negotiation. Specifically, the suggestion that knowledge production is a highly reflexive accomplishment that occurs through the constant movements that social researchers make. (p. 992)

Knowledge production is highly subjective and influenced by various social, historical, and educational experiences (Coffey, 1999). This view is supported by Chaves (2008), who maintained that positionality is 'a researcher's sense of self, and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order' (p. 474).

Drawing on the issue of positionality leads me to understand that I, as a social researcher, have life experiences and personal values that influence my research, the methods I utilize, and the questions I ask my participants. In other words, these experiences effectively shape the knowledge I produce in my analysis and deepen my understanding of the research context. Based on that, I believe that my fieldwork experiences as an English teacher to EFL undergraduate students for around eight years will influence my research procedures, my access to the research context, and my methods, and it will also help me to speak coherently about my participants in my writing. Coffey (1999) has pointed out that:

> Fieldwork experience is about emotion. We always have feelings about our research setting, people and experiences…. Emotional connectedness to the process and practices of fieldwork, to analysis and writing is normal and appropriate. It should not be denied, not stifled. It should be acknowledged and reflected upon and seen as a fundamental feature of well-executed research. (p. 159)

Although reflexivity has faced criticism for the way that it implies a research which does not produce objectivity (Allen, 2007; Hopkins, 2007; Sultana, 2007), Sultana (2007) has highlighted the value of being reflexive:

> I do not believe that being reflexive about one's own positionality is to self-indulge but to reflect on how one is inserted in grids of power relations and how that influences methods, interpretations, and knowledge production. (p. 376)

It has been acknowledged that being reflexive would develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which researchers influence and are influenced by the context (Allen, 2007). As a result of this, I humbly assume that examining students' opinions, sharing their experiences in studying a language program, and considering their perceptions about the nature of challenges they face at the university level, together with reflecting on my understanding of their views and coloured with my personal experiences would allow me to present a vivid picture of the research context.

Doing research in one's work environment raises the issue of being an insider. It has been noted that insider research involves 'social interviews conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage' (Ganga & Scott, 2006, p.1). I am an EFL female teacher who possesses a number of personal qualities similar to the majority of my participants. I speak the same language (Arabic); I share the same culture and the same religion. I attended Saudi state schools and obtained my first degree at a local college, and I was exposed to the same teaching methodology and instruction. Accordingly, being an insider studying my own community holds a number of advantages. Firstly, it would facilitate my access to the research site and allow me to establish a close rapport with my participants (Chavez, 2008). Secondly, it would help me to easily understand the emotional and psychological characteristics of the participants as well as the historical background of the field (Chavez, 2008; Ganga & Scott, 2006). Thirdly, sharing the same language would help me to clearly interpret the underlying meanings of the words produced by the participants (Chavez, 2008; Gnaga & Scott, 2006). All these advantages would lend validity to my research, as in Chavez's (2008) terms, 'more

insider research has been undertaken with the assumption that it is not only valid and significant, but in some ways more facile or effectual than outsider research' (p. 476).

1.4 Problem Statement

Driven by the goal to shift its economy from a heavy reliance on oil production to establish a knowledge-based economy, the education sector in KAS has gained a privileged position in terms of its objectives, strategies and developmental plans. To support its substantial investment in education in general and higher education in particular, the KSA government intends to educate, train and develop the skills of its young people so that they can better compete in the 21st century global market and play a key role in the KAS's future at the regional and international levels.

Based on this recognition of the importance of English in trade, tourism and education and in enhancing the development within a country (Crystal, 2004; Graddol, 1997), policy decisions were made concerning the teaching of English at primary schools starting in the fourth grade to sixth grade (10 years old). In addition to introducing English in the early stages of the students' schooling ages, the KSA has adopted English as the medium of instruction for many scientific courses at most Saudi universities (Ryhan, 2014; Al-Jarf, 2008). The rationale behind these decisions is that teaching English from the early stages (Wedell and Al-Shumaimeri, 2014) and requiring content courses to be taught through the medium of English (Al-Nassar and Dow, 2013) will improve students' English skills, the students will thus be able to not only increase their participation in knowledge construction but also be better prepared for playing a key role in today's global economy.

This move towards teaching and learning English is accompanied by an increasing dissatisfaction among Saudi educators regarding Saudi students' low level of achievement in English. A large body of studies has acknowledged that although students spend nine years in studying English, they graduate from secondary school with poor competence in English and thus face trouble in meeting the demands of their major studies when attending a university where English is a medium of instruction (Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Harbi, 2015; Al-Sghayer, 2014; Rahman & Al-Haisoni, 2013). At the same time, Saudi higher education in particular has faced a

serious challenge in helping learners develop a better understanding of their specialised subjects so that they can adequately compete in the local and global job markets. A number of recent studies have suggested that the language level of students who graduate from the university is not satisfactory for the Saudi Market (Al-Dosary, Rahman, & Shahid, 2005; Iqbal, 2010; Iqbal & Zenchenkov, 2014; Prokop, 2003).

To address secondary students' poor English proficiency, many higher education institutions in the KSA have offered students a Preparatory Year Programme (hereafter PYP) as a preliminary pathway to tertiary study. Students who enrol in the PYP are required to study various courses along with an intensive English course, i.e. a PYP English course. One of the first Saudi universities to implement PYP in the context of this study was Umm Al-Qura University (hereafter UQU). The UQU established a center, called the English Language Centre (ELC hereafter) to teach the PYP English course to students of other colleges. The ELC offers a two-term English language Preparatory Year Programmes (hereafter ELPPs) for students who enrolled in the PYP. The ELPP is divided into two courses: English for General English Purposes (hereafter EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (hereafter ESP). I will present more information about these two courses in Chapter 2.

Although the need for the PYP English courses is seen as a fundamental element in Saudi higher education, few documented studies have evaluated the importance of these PYP English courses (Al-Shumaimeri, 2013; Al-Seweed and Daif-Allah, 2012; McMullen, 2014); other studies have looked at particular aspects of the programme such as the writing materials used in the PYP English course (Ur Rahman, 2012) or the effect of the course on students' motivation (Al-Shumaimeri, 2013). Looking at some of these studies, McMullen (2014), for example, conducted a large-survey study to investigate whether there were links between a university's geographical location and students' gender and perceptions regarding the value of the preparatory English programme. Over 85% of the students surveyed stated that the course was necessary.

In addition, Ur Rahman (2012) evaluated just the teaching textbook provided for teaching writing skills to students enrolled in an intensive English language programme at Najran University. According to Ur Rahman's analysis of the textbook,

the tasks involved were not suited to either the students' previous knowledge or their language proficiency level. Thus, Ur Rahman concluded that textbooks should not only meet students' needs and wants but also be in line with the student' language levels. Looking at the effect an intensive course had on novice Saudi students' motivation, Al-Shumaimeri (2013) found that as students spent more time in the course, they became more motivated. Al-Shumaimeri explained the link between the increase in their motivation levels and the time spent on the course by considering the teachers' teaching techniques and personalities.

In summary, although these reviewed studies investigated students' experiences in learning the PYP English courses in the context of Saudi higher education, they tended to examine those experiences from a limited point of view. These studies have not targeted students' perceptions of the way they experienced studying the EGP and the ESP courses. In addition, these studies have not sought to explore how successful courses are in determining students' future language needs, preparing them to meet those needs, and helping them to apply what they have learned in course to the tasks that are required in their content courses.

The attempts to gain answers for these questions is the focus of this current study, which seeks to explore students' views regarding the impact that the ELPPs, i.e., EGP and ESP, had on their academic experiences, both during and after the programmes. To examine whether the ELPPs provided the students with valuable preparation to help them undertake the academic tasks required in their major studies, I targeted second-year pharmacy students to reflect on their experiences.

1.5 The Aim of the Study and Research Questions

This study aims to provide a necessary background regarding how well ELPPs equip students with the English skills that are required in their major courses, for which English is used as a medium of instruction. Therefore, this study focuses on providing a more detailed examination of the major language difficulties that both female and male EFL students encounter when studying pharmacy courses, which is taught in English. This study also focuses on uncovering the main causes of students' language difficulties. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that ELPPs need to be changed to match students' perceived difficulties, this study aims to present a clearer picture of

the extent to which the ELPPs influence students' academic experiences at the university, i.e. whether the courses facilitate students' acculturation and employment of English in their degree courses, or not. On the basis of their perceptions about the ELPPs' teaching and learning, this study aims to explore improvements which can be incorporated into the English courses. Building on the above discussion, I identify four aims of the study:

1. to provide a more detailed examination of the EFL second-year pharmacy students' language challenges when taking content courses that use English as a medium of instruction.
2. to explore the reasons for students' language struggles
3. to identify the degree to which the ELPPs prepare students for the academic demands of their tertiary education, and
4. to highlight the importance of understanding students' language needs and of exploring the features of ELPPs which need to be modified to address those needs.

Building on this, this study poses four research questions. These are:

(1) In terms of academic English skills, what are the main difficulties experienced by female and male undergraduate pharmacists when studying their degree courses through English-medium instruction?
(2) In the students' own view, what are the reasons for these difficulties in this particular context?
(3) What impact do the English language preparatory programmes offered by the English Language Centre have upon their academic experiences?
(4) In the students' own view, how might the English Language Centre best go about addressing their language needs to decrease the identified difficulties?

1.6 Significance of the Study

Research on students' perceptions of the value of the PYP English courses in Saudi higher education has gained attention. However, students' perceptions regarding how their language improves due to EGP and ESP instruction are still unclear. This study,

therefore, contributes not only by providing an important opportunity to advance our knowledge of the PYP English course teaching and learning in the KSA but also by helping us to better understand its appropriateness in meeting students' target needs (i.e., pharmacy). In addition to the best of my knowledge, no researcher has yet investigated the value of PYP English courses in the context of this study; i.e. Umm Al-Qura University. Furthermore, no researcher has yet explored the experiences of students who completed such language programmes and started their degree courses, nor has any researcher looked at the perceptions of pharmacy students. The current study should fill these gaps.

The findings of this current study should permit the ELC stakeholders to assess their existing programmes, address students' perceived needs and identify the main factors which contribute to the programme's success or failure. This study should include some important insights into teacher education which can be used to prepare language teachers to improve students' English abilities and help them to achieve, whether at their school or university. In addition, the study should build upon the limited use of qualitative research which has been conducted in this particular context. Employing the constructivist mode of inquiry, I might be able to provide a deeper understanding of students' personal stories, feelings and expectations for the subsequent language programmes; these topics would not be explored if this study were limited to a quantitative approach.

Finally, this study should form a new basis for recommendations; I will suggest new avenues for research to further investigate the impact which language programmes have on students' academic experiences.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis
This thesis comprises seven chapters. The first chapter includes a brief overview of my past learning and teaching experiences as an English foreign language learner and later as a language teacher in an EFL context. It also includes the research questions, the significance of the study and an overview of the chapters included in this thesis.

The second chapter presents a discussion of this study's macro context. It begins by providing the historical, social and economic background of the KSA. This is

followed by a discussion of the education system in the KSA, particularly the EFL teaching and learning methods used in schools and at universities. The remaining part of the chapter addresses the study's contexts, both Umm Al-Qura University and the English language Centre (ELC) including a description of the ELPPs offered in the ELC.

The third chapter reviews the relevant literature. It begins by discussing the English for specific Purposes (ESP) approach, its emergence, definition and classifications in the literature. This is followed by a definition of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), including a description of the types of the EAP and a presentation of the studies that have been conducted on the value of EAP instruction. This chapter also focuses on English for General Purposes (EGP) and the differences and similarities between EGP and ESP. The chapter includes research on students' perceptions of their difficulties in using English followed by a review of the research on some of the causes that contributing to students' struggle in English. Finally, the chapter ends with some of the key studies conducted on the quality of preparatory language English programmes provided in the EFL context.

The fourth chapter presents the methodology adapted in this study. It focuses on the ontological assumptions and epistemological stances that underpin the study's theoretical framework. It includes a description of why the chosen set of procedures is applicable to my study. It also presents the sample and analysis procedures. It concludes with an explanation of the study's ethical considerations.

Chapter five is concerned with laying out the study's findings. It begins by presenting a quantitative analysis which is elicited from the questionnaires and is followed by the qualitative analysis which is elicited from the semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Chapter six discusses the major findings with references to the literature discussed in Chapter three and to the study context introduced in the Chapter two.

Chapter seven presents the conclusion of the study and its theoretical and pedagogical implications. It includes the study's recommendation, contribution and limitations.

This chapter concludes with some suggestions for further study and a reflection on my PhD journey.

Chapter Two: Study Context – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

2.1 Preview

This chapter presents a profile of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It includes the country's location and size, demographics, governmental structure and pace of economic development. The Saudi educational policies and issues related to the quality of higher education are also described. The chapter also tracks the development of public and higher education, together with how English is taught in schools and universities. This is followed by a presentation of the context where this study was held, namely Umm Al-Qura University (UQU). The English Language Centre (ELC) that manages the work of the English Language Preparatory Programmes (ELPPs) is presented followed by a description of the ELPPs.

2.2 Study Setting: Location and Size

The KSA is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula and the second largest in the Arab world, after Algeria. It lies at the crossroads of three continents – Asia, Africa and Europe. Located in the southwest region of the Middle East, between the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, it occupies 868,730 square miles (2,250,000 square kilometres). The political neighbours of the country are Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait to the north; Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman to the south; and the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates to the east.

As the birthplace of Islam and the guardian of the two holy mosques, the KSA has special importance in Arabian and Muslim countries (Ministry of Culture and Information, 2014). Makkah is regarded by Muslims as the holiest and most honourable city on earth. It is the birthplace of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) and the site from where he started calling others to Islam. The holy mosque (also known as Al-Masjid Al-Haram), which is the house of the *Ka'aba*, is located in Makkah. Five times a day, all Muslims from all over the world turn in Makkah's direction to pray; every year, Muslims visit Makkah to perform *Hajj*[1] or *Umrah*[2].

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[1] Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam, and a mandatory religious duty for Muslims that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime.
[2] Umrah is a non-mandatory religious duty performed by Muslims at any time of a year.

The KSA's population which was 5,719,022 in 1970, has grown dramatically since then, from 9,618,104 in 1980 to 16,086,217 in 1990 and 21,109,114 in 2000; it is expected to increase to approximately 40.4 million in 2050. Its estimated population in 2009 was 25.37 million, of which Saudi citizens constituted 73.1% and non-Saudi residents comprised the rest. Saudi males represented 36.7% and females made up 36.4% of the total population (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, 2010). Based on preliminary estimates issued by Countrymetres website[3] in 2016, the current Saudi Arabia population is 32, 447,261, of which the males represented 55.2% and females comprised 44.8%.

2.2.1 Culture and Religion

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy where the king heads both the government and the Consultative Assembly (*Majlis Al-Shura*), which are the main executive and administrative bodies in the country. Its constitution was established more than 14 years ago, based on the *Qur'an* (Islam's holy book) and deeply rooted in the Islamic Shariah Law '*Sunna'* set by the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) (Al-Johani, 2009). The religion of Islam is practised by all Saudi people and governs all aspects of their social, political, economic and legal lives. Moreover, all their traditions and attitudes have been deeply shaped by Islamic rules, as well as their Bedouin heritage. In Saudi Arabia, family relationship is very strong, and it is of great importance for younger children to respect their eldest sibling. Upon arrival, a guest is warmly welcomed, and coffee or tea and snacks must be offered.

Islam requires women to wear a *hijab,* a long garment to cover their bodies from head to toe. Saudi women must wear an *abaya* in public*,* a long, loose black cloak covering the body from the neck to the ankles. They must also wear a one-piece veil, which covers the whole face, or *niqab*, which leaves their eyes uncovered. Furthermore, women's movements are very limited in Saudi Arabia. A woman is not supposed to leave the house or travel without the permission of her male guardian (*mahram*), who is her relative (father, son, brother or uncle) or husband. Females are not allowed to drive and are discouraged to use public transport, which may result in *khalwa* (mixing

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[3] Conutrymeters' website (http://countrymeters.info/en/World)

with a non-relative male). Therefore, the male guardian must drive his family to work, school, the hospital, the bank and elsewhere.

Gender segregation in public is present everywhere in Saudi Arabia, including all workplaces and educational institutions. Many social locations, such as banks, cafes and restaurants, are designed to have separate entrances for men and women. Women and men who are not related should not have direct interaction, unless in cases of necessity, and unlawful mixing between the sexes is taken seriously. An example of necessity is the interaction between women and men in a hospital setting, but it should be formal and strictly limited to a doctor-patient consultation. More importantly, men are typically reluctant to interact with women because they consider it culturally embarrassing or immoral. Although women's status has changed under King Abdullah's reforms, many Saudi males are unwilling to abandon the traditional moral codes. Based on the above-mentioned facts and the discussion in the Methodology chapter, a female researcher such as myself obviously faces a variety of difficulties, especially when collecting data from male participants.

Islam also places particular emphasis on education, since it views learning as a religious duty for all males and females. The first revealed words from the *Qur'an* instruct everyone to read and use intellectual reason to study the universe:

> *Recite in the name of your Lord who created – Created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most generous – Who taught you the pen. Taught man that which he knew not (Qur'an, Surat Al-Alag, 96).*

The Prophet Mohammad's (peace be upon him) statement, '*The seeking of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, man and woman*' (Wafi, 1967), indicates that education is not only a right but also a responsibility for both females and males.

Arabic is the main language of all Saudi people and about half of the immigrants. Classical Arabic (*Fussah*) – the *Qur'an's* language – is the main medium of instruction in schools. It is also used in prayers, religious speeches and all official documents. English is the second main language, which is taught in schools but rarely used in daily life.

2.2.2 Economy

The KSA depends heavily on the oil economy; the government controls most of the major economic activities. The country is among the world's largest producers and the largest exporter of oil, with one quarter of the world's known oil reserves (OPEC, 2014). Before the discovery of its oil reserves in 1938, the country's economy was simple and mostly depended on farming, fishing and commerce. The central pillar of economic life at that time was based on trade generated by the pilgrims visiting the two holy mosques in Makkah and Madinah, as well as on the export of dates.

During the 1940s and 1950s, a number of oil deposits were found in the eastern provinces of the kingdom, such as Ras Tanura in 1945, Al-Ghawar in 1948 and other oil fields in Rub al-khali in 1950. This intensive exploration of the oil fields was made possible with the help of two English-speaking countries, the UK and the US. From the 1970s to the early 1980s, the economy changed from one based on nomadic trade and agriculture to that of an oil industry. This tremendous economic growth was facilitated by the dramatic rise in oil prices, which helped boost the Saudi government's revenues.

Due to the enormous revenues from oil exports in line with high oil production, the KSA began to establish vast service industries and governmental projects. These extensive, local development activities resulted in several international companies' investments in the kingdom, as well as many job opportunities, which in turn required a more skilled and educated workforce. Consequently, the participation of a large number of companies from English-speaking countries (e.g., the US) increased, and thousands of Americans were employed in Saudi Arabia. To meet the shortage of Saudi workers, coupled with vast development projects, Saudi Arabia also employed non-Arabic-speaking workers to perform the most menial and most highly technical tasks, where English was the only language of communication between them and the locals (Mellahi, 2007).

2.2.3 Education

As in other nations, the KSA's educational system should reflect the cultural values and ideology of its citizens. One of its most important features is the strong

orientation towards Islam (Al-Sadan, 2000; Saleh, 1986). The evolution of education in Saudi Arabia, the structure of its educational system and the contents of school textbooks have been centred on Islam. The Saudi educational system aims

> to have students understand Islam in a correct and comprehensive manner; to plant and spread the Islamic creed; to provide the students with the values, teachings and ideals of Islam; to equip them with various skills and knowledge; to develop their conduct in constructive directions; to develop the society economically and culturally; and to prepare the individual to be a useful member in the building of his/her community (Ministry of Education, 1980).

Hence, in accordance with this educational policy, Islam is the core of the Saudi curriculum, with time each week devoted to study the *Qur'an* and other Islamic subjects in general education. Religion is also a prerequisite course, which must be taken at university level in all disciplines. Students are expected to memorise one *Surat* (chapter) from the *Qur'an* before their graduation.

The gender-based segregation policy is the second feature of the Saudi educational system. Girls are separated from boys at all levels of education, but textbooks and teaching methods are the same in girls' and boys' schools. Kindergarten, nursery and some medical schools in universities are the exceptions. Teachers of the same gender teach students in schools and universities. In higher education, in case of the shortage of female teachers, male instructors often teach female students through closed-circuit television, where students and teachers communicate through remote devices (Al-Jughaiman & Grigorenko, 2013; Saleh, 1986; Sanabary, 2006).

The Saudi government is one of the 164 governments that has based its educational policy on the 'Education for All' global movement. This framework, led by UNESCO in 1990, affirms the right to public education of all citizens, including children, adults, talented students and both genders (Al-Shaer, 2007). All Saudi female and male students have access to free education from the primary to the university level and receive free textbooks, transportation and health services (Faraj, 2005). As an incentive, the government also provides a monthly stipend to students entering university (Sanabary, 2006).

Education receives generous financial allocations due to the tremendous wealth from oil exports. In 2013, the budget for education and training was SR204 billion, 21% higher than that in 2012. In 2014, SR210 billion was allocated to education and workforce training, 3% higher than the 2013 budget and the highest since 2007 (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2013). Saudi Arabia spends about 5% of its gross domestic product (GDP), slightly higher than in some developed countries, such as Japan (3.8%) and Singapore (3.2%) (World Bank, 2014). Figure 2.1 shows the government expenditure on the education sector from 2009 to 2014.

Figure 2.1. Saudi government's expenditure on education sector per year
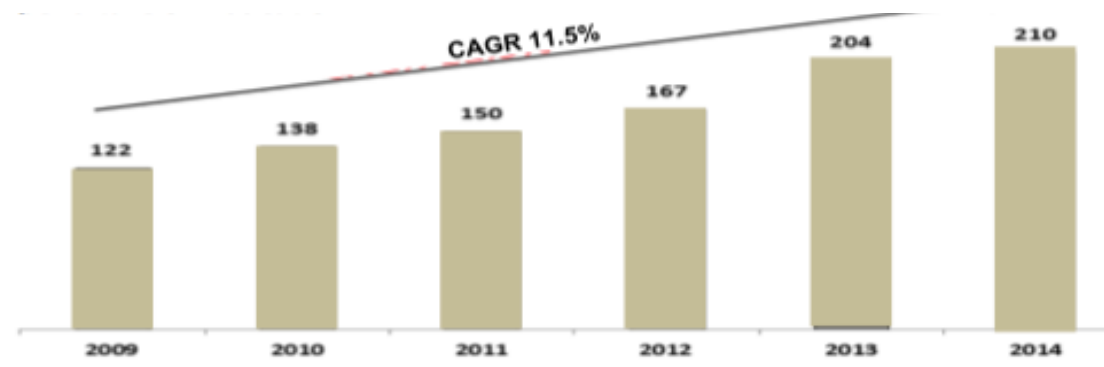
Source: Alternate Research (www.alt-research.com)

Recently, the three government authorities in education: the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the General Organisation for Technical and Vocational Training have joined together to be under the supervision of one ministry, i.e., the Ministry of Education.

2.3 English Language Teaching and Saudi Public Education

For the purpose of this study that focuses on Saudi undergraduates, it is important to highlight their general educational background.

2.3.1 School Development

Prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by King Abdul Aziz bin Saud in 1932, there was nothing known as formal education in Saudi Arabia. There were three forms of education: the traditional educational system called *kuttab*, public schools, and private schools (Al-Balawi, 2007). *Kuttab* is a kind of Islamic school held in mosques or in the teacher's house to instruct students how to memorise the

Qur'an and read and write Arabic text. The Turks in Makkah introduced the public educational system in 1988, serving to teach the Turkish language and curricula (Abdulwasa, 2002). Private education was for teaching the *Qur'an*, and basic literacy was funded and organised by Saudi families (Al-Hugail, 1998).

During the 1930s and after the discovery of the oil reserves in 1935, the educational systems in that period were replaced with government-operated schools (Wiseman et al., 2008). At that time, general education offered preparatory level, primary level and scholarship school. The three-year preparatory level was combined with the four-year primary level to become the six-year primary level. In 1936, the scholarship school was opened in Makkah to offer a five-year education for those who aimed at pursuing further education abroad This school is considered the beginning of the modern high school in the KSA (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). After the secondary level was introduced in 1957, the intermediate level was established in 1959.

While the Ministry of Education, established in 1954, supervised the education of boys, girls were still confined to home education, until 1960, when the General Directorate for Girls was established (Al-Malki, 2011). Primary education was started in 1961; in 1963, girls' education became available at the intermediate and secondary levels (Al-Munajjed, 2009). In 2003, the General Directorate for Girls was amalgamated with the Ministry of Education to facilitate administration (Ministry of Education, 2003).

The Ministry of Education is responsible for both girls' and boys' general education in public and private schools. Special education, junior colleges, teacher training and literacy programmes are also under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. It is charged with school construction and maintenance work, as well as providing school equipment, teaching materials and textbooks to students. Textbooks are developed and revised by various national advisory committees in the Ministry of Education (Rahman & Al-Haisoni, 2013; World Data on Education, 2011). A textbook is provided for each subject, including English at every level, which must be used in all the kingdom's schools, including private ones.

Currently, formal general education comprises four levels: pre-primary, primary, intermediate and secondary. Pre-primary education is not compulsory and is offered to children from the ages of three to six. The six-year primary level provides education to children between six and twelve years old. The intermediate and secondary levels are both three-year cycles for 12–15 and 15–18 age groups, respectively. In the first year of the secondary level, students study one curriculum. In the second and third years, they must choose either the art or science stream.

Responding to the need for national development in line with the country's vision to advance to a new era from an oil-based economy to an innovation-based one, the Ministry of Education has developed plans and projects to improve curricula and to ensure the right of access to quality education. One of the most important reform initiatives in general education is the decision to teach English to young Saudi learners. In 2004, English became a compulsory subject in the last year of the primary level. In 2011, it was expanded to include the fourth and fifth years. This initiative represents 'part of [a] wider educational reform' (Wedell & Al-Shumaimeri, 2014) that requires proper planning and adequate preparation.

Nevertheless, the introduction of English in Saudi primary schools has been a topic of heated debate among educational experts, the media and the public. One group has opposed this new trend, warning that it could influence the teaching and learning of Arabic and threaten students' Islamic identity (*The Guardian*, 2011). On the other hand, another group has tended to support early language learning, basing their views on the widespread assumption that it is more effective (Al-Shammary, 1989). The recognition of the low achievement in English among Saudi school graduators (Wedell & Al-Shumaimeri, 2014) and the increasing demand for 'equipping Saudi students with the necessary skills needed in the era of information and technology and globalization' (Al-Seghyer, 2011, p. 69) have highlighted the need for introducing English at the primary level. However, as Wedell and Al-Shumaimeri (2014) argued, introducing English to young Saudi learners was implemented hastily, neglecting the influences of major issues concerning the shortage of trained teachers of English in primary schools, inadequate materials and an inappropriate assessment system.

To ensure success in teaching English in public schools, the Ministry of Education introduced the King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer). Initially, this project was applied in 25 girls' secondary and 25 boys' schools across 25 provinces in Saudi Arabia. It aims to utilise qualified teachers, technical capabilities and modern instructional strategies to design high-quality educational curricula. These curricula aim to improve the educational environment by employing technology, face-to-face and self-study training in teaching all subjects, including English classes. It also aims to develop students' learning skills and encourage their creativity and analytical thinking through extracurricular activities. Students can choose to study in the traditional secondary school or the Tatweer-applied secondary school, where students are exposed to an educational context similar to that of the university. Students are able to arrange their timetables, choose their modules and enrol in the training workshop. Additionally, secondary school teachers are given more freedom of choice in their teaching practices.

2.3.2 English in Saudi Arabian Schools

Turkish was the first foreign language taught in Ottoman-operated schools (Al-Malki, 2011; Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saadat, 2002). When the Ottoman Empire fell in 1914, introducing the teaching of English in the Saudi Arabian educational system started. The main reason for choosing English as a foreign language (EFL) in the KSA is that '[t]he Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone great political, social and economic development. To meet new challenges, the Ministry of Education has introduced English as a foreign language (EFL) in schools since 1925' (Al-Ahaydib, 1986, as cited in Liton, 2013).

In 1928, English was taught at the preparatory and primary levels for 4 hours a week (Al-Seghayer, 2011); this lasted until 1943 (Baghdadi, 1985). In the scholarship school, teaching English was important because its main aim was to develop students' English competence to be able to pursue higher education in the US and Britain. In this school, English was taught for 12 hours a week in years 1, 2 and 3 and for 8 hours a week in years 4 and 5. In 1957, English and French were introduced in secondary education, but French was removed in 1969.

In 2004, the Ministry of Education introduced English at the primary level. Since then, it has been taught as a core subject in year 6 for 2 hours a week, using *English for Saudi Arabia, Sixth Grade* as the textbook. It was published by several specialists in the Ministry of Education and has a teacher's guidebook, student's workbook, cassette and CD. Students are exposed to learning basic English, such as the alphabet, numbers, colours, simple vocabulary and short sentences. In terms of grammar rules, students are introduced to use possessives, prepositions and some pronouns. Students are assessed continuously throughout the year, whether they can recognise and write the English alphabet, colours and numbers. The assessment also focuses on their speaking ability; they must be able to introduce themselves, raise questions and form answers, making and replying to simple commands (Al-Seghayer, 2011)

At the three-year intermediate level (following the primary level), English was introduced in 1959 and was taught for 8 hours a week, but since 1980, English has been taught 4 times a week. The textbooks used are the *Say it in English* series for years 1, 2 and 3, developed in 2004 by the female section in the Ministry of Education. The syllabi in the three textbooks are organised according to the functional-notional approach to develop students' communicative competence. Each textbook consists of 6 units, and each unit has 4 lessons. Each lesson has several tasks, devoted to speaking, listening, writing and reading components and also covering some grammar rules and vocabulary. Students who graduate from the intermediate level should have acquired 627 nouns, 239 regular and 98 irregular verbs, 245 adjectives, 39 adverbs, 44 pronouns, 16 propositions, 6 possessives and 267 language expressions (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

At the three-year secondary level (the final stage of general education), English was taught for 6 hours; since 1982, it has been taught for 4 hours a week in each term. The textbook *English for Saudi Arabia* has been used for this level for almost 20 years. It was produced by the Ministry of Education and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals. In total, 6 books are used for the 3 years. Graduates from the secondary level should have learned 955 nouns, 340 verbs, 310 adjectives and 30 verbs (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Saudi students study English for a total of 9 years, during which they are exposed to the same textbooks, teaching methods and number of teaching periods.

Additionally, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, English is taught in private schools. They are required to use the same textbooks and the examination system that are followed in public schools. While private schools are led by Saudi principals assigned by the Ministry of Education, the majority of English teachers come from other countries, such as Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Palestine. Private education enjoys special privileges because 'it is often associated with higher tuition and consequently a higher socioeconomic status, a perceived 'better' peer group, and more flexible curriculum and school guidelines' (Deraney & Abdelsalam, 2012). In the Saudi Arabian context and despite the high tuition fees of private schools, most Saudi families are convinced that such schools are right for their children (Albawaba News, 2000) and for English teaching (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

In private schools, English is introduced from kindergarten and taught for 3 hours a week. Several commercial textbooks are used, including *Start with English* (Oxford University Press), *Let's Learn English* (Longmans), *Way Ahead* (Heinemann/Macmillan) and *Side by Side* (Pearson). In contrast to public schools, which are characterised by limited teaching methodologies and strong reliance on textbooks as the main teaching resource, teachers in private schools utilise various instructional methodologies, such as visual aids and English laboratories, along with technological facilities.

2.3.3 Teaching English in Saudi Schools

According to Tudor (2001), the language classroom is influenced by the cultural and social norms within any context. Cultural factors contribute to the challenging nature of teaching English in Saudi Arabia (Grami, 2012). These cultural factors are linked to the way Saudi students perceive their teachers as 'prominent figures who deserve immense respect, fairly enough', and students should accept their control because they are 'the sole assessor of students' performance' (Grami, 2012, p. 3). What makes respect for teachers acceptable for Muslims, particularly the Saudi people, is that teachers embody the example of the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). This strong belief in the importance of the teacher's role seems to contribute to gaining 'a high status in society and absolute power in the classroom' (Elyas & Picard, 2010, p. 139). Consequently, a teacher controls everything in the classroom, even the students'

participation, which is limited to one- or two-sentence responses to questions generated by the teachers (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

From another angle, the English textbooks have been regarded as an artefact of the Saudi culture because their content seems to reflect the local culture and religious and social values. One example of content analysis of such English textbooks was conducted by Mahboob and Elyas (2014), who found units on Islamic issues included in the textbooks. All the textbooks also include examples referring to Saudi cultural and social practices, such as the limited use of women's pictures, restricted to the traditional presentation of women wearing a *hijab*. Because its content is locally oriented, each textbook does not 'push Western cultural practices but rather invites students (and teachers) to consider diverse practices and beliefs in relation to local practices' (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014, p. 141).

Several relevant studies (e.g., Al-Asmari, 2008; Al-Fahadi, 2012; Al-Gahtani, 2003) evaluated some aspects of the current EFL textbooks in Saudi public schools; one is on how the English culture is presented in these materials. Although teaching about culture in the language classroom is crucial, as it can aid in attaining second language proficiency (Kramsch, 1998), the current EFL textbooks focus on developing the linguistic rules of English, away from its culture, and rarely provide students with activities concerning the cultural aspects of native English speakers (Al-Seghayer, 2011). As perceived by most of the English major students at King Abdul-Aziz University, learning English should not be divorced from teaching its culture (Elyas, 2008). The findings of Al-Fahadi's (2012) study showed that the EFL teachers believed that for better cultural content, textbooks should, to some extent, contain a mixture of different cultures that should not create conflict between the Saudi and the target culture. Surveying 70 Saudi, intermediate-school, EFL teachers' attitudes towards teaching culture in their classrooms, Al-Gahtani (2003) found that most of the teachers responded positively and were aware of the importance of teaching to develop their students' sociolinguistic competence, as well as improve their linguistic proficiency. However, Al-Asmari (2008) highlighted the lack of policies on how to introduce culture in the English classrooms. Hommady (2011) argued that most courses in EFL teachers' colleges did not provide sufficient materials for teaching or learning English culture. Al-Samani (2014) pointed out that English could not be

learned successfully without knowledge of its cultural aspects because neglecting it could contribute to 'producing learners unable to conduct well-behaved responses once coming across odd cultural situations' (p. 147).

At each grade level, Saudi EFL teachers are given the same English syllabus, along with guidelines on how to teach the subject. Furthermore, they are required to cover the syllabus according to the timeframe. Unfortunately, teachers are expected to follow the units exactly as organised in the textbook and to use the same teaching methods in the teacher's guidebook, exactly as implemented by the Ministry of Education. Under such situations, teachers are restricted from taking control of their own teaching and from applying more complex teaching methods in class (Al-Bedaiwi, 2014). Furthermore, Al-Sadan (2000) asserted that teachers had no role in curriculum development, which influenced how they perceived themselves as merely transmitters of language knowledge. Tomlinson (2003) was concerned with engaging teachers in designing their own materials, and Harwood (2010) argued that material development should be taken as an important activity in teachers' education. On the other hand, Al-Seghayer (2011) believed that Saudi English teachers were unwilling to develop their skills in material development or to assume responsibility for this task since it had been the duty of others. To make matters worse, teachers had been discouraged from changing, adding, editing or even using textbooks other than those provided by the Ministry of Education (Al-Sadan, 2000). Consequently, students are not offered any supplementary materials for developing their English skills.

Exposing students to authentic spoken or written genres is important because it 'gives learners a state of the real world, an opportunity to 'rehearse' in a sheltered environment, hence the less authentic the material we use, the less well prepared learners will be for the real world' (McGrath, 2006, p. 105). Al-Seghayer (2011) argued that most schools were not provided with a language computer laboratory; if there was any, it was not well equipped. Additionally, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching English is essential in developing students' skills in the language, especially reading and writing (Barrel, 1999). Nevertheless, its use in Saudi schools is limited due to the lack of hardware, language teaching software and Internet access in school (Al-Maini, 2011; Saqlain, Al-Qarni, & Ghadi, 2013). Another important factor in this regard was highlighted in Saqlain, Al-

Qarni and Ghadi's (2013) research, in which the majority of teachers emphasised the need for pre- and in-service training on proper ICT use in English classes. Additionally, the limited time in using ICT and attending adequate training is considered a key barrier (Al-Maini, 2011). Therefore, in her study, Al-Jarf (2009) concurred that computer knowledge and ICT-based teaching methods must be mastered by all teacher graduates of King Saud University.

The traditional methods currently used to teach English in Saudi schools are the grammar translation method (GTM) and the audio-lingual methods (ALM). The ALM emphasises the process of stimulus and response situations. As it is regarded to be the main teaching method used by Saudi teachers (Al-Mohanna, 2011), teachers tend to rely on the use of extensive drills of grammar rules and new words (Seghayer, 2011). In the GTM, a language is taught through analysing its grammar rules and translating sentences from the target language to students' first language when teaching or practising exercises (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Saudi teachers tend to focus on detailed explanations of grammar rules and depend on structural analysis, answering questions and translating texts (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Saudi EFL teacher, according to Al-Seghayer (2014), is viewed as 'a material presenter and content demonstrator, not as a manager of language learning situations' (p. 20). Such a teacher-centred approach could encourage students to be passive-attentive to teachers' explanations of grammar or vocabulary presentation (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

Teaching speaking takes a very simple picture as students are engaged in extensive drilling of mechanical forms, which mostly stresses practising language patterns. As for teaching writing, students are presented with model texts to follow, whose topics are elicited from the textbooks. Teachers mainly focus on instructing students how to plan the texts rather than on teaching them useful writing skills. Furthermore, teachers expect students to complete the compositions and rely on them to learn how to write just by completing writing activities. Feedback on their writing is rarely applied and when it is done, it focuses on correcting grammar, vocabulary and punctuation (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). Investigating students' and teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of currently employed strategies of teaching English reading skills in a female secondary school in Saudi Arabia, Al-Nooh and Masson-Mcpherson (2013) found that both groups agreed that teaching students to decode sounds and words and

teacher reading aloud were very helpful techniques. However, students disliked being asked to read aloud for fear of making mistakes. When asked to answer a comprehension question, they often resorted to locating words from the question in the reading passage and simply copying the sentence as the answer.

Most of the English teachers in public schools are Arabs, which can be considered an advantage since they can interact with students without any culture or language barrier (Khan, 2011). Investigating teachers' and students' attitudes towards using Arabic in an English class in a Saudi intermediate school for females, Al-Nofaie (2010) found that both students and teachers held positive attitudes towards this trend. She also reported that teachers used the first language (L1) for certain purposes, such as when explaining grammar rules or introducing new words, and for helping low-level students. However, this privilege can be a real, double-edged sword because not only do Saudi English teachers tend to use Arabic more extensively than English, but students also become more in favour of using Arabic in every sense (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Mahamoud (2012) believed that any escape to L1 could be linked to one of these reasons, if not all: 'lack of patience especially while teaching vocabulary, lack of preparation on the part of the teacher or being unable to use the target language' (p. 1735).

Another important shortcoming in the EFL curriculum is the kind of evaluations used for assessing student performance. Assessing student learning is a high concern of education policymakers, particularly with the intention to improve English performance. However, examination in public schools is restricted to the schema format imposed by the Ministry of Education as the form for assessing students (Al-Sadan, 2000). Following the instructions provided by the General Directorate of Assessment, in the oral test, students are required to answer one or two questions asked by teachers and read a few lines from a paragraph chosen from their textbooks. As for the written test, students are asked to write about a topic that is also taken from their textbooks and fully discussed in class. To evaluate their reading comprehension, students are subjected to reading a passage selected from their textbooks and to answer questions that do not test their ability to understand implied information. They are instructed to memorise words and grammar rules and are subjected to drills in reading passages aloud and translating words and sentences. Furthermore, evaluation

practices carried out by teachers do not adequately reflect students' English proficiency. Students achieve excellent results in English because they are instructed to memorise a well-prepared essay for the final written exam (Elyas, 2008), provided with summaries of each unit to facilitate surface learning and given the chance of repeating the quizzes until desirable scores are obtained (Al-Harbi, 2015).

Al-Hazmi (2003) argued that the EFL courses and programmes offered in universities and colleges to students enrolled to be EFL teachers in KSA schools were inadequate and called for 'a systematic approach to pre- and in-service education for EFL teachers' (p. 341). These programmes were 'inadequate with regard to disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and technological pedagogical knowledge' (Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 22). Wedell and Al-Shumaieri (2014) argued that primary EFL teachers were neither fully aware of young learners when teaching theory and pedagogy nor had adequate English language competence. Javid and Umer (2014) asserted that most of the students enrolled in the English-major department at Taif University, supposed to be future EFL teachers, lacked oral proficiency in English; they contended that enrolment in this department should be exclusively for those with good mastery of the language.

2.4 English Language Teaching and Saudi Higher Education

For the purpose of this study that focuses on Saudi undergraduates, it is important to highlight their higher educational background.

2.4.1 Tertiary Development

The beginning of higher education in Saudi Arabia goes back to 1927, when King Abdul-Aziz sent 14 Saudi students to Egypt to study various fields of specialisations. Actual higher education generally began in 1949, when the College of Islamic Law (Shari'a), which later became Umm Al-Qura University (UQU), was established in Makkah (Al-Malki, 2011). The second institution was the Teachers College founded in 1952.

In the early 1970s, a period of rapid development resulting from enormous revenues from oil exports, the government focused on higher education to address the shortage of Saudi qualified workers and achieve socioeconomic progress in the country. The

advantage of that interest was reaped with the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education in 1975 to supervise all universities and colleges in the field of higher education. In the capital city of Riyadh, King Saud University (the first and oldest in the country) was established in 1957, with only 9 lecturers who taught 21 students. Currently, King Saud University offers a wide range of programmes in the sciences, humanities and professional studies.

Within the framework of the 10-year strategic plan of the Ministry of Education (2004–2014), the Saudi government has focused on human development, clearly demonstrated by the large financial allocation to education. This strong financial support aims at improving higher education in an effort to increase the number of well-educated Saudi citizens and raise their productivity and ability to access knowledge-based society (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010). Unlike the development of the educational system between the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by quantitative growth and infrastructural improvement (Prokop, 2003), higher education has now witnessed massive development in both quantity and quality standards (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). For example, the ninth plan (2010–2014) emphasised increasing the quality of education, expanding scientific research, enhancing partnerships with universities at home and abroad, assessing students' admission to universities and using ICT and technology.

Higher education offers a range of programmes. Colleges of technology provide students with post-secondary training programmes leading to diplomas (two- to three-year programmes). These colleges aim to fulfil the need for technicians with multiple skills, ready to work in many areas, such as electricity, bank management, food industries and electronics and communication. Bachelor's degrees include scientific and humanities programmes; normally lasting four years, the duration may vary according to the specialties. For example, pharmacy is a five-year degree, including hospital training. Veterinary and engineering degrees last for five years; dentistry, medicine and law take six years. Master's degree programmes require students to take two years to complete, and doctoral degrees take from three to five years (World Data on Education, 2011(7th edition); The Current Status of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, 2011). Female and male enrolment at different levels of higher education increased from 636,445 in 2006 to 903,567 in 2010. The majority of student

enrolment was at the bachelor level, which increased from 528,346 to 794,238 over the same period. The number of students in diploma programmes also increased from 93,963 to 127,148, master's students from 9,768 to 19,592 and doctoral students from 2,410 to 2,565 over the same period (The Current Status of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, 2011).

To support the education and professions of females in Saudi society, the government has undertaken several initiatives, which include opening a number of specialisations for women. Currently, female students have equal access to disciplines that used to be exclusively for male students, such as media and information, commerce and business, medicine, dentistry, nursing and pharmacy. King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was established in 2009, a leading, co-educational, international research institution offering technology and science-related programmes, such as energy, environment, biological engineering, applied mathematics and computer sciences (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The university has also sought cooperative partnerships with some international universities, for example, the Academic Excellence Alliance partnership with Stanford University and the University of California in the US. Female-only universities were also opened, including Effat University in 1999 and Princess Nora Bint Abdulrahman University in 2011.

2.4.2 Teaching English in Saudi Universities

Teaching English in higher education is to some extent different from doing so in public schools. Nevertheless, the teaching practices employed in universities are similar to those used in schools as English is taught using teacher-centred and theory-based approaches (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Al-Hazmi, 2006; Javid & Umer, 2014; Khan, 2011).

In Saudi universities, English is studied either as a major degree or as a prerequisite course. Some Saudi universities teach English as a major field of study, consisting of a four-year programme leading to a Bachelor of Arts in English. Students are required to take courses to fulfil university or college requirements, including courses such as Arabic, the Qur'an and Islamic studies. They are also supposed to study courses

prescribed by the English Department, which normally offers linguistics courses in semantics, syntax and phonology. Students are also introduced to English literature, including drama, novels, poetry and the history of English literature. They are required to take courses in translation and in English-teaching methods (Al-Seghayer, 2011). At the end of each semester, students take final exams for each course. During the last semester of the fourth year, students are supposed to teach English in public schools under the supervision of their respective advisors

When it is taught as a required course, students are supposed to take it for two to four hours per week. The university's council or the instructors choose the textbooks. In either case, textbooks act as curriculum models for teachers, providing them with the selected topics to be covered and with concrete examples of suitable teaching methods. Teachers are supposed to cover only the topics that are in these textbooks, though not necessarily all of them or in the order presented. A typical English syllabus focuses on teaching linguistic knowledge rather than on skill development. Students are given a final exam to determine the level that they have learned from the course. Students who pass this exam are no longer required to take any other English courses during their undergraduate level (Al-Seghayer, 2011).

Recently, the Saudi universities have decided to introduce English as a medium of instruction (hereafter EMI) for many scientific undergraduate courses and as a preparatory year programme. At UQU, undergraduate courses in the colleges of medicine, pharmacy, nursing, applied sciences and computer sciences use English as a medium of instruction. The PYP is an introductory pathway that aims to prepare Saudi secondary school students to study in higher education. Students are required to successfully pass all the courses in the PYP before they can enrol in their academic undergraduate courses. The types of courses in the PYP and the numbers allocated for each course vary from one university to another, and often even within a PYP, as described in the following sections.

2.5 Umm Al-Qura University

Umm Al-Qura University (hereafter UQU) was founded in 1949 in Makkah and was the first higher educational institution to teach EFL to Saudi students. English was taught as a prerequisite course for two hours per week at the undergraduate level.

Then in 1962, the English Department was established in its College of Education. Before joining the College of Social Sciences in 1983, it was an independent department with its own objectives and visions (UQU, 2015). Located in the holy city, the place of Masjid Al-Haram, UQU enjoys a considerable academic reputation in the fields of Islamic studies, Arabic language and education. In parallel with the development in higher education policies in 1981, the university established several faculties offering undergraduate, postgraduate and higher diploma degrees in Islamic studies, education, Arabic language, social sciences, applied sciences, engineering and Islamic architecture and medicine (UQU, 2015). With the establishment of the College of Medicine and Medical Sciences, the College of Community Service and the Continuing College, the number of colleges jumped to 12, accommodating 30,000 students. The university colleges are spread over three campuses in Aziziyah, Al-Zahir and Al-Abdiyah, each with its own library, two exclusively for males in the Aziziyah and Al-Abdiyah campuses. Al-Zhair's library is for female students.

To assist in the country's economic future, the university aims to elevate the quality of its educational system by producing highly educated students who contribute to national development (UQU, 2011). In light of the National Development Plan and to meet the needs of employers, UQU (2015) intends to increase the number of students in pure science studies at the expense of the arts and humanities. The university has also expanded by opening various disciplines to females so that they can achieve their ambitions and participate effectively in the Saudi labour force.

The admission policy at UQU requires student applicants to have a secondary school certificate with grades of 80% or above. They are also required to pass admission tests such as the Summative Assessment and Standardized Test provided by the National Centre for Assessment in Higher Education. Interviews are often required for some undergraduate courses, such as for the English Language Department in the College of Social Sciences. The enrolees may be classified as: (a) a Saudi or a person born to a Saudi mother, (b) a recent graduate from a local or international secondary, either public or private school, and (c) a student with no prior record of discharge from the university for disciplinary reasons[4].

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[4] UQU website (https://uqu.edu.sa/en/dadregis/179).

2.5.1 The College of Pharmacy

The College of Pharmacy was established in 2006, and its first graduation was held in the following year. It is located in Al-Abdiyah campuses in Makkah and female and male students are supposed to take their pharmacy courses in separate buildings. The vision of this college is to:

> To be an internationally recognised college of pharmacy for excellence in education, practice and research contributing to health improvement and knowledge-based economy[5]

The College of Pharmacy offers two degrees; a Bachelor of Pharmacy (Pharm-B) and a Doctor of Pharmacist (Pharm-D). The Bachelor of Pharmacy programme lasts for four years of study and includes five departments; the Department of Clinical Pharmacy, the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, the Department of Pharmaceutics, the Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry and the Department of Pharmacognosy. The main prerequisite to secure a place in the Bachelor of Pharmacy programme is passing a full-time one-year mandatory Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) offered at UQU. Upon their completion of the PYP, students are eligible to enrol in the College of Pharmacy and in that year they would be in the second year of their academic year. As shown in Table 2.1, second-year pharmacy students are required to take general courses, such as courses in Arabic language, Islamic studies and the Qur'an along with a number of specialised courses in the field of pharmacy such as microbiology, chemistry, mathematics, approaches to the pharmaceutical profession and pharmaceutics.

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[5] UQU website, College of Pharmacy (https://uqu.edu.sa/en/pharmcol)

Table 2.1

Pharmacy courses taught in the second year at Umm AL-Qura university

First Semester	Second Semester
The Holy Qur'an	Arabic Language
Islamic Studies	Anatomy and Histology
Mathematics	Physiology
Approaches to Pharmaceutical Profession	Biochemistry
Physiology	Pharmaceutical Organic Chemistry (2)
Pharmaceutical Organic Chemistry (1)	Pharmaceutics (2)
Microbiology	Prophet Profile
Pharmaceutics (1)	-

In the third year of their academic studies, particularly in the second semester, students can apply to study in one of the five departments offered in the Bachelor of Pharmacy programme or they can apply to study in the Doctor of Pharmacy programme.

Admission to the Doctor of Pharmacy programme is based on students' performance and their overall records in their second and third years. However, to be eligible for a Doctor of Pharmacy degree, students must have over 80% or a GPA (i.e., Grade Point Average) of 4 out of 5. In addition, students are required to take a number of specialised tests in the field of pharmacy[6]. As English has become the language of instruction in some of UQU's colleges, and in the Colleges of Pharmacy in particular, newly admitted students in these colleges are required to take a year-long of compulsory preparatory courses. This is discussed in the following section.

2.5.2 Preparatory Year Programme

Many Saudi universities offer a Preparatory Year Programme (PYP) as a pre-pathway to tertiary study. One of the first Saudi universities to implement a preparatory year programme was UQU. A PYP was first applied in the Faculty of Engineering and Islamic Architecture in 2006, and then applied in the medical colleges in 2007. This program lasts for one year (two semesters), and this year is considered to be the first

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[6] (UQU website, College of Pharmacy https://old.uqu.edu.sa/pharmacy/ar/93203362).

year of the university study plan. The following is a list of this programme's objectives[7]:

1. Provide students with multiple skills that will help them achieve success and excellence in their academic study and professional life.
2. Bridge the gap between the secondary and university stages.
3. Determine the students' capabilities by measuring their performance during the preparatory year and select the college that best suits their capabilities according to the requirements of each college.
4. Improve the quality of input of the colleges taking part in the preparatory year.
5. Improve the educational environment, take necessary steps to achieve academic quality and use new teaching techniques.
6. Develop students' creativity and innovation.
7. Participate in improving the outcomes of the university.
8. Engage students in the environment of electronic interactions through digital curricula according to the standards of international companies.

Since the 2009–2010 school year, a preparatory year has been implemented in various colleges through three preliminary programmes: the Pre-scientific programme (PSP), the Pre-medical programme (PMP) and the Pre-administrative programme (PAP). As indicated in Table 2.2, the PSP is for students who aim to enrol in College of Engineering and Islamic Architecture, the College of Computer and Information Systems, and the College of Applied Sciences. The PMP is for the students who will join the College of Medicine, College of Applied Medical Sciences, the College of Pharmacy, the College of Dentistry, the College of Health Sciences, or the College of Nursing. To enrol in the College of Business and Administration, students are required to apply to the PAP.

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[7] UQU website, Deanship of Preparatory Year Program (https://uqu.edu.sa/en/pre-edu/AboutUs)

Table 2.2
Academic routes and the associated colleges

Pre-Programmes	Colleges
1. Pre-Scientific Programme (PSP)	College of Engineering and Islamic Architecture College of Computer and Information System College of Applied Sciences
2. Pre-Medical Programme (PMP)	College of Medicine College of Applied Medical Sciences College of Pharmacy College of Dentistry College of Health Sciences College of Nursing
3. Pre-administrative Programme (PAP)	College of Business and Administration

Source: UQU website, Deanship of Preparatory Year Programme

Because this current study targeted the second-year pharmacy students as its sample, I looked at PMP. In this programme, as shown in Table 2.3, students are required to study the following subjects: medical physics, cell physiology, human genetics, chemistry, active learning skills, computer skills and English.

Table 2.3
Courses required in the pre-medical programme in the preparatory year programme

First semester		Second Semester	
Course Title	Course Hours	Course Title	Course Hours
Chemistry 1	2	Chemistry 2	2
Human Genetics	2	Cell Physiology	3
Learning Skills	3	Medical Physics	4
Computer Skills	2	Computer Skills	3
English (General)	6	English (Medical)	4

Source: UQU website, Deanship of Preparatory Year Programme

As this study aimed to examine the second-year pharmacy students' perceptions of the impact that the English programmes provided in their PYP, more information on that course is provided in the following section

2.5.3 The English Language Centre (ELC) – The English Language Preparatory Programmes (ELLPs)

The ELC manages the work of the English programme, as it is called, ELPPs. The ELPPs consist of two types of courses, English for General Purposes (EGP) held in the first semester, and the second one is the English for Specific Course (ESP) that runs in the second semester.

The EGP course uses international EFL textbooks entitled New Headway Plus (Special Edition series; Soars and Soars, 2007) provided by Oxford University Press. The book consists of four levels: beginners, elementary, pre-Intermediate and intermediate. The aim of this course, as stated in the Preparatory Year Programme (PYP)- Course Description for the EGP, (see Appendix 2.1) is:

> …to prepare Medicine and Heath College students to advance to the ESP levels so they may develop the English language skills necessary for success in their university core courses. Overall, the EGP course revises the students' fundamental knowledge of the English language in the following areas; grammar, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

The main prerequisite to take the EGP course is to pass an in-house English Language Proficiency Placement Test. The ELC administers this test at the beginning of the PYP. The aim of this test is to assess students' present language ability and to place them into groups that are in line with their present language levels. The students who obtain low results are placed in the low-level English groups and are required to study all four levels in the first semester. Students placed in the intermediate-level groups are required to study only the latter three EGP textbooks, and those students with higher levels of proficiency in English are required to study just two EGP textbooks. The duration of the EGP course is 16 weeks in the first term. The EGP course is taught for 3 hours every day, making it 16 hours per week but the course is generally awarded for six credit hours (see appendix 2.1).

The syllabus adopted for the EGP course is likely to use skill-based and task-based approaches. The core elements of the EGP course include grammar, oral communication, reading skills and writing skills (see appendix 2.2; for more on core

English elements). However, reading through the EGP core elements, it seems that it is not easy to determine which skills or tasks are targeted in EGP course. For example, reading skill is a macro-skill that can be subdivided into a number of micro-skills, including skimming, scanning, distinguishing between the important and less important items and making inferences and conclusions (Jordan, 1997). However, as shown in the Core English Elements of the EGP course, in reading skills the

> Emphasis will be on vocabulary growth, comprehension and expression of the main idea. Students will develop study and reading skills such as pre-reading

The assessment of the EGP course in the ELC heavily relies on four types of assessment; including class participation, short quizzes, midterm exams, final exams and presentations (see appendix 2.3; for more on EGP assessment tools). In addition to passing the final exam which comprises 40% of the total grade (i.e., 100), students are also required to pass two written midterm exams which combine to comprise 40% of the total grade and complete coursework that comprises the final 20%. Although it was stated that students are required to take short quizzes and give presentations, the course assessments tools, as stated in the Course Description for the EGP course (see appendix 2.3), do not show how these quizzes and oral presentations are tackled or assessed. However, it can be inferred that this coursework includes the three types of assessment tools; class participation, quizzes and presentations are left for the teachers to deploy these tools in the way they see fit. The students are exposed to lecturing and are expected to be engaged in both group interactions and self-learning. However, the students are not trained to utilise these approaches in their school lives.

In the second semester, students take the ESP course which uses 'a professional careers curriculum provided by Oxford University Press' (Course Description for the ESP course). It uses two ESP textbooks: *Nursing 1* (Grice and Meehan, 2007) and *Nursing 2* (Greenan and Grice, 2007). The main aims of the ESP course, as stated in the preparatory year programme (PYP)- English for Specific Purposes, Course Description for English language (see appendix 2.4) are:

> …to focus on the functional language needed for success in a specific program of choice. Overall, this ESP course provides

students the language, information, and skills needed for their studies and careers in the area of health services. It presents them with English from a variety of nursing-specific topics and situations, and develops their communication skills with patients.

The main prerequisite to take the ESP course is to have passed the EGP course that runs in the first semester. Unlike in the EGP course, in ESP, students are not required to take any type of tests for them to be placed into groups according to their results on the placement test. In other words, students in different groups from the Group 1 who studied EGP course in the first semester are the same students in that group who will study the ESP course in the second semester. The ESP course is taught for 3 hours every day making it 16 hours per week, but the course is awarded just 4 credit hours (see appendix 2.5, for information on ESP's course details). In line with the EGP syllabus, the ESP syllabus is based on a skill- and task- based approaches. The teachers are provided with an audio-CD and a teachers' book and a number of laboratories equipped with recent audio-visual system are assumed to be available. The aim of using these new innovations is 'to prepare them [the students] for their processional studies and for competitive assessments and evaluations' (see appendix 2.6, for more information on ESP's course description and teaching facility). In line with the core English elements of the EGP course, the ESP covers grammar, oral communication, reading skills and writing skills. Yet, it seems that the main focus of the reading skills in ESP course is on professional vocabulary growth.

The assessment practices adapted for the ESP course use four assessment tools: short quizzes, midterm exams, final exams and presentations (see appendix 2-6). Unlike in the EGP course, class participation is not included. In addition to passing the final exam which comprises 50% of the total grade, students are also required to take two written midterm exams which together comprise 30% and coursework which comprises 20%. It can be inferred that the coursework includes the three types of assessment tools, i.e., class participation, quizzes and presentations and it is left for the teachers to use each type of tool in the way they see fit (see appendix 2.7, ESP Assessment Tools).

Since the ELC's university website is under construction, its number of teachers, those teachers' experiences and their qualifications are not available. Roughly speaking, the language teachers, both female and male, include both native speakers (NSs) of English and non-native speakers (NNSs). However, the majority of teachers who are NNSs are from Jordan, Pakistan and KSA. The ELPPs teachers are supposed to teach students of the same gender.

2.6 Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to KSA, with a focus on its culture and religion, economy and education. I discussed how English is taught in both schools and universities. I introduced a brief history of Umm Al-Qura University and the Preparatory Year Programmes (PYP). I also shed light on the nature of the ELPPs, which the English Language Centre (ELC) offers, and on the teaching materials in the ELPPS, i.e., EGP and ESP courses and assessments. The following chapter presents the literature review.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Preview

Since the English language preparatory programmes (ELPPs) offered to students in the context of this current study are divided into courses; English for General Purposes (henceforth EGP) and English for Specific Purposes (henceforth ESP) courses, this review first aims to cover what ESP is and how it reached this stage of development in the world in general, and in the Middle East in particular. It is useful to examine how it is defined and classified in the literature and this will be presented in the second part of this chapter. English for Academic Purposes (hereafter EAP) as seen as falling within the broader category of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and which has also been introduced as a separate concept in ELT (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987) will be considered in the following sections. Before introducing the question of the differences/relationships between ESP/EAP and EGP courses, it is useful to present a brief overview of the meaning and practices of the teaching of EGP in relation to ESP. Next, a number of studies about the language difficulties that non-native English speaking students (NNS) have when adapting to the demands of courses in their subject majors like pharmacy courses, taught through the medium of English will also be reviewed, followed by a section presenting some of the causes that contribute to students' struggle in English. Finally, the chapter ends with key studies conducted on the impact of English programmes, including EGP and ESP instruction on EFL students' academic experiences.

3.2 The Emergence of ESP

ESP researchers believed that the first rise of ESP in the 1960s was brought by a combination of three important factors: the changes occurring in the world after the Second World War, a revolution in linguistics for designing English courses tailored to serve specific needs and interests, and a focus on the learner (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Firstly, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) further argued that two key historical periods brought ESP into life; the expansion in the scientific and economic activities after the Second World War and the Oil Crisis in the early 1970s. According to them, these two key events promoted the role of English writing;

> The effect was to create a whole new mass of people wanting to learn English, not for pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but because English was the key to the international currencies of technology and commerce (p.6).

This development was gained momentum by the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s. In that period, oil rich countries, such as the KSA, earned a considerable amount of revenues from its oil exports. As a result, the Saudi government invested a substantial amount of their financial resources for developmental plans. As English was the language for marketing the oil wealth as well as for developing the scientific and technological knowledge, the government in KSA decided to import expertise from the native-English speaking countries for developing the country's economy at both national and global levels. Benech (2001) sheds lights on reasons behind the increase in the teaching of English in the ME, during the oil crisis in the early of 1970s and particularly in the KSA. It was to teach the Saudi workers in ARAMCO Company to become productive workers, as was discussed in Chapter two. The KSA, therefore, realized the importance of English for international business, technology and science needed for the purposes of developing its oil industries in particular, and its governmental institutions in general. Consequently, English has become a compulsory subject taught in Saudi schools as well as the medium of instruction for teaching a number of courses in the Saudi universities, as discussed in Chapter two.

As for the second factor, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argued that because the requirements for learning English had increased, the demand for tailoring language courses that satisfy the needs of learners was inevitable. Consequently, there were studies in the field of linguistics to determine the type of language features required in specific situations to be the basis of learners' courses. As a result, course designers shifted their attention from designing General English courses to designing courses based on the needs, interests and the demands of particular group of learners in a specific target context, that is English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Another factor that also contributed to the emergence of ESP stemmed from the growing interest in the field of psychology (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). It was argued that learners used different learning strategies, inherited different L1 norms

from their educational and cultural backgrounds, faced different language difficulties and were influenced by different interests and needs. Placing central emphasis on identifying learners' needs, interests, motivation and their strategies to learning resulted in defining the principles for designing language courses that adapt the language instruction to serve the needs of the students. All these factors seemed to highlight the need of offering ESP courses in language learning.

3.2.1 What is ESP?

ESP is normally considered to be 'a theoretically and pedagogically eclectic parent, but one committed to tailoring instruction to specific rather than general purposes' (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p. 2). It refers to 'the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain' (Paltridge and Starfield, 2014, p. 2). According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 19) ESP is 'an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learner's reason for learning'. In this sense, they accept that 'ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material or methodology' (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 2).

A generally more accepted definition of ESP is given by Strevens (1988, as cited in Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 3) who elaborates on ESP by making a distinction between (1) absolute characteristics and (2) variable characteristics. These are

1. designed to meet specific needs of the learner; related to content, to particular disciplines, occupation and activities; centered on language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, and analysis of discourse; in contrast with 'General English

2. may be restricted to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only); may be not taught according to any pre-ordinated methodology

Building on the proposed definition of ESP by Strevens, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 5) provide theirs, which, according to them, helps to clear up the confusion caused by Strevens's definition. For them, the absolute characteristics of ESP are:

> (1) ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner; (2)
> ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of
> the disciplines it serves; (3) ESP is centered on the language
> (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genre
> appropriate to these activities.

On the top of the absolute characteristics, they suggest four variable characteristics:

> 1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific
>   disciplines; (2) ESP may use, in specific teaching
>   situations, a different methodology from that of general
>   English; (3) ESP is likely to be designed for adults
>   learners, either at a tertiary level institutions or in a
>   professional work situations. It could, however, be used
>   for learners at secondary level; (4) ESP is generally
>   designed for intermediate or advanced students

Although slight differences of opinions still exist in the definition of ESP, it appears that most definitions quoted here agree on two main points. First, ESP is driven by a goal of achieving context-specificity and fulfilling the needs of the learners. Second, it therefore, differs from English for General Purposes (EGP).

3.2.2 ESP Classifications:

A number of ESP classifications were found in the literature. Nevertheless, mapping out all proposed ESP classifications would be beyond the scope of this study. In this sense, I will refer to those who fall within the scope of this study.

First, and as shown in Figure 3-1, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 17) classified under ESP three main categories, English for Science and technology (EST), English for Business and Economics (EBE) and English for Social Science (ESS). On an other level, each these three main categories is further subdivided into (a) English for Academic purposes, i.e., learning English is required for academic study, and (b) English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), i.e., learning English is required for work training.
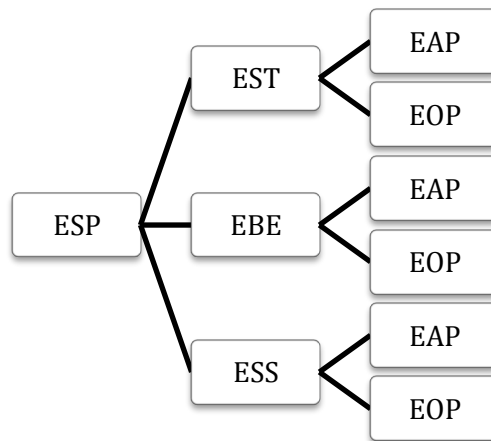
Figure 3-1: ESP sub-divisions in terms of EST, EBE and ESS (Hutchinson and Waters
(1987, p. 17)

Second, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) divided ESP into two main branches: the first
is English for Occupational, English for Vocational, English for Professional
Purposes (EOP, EVP, EPP), whereas the second one is English for Academic
Purposes (EAP). Each of these major branches could be sub-divided according to
disciplines or professions/occupations as shown in the Figure 3-2 (Flowerdew and
Peacock, 2001, p.11).
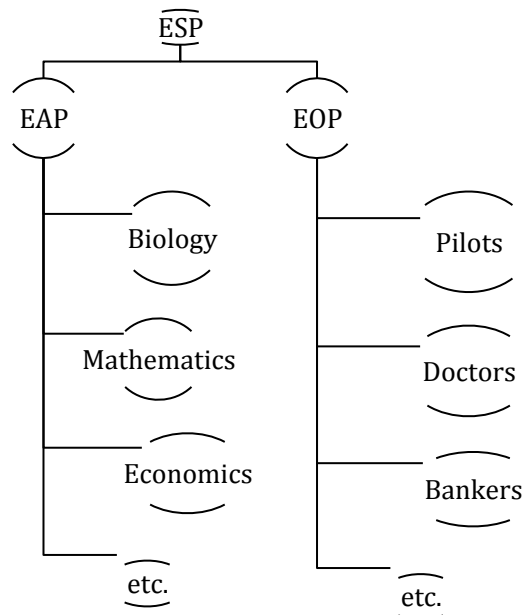
Figure 3-2: ESP sub-divisions in terms of academic disciplines and types of
occupations

The term EOP is used to refer to English that is not taught either for academic purposes or general purposes; rather, it is for professional purposes, such as is needed in performance of a real life occupation, rather than when studying (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). One example to distinguish between EAP and EOP is to think of an English course designed to prepare medical students to carry out academic tasks, such as reading specialized medical journals or textbooks, and writing assignments for their course in medicine: this course thereby would be an EAP course (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001). In contrast, an English course concerned with teaching the language for doctors, such as how to talk to English speaking patients or colleagues, or how to read instructions for medical apparatus they might use, would be described as an EOP course (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998).

However, this distinction between EAP and EOP is not always clear. For this reason, Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p.11) assert that, 'a lot of work conducted in the academy is in fact preparation for the professional occupations students are likely to go into when they graduate and might therefore be classified as EOP'. Thus, another slightly different subclassification of ESP has been offered, into EAP directed to help students in their studies and EOP to prepare those same students for their future professional occupations, as shown in Figure 3-3. Both would be ESP by the fact that both are concerned with types of English particular to some group, rather than suited to all learners.
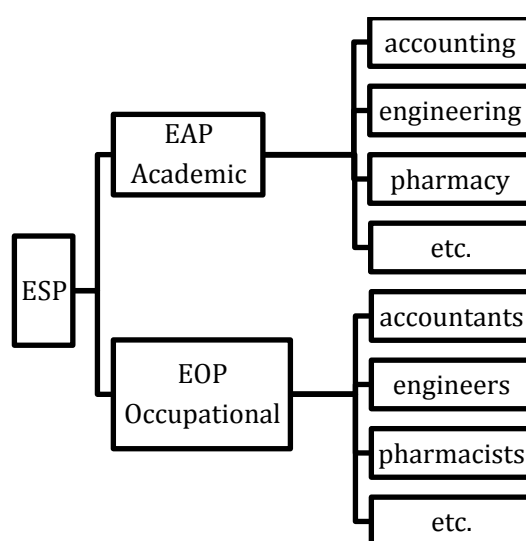
Figure 3-3 ESP sub-divisions by learner current academic needs and future

professional needs (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001, p.12)

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Within the EFL settings, Zohrabi (2010) presents his classification in which ELT is divided into two main strands; EFL and ESL. Each of these main branches is then subdivided into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Although it has been argued that the distinction between EAP and EOP is not clear (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001), Zohrabi's work has emphasized only on EAP sub-division. In his model, as shown in Figure 3-4, EAP is divided into English for General Purposes (EGP) and English for Special Purposes (ESP). EGP covers areas such as study skills, language skills and language system, whereas ESP focuses on social sciences, educational sciences, medical sciences and mathematical sciences. Perhaps one should understand from this model that both EGP and ESP are designed to help students with their academic study and for this reason this research is interested in Zohrabi's work.
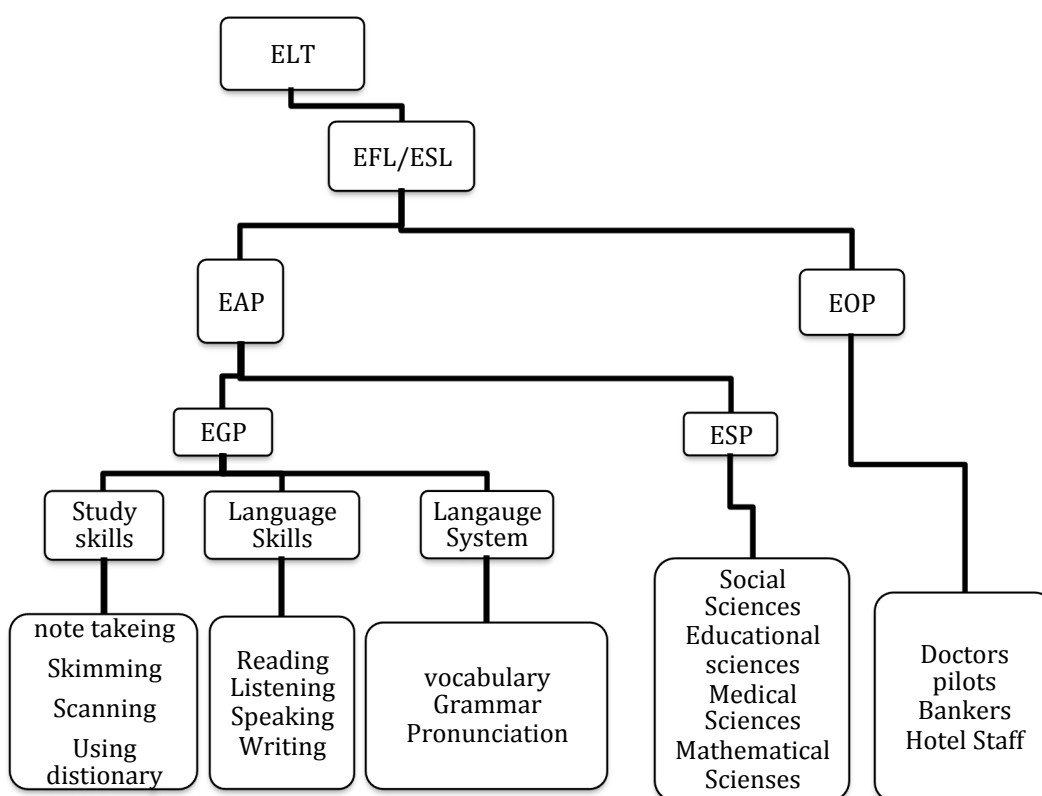
Figure: 3-4 ESP sub-divisions in Zohrabi's model

To be more specific, this classification divides EAP into EGP and ESP courses and this division reflects exactly the study of ELLPs in the context of this study. Second, this study aims to explore students' assessments of their weakness and strengths in

using English, together with their views of the impact of the EGP and ESP instruction on the gained improvement of their study skills, language skills and language system as shown in Zohrabi's model. It should be noted, however, that EOP in the KSA is usually taught through courses provided by the private sector, including companies that require it, such as ARAMCO. One does not find such courses taught in state school or in universities where either EGP or EAP prevail.

3.3 The Emergence of EAP

This section aims to provide more information about EAP instruction, its course types and how it acts as a very useful starting point for preparing students to handle the demands required in their major degree.

Teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is a relatively new trend which has emerged from the broader field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Historically, the term EAP was first used in 1974 by SELMOUS that later become BALEAP (British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes). Recently, the teaching of EAP has witnessed a dramatic expansion in line with the growth of English as a leading language for the dissemination of academic knowledge (Graddol, 1997). Furthermore, the growing interest in teaching EAP has been in line with the trend towards internationalizing and globalizing higher education so as to enhance the number of international university students eligible to study outside their home countries in the five so-called 'Main English-Speaking Destination Countries' (MESDCs) i.e. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA (Healey, 2008, p. 335). In the UK, for example, EAP instruction grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s as universities experienced a large number of international students aiming to study on their campuses, particular from China and the Middle East. These students had diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and educational experiences but were required to learn the necessary academic language to integrate better into their new academic contexts. Thus, the teaching of EAP courses has aimed to meet these needs.

3.3.1 What is EAP

EAP has been defined as 'any English teaching that relates to a study purpose' (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, P. 34). It is concerned with the 'teaching of English with specific aim of helping learners to study, conduct research or teach in

that language' (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001, p. 8): in this research we are interested in the first of those. Hyland (2006) indicates that EAP courses, whether in students' home countries or in other countries, are 'designed to improve students' academic communication skills in English to the level required for entry into an English-medium university or college' (Hyland, 2006, p. 4).

More widely, teaching EAP has also expanded in many non-English language-speaking countries, where English is increasingly used as the medium of university instruction. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) proposed four types of EAP settings indicating that 'the key determinant of what an EAP course should contain is whether or not the subject course is taught in English' (p. 34). They list four types of EAP situations: (1) EAP in English speaking countries such as UK or USA; (2) EAP in ESL countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria and countries in South East Asia such as Singapore and the Philippines; (3) a situation where certain courses are taught in English but the others are taught in the national language, as mainly found in countries in the Middle East; and finally (4) a situation where all courses are taught in the national language and English 'plays an ancillary role' (Shing and Sim, 2011, p. 3). In fact, Chazal (2014) maintains that the concept of EAP is interpreted and applied differently based on students' needs and the situation where an EAP course is given.

It appears from this classification that the KSA falls within the third type, since school education mainly uses the Arabic language to teach all subjects, so that Saudi students begin their tertiary studies with quite a low level of English; however many majors other than English are now taught through the medium of English at university. Therefore, it should be noted that in EFL or ESL in general, and in the context of this current study in particular, students on their English course, such as the English language preparatory programmes in the KSA, start from a low initial EGP proficiency level, and follow what is in effect an EGP course, though perhaps officially named EAP. They naturally arrive at the English medium study of their subjects unprepared for both the academic features of the language they encounter and its discipline specificity.

3.3.2 Types of EAP

In most English native speaking universities, EAP courses can be short as to cover

two or three weeks before commencing an academic degree course (e.g., pre-sessional EAP course), or as long as two years (e.g., preparatory or foundation year). Or as an in-sessional EAP course, which runs concurrently with students' undergraduate or postgraduate programmes aiming to offer students support in English academic skills (Jordan, 1997; Chazal, 2014). In the context of this study, a one-year preparatory language programme is offered to the students, whereas in-sessional language courses are not provided.

Chazal (2014) maintains that one important feature that distinguishes in-sessional courses from pre-sessional courses is that because the students are already studying in their content courses, they may be able to identify their needs, as well as they might 'have some useful materials to contribute in order to meet these needs' (Chazal, 2014, p.34). Such materials can be useful for language teachers for designing learning materials for the students. The second feature relates to the collaborative work that can be established between the subject teachers and the language teachers which may end with having 'information/feedback given in both directions' (Jordan, 1997, p. 70).

Jordan (1997) classifies the components of any EAP course; i.e., EAP components and Non-EAP components, arguing that not all EAP courses should fall within this scheme but rather it can work as a starting point for some guidelines. The following Tables 3-1 and 3-2 show all these components and the average time that should be spent on each component. Similarly, the proportion of time spent on these components is not fixed, but rather it should be related to the importance of the component to the students' future needs. For example, among the non-EAP components, English for Social Purposes is as essential as academic writing, particularly for students studying in English-speaking contexts where the international students might need some practices in the spoken language for everyday interactions and academic writing style as well.

Table 3.1

EAP course components and the average time spent on each component

Course components	Time %
A EAP COMPOENTNS	
1. Academic writing	25
2. Listening and note-taking	15
3. Academic speech (oral presentations and seminar strategies)	14
4. Reading comprehension and strategies	16
5. Library/reference/ research skills	9
6. Integrated study skills	16
7. Individual study projects	18
8. Note-making (from reading)	18
9. Subject-specific topics/language	30
10. Guest lectures/plenaries	7
11. Individual tutorial	-
12. Self-access/individualized learning	10

Table 3-2

Non-EAP course components and the average time spent on each component

B NON-EAP COMPOENETS	Time %
1. Grammar	12
2. English for social purposes	16
3. Computer literacy	8
4. Vocabulary development	11
5.Pronunciation/language laboratory	-
6. Media: newspapers/TV/videos	-

As can be shown in Table 3-2 not all the components should be included in an EAP course. However, they are the main components in EGP courses (Jordan, 1997). It can be suggested that students at a lower level of English competence, such as school leavers in KSA, are not ready for discipline-specific language education (ESP) but rather they need to be exposed to preparatory courses to first master the common core language before they go on learning the specific features of language, i.e. they need EGP, based on non-EAP components, followed by EAP, based on EAP components, and then ESP.

3.3.3 The Value of EAP Instruction

In KSA there has been a conflict in the Preparatory year programme whether students

need EGP or ESP for them to enroll in English majors in the following year. But, their English proficiency on arrival from school is often low, and perceived by the university as 'too low' for any ESP. However, the university chooses instead to teach them an EGP course which (a) is something they can cope with and (b) seen as a foundation needed to be established before going on to ESP. But, as a result the students end up unprepared for neither the ESP course nor for their major study. As a response to the need for providing evidence of the success of EAP instruction, this section will briefly review a body of growing research on students' perceptions of the value of EAP courses. Again, it should be noted that the aim of this section is to support my beliefs that students in KSA may need EAP instruction after the EGP and before ESP.

Dooey's (2010) qualitative study gives an indication of the noticeable improvements the students had gained from receiving EAP instruction. The study focused on international students' perceptions of the value of a semester-long EAP course offered at university in Australia. Dooey administered questionnaires to L2 students (N=150) from diverse backgrounds, including Saudi Arabian students. Results revealed that most of the students reported the usefulness of presentations and group discussion tasks they were involved with in the course, not only in terms of becoming familiar with the structure of presentations, but also in terms of increasing their confidence to stand alone in front of the whole class and speak in a second language. Furthermore, the students reported that the course helped them to find various ways to cope with the academic and linguistic demands that their content courses placed on them. They learned to employ a variety of survival strategies, such as seeking consultation from self-support classes, teachers, friends, classmates and members of their own ethnic groups.

Fox et al. (2006) interviewed a sample of 28 L2 students studying in three different Canadian universities. The sample was a mix of male and female students from a variety of backgrounds and enrolled in various academic disciplines. Results revealed that the course improved students' writing skills to perform more formal written texts. They reported that they were also able to guess the meaning from the context while listening, but some of them said that they still had difficulty in comprehending lectures due to teachers' various accents, unknown terms, and their limited discipline-

specific background. With regard to the speaking skill, most of the students interviewed thought they could carry on everyday conversations, but felt that academic speaking such as giving a formal presentation was still a problem. As for the reading skill, students found their limited vocabulary knowledge and lack of discipline-specific background were the main barriers to reading quickly. Nevertheless, the study showed, as perceived by the most of L2 students, that receiving EAP instruction was a contributing factor in facilitating students' academic acculturation and smoothing the transition to be able to survive well in their new way of learning and living.

In Australia, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) looked at the similarities and differences in academic language development between two groups of students: students who had completed an EAP course before they commenced their content courses (EAP students) and those who entered their degree studies directly (non-EAP students). Results revealed that their experiences with academic listening and speaking did not differ between the two groups; however, their experiences in the academic reading and writing skills were different. With respect to reading skill, the EAP students felt that EAP course had helped them to cope with reading requirements as they reported the use of various strategies to overcome reading problems and to enhance reading speed, which was not common among the non-EAP students. They reported the ability to guess the meaning of the unknown terms from the reading text, and engage in skimming, scanning, summarizing and developing their own vocabulary booklist. With respect to the writing skill, the students from both groups cited writing as their main source of problems due to rhetorical differences between English and Chinese. However, EAP instruction was valued by EAP students as they tended to value some writing tasks they had in the EAP course such as summary writing, report writing and using vocabulary books in accomplishing tasks required in their content courses.

Terraschke and Wahid concluded that the EAP course was a good learning experience from which students could learn valuable academic skills and obtain a greater understanding of useful strategies to cope with the requirements of their content courses. They suggested that both EAP and non-EAP students would 'benefit from an expansion of the current workshops to include practical tips for what to expect in their degree and for how students can improve their reading and writing skill within the

tight schedule of their academic program' (2011, p. 181).

3.4 What is EGP?

I have up to this point said little about EGP in relation to ESP and EAP. The EGP is termed as 'General English' (Bruce, 2011), 'general ELT' (Chazal, 2014), 'English for General Purposes' (Folwerdew and Peacock, 2001; Jin-Yu et al, 2011), and 'general CLT' (Alexander, 2012).

There have been some arguments on where to draw the boundaries between EGP and ESP. Gatehouse (2001, p. 4) indicates that 'it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin'. Some researches in the ESP believe that EGP courses do not equip students with the necessary language and skills needed to function effectively in specific situations. Mallikarjun (1983) states that;

> The general second/foreign language course aims at all language skills and develops a general competence in the learner communicate in routine functional domains. The learner, however, will not be able to communicate in situations which are technical in nature and which are not common to all speakers of the language

EGP is found to be 'the major trend in any EFL settings' (Zohrabi, 2010, p.168) and the main purpose of teaching it is to 'enhance students' general language competence for a more accurate and fluent production and reception of English in dealing with every day situations' (Liu et al, 2011, p. 271). To this end, EGP acts as a tool to 'assist weak learners to obtain adequate ability in order to tackle academic courses' (Zohrabi, 2010, p. 168). Subject-specific English (i.e., ESP), on the other hand, includes 'the language structure, vocabulary, the particular skills needed for the subjects, and the appropriate academic conventions' in a particular academic subjects (Jordan, 1997, p. 5).

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), the proposed classifications of ESP courses have been deemed to fail since they failed to illuminate the degree of overlaps between the nature of the various types of ESP courses, namely EAP and EGP, therefore, they postulate 'the presentation of the whole English Language Teaching on a continuum that runs from clearly definable General English courses through to

very specific ESP courses' (p.8). Figure 3.5 presents this continuum.

GENRAL 1	2	3	4	**SEPCPFIC** 5
Position 1 English for Beginners	*Position 2* Intermediate to advanced EGP courses with a focus on a particular skills	*Position 3* EGAP/EGBP course based on common-core language and skills not related to specific disciplines or professionals	*Position 4* Courses for broad disciplinary or processional areas (e.g., Report writing for Scientists and Engineering Medical English, Legal English, Negotiating skills for Business English)	*Position 5* 1) An academic support course related to a particular academic course. 2) One-to-one work with business people

Figure 3.5: Continuum of ELT course (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998, p. 9)

The use of the continuum would clarify that EGP falls in position 1 and 2 where an English course is taught in schools and 'has the aim of teaching English as a part of a broad educational process' (p.8). At position 3 programmes are taught to students within specific time and with clear objectives, whereas at position 4, the courses tends to be more specific in terms of the skill taught but the students are not required to be from one discipline or professions. Thus, it is position 5 where 'the course can be geared to the specific needs of the target situation and of the individual concerned, and can make extensive authentic material in their own subject area' (p. 9). The use of this continuum would, in my humble view, define and classify how students on an English course, such as the Preparatory Year Programme in KSA, start from a low initial EGP proficiency level (i.e., position 1 and 2), and follow what is in effect an EGP course (i.e., position 3), though perhaps officially named EAP, and then arrive at ESP (i.e., position 4). However, they arrive at English medium study of their subjects unprepared for both the academic features of the language they encounter and its discipline specificity (i.e., position 5). John (1998) argues that, what then happens, due to students' poor English competence, is that most subject teachers then deliver lectures in a mixture of English and Arabic and show less interest in assessing the

quality of students' linguistic skills.

More specifically, Zohrabi (2010) argues that 'it is the particular context, students' proficiency level, and objective which determine whether EGP or ESP can be useful and helpful'. The focus when students' initial proficiency is low is, therefore, to expose students to general English language (EGP) and when they have obtained an appropriate language proficiency, they could be able to get on with their discipline-specific tasks easily (Shing and Sim, 2011; Zohrabi, 2010). Overall, my conclusion is similar to Zohrabi's (2010) that the discussion concerning EGP or ESP, and indeed the role in EAP of further EGP instruction, is not fixed since the appropriate nature of an EAP course is crucially related to the precise nature of the particular learning context in which it occurs

The definition of EGP would be an insufficient attempt unless there is a discussion devoted to present the main differences exiting between it and the field of ESP/EAP. Therefore, in what follows some of the main differences and similarities between ESP and EGP courses are presented.

3.5 ESP and EGP Relationships and Differences
3.5.1 Needs Analysis

ESP has been defined as a need-driven activity 'involving courses that attempt to meet the needs of students preparing for, or already participating in, higher education' (Bruce, 2011, p. 7). In this sense, a key feature which distinguishes ESP from EGP is the process of "producing a comprehensive description of the unique needs and wishes of the EAP students" (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 177). Bruce (2011) similarly argues that while general ELT is concerned with a learner's development of overall language proficiency (communicative competence), ESP is the study of language academic' (p. 116). Jin-Yu et al. (2011) concur that "EGP courses aim to enhance students' general language competence. . . . ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learners' reasons for learning" (p. 271). Seedhouse (1995) argues that needs analysis is rarely carried out in general English classrooms; however, he argued that, in a general English course, needs analysis is a useful tool for 'discovering motivation, and psychological and social needs, rather than on making lists of individual

communicative needs or linguistic items' (p. 60). Although Seedhouse applied needs analysis to a general English course, his proposal was limited to specifying the students' "motivation and other psychological needs" (p. 64), neglecting students' language needs in the target situations. Building on this, learner need is a key element in ESP course design but is absent from EGP course design.

ESP researchers and specialists have incorporated a variety of approaches to needs analysis: including target-situation analysis (Munby, 1978); present-situation analysis (Richterich & Chancerel, 1977/1980); learning-centred approach (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987); strategy analysis (Allwright, 1982); and means analysis (Holliday & Cooke, 1982). Munby's (1978) model focused on the students' needs in the target situation or at the end of a language course; it is concerned with communicative syllabus design. Munby's model has been criticised for placing too much emphasis on analysing students' needs in the target situations and for neglecting the students' needs at the start of a course (Jordan, 1997). In contrast, the present-situation analysis involves analysing "the students' state of language development at the beginning of the language course" (Jordan, 1997, p. 24). Some developments in needs analysis have arisen from these two models.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose a major development in needs analysis. In their model, Hutchinson and Waters compared target needs (defined as "what the learners need to do in the target situations", p. 54) with learning needs (defined as "what the leaner need to do in order to learn", p. 54. Hutchinson and Waters further argue that students' needs should not be restricted to the language uses in the target situation. The model should include students' *necessities* (what the learners have to know to function effectively in the target situation), *lacks* (the language areas which students need help with to do well), and *wants* (the language areas which students would like to acquire; pp. 55–56). Jordan (1997) argues that, although students may feel that their wants are not required for the courses that they will be attending, those wants must still be taken into consideration. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) highlight this point, stating that "bearing in mind the importance of the leaner motivation in the learning process, learner perceived wants cannot be ignored" (p. 57). Needs analysis can often be obtained using a variety of instruments: questionnaires, interviews, student tests (e.g., language tests, self-assessments, progress tests, and end-of-course

test), student diaries, and case studies; similarly, information can be gathered from different sources, including students, teachers, sponsors, and programme administrators (Jordan, 1997).

Belcher (2006) maintains "needs assessment is seen in ESP as the foundation on which all other decisions are, or should be, made" (p. 135). Zohrabi (2010) agrees with Belcher's view, writing that in the EFL contexts, "the main reason that many EAP courses fail to meet students' expectations is that some of the institutions do not conduct needs analysis at the beginning of their programs" (p. 173). Zohrabi further argues that, in the EFL context, a needs analysis can contain other dimensions, such as the learners' proficiency levels. This is because EAP classes in EFL contexts, as viewed by Zohrabi (2010), 'usually consist of different levels of proficiency, so that needs analysis should also consider these aspects in designing materials and methods' (p. 174).

3.5.2 Teaching and Learning Activities

Once the description of a learner's needs is obtained through the needs analysis, the course designer must develop full descriptions for the courses. Teaching language in an ESP course often supports learning of the skills which a group of students most needs; this is often based on "a 'need-to-know' basis to support the skills work" (Chazal, 2014, p. 13). Elsewhere, Chazal (2014) states that ESP topics tend to be "narrowed down and focused on in more depth, from different perspectives, and with critical approach" (p. 13) and that they are often student-generated; thus, students are supposed to learn a "relevant topic-based vocabulary" (p. 14). In the EGP course, on the other hand, topics are selected with an open-ended focus and usually covered with less depth; therefore, students' critical thinking skills are not enhanced. Many EGP courses tend to focus on teaching the four English skills equally, but ESP syllabi "tend to be skill driven and/or task driven, with a focus on integration of skills" (Chazal, 2014, p. 13). This skill-based approach is often considered important, given that a particular group of students (e.g., pharmacists) may only need to develop their written abilities before writing a lab report. Furthermore, EGP courses tend to focus on teaching language structure based on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Zohrabi, 2010; Chazal, 2014).

Todd (2003) explains that ESP teaching involves "a preference for inductive learning over more teacher-centered deductive approaches" (p. 151); achieving this induction in EAP requires several approaches. First, the text-based approach (the use of examples from specific genres which the students are likely to produce in their future academic studies or professional fields) is one of the major distinctions between EAP and EGP teaching. Some of the practical uses of text-based approaches are linked to the use of genre analysis for both written and spoken genres. In genre-based teaching, the students are taught to understand how an effective text is produced by providing information about how "the social/rhetorical actions routinely used by community members to achieve a particular purpose, written for a particular audience, and employed in a particular contexts" (Hyland, 2009, p. 49). While learning the discourse of their own disciplines, the students are taught to analyse the different texts, norms, and linguistic features that distinguish one type of text from another (Hyland, 2000, 2009). In this sense, students can be taught to act as researchers or as "observant readers of the textual and rhetorical conventions in their own fields" (Chen, 2011, p. 53). Furthermore, the desire to increase the use of genre-based teaching among students of lower proficiencies is motivated by its role in providing them with long-term support "as they move towards their potential level of performance and the confidence to independently create texts" (Hyland, 2000, p. 13).

In addition to genre-based approach, content-based instruction (CBI), focuses on 'teaching students the language, skills and academic conventions associated with their particular subject and its content' (Jordan, 1997, p. 61). CBI is based on the argument that 'content presents an ideal vehicle for language' (Brinton and Holten, 2001, p. 240). In this approach, students are required to complete language tasks related to their field of study; therefore. "the focus for students is on acquiring information via the second language and, in the process, developing their academic language skills" (Brinton et al., 1989, as cited in Brinton & Holten, 2001, p. 239). Previous literature has indicated that CBI moves students to a more advanced level of language but also provides them with a comprehensive disciplinary background (Kasper, 2000), stimulates their motivation (Valentine & Repath-Martos, 1997), and supports learning transfer (James, 2006).

Nevertheless, some opponents of the CBI, such as Hutchinson and Water (1987),

maintain that 'the only justification for using highly specialized texts is to achieve face validity' (p. 166). Meanwhile, Brinton and Holten (2001) found that although CBI is an effective approach of delivering EAP courses, the teachers tended to place more focus on helping students to comprehend the content rather than teaching the grammar and vocabulary, concluding that:

> …if we allow content alone to drive our language teaching agenda (or alternatively, if we allow students error patters to dictate what grammar is taught, we are doing our students a disservice' (p.251).

In the EFL contexts, Zohrabi (2010) argues against the use of CBI on a quite different basis, claiming that EFL students need first to develop their general language competence, i.e. EGP, and writes that 'it is a waste of time and energy because they need more general English in order to acquire structural and lexical knowledge' (p. 173). My argument is that CBI is important but that it only can work in the context of this study if students are exposed to teaching of the appropriate level, thus allowing them to cope with and eventually master the language. However, I would argue, following Zohrabi's (2010) view, that CBI might be applicable to advanced students "who already have a high grasp of core or general language: nurses, pilots, graduate students and so on" (p. 173). That sort of difficulty does not arise when providing EAP pre-sessions in native speakers (NS) host countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom because those countries may impose minimum IELTS/TOEFL[8] requirements before accepting students; the accepted students are thus much higher in proficiency than the graduates from KSA, allowing CBI or ESP to work.

Closely related to the issue of genre analysis and CBI, many EAP researchers have highlighted the use of authentic sources in EAP teaching materials. Authentic sources are, according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), "taken from the target situation and, therefore, not originally constructed for language teaching purposes" (p. 159). Alexander et al. (2008) point out that authentic sources are "essential in EAP and are

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[8] IELTS stands for the International English Language Testing System. TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language

intrinsically motivating for students" (p. 20). The major advantage for the students is in helping them to "gradually acclimatize and integrate into the discourse community of their disciplines" (Chazal, 2014, p. 280). This approach is perhaps best illustrated by demonstrating that authenticity depends on the type of exercises used and on whether they 'reflect the ways in which the text would actually be used by students in their course work (Chazal, 2014, p. 28). In this sense, Chazal maintains that authenticity is not a mere text that can be implemented in a language classroom; rather, 'it is a considerably broader phenomenon related to its intended context, audience, and purposes' (p. 281).

3.5.3 The Role of the Teacher

In both EGP and ESP settings, teachers have to deal with students who employ different learning styles, have varying language proficiency levels, and have different expectations of the objective of their courses and materials. Thus, teachers should employ diverse teaching practices and design tasks which address students' aims, needs, and language levels (Richards, 2007; Zohrabi, 2010, 2011). For this to happen, teachers should be willing to provide students with a variety of activities and to create a learning atmosphere where students can effectively use language rather than merely absorb transmitted knowledge in a mechanical way. Undoubtedly, one of the most effective teaching methods in both EGP and ESP contexts is communicative language teaching. As Richards (2007) suggests, teachers can employ this method to conduct activities in which students are engaged in role-playing, pair or group work, games, discussions, and debates.

Mixed-ability classes, as highlighted by Salli-Copur (2005), are a fact in not only language classes but all courses. In mixed-ability classes, teachers encounter variations in students' language abilities, cultural backgrounds, attitudes towards language, mother tongues, learning study, age, motivations, and education levels (Ur, 1996, p. 304). To meet this type of challenge, researchers have suggested that teachers should be willing to understand students' problems and deal with them accordingly. Salli-Copur (2005), for example, suggest that teachers personalise tasks to make them more relevant to their students' language abilities and intelligence levels by utilising games and group- or pair-work activities. In the EFL context, Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi (2015) conducted a study to explore the challenges faced by EFL teachers

teaching English in mixed ability classes. They found that the teachers faced difficulties in dealing with their students' needs and language abilities and that they implemented limited teaching activities to deal with students' problems. Al-Shammakhi and Al-Humaidi called for more training to help teachers know how to deal with classes of different abilities.

While teachers are seen as language experts and students as novices in EGP settings, ESP teachers and students are both seen as learners in the target academic community (Alexander et al., 2008). General English teachers may train with a set of general strategies 'but may not know which are appropriate in the EAP context and consequently feel unconfident and de-skilled' (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 19). Alexander (2012) conducted a study on the beliefs teachers hold in relation to teaching EAP at low proficiency levels. The results indicated that teachers who may be experienced in the use of communicative language teaching have beliefs about teaching EAP 'which might form potential barriers to successful delivery of EAP materials for low level learners and to identify concomitant beliefs which might constitute critical success factors in enabling such students to achieve their target competence' (Alexander, 2012, p. 108). For the teachers to operate effectively in the ESP context, Robinson (1991) notes that

> The key quality needed by the ESP teacher is flexibility: the flexibility to change from being a general language teacher to being a specific purpose teacher, and the flexibility to cope with different group of students, often at very short notice. (p. 231)

The distinctive nature of the ESP setting has changed the role of the language teachers; the term *practitioner* is preferred to *teacher* in the ESP context (Swales, 1985, as cited in Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) proposes several roles of ESP practitioners; the first is the role of researcher, suggesting that "ESP teachers need to be aware and in touch with research" (p. 15), as this makes them aware of how best to conduct needs analysis, design courses, and select appropriate teaching materials by incorporating "the findings of research" (p. 15) in these materials. The second role, that of course designer and material provider, involves choosing the appropriate materials to suit the students' needs, either from the published material or by adapting materials when the published material is

unavailable or unsuitable. The role of the course and material evaluator involves assessing students' understanding of the language and determining whether they have acquired the essential skills for their field of study. As a course evaluator, the ESP teacher needs to assess the teaching materials used in the course to decide if these materials are meeting students' needs and expectations. The role of collaborator is important because it involves working with subject teachers and field specialists. For instance, a teacher may identify the appropriate teaching materials to seek out from subject teachers, who can also be consulted to comment on the activities and materials which the ESP teacher prepares for the students.

Although ESP teachers' competence in students' subject areas is a topic on which researchers have conflicting views (Bielawska, 2015), those in the ESP field have highlighted the need for having a basic background in students' subject field of study (Hyland, 2009; Belcher, 2006; Gatehouse, 2001; Alexander et al., 2008). However, Spack (1988) suggests that EAP teachers may lack the content knowledge to teach a writing course in different specific disciplines; thus, teachers' limited levels of text knowledge in particular subgenres could carry the danger of causing these teachers to lose self-confidence; indeed, "they therefore find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students" (p. 123). Closely related to this is the view held by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who state that ESP teachers are not required to be teachers of specialised subject content. Rather, they should be interested in learning the specialised subject by asking students questions; thus, they will be "surprised at how much knowledge of the subject matter they 'pick up' by teaching the materials or talking to students" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1988, p. 163). The teachers who teach the preparatory year courses in the context of this study are not specialists in any discipline, including pharmacy. Thus, it would be safe to assume that they are in the position described above.

To this end, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) hold the view that "the great majority of ESP teachers have not been trained as such" (p. 157). Zohrabi (2010), therefore, maintain that EAP teachers "need to develop optimistic views, be familiar with the basics of the subject and be informed about their previous knowledge on the subject" (p. 176). Others (Spack, 1988; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) have argued that teaching

ESP is a challenging task for less experienced teachers. In an investigation of an ESP course taught at the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, Al-Solami (2014) found useful information about the main barriers that have prevented EGP teachers from meeting the demands of the ESP course and from engaging professionally in ESP teaching. These barriers were a lack of field knowledge, a lack of suitable training, and a lack of ESP resources. In fact, the EGP teachers in Al-Solami's (2014) study were not the only people who admitted that teaching ESP courses requires content knowledge; the students also admitted this. Farooqi (2010) studied students' perceptions of who should be responsible for teaching the ESP course, gathering data from the students in the ELPPs at UQU. Farooqi distributed questionnaires and conducted interviews with the students. The data analysis revealed that students perceived that their EGP teachers lacked adequate terminology and content knowledge in computer science. Farooqi, therefore, suggested that the technical vocabulary should be carried out only by subject teachers in a computer science department.

Flowerdew and Peacock (2001) argue that "teachers should be willing to adjust teaching activities and materials to the students' needs, to familiarize themselves with the language of the students' special subject" (p. 181). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) maintain that the work of EGP teachers differs from that of the ESP/EAP teachers, as the latter are supposed to "deal with needs analysis, syllabus design, materials writing or adaptation and evaluation" (p. 157). A particular emphasis is also placed on ESP/EAP teachers' practices related to the development of students' learning autonomy. Alexander et al. (2008), for example, point out that "good teaching practices in general English emphasizes two of the dimensions of autonomy, active participation in learning and the need to be a risk taker, the third requirement of autonomy, reflection, is not given as much prominence" (p. 293). To create autonomous learners, EAP teachers, according to Alexander et al., are required to develop "reflexive capacity, in both herself and her students through reflective dialogue" (p. 295). Furthermore, it is likely that, in addition to their role in developing students' autonomy, ESP/EAP teachers are required to "understand the role of critical thinking in academic contexts" and the need to "employ tasks, processes and interactions that require students to demonstrate critical thinking skills" (BALEAP, 2008, as cited in Chazal, 2014, p. 12).

Jordan (1997) goes further by identifying two main problems that ESP/EAP teachers can encounter: (a) students' inadequate knowledge in the specialised courses and (b) tutors' lack of background knowledge in the specialised subject. To deal with the first problem, Jordan (1997) strongly encourages ESP/EAP teachers not to teach the subject content but rather to "advise the student to discuss the matter with his/her subject tutor" (p. 251). As for the second problem, Jordan put forward four suggestions for teachers of an ESP course: asking students themselves, team teaching, using discipline-specific topics or texts, and offering students access to optional reading or writing tasks that the students select from the appropriate subject area.

Team teaching, also known as collaborative teaching, or joint teaching, involves 'working together of the two sides, language and subject, to prepare students for particular tasks or courses' (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998, p. 44). Although joint teaching is time-consuming and not easy to set up, its benefits for both students and tutors are countless. One of the many reported benefits of team teaching in the literature is that it could increase both authenticity and credibility, in turn encouraging the students to take their EAP courses seriously (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In addition, collaborative teaching may equip the students with their most valuable academic skills while they are learning about their content subjects, thus enriching their discipline-specific vocabulary competence and helping them to gain detailed familiarity with their teachers' expectations (Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Frohman, 2012; Kennelly et al., 2010).

3.5.4 The Role of the Learner

ESP/EAP courses usually target learners who are adults and who have some background in English; they are learning English to develop a set of specific skills, whether for academic or professional settings, within a limited time frame (Jordan, 2002; Todd, 2003). EGP courses, on the other hand, are typically offered to younger learners for whom English learning "is often broad in focus with long time scales and targets based around general English proficiency" (Chazal, 2014, p. 11). However, in the KSA, EGP courses (i.e., preparatory English courses) are given to learners in both schools and universities due to the students' low English abilities.

Another important task for EAP/ESP students is to be able to "develop the skills they require to study alone and this makes it clear that an important part of ESP/EAP methodology is promoting leaner independence" (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001, p. 181). Several authors in the ESP field have discussed learner autonomy, which has been labelled with different terms, including self-reflection, self-access to materials, autonomy, and individualised instruction (Jordan, 1997). Student autonomy, as Alexander et al. (2008) explain, is "one of the clearest requirements for successful English-medium academic study" (p. 271). Learner autonomy in the ESP/EAP contexts requires students' self-reflection and their "ability to see and use wisely opportunities for learning in the various situations in which an individual functions" (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 272). For students' self-reflections to function, "the learners must have a certain freedom to decide when, what and how they will study" (Gatehouse, 2001, p. 5).

The main reason to advocate for learner independence is the hope that students "need to be able to continue their EAP learning without the EAP teachers after they have moved on to their specialist studies" (Jordan, 1997, p. 116). The second reason is that students' previous learning experiences have been identified as the main sources of students' language challenges at the tertiary level (Johnston, 2001). Therefore, developing this skill pushes students to work independently in learning the language of their academic community, which is a key teaching aim in ESP/EAP settings.

In fact, learners can be key elements in evaluating the effectiveness of course content and specifying its main strengths and weaknesses. Students' judgments about their own language improvements and their perceptions of the difficulties they are facing can determine which aspects of the course content need to change. Having students take part in course evaluations is not limited to ESP/EAP contexts, as a number of studies have aimed at evaluating EGP courses (Zohrabi et al., 2012; Mohamadi, 2013). However, in the context of this study, I would assume (based on experience) that students do not take part in course evaluations.

3.5.5 Assessment

In most educational settings, assessment is seen as a key feature of learning. Alexander et al. (2008) stated that assessment "lies at the heart of teaching and

learning" and that it helps teachers "obtain information about the students and their learning process" (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 75). The terms *assessment* and *test* are often used synonymously, but a test is "only one of several possible ways to evaluate a student's abilities which come under the heading of assessment" (Chazal, 2014, p. 291). That is, the term *assessment* is more comprehensive than *tests* because it covers all types of evaluations, which can "range from ongoing evaluation of coursework and informal class observation to formal international tests such as IELTS" (Chazal, 2014, p. 291). Assessments in ESP/EAP and in EGP follow similar general principles.

Testing, therefore, is seen as a type of assessment that is more concerned with the mechanical ways of measuring the students' structural and grammatical knowledge (Zohrabi, 2011, p. 75); it is typically conducted at the end of the students' learning process (Chazal, 2014). Jordan (1997) uses the word *tests* to refer to various evaluations used in ESP/EAP courses. Objective tests are based on the multiple-choice format and are marked by a computer. Although such tests are marked reliably and quickly, researchers have questioned their ability to assess students' spoken and written abilities (Brindley & Ross, 2001). Subjective tests, on the other hand, use open-ended or essay-type questions, which often give students greater freedom to answer. In most ESP/EAP classes, four types of tests are used: placement, progress, achievement, and proficiency tests (Jordan, 1997). A placement test is used once students are accepted for a language course. The purpose of this test is to "help decide which class/group they are to go in" (Jordan, 1997, p. 86).

Progress tests are often given to students to check learning within a limited period of study (e.g., 4 weeks). Jordan (1997) suggests that more care should be given to the frequency of such tests: "if they are given too often, they become an end in themselves, and any pleasure there might be in learning will be destroyed" (p. 87). Achievement tests, on the other hand, are carried out at the end of the language course to "assess how well students have learned, based on the whole syllabus for the programme of study" (Chazal, 2014, p. 293). Jordan (1997) further adds that achievement tests "may reflect the language needs of the target situation and contain a stimulation of study skills in use (e.g., listening to a talk, making notes, writing a report, etc.)" (p. 87). Proficiency tests, according to Alexander et al. (2008), are used to "make predictions about language performance in the future, either for a specific

work or study purpose, or in general terms" (p. 306). One example of this type of test is the IELTS, which is used to assess a student's ability to follow a university programme; this test is often required, particularly at English-speaking universities.

In the context of this study, the perception is that tests are held in the forms of midterms and final exams, which are administered at different points in the academic year, either during (i.e., midterms) or at the end of the semester (final exams). These tests seem to emphasise rote learning rather than encouraging students to gain a deeper understanding of the target language (Zohrabi, 2011; Al-Seghayer, 2011). Al-Seghayer (2011) indicates that the main challenge Saudi EFL teachers face is their lack of experience in test writing ; thus, they produce test items that are too concerned with grammar and lexical items and that ignore the skills needed in students' target settings, such as note taking or report writing (Zohrabi, 2011). Therefore, Chazal (2014) suggests that test writing, including for midterms and final exams, should be done collaboratively with other teachers in the course. This is particularly important for ensuring a balance of coverage among most of the areas covered in the course.

3.5.6 Motivation

Among the various motivational theories in L2 learning is the self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). They proposed a motivational scale with three orientations, namely amotivational, extrinsic, and intrinsic. Intrinsic orientation refers to an individual's motivation to accomplish a particular task to receive internal rewards such as joy, pleasure, and curiosity. Extrinsic orientation, on the other hand, refers to an individual's motivation to accomplish a certain activity to receive external rewards such as high grades, praise, or avoiding punishment. Amotivation refers to an individual's lack of motivation, such as when students do not value the activity they are doing or see no benefit between the efforts they are making and the outcomes they are getting (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

From an ESP/EAP point of view, Woodrow (2013) investigated international students' motivation to learn English by adapting the self-determination theory used in language learning motivation research to the goal orientation theory used in academic learning motivation. To track any changes in their motivation and the types

of factors causing that change, she surveyed and interviewed students on three different occasions: at the beginning of their foundation year, in the first term of their undergraduate course, and at the end of their first year. She found that students in the foundation year showed strong extrinsic motivation for their language learning, which was mostly linked to pleasing their parents and getting a good career. When they transferred from the foundation year to their undergraduate studies, the students' responses to the interview questions reflected a high level of intrinsic motivation, indicating a growing interest in their academics. A small group of the participants claimed that they were unmotivated because the work assigned to them had become harder, causing unfamiliarity with the expectations of the tertiary academic requirements.

Still in the EAP/ESP field, Jordan (1997) argues that long ESP/EAP courses could reduce students' interest and motivation, suggesting that it is better to divide the courses into short sections with particular goals for each part. Robinson (1980) and Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) seem to agree further that students will be more motivated when the English course helps them with their subject course or professional needs and with particular skills related to their course. As Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) state, "Many learners are hungry for material and advice that will help them with their specific course or with particular skills related to their course" (p. 10). Such courses appear to be more motivating and more successful.

Indeed, it is not surprising to find that ESP/EAP students are largely extrinsically motivated when the language course is a prerequisite for their major studies (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox et al., 2006). However, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 48) argue that motivation is a highly complex individual matter. They state that there can be no simple answer to the question of "What motivates my students?" Unfortunately, the ESP world, though it recognises the need to ask this question, has apparently assumed that there is a simple answer: relevance to target needs. In practice, this has been interpreted to mean that medical texts motivate students of medicine, engineering English motivates engineers, and so on. However, as we shall see when we deal with needs analysis, there is more to motivation than the simple relevance to perceived needs.

3.6 Students' Perceptions of their own Difficulties in English

Numerous explanations have been proposed regarding students' perceptions of their difficulties with foreign language learning and use. Each time scrutinised the literature, I have found that the notion of students' difficulties has been approached from different angles. A learning difficulty is often called a problem, but it is not the same as an error. A learner may have difficulties/problems that may or may not result in an error being made. The learner may overcome the difficulty in some way that does not produce an error. Jung (2005) drew attention to the distinction between difficulties and constraints: "while 'difficulties' refer to dimensions of learning, 'constraints' include institutional, socio-psychological and culture dimensions of obstacles in EFL learning" (p. 610). Thus, language learners' difficulties may be sub-classified in many ways into different types, but since this study focused on students' difficulties with four English skills, I have subdivided these difficulties based on those four skills.

3.6.1 Vocabulary Knowledge

Although vocabulary development is not a study skill, it appears to be valuable in all four English skills addressed in this study; thus, it has been given separate attention in this section. Jordan (1997) maintains that vocabulary development is often neglected in EAP/ESP courses, writing that "the result of this neglect is that it may be left to the students' indirect learning, which may be inefficient" (p. 149). Wallace (1982, as cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 150) refers to specific word difficulties, including

> recognize it in its spoken or written form; recall it at will; related to an appropriate object or concept; use it in an appropriate grammatical form; in speech to pronounce it an a recognisable way; in writing spell it correctly; to use with the words it correctly goes with, i.e., in the correct collocation; use it at the appropriate level of formality; be aware of its connotations and associations'

This leads to the question regarding what vocabulary the students need to learn, the answer to which, in Coxhead's (2011) view, might not be easy to determine. This is because essential factors, such as students' needs, their level of proficiency, the learning context, and the amount of time available for learning, should be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of research related to L2 readers

has been devoted to vocabulary classification, focusing particularly on determining which kinds of vocabulary need to be known.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) classified EAP vocabulary into two categories: technical vocabulary and semi-technical vocabulary. Technical vocabulary terms, or specialised words, "are expected to belong to a particular subject area at university or to a professional discipline" (Coxhead, 2014, p. 116). In other words, people who do not belong to same academic or professional field might not easily understand such terms, but those within these areas are expected to be able to understand and use them (Alexander et al., 2008; Coxhead, 2014). For example, individuals within the pharmacy field would be expected to understand the term *bisacodyl*. Such items are clearly a part of ESP. Semi-technical vocabulary, on the other hand, refers to "the specialized uses of general vocabulary in specific disciplines" (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 83). Therefore, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that some general everyday terms can carry specialised meanings when used in specific contexts (Coxhead, 2014). For example, in pharmacy, a drug for an acute condition is for a short-term pain or illness, not for extreme/sharp pain as everyday English would suggest. Such vocabulary might be part of ESP, some EGP.

Another example of a detailed classification is the proposal by Coxhead and Nation (2001), who divided vocabulary used in academic texts into four main groups. The first group involves high-frequency words, including 2,000 word families that provide about 80% of the running words found in academic texts; these are a part of EGP. The second group contains academic vocabulary, including 570 word families identified by Coxhead (2000) as the academic world list (AWL)[9]. These are supposed to be common across disciplines, so they are a part of EAP. The third group, technical vocabulary, differs from one subject to another, so it is part of ESP. It consists of over 1,000 words for any one subject. The fourth group, low frequency vocabulary, includes all the other words that have a low frequency of occurrence. Coxhead and Nation (2001) concluded that reading academic English may depend on the early acquisition of the 2,000 frequent word families and the AWL, which would give

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[9] Using West's (1953) general service list (GSL) of English words, Coxhead developed the academic world list (AWL).

readers close to 90% coverage of the words to be found in academic texts. However, when this learning is supplemented by technical vocabulary, students will cover 95% of the words needed for effective academic reading.

In opposition to this proposal, Hyland and Tse (2007) examined the distribution of some AWL words in three academic disciplines: science, engineering, and social sciences. They found that many examples of the same words varied in meaning and usage from one discipline to another; hence, they could not really be regarded as the same word. However, Bruce (2011) suggests that the role of the AWL and the 2,000 frequent word families should not be underestimated, noting that students' vocabulary knowledge should be based on three main components: the AWL, GSL, and the specialised vocabulary that they will need in their disciplines.

The literature indicates that vocabulary knowledge is a key element of students' academic progress and that any deficiency in vocabulary knowledge can relate to students' poor receptiveness and production. The findings of these studies suggest that vocabulary needs to be taught more intensively and actively to enable students to cope with the requirements of their academic studies (Cobb & Horst, 2001). In approaching the teaching of vocabulary, Jordan (1997) outlines using grids, word networks, inferring meaning from the context, and concordance. Concerning grids: "The words are shown in use in texts and sample sentences, and practice is given in a variety of exercises" (Jordan, 1997, p. 156). An advantage of grids involves the ability of students to be employed into pairs and groups and at various levels and skills. On the other hand, word networks (or "thematic webs"), as proposed by Ellis and Sinclair (1989), deal with presenting the students with "vocabulary items that relate to a topic" (Bruce, 2011, p. 99). Using context to determine the meaning of a word is contextual analysis (Kruse, 1997, cited in Jordan, 1997). This approach entails the following strategies (Jordan, 1997, p. 158):

a. Teaching the word building skills (suffixes, prefixes, roots),
b. Guessing word meaning from the definition clues (parentheses and footnotes, synonymous and antonymous)
c. Guessing word meaning using higher level of analytical skills and practices (example, summary, experience) (Jordan, 1997, p. 158).

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The use of a corpus software or a concordance, which is defined as "lists of words together with list of the contexts in which each word occurs" (Jordan, 1997, p. 159), is regarded as an important approach in vocabulary development (Johns, 1991, 1994). The advantage of this approach is seen in terms of presenting the students with an authentic text of vocabulary in a way that encourages them to relate the target word back to its context and then perform various types of tasks such as gap-filling and close activity (Bruce, 2011). It also encourages students to develop their discovery strategies by uncovering the reasons why or why not particular words go together (Jordan, 1997).

Corpus-based studies have contributed a great deal toward understanding more about specialised words as well as toward classifying them from general everyday terms. Following Coxhead's (2000) word-selection criteria, Wang et al. (2008) compiled a medical academic word list composed of the most frequent and specific academic medicine terms. More importantly, Grabowski (2015) analysed a corpus of English pharmaceutical texts composed of four different pharmaceutical text types: patient information leaflets, summaries of product characteristics, clinical trial protocols, and selected chapters from academic textbooks on pharmacology. The results reveal that these four text types present a high linguistic variation and different vocabulary use. Furthermore, considerable variation was observed with respect to the choice of key words and lexical bundles. Such work as Grabowski's (2015) study, for example, could be used as a self-study reference to expand students' understanding of how words are used in their discipline. It also supports ESP/EAP teachers in translating the data presented in these studies into useful teaching materials.

It also would be more useful to teach students vocabulary learning strategies (VLS). Nation (1990) listed three strategies which might enhance students' vocabulary development, including guessing from context, using mnemonic techniques, and using word parts. Oxford (1990), on the other hand, proposed four strategies: social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Kim (2006) conducted a study to discover how Korean college students learn vocabulary. The participants reported that it is easier for them to guess the meaning of unknown words when they occur in a rich context.

In Saudi Arabia, Baniabdelrahman and Al-Shumaimeri (2014) explored the strategies used by first-year university Saudi students to deduce the meaning of unknown words when reading a text. The results reveal that the students' ability to guess the meaning of unknown words was poor, and they rarely used the right strategy to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words. They were more likely to rely on a strategy in which "the spelling of the word was similar to that of a word I know." This reinforces the need to expose students to "different guessing strategies and to focus on the most effective ones" (p. 89). Al-Haysony (2012) found that the preferred vocabulary discovery strategies used by Saudi students enrolling in an intensive English course were passing over the word (i.e., a skipping strategy) and asking teachers or peers to explain the meaning (i.e., a social strategy). Guessing the meaning from the context and using a dictionary were rarely used.

3.6.2 Reading Skill

This section starts with an overview of the type of tasks required in academic reading. It ends with a review of a number of studies examining students' difficulties with academic reading.

3.6.2.1 Academic Reading Tasks

Reading requires readers not only to understand new information in the text but also to access their prior knowledge (schemata), background, and expectations of the text and to understand the text (Bruce, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2001). In general reading, Grabe and Stoller (2001) have argued that reading is "the central means for learning new information and gaining access to alternative explanations and interpretations" (p. 187). In addition, reading skill can be divided into various purposes that students can achieve, which Grabe and Stoller (2001) explain as follows:

> We sometimes read to get the main idea but not much more (e.g. skimming a newspaper story), and sometimes we read to locate specific information (e.g., scanning for a name, date, or term). Commonly we read texts to learn information (i.e., reading to learn), and sometimes we are expected to synthesize information from multiple texts, or from a longer chapter or book, in order to take a critical position with respect to that information (i.e., reading to

integrate and evaluate information). Perhaps most often, we read for general comprehension (i.e., reading to understand main ideas and relevant supporting information). We also read for pleasure, with the intention of being entertained or informed, but not tested (p. 187).

Most of these purposes, if not all, are utilised in academic settings; however, academic reading "involves a complex set of processes, and it is more effective and realistic to focus on the reading outcome and task rather than using metalinguistic terms like 'skim' and 'scan'"(Chazal, 2014, p. 157). Taking a similar view, Alexander et al. (2008) noted that it must be acknowledged that "reading is a core requirement at all levels of academic study and may take up the largest part of a student's time" (p. 119). Reading is linked to writing skill because students need to read journals or textbooks with the aim of gathering important information and ideas for writing assignments, examinations, or research reports. Thus, the linking of reading skill with writing skill appears to be inevitable (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Hirvela, 2001; Jordan, 1997). As Hirvela (2014) explained, "input gained through reading plays an important role in what students write and how they write" (p. 87).

Reading the genres of a subject-specific discipline is different than that of general English because it has been argued that "in subject areas students often read to perform some task—to learn about something, get information, learn how to do something or draw material for argument" (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001, p. 185). Jordan (1997) provided various purposes that students can address in their reading:

-to obtain information (fact, data, et.)
-to understand ideas or theories, etc.
-to discover authors' views
-to seek evidence for their own point of view (and to quote) all of which maybe needed for writing their essays
(p. 143)

When students read genres related to their field of study, they will be concerned with understanding the subject content and the language in which it is expressed; hence, more comprehension is required (Jordan, 1997). Thus, reading an academic text requires a greater understanding of different reading strategies and skills for effective reading. There are a number of reading sub-skills utilised in reading that students need to develop (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Jordan, 1997). Jordan (1997) pointed out that students need skimming and scanning

skills to get the main ideas or gist of the text as well as its primary and secondary information. They need to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, read selectively to identify particularly important points, and know how to draw inferences and conclusions. Other important skills are the ability to take notes, to deduce the meaning of unfamiliar words, to understand data presented in diagrams or tables, and to understand connections between paragraphs and between sections.

Research on students' perceived difficulty with academic reading has often focused on which genres EFL/ESL students deem most important as well as which generate more difficulty. Chowdhury and Haider (2012) found that the majority of pharmacy students reported reading photocopied notes; textbooks and journal articles were the main reading tasks required in their pharmacy courses. In Saudi Arabia, Yousif et al. (2013) found that reading pre-lecture handouts was required from most of the students who studied in the pharmacy departments at different universities across the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

3.6.2.2 Students' Difficulties in Academic Reading Skills

Jordan (1997) asserts "in any self-assessment or questionnaire-based survey, students almost always cite reading as the skill causing them least difficulty" (p. 51). Even if many students rank reading as *least difficult*, "this does not mean that students have no problems at all with reading" (Jordan, 1997, p. 51).

The relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension seems to be inevitable. Alexander et al. (2008) pointed out three difficulties particularly related to reading academic texts in a second language, namely "understanding the meaning of unknown words, decoding complex sentence and reading too slowly because word-by-word reading" (p. 119). According to Grabe and Stoller (2011), L2 readers suffer from poor linguistic backgrounds, limited knowledge of vocabulary, and a lack of the cultural context that a text includes. Scholars like Laufer (1992) and Hu and Nation (2000) have emphasised that a lack of sufficient vocabulary knowledge is a crucial element negatively influencing reading comprehension rather than a lack of adequate reading strategies or grammatical knowledge.

Research conducted by Cobb and Horst (2001) on students studying economics at

Sultan Qaboos University in Oman indicated further that Omani students' struggle with reading was attributed to their limited knowledge of the sub-technical terms. Thus, the university leaders decided to supplement the students' reading course with an intensive vocabulary course called PET. 2000. They developed that corpus from students' textbooks, including a 2,387-word list, and presented them with a computer. The students were assigned to learn 200 words from the list every week, and they were given one lab hour for accomplishing the task. The results reveal a positive effect of the intensive vocabulary course on the students' vocabulary development.

Marshall and Gilmour (1993) studied the English reading ability of a group of science and technology students in Papua New Guinea, paying special attention to 45 sub-technical words—defined for them as words "used to modify and express the relations that exist between the key concepts of the discipline" (p. 23), such as *limit*, *maximum*, and *rate*. The students performed poorly regarding reading comprehension and tended to misinterpret the targeted words (e.g., they thought *accumulate* meant "to take from") or misidentify words with similar spellings (e.g., *exert* and *exhort*). Marshall and Gilmour concluded that teachers should concentrate on not only teaching "lists of scientific and technical words" but also on "the contexts and structural relations within which the words have meaning" (p. 75).

Jordan (1997) argues that because students lack rich vocabulary knowledge, they tend to read slowly. Fluent reading requires "rapid and automatic word recognition, the ability to recognize basic grammatical information, and the rapid combination of word meaning and structural information" (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 196). Bruce (2011) views a good reader as one who "takes in the sense of a whole chunk without having to process individual words" (p. 150). Fluent readers, therefore, can match new words to the form and to their mental lexicon of previously known words, bring together what they already know about the text and their prior knowledge of the topic, and read in chunks rather word-by-word with the eye movement needed to read quickly (Alexander et al., 2008; Bruce, 2011). Nation (2009) asserts that reading speed is influenced by "the purpose of the reading, and the difficulty of the text. The difficulty of the text is affected by the vocabulary, grammatical constructions, discourse, and background knowledge" (p. 63).

There is a general agreement that ESL/EFL students lack the strategies needed for effective reading and thus face problems in processing reading. Li and Munby (1996), for example, looked at the reading processes of two Chinese graduate students studying in Australia to examine L2 readers' strategies for reading academic texts chosen by the participants. Their study indicates that strategies taught in EGAP courses may not be useful for the type of strategies that are actually required for reading specialised texts. The authors advocated exposing students to a wide array of metacognitive strategies, including those that are applicable to specific types of academic texts. Hijikata et al. (2013) examined the relationship between the types of reading strategies employed by two undergraduate Japanese students to improve their L2 proficiency. The results show that the poor reader tended to divide the text into four stages, starting with the word level, followed by the phrase level, then the sentence level, and finally the main ideas summary. In fact, he made few notes instead of building up an understanding of the whole text's meaning. In contrast, the good reader started by checking the organisation and structure of the paper (i.e., skimming and scanning before engaging with the activity of reading in detail). Furthermore, the notes he wrote clearly showed that he had successfully worked out the meaning of the text.

To better understand students' struggle with academic reading, a fairly large-scale study was conducted at a university in Hong Kong between 2003 and 2004 to investigate the types of language difficulties of 4,932 undergraduates from 26 academic departments (Evans & Green, 2007). Although over two thirds of the participants were first-year students enrolled in mandatory EAP courses, the rest of the participants were in the middle of the second term of their major degree; thus, they were similar to our participants. The study involved the use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods, namely self-reporting questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, to elicit information from different resources like students, teachers, and programme leaders. The findings of their study reveal that over half of the students (53%) encountered difficulty with understanding technical vocabulary. However, nearly half of students (47%) responded that attempting to understand sub-technical terms was also difficult.

The strong relationship between technical vocabulary recognition and problems with

reading has also been observed by Evans and Morrison (2011a), who spent three years tracking 28 undergraduate students on a range of academic fields at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The study data were collected using interviews supplemented with questionnaires, diaries, and activity logs. The interviews were divided into two phases. The first involved questions that probed students to talk about their academic and linguistic experiences during their first two months of school. The second phase required students to reflect on a variety of issues, such as English as the medium of instruction and the use of language in their specific subject area. When asked about their difficulty with reading, students reported that their lack of rich technical vocabulary was the most challenging aspect, and they also felt that understanding sub-technical terms was difficult to some extent. In line with the results obtained from the interviews, the students rated 'understanding specialist vocabulary' and 'working out the meaning of difficult words' as the greatest problems hindering them from inferring the meaning of the reading texts and impeding their ability to read further.

In a large-scale survey undertaken at five universities in Hong Kong, Hyland (1997) found that students ranked specialist terms as the most problematic aspect of English. Hyland indicated that Chinese students' struggle with vocabulary recognition arises from "the fact that they are forced to deal with a host of new terms, many of which have no Cantonese equivalent" (p. 65). In support of this, Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) asserted that when a term does not exist as a cognate term in the students' native language, or when it is composed of word elements unfamiliar to students, this challenge may arise. I imagine that most chemical names for pharmaceuticals, such as *bisacodyl*, would be international rather than completely different in Arabic. Of course, they might seem a little unfamiliar when pronounced in Arabic and written in Arabic script. However, even if all drugs were referred to by similar cognate names in Arabic and in English, I would imagine that it would still be of no help to students since they would not know these words in Arabic—having not already studied pharmacy in Arabic. In contrast, I would imagine that students would have no problem with a word like *burger* in English since the cognate word borrowed in Arabic would already be well-known to them.

A survey-based study conducted at a private university in Bangladesh (Chowdhurry & Haider, 2012) investigated the language difficulties of second-year pharmacy

undergraduates. As a preliminary pathway to a tertiary study, their respondents had studied an intensive English language course for two semesters, similar to the participants of my study. Chowdhurry and Haider found that 57% of the pharmacy students reported facing difficulty in guessing the meaning of unknown words, whereas only 17.5% had difficulty understanding the specialised words. Reading a text to get the general ideas was found to be another difficulty encountered by these students, as 30% said they struggled with this very often and 50% said that they sometimes suffered from this difficulty. Another area of difficulty identified by their respondents was the ability to comprehend the main points, as 47% of the students indicated they had this problem very often and 30% reported they sometimes experienced this problem. Based on these findings, it is suggested that their English program should be further improved by placing more emphasis on developing students' vocabulary knowledge and exposing them to a wide variety of reading genres, such as journal articles and reference books related to the field of pharmacy.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Moallim et al. (2010) conducted a study to investigate students' perception of their learning difficulties during their second year in their major studies. Students (N = 270) were studying in the medical school at Um Al-Qura University (UQU), the same context in which the current study was carried out. They found that keeping up with the large amount of reading materials was challenging as was recalling information they had just read.

With the aim of examining the influence of extensive reading on students' reading performance, Abdellah (2013) conducted an experimental group design study where one group (*n* = 50) went through the extensive reading course for one semester, and the other group (*n* = 50) had the normal reading course. Both groups had a pretest and a post-test for reading development. The results show that extensively reading materials selected by students increased their reading motivation and improved their processing of different types of texts at a good rate of speed and with good comprehension.

Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009) reported on the implementation of an extensive reading program with 70 EFL Saudi undergraduate students in the College of Language and Translation at Ibn Saud Islamic University. Their main focus was to

compare the effects that could be gained when applying an extensive reading approach and an intensive reading approach on students' reading comprehension abilities. The study began by discussing the rationale for extensive reading to enhance one's reading comprehension ability, facilitate reading speed, and develop vocabulary. The study also described various challenges which tend to hinder benefits obtained from an extensive reading approach, including variables related to students' poor level of English proficiency, short course duration, inadequate library use techniques, and students whose profiles are atypical for pleasure reading. However, the results reveal how extensive reading can enhance vocabulary development and reading comprehension and foster a positive attitude towards reading for pleasure.

3.6.3 Writing Skill

Following section 3.6.2, this section first presents academic writing tasks and follows with a presentation of research on the perceived difficulty of academic writing.

3.6.3.1 Academic Writing Tasks

Writing is also a key requirement when studying a university major. For instance, Hyland (2014) stated that "countless individuals around the world must now gain fluency in the conventions of writing in English to understand their disciplines, to establish their careers or to successfully navigate their learning" (p. 95). Jordan (1997) agreed with Hyland's view, pointing out that written work is of primary concern to students in higher education. In particular, students at university may be required to write in a wide range of genres, such as class assignments, term papers, lab reports, and case study write-ups (Alexander et al., 2008). To understand what is involved in writing at the undergraduate or postgraduate level, students need to have been prepared by earlier EAP training for the kinds of texts they will be required to produce and for the content and language their subject teachers will expect those texts to contain (Bruce, 2014). Related to this issue, a number of genre-based studies have found that there are "distinctive differences in the genres of academy where particular purposes and audiences lead writers to employ very different rhetorical choices" (Hyland, 2013, p.22).

Among the genres, writing exam answers has been considered to be a particularly difficult task for students (Alexanders et al., 2008, p. 183). Jordan (1997)

demonstrated that when students start their subject-area courses, they—particularly L2 students—sometimes feel that it is not easy to take a test in English. Therefore, emphasis should not only be placed on giving students practice in analysing questions and formulating adequate answers, but also on giving students "practice in writing an answer 'against the clock' (Jordan, 1997, p. 219). Jordan (1997) highlighted the need to organise practice writing sessions for exams by drawing on an extensive range of sources, discussing key terms of question types (e.g., Dudley-Evans, 1988; Swales, 1982), and describing some actual writing training sessions offered by some EAP centres in British universities (Dudley-Evans, 1988; Jordan, 1984). Furthermore, he maintained that providing students with copies of past exam papers obtained from the specialist departments and commented on by the EAP teachers and students would help students in developing their strategy of organising their answers without spending too much time on one answer.

Research on students' perceived difficulty with academic writing has often focused on the differences between subgenres and has illuminated which genres EFL/ESL students deem most important as well as which generate more difficulty. In Evans and Green's (2007) study, for example, students were asked to indicate the importance of various academic writing tasks they may be required to perform. They found that students reported projects as the most important (61%), then reports (60%), followed by essays (56%), case studies (48%), term papers (42%), and literature reviews (28%). This shows that students attached a higher degree of importance to projects and reports; the other tasks appeared to be somewhat less important.

With respect to EFL contexts, Kirkgoz (2009, p. 87) found that the main writing tasks required of Turkish undergraduates studying their major degrees were answering examination questions, writing summaries, writing projects, and writing laboratory reports. In a survey of Arab students' English needs at Yarmouk University in Jordan, Zughoul and Hussein (1985) found that students studying various academic disciplines ranked note-taking first and writing text answers second as the activities they needed most in their tertiary study. More specifically, Javid and Umer (2014) and Al Khairy (2013b) found that writing a summary was the most important writing task reported by undergraduates majoring in English at Taif University. Although the last is in the KSA, it may not reflect the reality of pharmacy students involved in this

study.

3.6.3.2 Students' Difficulties in Academic Writing Skills

Looking at the language difficulties experienced, Evans and Green (2007) found that their Hong Kong students perceived all aspects of writing skills to be a source of problems for them, which weakened their confidence in their ability to produce academic texts. The findings reveal that around a quarter of the students found writing easy, whereas around a three-fourths reported that they experienced some difficulty with academic writing. The rest of the participants perceived this skill as neither easy nor difficult. Evans and Green (2007) noted that most of their participants reported having greater difficulty with the language-related aspects of academic writing than with content-related aspects. That is, they faced difficulty when trying to "communicate their ideas appropriately, accurately and smoothly" (Evans and Green, 2007, p. 11).

Evans and Morrison (2011b) also found that many of their participants came to realise that their writing lacked sophistication and suffered from lexical and syntactic simplicity. Indeed, Evans and Morrison pointed to the existence of genuine problems with the simplicity of students' writing styles, indicating that tertiary-level students, particularly those who came from Chinese-medium schools, failed to meet the strict demands of tertiary-level academic writing. As for the reason for this, students felt that their learning background did not equip them with adequate EAP writing skills. In contrast, those who graduated from English-medium schools easily adjusted to the new demands.

In the EFL context, Chowdhurry and Haider (2012) found that around 45% of pharmacy students indicated that they had difficulty finding the appropriate word, and 30% indicated that they had problems organising ideas. Another 35% had difficulty organising paragraphs. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Moallim et al. (2010) found that 60% of their medical students faced difficulty in writing essays.

Several attempts have been made to examine Arab students' perceptions of different aspects of writing difficulty and to show that problems with vocabulary and grammar dominate. Al-Khairy (2013b) reported that students found the use of appropriate

vocabulary to be their weakest area, which impeded them from performing well in their subject study. Accuracy (or grammar) was ranked as the second-most problematic area, followed by the use of irregular verbs and the use of appropriate prepositions. Error analyses of Arabic EFL learner writing have highlighted similar areas. Hashim (1997) reviewed literature from the 1960s to the 1980s and identified that the most problematic area for Arabic-speaking students was English syntax; many errors fell into seven categories: verbs, prepositions, relative clauses, conjunctions, adverbial clauses, sentence structure, and articles. Examining 40 exam scripts of first-year university students majoring in English at Qatar University, Al-Buainain (2006) analysed and categorised students' writing errors into inappropriate use of verb tense, subject-verb agreement, omission or addition of the verb *to be*, and articles.

One possible reason for such difficulties is that there is a strong possibility that Arab students are ill-equipped to be able to write effectively in all these genres in their first language (Halimah, 2001). Looking at the Arabic texts and English texts produced by 100 native Arabic-speaking students writing for science and technology, Halimah (2001) found that the students did not demonstrate an ability to write in Arabic or in English. This suggests a lack of an emphasis on teaching Arabic writing at school. Furthermore, Halimah maintained that the areas with which students have been found to be unable to deal are not linguistic-related aspects (e.g., capitalisation, spelling, punctuation, and handwriting), but the rhetorical differences which exist between the Arabic and English writing styles. Cummings (1989) maintained that Arab learners tend to apply a knowledge-telling model when writing. Thus, their writing may not include knowledge-questioning or expressing their opinions, but transmitting existing knowledge. In fact, using another person's words and not acknowledging the sources of their work is not seen as plagiarism, but as acceptable (Shurki, 2014).

Another major reason for such difficulties is the amount and type of relevant input received. Al-Khairy (2013b) found that participants reported the major causes of their writing problems to be a lack of language courses offered to students at Taif University as well as limited exposure to English language practices outside the university. Supporting this view, Al-Khasawneh (2010) is almost certain that in EFL learning contexts, as in the case of this study, little can be achieved when learning the

English language because there are few chances to practise English outside the English class. Khan (2011, p. 1250) showed that students' language-related problems are caused by the following factors:

> a) School graduates have a lack of information regarding the university or college in which they enrolled; b) there is deficiency in the English language curricula offered by some schools and universities; c) dreadful teaching methodology; d) problems with proper language environment; and e) a lack of personal impetus on the part of the students.

Saudi students at the school level are not taught how to improve their writing skills (Al-Hazmi & Scholfield, 2007). At the same time, Javid and Umer (2014) argued that teaching English at Saudi schools is worsened by the fact that most teachers lack the appropriate training in English language teaching or the motivation to employ innovative techniques in their teaching practices; this leads to "the continuation of traditional, outdated and teacher-led teaching practices that is major impediment in the way of effective and efficient ELT in Saudi Arabia" (p. 167). Salebi (2004) maintained that the use of drills and activities aimed at teaching grammatical structures makes students handicapped in writing. Thus, in his view, "This oversensitivity will increase students' tension when they attempt to use the target language in either communication or writing production and intentionally produce interference error" (p. 223).

Another possible factor behind student difficulties with grammar and vocabulary in academic writing is the lack of suitable feedback they receive. Evidence indicates that students prefer written teacher feedback to other forms of feedback, such as peer feedback and oral feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Alexander et al. (2008, p. 207), however, emphasised that teachers could encourage students to evaluate their own produced texts as well as texts produced by peers. However, 'a climate of trust, and a sensitivity to group dynamic and individual feelings' needs to be created. It is believed that this approach has the advantage of drawing attention to the need for encouraging students to be more responsible for their own improvement process, thereby developing their autonomy (Alexander et al., 2008; Chazal, 2014).

Clearly then, one factor that may make certain written genres more difficult for Arab learners to write is the contrasting rhetorical differences between Arabic and English texts. Hyland (2014) further asserted that the source of the difficulty students encounter with writing is not merely their poor linguistic competence, but "the ways that different strands of their learning interact with each other and with their previous experiences," indicating that "entering the academy means making a '"cultural shift' in order to take on identities as members of those communities" (p. 97). Furthermore, students need to be exposed to different writing approaches, such as the product approach, the process approach, and the genre-based approach. Despite the fact that all these approaches are essential elements of teaching writing, research has shown that teaching genres and their associated rhetorical features and discourse structures is identified as an efficient approach to the teaching of EAP writing (Chen, 2011; Mustafa, 1995). However, using a genre-based approach to teach writing would be difficult for the students whose level of English proficiency is low (Alexander et al., 2008). Thus, Alexander et al, (2008) advocated that developing students' awareness of the key rhetorical features should be applied gradually and range from simple writing activities to more complex genre writing, such as an essay or report.

There also exist many studies which have analysed EFL learner writing and have demonstrated the non-nativelikeness (especially errors) of their vocabulary and/or grammar. Although these do not tell us whether or not the writers were aware of the mistakes they were making (and indeed it is very likely that learners are often not aware of them), they do shed light on why teachers' and learners' perceptions of writing difficulty might focus on these matters in general. Silva (1993) explained that L2 students' inadequate language knowledge leads them to produce inappropriate written texts with less fluency, less effectiveness, and many accuracy errors, perhaps reflecting that L2 composition is the most complex task that L2 writers might have.

In a similar study, Hinkle (2003) analysed academic texts produced by 877 international students and 206 native English speakers to investigate the differences between their products. The results show that L2 writers' productive range of lexis and grammar was poor and largely composed of structures widely used in spoken discourse. For example, in many cases L2 writers relied on the use of the copula *be*

construction as the main clause verb in their texts. Arabic speakers tended to more often employ the existential *there* with the copula *be* to support their claims (e.g., "There are many academic fields and various types of occupation"). This construction's use among Arab students was even more notable than in the texts produced by other international students (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, or Indonesians). Furthermore, L2 writers relied on vague nouns (e.g., *people*, *things*, *class*) to argue their positions, thereby signifying their limited lexicon and restricting their options when producing academic texts. In addition to vague nouns, public verbs (e.g., *say*, *tell*, *talk*, *ask*, *write*, and *speak*) and private verbs (e.g., *believe*, *feel*, *learn*, *study*, *think*, and *understand*) were significantly more frequent in the texts produced by the international students than in NSs' texts. Hinkle (2003) concluded that NNSs lack many academic text features, and therefore "Instruction for university-bound L2 students needs to concentrate on expanding their syntactic and lexical repertoire" (p. 297)

3.6.4 Speaking Skill

This section starts with an overview of the type of tasks required in academic speaking. It then reviews research on students' difficulties in academic speaking.

3.6.4.1 Academic Speaking Tasks

Hughes (2010) defines speaking skill as "a unique form of communication which is the basis of all human relationship and the primary channel for the projection and development of individual identity" (p. 208). Hughes stated that it is also "of high-risk business for all speakers" (p. 208) because what someone has said "can never be erased or struck out entirely in a polished final draft presented to the recipient" (p. 208). More than the other language skills, the demands of speech held in real-time conversational contexts require EFL/ESL speakers to acquire an array of cultural, pragmatic, and good linguistic knowledge (Al-Jumah, 2011). Consequently, speech production places a tremendous cognitive load on ELF/ESL speakers.

In identifying the speaking tasks and genres that students need to use in academic settings, Jordan (1997, p. 193) describes the following:

-asking question in lectures;

-participating in seminar/ discussion

-making oral presentations; answering ensuing
questions/points;

-verbalising data, and giving oral instructions, in
seminars/workshops/laboratories.

Evans and Green's (2007) survey was a bit more detailed, finding that with respect to speaking skills, ESL students were required to achieve complex speaking tasks, including oral presentations (75%), seminar discussions (57%), and tutorial discussions (56%). From Evans and Green's point of view, "the new generation of Hong Kong undergraduates find it difficult to cope with these demands, particularly in their first year at university" (p. 10).

Ferris (1998) replicated Ferris and Tagg's (1996a, 1996b) survey research, but the target participants in his study were the students rather than the professors. The majority of the students were undergraduates from different language backgrounds (Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Russian) and were enrolled in various academic disciplines (business, physical and biological sciences, engineering and computer sciences, and social sciences). Ferris found that the type of speaking and listening tasks also varied across academic area, class size, and precept of ESL students in the class. Classes with a higher number of ESL students were likely to require class discussion and formal speeches. These tasks, according to the author, were more often required in EGP courses. It was also found that formal speeches, class discussions, and small group work were frequently required in art and humanities and business classes, but they were rare in other science classes.

In academic settings, students need to be able to interact with their peers and teachers and communicate their message persuasively and firmly. However, in the ESL/EFL academic contexts, code switching is common. As indicated by Chazel (2014), this "illustrate[s] how a student's first language remains vitally important in an English-medium academic context" (p. 241). Evans and Morrison (2011) noted that despite the prominent use of the mother tongue in many native-language (L1) learning contexts, the employment of spoken English is less articulated outside the classroom and limited more to lecture theatres. This passive role of spoken English has been

noted in the literature (Evans & Green, 2007; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Hyland, 1997). In addition, as Evans and Morrison (2011a; 2011b) suggested, most academic communication activities such as projects, study group discussions, seminars, tutorials, and laboratory work are conducted in the students' L1 (in this case, Cantonese). There is ample evidence emerging, however, to indicate that students are still required to develop their English speaking abilities, because it is apparent that "the need to communicate orally in English tends to be confined to presentations" (Evans and Morrison, 2011a, p.394). Thus, Evans and Morrison (2011a) called for more EAP training sessions designed to develop students' presentation skills in Hong Kong.

3.6.4.2 Students' Difficulties in Academic Speaking Skills

Previous studies have concluded that speaking skill is a difficult task for the EFL/ESL students to handle; however, it tends to receive the least attention (Jordan, 1997).

With respect to students' views about their own difficulties with academic speaking, a number of studies have shown that academic speaking skills are often ranked as a major source of difficulty for second-language (L2) students (Chowdhury & Haider, 2012; Evans & Green, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011a, 2011b; Ferris, 1998; Hyland, 1997). In Evans and Green's (2007) study, 60% of the students surveyed indicated that speaking accurately was their most difficult challenge. Just over 40% of them ranked exchanging their ideas with other students in a fluent manner as their second most important difficulty, which was followed by speaking using clear pronunciation (40%). Around a third of the students reported that they had difficulty participating in class discussion (32%) and presenting information and ideas (31%). Although they were more comfortable with their ability to ask questions (22%), a third (32%) of the surveyed students were less comfortable with their ability to respond to professors' questions. In general, the study showed that students' lack of appropriate knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation was the most important factor affecting their English speaking development. The second factor was related to the fact that most teachers "tend to give far greater weight in assessment to content than to any other criterion" (Evans & Green, 2007, p. 13).

Ferris (1998) found that most ESL students faced problems with taking part in oral

presentations, student-led discussions, and class discussions. It has been reported that, although ESL students identified clear pronunciation as their most problematic area, their lecturers considered this to be relatively unimportant (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a, 1996b), stating that it decreased students' confidence in speaking English, participating in class, or initiating active interaction with classmates who are NSs. Finally, as many students observed, most ESL classes were devoted to teaching reading and writing skills; thus, they thought "additional training in aural/oral skills (listening comprehension, note-taking, conversation, formal presentations, and pronunciation) would be helpful for them" (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a p. 301).

Chowdhury and Haider (2012) reported in their study of Bangladeshi pharmacy students that finding the appropriate word was a difficult task to handle, as 45% and 52% of the students had such experiences sometimes and often, respectively. Giving oral presentations was another difficulty, as 40% and 32% reported that they always and sometimes experienced such a struggle. Another problem that 67.15% reported was that they sometimes faced problems when pronouncing certain English words, but only 17.5% indicated that they never experienced pronunciation problems.

In Saudi Arabica, Al-Moallim et al. (2010) found that 52% of the Saudi medical students reported having difficulty in interacting with their subject matter teachers and peers or in expressing ideas fluently, and 53% felt very shy speaking in English.

3.6.5 Listening Skill

This section starts with an overview of the type of tasks required in academic listening. It ends with a review of a number of studies examining students' difficulties with academic listening.

3.6.5.1 Academic Listening Tasks

Listening has been defined as "the ability to identify and understand what others are saying" (Thomlison, 1984, cited in Hamouda, 2013, p. 117). For ELS/EFL learners to construct meaning from what others are saying, they need three types of knowledge (Goh, 2014): "knowledge about language (phonology, syntax, and vocabulary), knowledge about the language use (discourse and pragmatic), and knowledge about context, facts and experiences (prior or background knowledge, or schema)" (p. 58).

Goh (2014) argued that although general listening and listening for academic study may involve distinct features, both require these three types of knowledge.

Hyland (2009) classified spoken academic genres in higher education contexts into 10 types: lectures, seminars, tutorials, peer study groups, colloquia, student presentations, office hour meetings, conference presentations, PhD defence or viva, and admission interviews. Although all these genres are equally important in academic contexts, lectures seem to place greater demands on NNSs, as it requires students to "process extensive spoken monologues and simultaneously take notes" (Bruce, 2011, p. 154). Academic lecture is described as a form of monologue (Dudley-Evans, 1998) and is "structured according to tone groups, often in the form of incomplete clauses, and often signaled by filled or unfilled pauses or micro level discourse markers" (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997, p. 33). It remains an important teaching method at university "mainly because they are seen as an effective way of delivering information to large groups of people" (Alexander et al., 2008, p. 217). Although it is widely acceptable that the students can record lectures on their digital devices or load electronic lecture formats, "students learn better by listening, selecting, organizing, writing down and reviewing" (Myers, 2000, cited in Alexander et al., 2008, p. 217).

Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981) identified three academic lecturing styles: reading style, conversational style, and rhetorical style (p.134). Although it is commonly held that the academic lecture style could be regarded as an issue of individual choice (Dudley-Evans, 1998), it has been suggested that most academic lecturing styles are becoming more informal and interactive (Morell, 2007), especially when NNSs are concerned (Basturkmen, 1997; Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Northcott, 2001). Northcott (2001), for example, highlighted the advantage of using the conversational style where different degrees of interaction between the students and the lecturers come into play, arguing that when students are given the chance to communicate with the lecturers and ask for clarification, which is typical in the conversational style, their lecture comprehension will be enhanced. Morell (2007) investigated what might promote interaction between teachers and undergraduate students in an EFL context. The results obtained from her ethnographic study show that the presence of an interactive lecturing style tended to be related to the instructors themselves and to the perceptions they held about their roles in establishing interactive sessions. In some

cases, Morell (2007) found that although some instructors were aware of how to enhance classroom interaction, they tended to be less concerned with achieving such because of their perceived role to "transfer information and not to carry out a social gathering" (p112).

In pharmacy education, Khan et al., (2012) conducted a study in a university in Malaysia to explore what types of different teaching methods contributed to pharmacy students' learning process and long-term knowledge. Khan et al. divided students into three groups; each group was exposed to a particular teaching modality. Khan et al. showed the students in Group 1 images and PowerPoint lecture slides and showed the students in Group 2 videos and PowerPoint slides. Khan et al. also provided the students in both these groups with pre-lecture handouts. Group 3 was instructed using PowerPoint, a whiteboard, and videos, but did not receive pre-lecture handouts; rather, these participants were encouraged to take notes. Khan et al. found that students in Groups 1 and 2 were passively listening and watching and sometimes were distracted, but the students in Group 3 were "more focused and involved in the sessions, as they know that the supportive material would not be provided later" (Khan et al., 2012, p. 378). McKnight (1994) examined NNSs who were undergraduate students majoring in business at a large Austrian university. The results indicate that when the lecturers used a spontaneous spoken language lecturing style associated with 24 overhead visuals, students tended to concentrate on copying the visuals into their notebook. When they were interviewed, the students reported that they could only listen or could only write; they could not adequately process both tasks at the same time.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), recent publications have suggested that Saudi universities have realised the crucial importance of improving the quality of higher education teaching and learning in general and academic lectures in particular (Al-Nassar & Dow, 2013). In the health sciences, a shift has been made from the "one-way communication, focused on imparting information, sometimes dull, boring and repetitive" (Al-Nassar & Dow, 2013, p. 53) to small group teaching, which can provide teachers with the opportunity to employ interactive styles of teaching. Yousif et al. (2013) surveyed 300 undergraduate students studying in the college of pharmacy in universities across the KSA, similar to the students of my study. They found that

the direct lecturing style (53.3%) was reported as the most used type of instruction in Saudi pharmacy colleges. Forty-three percent of them indicated that they were exposed to a combination between the direct and interactive lecturing styles, and 3% indicated that only the interactive method of interaction was employed. However, over half of those surveyed (59%) indicated that combining the direct lecturing style with the interactive lecturing style was most preferred. With respect to the language of instruction, over half (53%) of those surveyed indicated a preference for the use of both Arabic and English, whereas less than a third responded (32%) with a preference for English alone.

Al-Moallim et al. (2010) found that the majority of their medical students were not happy with the traditional lecturing style and called for the need "to be involved in the learning process and to have more chances to ask questions during teaching sessions" (p. 1275). A lack of such a lecturing style in their content classes may explain why the majority (62%) of them indicated that they faced difficulty with following the teachers and taking notes, and why 50% said they were unable to identify what information was important and what was not, resulting in an inability to understand what part of the lecture they were expected to learn by the end.

It is interesting to note that the feasibility of using Arabic as a medium of instruction at the college of medicine has been considered a major area of interest in a number of studies. Al-Jaralla and Al-Ansari (1998) found that 49% of medical students at King Saud University in the KSA said that they could understand 75% of the English lectures, and 45% could comprehend 25% of the lectures. Of all the students, 90% could understand more when lectures were taught in both Arabic and English, and 60% could comprehend lectures easily when they were delivered in Arabic only.

Hasan and Abdalaziz (2012), however, found that 40 out of 90 female pharmacy students (44%) preferred using only Arabic as the main medium of lecture instruction; 33 students (37%) preferred the combination of English and Arabic instruction. Only 17 students (19%) preferred to be exposed to English only. The authors claimed that the key factor leading to students' inclination towards the use of their L1 was "the harmony between thinking and speaking that is created with the use of 'familiar' language" (p. 432). Yousif et al. (2013) found that 44% of pharmacy students

studying in different pharmacy colleges in the KSA preferred to use Arabic only, and 32% preferred English only. However, 52% of them reported that they supported combining both Arabic and English as a medium of instruction. Al-Jarf's study (2008), however, found that the majority (82%) of the students majoring in various medical schools, including medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and other schools at KSU, felt that Arabic is suitable for teaching subjects like Islamic studies, Arabic, history, and education. Alternatively, English was considered to be appropriate for teaching medicine, science, nursing, pharmacy, science, and computer science (Al-Jarf, 2008).

The use of Arabic in L2 academic classrooms, or "code switching," has been regarded as a valid pedagogical tool (Chang, 2010; Tamtam, 2013; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005). Chang (2010) found that the use of English-medium instruction caused some undergraduate Taiwanese students difficulties in understanding the course content, and it often impeded them from taking part in class discussion. When she interviewed Taiwanese professors, she observed that these professors often switched from English to Mandarin because they were aware of their students' difficulties in English and because they wanted help reduce the students' anxiety. She also reported that the professors tended to code switch between Mandarin and English to respond to three circumstances: "looks of confusion from the students, introduction of difficult concepts, explanations requested by the students in Mandarin" (Chang, 2010, p. 67). Al-Nassar and Dow (2013) stated that mastery of English is an important outcome of a degree course. Thus, NSs of Arabic students are expected to improve their ability in English as they learn their subject matter, which is supposedly taught in English as the medium of instruction. Therefore, Al-Nassar and Dow argued that learning English cannot be limited to ELLPs in the PYP; rather, further efforts are required from the subject teachers to make sure that students practise English in their major studies by not abandoning the use of English as the medium of instruction.

3.6.5.2 Students' Difficulties in Academic Listening Skills

Many studies have attempted to identify what variables of lecture discourse create the most problems for NNSs' lecture comprehension. Jordan (2002) categorised the problems affecting students' lecture comprehension into three areas: the ability to decode, to comprehend, and to take notes. Effective listening comprehension involves sound discrimination, which is built by students' knowledge of English sound systems

and their ability to convert these sounds into recognisable words (Goh, 2014). Flowerdew (1994) added that the decoding process involves not only recognising English sound systems but also a "recognition of irregular pausing, false starts, hesitations, stress and intonation patterns" (p. 37).

As Goh (2014) and Dudley-Evans and St. Johns (1998) have implied, one challenge occurs when students lack the ability to identify English sounds and convert these sounds into recognisable words. Another listening challenge occurs when students have inadequate lexical and grammatical knowledge. Meccarty (2000), for example, examined the impact of lexical and grammatical knowledge on the reading and listening comprehension of 154 Spanish undergraduates. The results show that lexical as well as grammatical knowledge were major factors contributing to L2 listening and reading comprehension development. However, Meccarty found that a considerable proportion of variance in listening and reading comprehension was associated with the students' level of lexical knowledge. Meccarty concluded that because it was found that strong lexical knowledge would optimise comprehension and distinguish successful readers/listeners from less successful readers/listeners, developing students' lexical knowledge in the language classroom is required.

Evans and Green (2007) found that listening skill seems to be of rather less concern for their Hong Kong undergraduate students compared to the other three language skills. They felt some degree of simplicity with most listening sub-skills. Yet, the students felt that understanding technical key words was the greatest obstacle preventing them from understanding the lecture content. Likewise, Hyland's (1997) participants assigned a lower ranking to their difficulty with listening and were less anxious about their listening proficiency. Hyland (1997, p. 11) justified rating listening proficiency to be of little concern by indicating that "The need to process academic content knowledge almost exclusively in English is a compelling reason for quickly enhancing receptive proficiency." Although listening skills seem to be less problematic for ESL students (Chowdhury & Haider, 2012; Evans & Green, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011b; Hyland, 1997), students in Saudi Arabia experience listening comprehension difficulty. Al-Moallim et al. (2010) reported that 62% of medical students assumed that they struggled to understand and write notes, and 50% reported that they did not comprehend what they were supposed to learn by the end of

the lectures. They attributed this lack of adequate understanding regarding the lecture content to language barriers.

In the KSA, Hamouda (2013) investigated listening comprehension problems encountered by 60 first-year Saudi undergraduate students majoring in English language and translation at Al-Qassim University. When students were asked about the importance of listening skills to the success of their content study, around 84% of them reported that listening skills are important. Hamouda reported that unknown vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and long stretches of listening were the major problems encountered by Saudi students. According to Hamouda, these problems seriously hindered their listening progress and increased their feeling of fatigue, distraction, and frustration. Furthermore, despite being English majors, unlike our participants, around 77% found listening to be a difficult task to handle.

Taking notes is a complex task that requires much thought and effort (Alexander et al., 2008; Chazal, 2014; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Jordan, 1997). Jordan (1997) reported a study conducted by Dunkel and Davy (1989), who investigated students' reasons for taking notes during a lecture. The students reported four reasons: (1) as a mnemonic assisting device; (2) to prepare for an exam; (3) to compare information contained in the textbooks and the lecture; and (4) to enhance attention during the lecture. In Saudi Arabia, Benson (1989) interviewed Hamad and examined his note-taking skills and recorded the lectures which Hamad had attended. The analysis of the research data showed that Hamad was preoccupied with taking notes of what he regarded as important points to be used on the test. In doing so, Hamad paid less attention to the other interactions during the lecture and to the teacher's anecdotes, despite the professor feeling they were important. In comparison to notes taken by L1 students, Hamad's notes were short, simple, and showed the limited range of vocabulary choice. Students' notes vary from one student to another; however, as implied by Jordan (1997), 'Note-taking as a skill is not easy in one's own language; in a foreign language, the difficulties can become very serious" (p. 188).

Particularly relevant to our study, is a more recent study which concerns students' perceptions of listening to subject lectures—albeit in the USA; Huang (2004) focused

on second language learners' academic listening problems at an American university. In Huang's study, 78 Chinese students were asked to complete a questionnaire about their perceptions of the types of factors that affect their comprehending lectures in English. Results revealed that some difficulties in understanding lectures were linked to students' poor English competence. The students reported six aspects which caused them to struggle with understanding the academic lectures delivered in English. These factors included the speed of the speech, a lack of clear pronunciation, long and complex sentences, informal expressions, a lack of clearly defined important terms and concepts, and the use of discourse markers. As far as second language learners' academic listening is concerned, research has indicated that the speed of delivery (Flowerdew, 1994) and the lecturer's accent cause comprehension difficulties for L2 students (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992).

The last area of difficulty which affects students' listening comprehension was the failure to maintain concentration during lectures (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Hamouda, 2013). In Flowerdew and Miller's (1997) study, students realised that attention was essential to listening, and they identified three factors breaking concentration: a lack of alternative stimuli modes, environmental distractions, and physical well-being. In addition, Hamouda (2013) found that a number of students indicated that comprehension was affected by several environmental factors. They commented that the climate of the classroom and noises coming from outside the classroom were major barriers impeding comprehension.

3.7 Reasons for Students' Difficulties in English

In this section, the focus will be on reviewing some of the potential reasons which may influence making good use of English, thus resulting in facing difficulty.

3.7.1 L1 Interference in Second Language Learning

Native language interference has been viewed as one of the main factors that either supports or impedes the learning of a second language. Ellis (1997) viewed interference as a type of transfer: "the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2" (p. 51). Learning a second language has also been seen as a matter of habit formation (Norris, 1987, cited in Al-Zoubi & Abu-Eid, 2014). The presence of L1 interference is linked to the extent of the differences and similarities

between learners' L1 and L2. When two languages share similar linguistic characteristics, L2 learning is enhanced; hence, the correct production of L2 is expected. When there are few or no common characteristics between L1 and L2, L2 learning is impeded and language errors are expected to occur in the production of the target language (Al-Zoubi & Abu-Eid, 2014). L1 interference can often occur in three component parts of language: pronunciation (phonology), vocabulary (morphology), and grammar (syntax).

To better understand the influence of Arabic on learning English, it is worth indicating the differences between the two languages. Standard Arabic or Classical Arabic are synonymous for one another and belong to the Semitic language family (Watson, 2002). Classical Arabic or Standard Arabic is taught at schools and is used in the official contexts of all Arabic countries, including the KSA. Written Arabic consists of 28 letters, all of which are consonants; written English has 26 letters, 24 of which are consonants written by 21 of these letters. Eleven vowels are written by five of these letters and also include eight diphthongs. In contrast, Arabic has a total of six vowels; three long vowels are written in consonants (*i*, *u*, and *a*), and three short vowels (*i*, *u*, and *a*) are not written but are sometimes indicated in the scripts by diacritics placed above or below the consonant or by one of two diphthongs (*aw* and *aj*). Saigh and Schmitt (2012) indicated that although written Arabic and English "belong to a sound-based type of writing in which phonemes are represented by graphemes" (p. 23), they are different in their orthographical systems (p. 26). In written Arabic, every phoneme is represented in the spelling system; thus, it is based on letter-to-sound correspondences or it is "very consistent with almost phoneme-grapheme representation" (Saigh & Schmitt, 2012, p. 26). English, on the other hand, as described by Saigh and Schmitt (2012), has "inconsistent/more complex representations, and so the sound-symbol correspondences are relatively more opaque than in Arabic" (p. 26). For example, the phoneme /k/ is spelled in one way in Arabic (ك). In English, on the other hand, it can be written in various forms: *c* as in *picnic*, *k* as in *kitchen*, *ck* as in *stick*, and *ch* as in *school*. The grapheme *gh* can be pronounced in various ways: /g/ as in *ghost*, /f/ as in *laugh*, and silent as in *through*. Thus, NSs of Arabic transfer their L1 spelling system skills to handle English orthography, and such L1 transfers may contribute to many spelling mistakes such as *piknik* for the word picnic and *fone* for phone (Fender, 2003; Grami & Al-Zughaibi, 2012; Sabbah,

2015).

Written Arabic does not represent upper and lower case as does the written English language. However, Arabic letters are written in different forms depending on whether they occur alone (e.g., /m/= م), at the beginning of a word (e.g., Makkah= مكه), in the middle of a word (e.g., Hamed = حمد), or at the end of a word (e.g., Maram = مرام). Ryding (2005, p. 45) indicated that Arabic morphology is formed from a root morpheme, which is defined as "a system of consonant roots which interlock with patterns of vowels and sometimes certain other consonants to form words or word stems" (p. 45). A root such as /k-t-b/ is stable across all the forms of words or as a "core around which are constelled a wide array of potential meanings, depending on which pattern is keyed into the root" (Ryding, 2005, p. 47). According to Ryding, it also conveys lexical meaning (/k-t-b/ means "writing") and can be joined with an affix pattern (which includes short vowels) to form words such as *katab-a* (verb, "he wrote"), *katab-at* (verb, "she wrote"), *kitaab* (noun, "a book"), *kutub-an* (noun, "two books"), and *kuttaab* (noun, "writers"). These patterns are actually said to have grammatical meaning because they distinguish word types or word classes, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

When Arabic words are not written in diacritics (i.e., without the representation forms of letter-sound pronunciation or of short vowels), readers rely on their phonological knowledge (i.e., letters corresponding to sounds, morphological knowledge, root morpheme, the syntactic and the semantic knowledge) to pronounce the letter or identify the missing vowels (Fender, 2003; Saigh & Schmitt, 2012). In contrast, English always represents its vowels in writing, and its native speakers can use their contextual knowledge to identify missing vowels (Saigh & Schmitt, 2012).

Previous research has shown that NSs of Arabic have difficulties recognising English words; this may be due to the negative transfer of L1 word recognition. Ryan and Meara (1991), for example, found that Arab ESL learners made significant errors in spelling vowels compared to non-Arab ESL peers. They concluded that L1 Arabic literacy influenced their ability not only to identify the missing vowels accurately but also to rely on consonant graphemes rather than vowel graphemes. A study conducted by Fender (2003) found that compared to ESL Japanese speakers, Arab ESL learners

were slower and had less fluent word recognition skills because they heavily relied on phonological process skills, which appears to have not been helpful since English has many inconsistencies in its spelling system. Saigh and Schmitt (2102) also found that ESL Arabic speakers had difficulty recognising short and long vowels but experienced more problems with identifying short vowels than long vowels. They concluded that because they followed their L1 spelling processes to identify the missing English vowels, regardless of short or long vowels, they were unable to infer the missing vowel and spell the English words correctly. Khan (2011) argued that homograph words caused Saudi students the most confusion in reading or writing (e.g., *to, too, two*).

The transfer of Arabic phonological knowledge can be problematic when NSs of Arabic learn L2 sounds that are not found in their L1. Each letter in Arabic represents one sound spelled in writing as well in pronunciation. Therefore no Arabic letter has a silent sound as in the English language. Hassan (2014) added that, though there are 28 sounds in Arabic, each of which has one letter to represent its sound, there are 44 sounds in English (24 consonants and 20 vowels). Therefore, NSs of Arabic face difficulties in pronouncing some sounds that are not found in Arabic simply because their speech organs are not trained to produce them. Nunan (2001) indicated that differences between the L1 and the L2 sound systems contribute to pronunciation errors in the L2 because learners transfer their mother tongue sound systems into the target language. Khan (2011) indicated that some features of the English sound system create problems for Saudi learners because they are not used in their native language. For example, with silent letters (e.g., *sight*), a group of different letters represent one sound (e.g., *ti* = /ʃ/ in *patient*; *gh* = /f/ in *rough*). Hassan (2014) reported that the English /p/ and /b/ sounds are two phonemes, but in Arabic there is only one phoneme, /b/; thus, NSs of Arabic face problems in distinguishing between /p/ and /b/ sounds. They often pronounce the voiced bilabial stop /b/ instead of the voiceless bilabial /p/ or replace the letter *b* with the letter *p* or vice versa, therefore, mispronunciations and spelling mistakes are expected (Baloch, 2013; Khan, 2011). Another problem facing NSs of Arabic is that they appear to have difficulty pronouncing the consonant clusters in English. They insert a vowel in a cluster of consonants when writing or pronouncing them, as with *text* (/tekist/), *plastic* (/bilastic/), and *splendid* (/spilendid/; Sabbah, 2015, p. 281).

Many studies have explored the influence of L1 syntactic knowledge on the production of L2 writing. Watcarapunyawang and Usada (2013) wrote that "when syntactic properties of the two languages are very different, it makes L2 students rely on their first language when writing in second language" (p. 69). Arabic consists of three tenses: imperative, simple present, and simple past. Present tense is used to designate actions that are happening in the present or will happen in the future (Reishaan & Ja'far, 2008). Thus, Arabic has a single form for the present tense (and a single form for past tense), unlike English, which has both simple and continuous forms of each tense. In Arabic, there is also no verb *to be* in the present tense and no auxiliary verbs such as *do* or *does*. Consequently, it is argued that NSs of Arabic omit these verbs when structuring sentences in English, as in "Huda happy" instead of the correct structure "Huda is happy" or "while my mother cooking, I preparing the table" instead of "while my mother is cooking, I was preparing the table" (Sabbah, 2015, p. 275). Hussein and Mohammad (n.d., p. 185) found that, regardless of students' level of proficiency in English, they were more likely to formulate sentences first in Arabic and then translate them into English, thereby creating negative transfer. Salebi (2004) reported research showing that Saudi students relied on their native language (Arabic), producing nine translation errors and 39 indefinite article omission errors. This indicates that Arab speakers had difficulties using English articles because 'a, an and the' are discrete words in English but are prefixed to nouns and adjectives in Arabic; thus, they are not considered as separate words. Khan (2011) explained that this leads to doubling subjects (e.g., "My brother he is a doctor") and prepositions (e.g., 'I am from in Makkah"); the use of present perfect tense and articles are other common errors that most Saudi learners produce when writing a text in English.

These conclusions have been supported by a range of studies comparing the features of academic genres written by Arabs. In 1966, Kaplan, for instance, pointed out that many Arabic-speaking learners, despite their mastery of the structure of English, produce essays that are considered to be inadequately organised. This view is supported by Williams (1982), who explained that "Arabic tends to favour lexical repetition while English prefers ellipsis" (p. 125). The texts produced in English by Arabs tend to have overemphasis, simplistic structures, and redundancy. Khalil (1989) also analysed the cohesive devices in 20 English texts written by Arab students at

Bethlehem University and found that some students transferred discourse features of Arabic into their English writing. Another similar observation was made by Doushaq (1986), who found that Arabic-speaking students neglected other connectors and extensively relied on the use of "*and*, *but*, *while*, and *because* [emphasis added]" when linking ideas together, resulting in short and vague sentences. Fakhri (1994) analysed a set of 60 English essays written by NNSs of English from different L1 backgrounds; thirty texts were written by NSs of Arabic, and the other 30 texts were produced by a group of NSs of Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai. Fakhri (1994) found that the overuse of 'and' per sentence was the main obvious difference in the writing of NSs of Arabic. It was also found that Arabic writers tend to begin a paragraph with *and*, which is not acceptable in English writing but is an appropriate style of writing in Arabic. Hirvela et al. (2012) studied the use and misuse of punctuation marks in English and found that the NSs of Arabic misused or entirely omitted punctuation marks.

3.7.2 Affective Factors

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the influence of affective factors in English learning and its implications in English teaching. Ellis (1994) wrote that "learners' affective factors are obviously of crucial importance in accounting for individual differences in learning outcomes" (p. 483). In 1987, Krashen developed the affective filter hypothesis, which posits that a number of non-linguistic variables play a role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, attitudes, and anxiety. Krashen claimed that learners with high levels of motivation and self-confidence and low levels of anxiety are linked to low filters; hence, they are better able to absorb the language input. In contrast, having a low level of motivation and self-esteem and a high level of anxiety leads to an increase in students' affective filters; thus, they are not ready to receive and process the language input.

Motivation, according to Dörnyei (2005), is a contributing factor in second language acquisition as well as "the initial engine to generate learning and later functions as an ongoing driving force that helps to sustain the long and the usually laborious journey of acquiring a foreign language" (Dörnyei & Cheng, 2007, p. 135). Nevertheless, the concept of motivation seems to be complex since the long history of research and

much theorisation has not brought an end to the confusion surrounding its complex nature. As Dörnyei (2009) pointed out, the diverse theories of motivation can only be reconciled if one takes into consideration that the main aim is to answer "the fundamental question of why humans behave as they do" (p. 117). Dörnyei (1998) also wrote that "although motivation is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of the concept" (p. 117). Dornyei and Otto (1999) argued that motivation is not a "static state but rather a dynamically evolving and changing entity, associated with ongoing process in time" (p. 1). Dornyei (2001) indicated that motivation is a cyclical process that may influence or get influenced by many demotivating factors or specific external forces that reduce learners' motivation to learn a language.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) revealed two L2 motivational orientations: integrative and instrumental. An integrative motivation refers to learners' interest in the target language community for learning the L2, whereas instrumental motivation refers to more functional purposes for learning the L2 such as getting a better job, gaining a higher salary, achieving a higher status in the community, or passing an examination. The Gardner socio-educational model has been subjected to criticism from a large number of researchers (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991) based on whether or not integrative motivation as understood by Gardner could be applicable in contexts where English is learned and taught as a foreign language (Benson, 1991; Lamb, 2007; Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

Although both types are viewed to be important in L2 language learning, integrative motivation has often been argued to be a superior factor over the instrumental factor (Ellis, 1994; Gardner, 1985, 2007). Instrumental motivation is seen to be associated with settings in which the learner has little chance of exposure to the culture of the target language, such as the EFL in general and the KSA in particular. It would be expected that our pharmacy majors would possess high instrumental motivation since they have chosen a major which requires them to study in English, presumably because they have a clear future profession in mind.

In this respect, too, studies exploring Arab university-level students' motivation for

learning English have documented that they are instrumentally motivated students (Diab, 2006). Al-Ansari and Lori's (1999) study examined the differences in the motivation and attitudes of English major and Arabic major undergraduate students at the University of Bahrain. They found that English major students were more positive towards the English language, its people, and its culture; so they could be seen as integratively motivated compared to their counterparts, who were Arabic majors. The Arabic major students possessed instrumental motivation (passing the examination) simply because English was a prerequisite course they were required to study before graduation.

A similar study conducted by Javid et al. (2012) in Saudi Arabia investigated female and male undergraduate students from three different departments at Taif University, including English, medicine, and information technology. The findings demonstrate that Saudi students had higher levels of instrumental motivation along with a fair degree of integrative motivation. Medical students, the closest to the participants in our study, were reported to have the highest level of instrumental motivation compared to students studying in the English and information technology departments. According to Javid et al. (2012), the higher level of motivation to learn English among medical students can be attributed to the fact that only students who graduated from high school with the highest overall grades are admitted into the medical colleges in the KSA; hence, they are assumed to be smarter and more intelligent than those students who obtained poor grades. Another justification made by the authors was that medical students are aware that English is required for their academic studies and future careers; hence, a good mastery of the English language is imperative. Malcolm (2013) found that Arabic-speaking medical students studying at the Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain (AGU) through the medium of English—so in a context quite similar to ours—were motivated by goals related to a need to not fail or return home carrying the disgrace of failure; hence, they were learning English for 'instrumental-preventative' purposes. Their dream to be successful doctors along with their wish to please their parents and fulfil expectations were perceived to have 'instrumental-promotional' roles for learning English. This result has been observed in several studies conducted to explore the motivational orientation of EFL Arab learners (e.g., Rababah, 2003; Zughoul, 1987).

A growing number of studies have reported that various factors affect learners' motivation, including parents (Gardner, 1985), teachers (Dornyei, 2002; Noels et al., 1999). In their study of university students' perceptions of the influence of their teachers' behaviours on their motivation, Corham and Christophel (1992) found that those teachers who were identified by the students as being unfriendly, unfair, unprepared, and lacking interest in the subject areas were the major factors contributing to their low level of motivation. In Saudi Arabia, according to their responses to a 23-item questionnaire using a Likert-scale, Al-Khairy (2013a) found that Saudi English-major students did not report teachers' anger as a contributing factor in reducing their motivation for learning English. However, Al-Khairy (2013a) argued that teachers' feelings of displeasure are not welcomed behaviours, as that may cause learners' reluctance to use English.

Anxiety, according to Dornyei and Schmidt (2001), is a "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry" (p. 364). Dornyei and Schmidt (2001) argued that anxiety can lead to a positive influence in terms of encouraging the students to accomplish a task. It can also bring a negative influence in terms of impeding them from achieving their learning goals, possibly hindering them from achieving good oral performance. Students with higher levels of motivation and lower levels of anxiety are often able to address their learning tasks, but students with lower motivation and higher levels of anxiety often hold high filters, restricting them from receiving more input, processing it, and confidently producing output (Krashen, 1989).

Speaking skills, such as with a class discussion, a short talk, or a presentation, have been reported to provoke the most anxiety:

> This anxiety comes in part from a lack of confidence in our general linguistic knowledge but if only this factor were involved, all skills would be affected equally. What distinguishes speaking is the public nature of the skill; the embarrassment suffered from exposing our language imperfections in front of others. (Arnold, 2000, p. 3)

Thus, an inappropriate background of linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, contributes to possibilities of making mistakes which

leads to a fear of being exposed to negative evaluation, which in turn increases language anxiety and hence influences self-confidence (Arnold, 2000).

According to He and Chen (2010), students' lack of confidence is often related to their low ability to speak English. Juhana (2012) argued that when students feel that their spoken utterance has not been understood by other speakers or when they themselves do not understand other speakers' conversation, a lack of confidence occurs. Jamila (2014) surveyed 83 tertiary-level Bangladeshi students to explore the causes that lead to students' problems in speaking English the most. She found that 20 out of 83 of them considered a lack of confidence as the first cause affecting their spoken performance. Fifteen ranked this as the second cause, and 11 viewed it as the third cause. A similar view was echoed by Ni (2012), who added that confident students are well-equipped for taking risks and standing up to learn a new language.

3.7.3 Previous English Learning Experiences

Students' previous educational experiences have been identified as the main source of language challenges at the tertiary level (Al-Husseini, 2009; Evans & Green, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011a, 2001b; Johnston, 2001; Taguchi & Naganum, 2006). Evans and Green (2007) found that students from Chinese-medium secondary schools experienced a wider range of language problems than those from English-medium secondary schools, especially in the area of academic writing and listening. A similar observation was made by Evans and Morrison (2011b), who found that Hong Kong students from Chinese-medium schools struggled with understanding their professors' accents because they were not familiar with 'listening to long stretches of academic discourse in English' at secondary schools (p. 393).

Referring to the learning context in Saudi Arabia, and as discussed in Chapter 2, it has been found, unsurprisingly, that students have limited opportunities to extend their English skills in secondary schools. Their school experiences have been characterised by grammar translation and direct method instruction, and teachers typically have the dominant role in the classrooms (Khan, 2011; Zaid, 1993). The extensive use of Arabic as the medium of instruction in the English language classroom in school has been shown to play a key role in reducing students' motivation to practise speaking in

the class and may encourage them to heavily depend on Arabic (Abu-Ghararah, 2014; Al-Shammari, 2011). Hamoud (2013) asked 159 students enrolled in the PYP at Qassim University to complete a questionnaire. The results revealed students' desire to develop their spoken English ability as well as their willingness to participate and interact with others in English during the language class. However, various factors were found to affect students' willingness to engage in class communication: low English proficiency, a lack of confidence, cultural beliefs, anxiety and fear of losing face, teachers' attitudes towards students' making speaking mistakes, and class management. Rababah (2002) discussed the communication weakness of Arab learners in general and Arab learners of English majors in particular. Rababah attributed the students' failure in using English to four factors: a lack of the target language exposure with its native speakers, curriculum design, a lack of using the target language in the language teaching classroom, and a lack of students' motivation.

Regarding Saudi language classes such as the PYP English courses, Al-Harbi (2015) discussed various factors that had major effects on students' speaking capacity. Al-Harbi noted that one of the most noticeable problems, which impedes the progress of Saudi students' speaking skills, are the Saudi teachers themselves. Al-Harbi also contended that most Saudi language teachers, both in schools and at universities, control everything in the classroom, choosing when and for how long students speak. Hamouda (2013) categorised the factors influencing students' ability to participate in class discussion into six main items: students' low English proficiency, a lack of confidence, cultural beliefs, anxiety and fear of losing face, teachers' evaluations, and class management. Abu-Ghararah (2014) found that teachers' attitudes affected students' willingness to initiate interaction and the latter expressed that they would only speak when they were asked to do so. Furthermore, the situation is worsened when teachers use Arabic to teach difficult words and to explain grammatical rules (Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2005, 2015). The extensive use of Arabic as the medium for teaching English in Saudi schools has shown to play a key role in reducing students' motivation to practise speaking in the class and may encourage them to heavily depend on Arabic (Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2015; Abu-Ghararah, 2014; Al-Seghayer, 2005, 2015; Al-Shammari, 2011).

Al-Jumah (2011) described how most Saudi students could not express themselves in an accurate and fluent manner, adding that "in ESL/EFL classroom interaction, teachers and students are often on opposing sides with one another: teachers babble all the time, whereas students mumble and swallow their words, or say nothing" (p. 85). Rababah (2002) discussed the communication weaknesses of Arab learners in general and Arab learners of English in particular. Rababah attributed the students' failure in speaking to four factors: a lack of exposure between the target language and its native speakers, curriculum design, a lack of using the target language in the classroom, and a lack of students' motivation. Abu-Ghararah (2014) argued that "hypercorrection and negative attitudes towards mistakes can generate stress and leave learners with the impression that they are being branded as low achievers, potentially resulting in lowered self-esteem and confidence" (p. 282).

Students' learning approaches are viewed as another reason for their language difficulties when studying at English-speaking universities. Learning approaches are divided into two groups: deep and surface. In the deep approach, "the students search for meaning, relate issues to prior knowledge and other subjects and integrate material with personal knowledge" (Johnston, 2001, p. 170). In the surface approach, students are described as rote learners because they depend on rote memorisation. It has been widely acknowledged that a deep approach and critical thinking are the abilities required the most at the university level (Entwistle & Tait, 1990). Students' approaches to learning can be affected by educational context, teaching methodology, subject content, and assessment methods (Ramsden, 1987). A positive link between a heavy workload and students' adaption of surface approaches to learning has also been found (Kember, 2004; Kember & Leung, 1998; Ramsden, 1992; Struyven et al., 2006). Johnston (2001), for example, found that students with a high fear of failure adopted a surface approach, and the amount of required work affected their approach to learning. Kember (2000) argued that the approach adopted by students depends on the nature of the task at hand, the curriculum design, and the way the course is taught. In Saudi Arabia, Syed (2003) argued that NSs of Arabic have most often been characterised as rote learners. Al-Seghayer (2005) and Zaid (1993) indicate that Arab students in general and Saudi students in particular are subjected to lengthy assignments involving the rote learning. As a result of this training, students have developed memorisation skills that they expect to continue using at the university

level. This approach can provide no help for students as they rely on rote memorisation as a primary approach to learning and learn material by heart so they can reproduce it on examination papers. In other words, they memorise isolated sentences, grammatical rules, or vocabulary for the sake of coping with the requirements to pass exams.

3.7.4 Parent Influence on Students' Second Language Development

Research has indicated that parents play a key role in the development of their children's attitudes towards learning a foreign/second language. Gardner (1985) maintains that

> …attitudes and motivation are implicated in second language acquisition, and to the extent that parents play an impotent role in attitudes development, they will also be influential in their attempts to learn a second language. (p.108).

Parental influence can be divided into active and passive roles, which can each be further classified as positive or negative (Gardner, 1985). Bartram (2007) holds the view that an active role involves the way in which parents encourage their children to do well in learning the language. A positive active role implicates parents showing interest in monitoring their children's language learning progress and rewarding them for their success. A negative active role, on the other hand, involves parents showing various discouraging behaviours, ranging from underestimating the importance of language learning to supporting other areas of learning over the language. A passive role involves parents' attitudes towards the community that speak that language (Bartram, 2007). In Gardner's (1985) view, parents' positive attitudes towards France and French speakers, for example, would entail their desire for developing an open perspective towards knowing the culture associated with that language and the people who speak it. In this sense, they would pass that sentiment on to their children, and hence, the *integrative orientation* of their children learning French would be supported. A negative parental disposition towards French, on the other hand, would possibly impede their children from learning it.

A growing body of research has suggested that increasing parental involvement in

their children's education contributes to their children's educational outcomes and achievement. Castro et al. (2015) asserted that "it is generally accepted that without the positive cooperation of family and school, it is not possible to reach the high standards set for educational outcomes by a demanding society" (p. 34). In their review of 37 studies published between 2000 and 2013 about parental involvement and students' academic outcomes, Castro et al. found a positive association, and the strongest associations were found when the parents supported their children in carrying out their literacy homework and in developing their reading habits. Other parental behaviours such as parental attendance of school activities, on the other hand, did not appear to exert strong influence on children's academic achievement.

3.8 Studies on Students' Perceptions of Language Programme in EEL Contexts

In this section, I look at studies on language preparatory programmes in contexts closer to my own and in the KSA and taking the form of either needs analysis studies or programme evaluation studies

Hwang and Lin (2010), for example, assessed the linguistic needs of 378 medical students along with 24 faculty members at a medical university in Taiwan. The findings gathered from the survey revealed problems with the language materials used for teaching medical students. The materials were not related to the medical field and needed to be subjected to thorough revision to enhance the deployment of medical reading skills. In a similar study, Akyel and Ozek (2010) conducted a needs analysis study with university students attending a variety of departments in a well-known university in Turkey. The results of their study demonstrated students' needs for more practice in speaking, reading, and writing in order to function effectively in their academic studies. The researchers suggested the necessity of implementing a variety of oral and spoken activities in the preparatory language programme.

In Saudi Arabia, Javid (2011) looked at the specific language needs of Saudi medical undergraduates studying medicine at Taif University. Data were gathered through multiple methods, including interviews, observations, and questionnaires, from both students and faculty members and were triangulated for validation purposes. The study reported that the majority of medical students who participated in the study lacked the required English language proficiency to be able to pursue their academic

studies. According to them, reading and speaking skills were considered to be of higher priority than writing and listening skills. Additionally, to understand the content of medical materials, faculty members expressed the need for teaching medical terminology and assigning more hours to the teaching of English for medical purposes (EMP). In this respect, Javid and Umer (2013, p. 370) asserted that "all the institutions and especially English language centers (ELCs) that require addressing the specific needs of ESP learners should develop in-house teaching materials based on a comprehensive and standard NA." Also in the KSA, Zaid and Al-Amir (2010) tested the proficiency level in the four English academic skills of 61 male medical students who took an ESP course at King Khalid University. The students were assigned to study in-house materials (i.e., *Academic Textbooks for Health Profession* developed by Mazyad, 2003) and required to take three tests: two midterm exams and one final exam. Analyses of students' exams showed a positive correlation between their total scores in all components of English skills and scores they attained on a particular skill.

Studies conducted to evaluate preparatory language programmes have gained much attention, but I will only review here those of more relevance to the focus of my study and which have been conducted in EFL contexts and the Saudi context. In Iran, Zohrabi (2011) aimed to investigate the value of an English for general purposes (EGP) course offered to Iranian students studying at the University of Tabriz. Data were collected from 240 students and 20 language teachers. A variety of instruments were employed such as questionnaires, interviews, and class observations. The results revealed that most of the students held negative attitudes towards the value of the course mainly because it failed to meet their language needs. Teachers controlled everything in the class and were only interested in covering the textbooks from cover to cover, reading aloud the reading passages and responding to all the students' language activities without carrying out any language task communicatively. Thus, Zohrabi called for the need to increase the hours for the course so that teachers could find more time to increase students' use of language as well as suggested that the objective of the course should be based on students' target needs.

In 2012, Zohrabi et al. (2012) conducted a similar study to evaluate an EGP course,

but the purpose of this study was to identify the factors that influenced the value of that course. The results showed that students lost confidence in the course and were motivated to take it only for obtaining grades rather than enhancing their language ability. They reported that they still faced difficulties in reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Furthermore, they indicated that the EGP course failed to equip them with the needed skills and language to perform effectively in their ESP course. The study revealed that one of the main factors affecting the quality of the course was that the time allocated for it was short and thus restricted the teacher from dedicating sufficient time to each skill or carrying out any communicative tasks. Having mixed-ability students in the class was also reported as a factor affecting the course, and therefore, Zohrabi et al. called for the need to group students according to their language levels to maintain a balance amongst the students.

In Iran, Mohamadi (2013) aimed to uncover students' views of an EGP course with respect to their evaluations of the in-house textbooks they were studying and the teaching practices used by the teachers who taught them. The results showed that these students were instrumentally motivated to learn the course, but their motivation was not responded to because "there was no match between what was happening and what was appropriate" (p. 1291) for them to learn. The main reason for that mismatch was that students' main aim for taking the course was to enhance their oral communication skills, but the course focussed on reading skills. Furthermore, the students felt that their textbook was discouraging and cited two reasons: First, it did not meet their language needs. Second, it involved activities that were designed in a way that did not support the implementation of pair/group work activities.

Another study conducted by Hessamy and Mohebi (2014) aimed to investigate students' perceptions of their ESP course, which was offered to Iranian students studying in four different medical universities. The findings gathered from the surveys and the interviews revealed that overcrowded classes, students with multilevel language proficiency, teacher-centred approaches, shortage of time, lack of communicative activities, and inadequate assessment practices were the main factors affecting the quality of the course. However, students reported positive comments on the effectiveness of the course in supporting the learning of new medical terminology.

In contrast, Salehi et al. (2015) evaluated an ESP medical textbook applied in medical schools in Iran by using questionnaires and interviews with students and instructors. The findings revealed that students and instructors held different views on the quality of the textbook. Although the instructors viewed it as effective for equipping students with the skills required in their medical studies, students felt that, although it was relevant to their field of study, it failed to equip them with "those vocabularies, which are needed for medical terminology, suffixes, prefixes and acronyms" (p. 149).

In Turkey, Üstünel and Kaplan (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of a general English programme offered to students studying in the School of Foreign Languages at a private university. The findings revealed that, excluding listening skills, the course failed to enhance students' abilities in speaking, reading, and writing. The students were still facing problems in speaking and were unable to deliver oral presentations or even short talks. They also were unable to comprehend the information in their subject-matter texts, and thus the idea of exposing these students to reading strategies instruction was suggested. With respect to L2 vocabulary, students reported that the course did not enrich their vocabulary gains. Examining the effectiveness of a general English preparatory programme at Abant Izzet Baysal Uniebrsity in Turkey, Coskun (2013) found that the poor physical conditions affected students' views of the quality of their EGP programme. In this respect Chan (1996, p. 8) also emphasised the positive link between students' academic achievement and classroom conditions, writing that

> A good learning environment frees students from physical distress, makes it easy for students to concentrate on school work and induces students in logical thinking'

In Kuwait, Al-Daihani (2015) explored students' perceptions of the effectiveness of an ESP course offered in the College of Technological Studies. The students were asked to respond to a questionnaire about their views on their English competencies after they had completed the course. The results revealed that the course was not helpful because it devoted much attention to grammar instruction and reading skills over other language skills. However, the students agreed that their grammar proficiency was not effective, as they were not sure how to write accurately.

Similarly, although they felt that the ESP course helped them enhance their reading skills, they reported that it failed to develop the skills of reading information located in tables and charts.

It should be noted that none of the studies conducted in the KSA investigated students' perceptions of a language programme applied in their contexts in relation to whether it was an EGP or ESP course, unlike this current study, which aimed at uncovering this important element. Al-Shumaimeri (2011) investigated the English preparatory programme of King Saud University to find out whether the programme was successful or not from the students' own perspectives, as well as to explore whether their English proficiency level or the college they wished to join influenced their perceptions of the course. The results of the study showed that the majority of the students reported positive attitudes towards the course and felt that it was beneficial in terms of helping them with the deployment of their English language skills. Yet, when examining students' English proficiency level, Al-Shumaimeri found that students with lower English proficiency reported negative opinions. In general, the students also held very good perceptions of the role of the course teachers and their teaching performance, and though some of them had good perceptions of the teaching materials used and assessment procedures applied, only a few of the students reported having poor perceptions of the limited use of extracurricular activities. However, students reported that the area where the course had provided the greatest support was in enhancing their speaking abilities, whereas the ability to write in English was its least contribution, hence implying a failure in the course.

Similarly, Al-Kaff (2013) explored students' attitudes and perceptions of learning English during their study of a preparatory language programme offered by the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah. A questionnaire was designed to identify students' views regarding the importance of learning English, whether it is a difficult language to learn, and what the main areas of its difficulty are. The study also aimed to explore students' methods used to improve their English. The questionnaire was distributed to 47 preparatory-year students and analysed. The results of the study indicated that students held positive attitudes towards English, and therefore, they were motivated to improve their English, even if they were required to meet other academic demands. A considerable number of

students agreed that English is difficult, and speaking and writing were their main problematic areas. The findings gathered from open-ended questions in the students' questionnaires revealed that the language programme partially helped learning English: most of the students reported that the course was intensive, and the emphasis placed on teaching grammar left no room for carrying out any spoken practices.

3.9 Summary

Since the current study focuses on exploring students' perceptions of the impact of the ELPPs on their academic experiences, I reviewed the literature in three main areas: ESP, EAP, and EGP. First section involves a review of the emergence of ESP, its definitions, and classifications. As EAP emerged from the broader field of English for specific purposes (ESP) and is intended to prepare learners for the demands required of them in their academic studies, I reviewed the literature on its emergence, its types, and why it has been seen as a valuable provider for preparing students to meet the academic demands of their tertiary education. Since it is found to be the major approach used in many EFL contexts, as with the context of this study, the EGP approach, its definitions, and how it differs from the ESP approach were given a special emphasis in this chapter.

Also, I reviewed the literature on the perceptions held by EFL students following English language programmes regarding the type of difficulties they experience in academic reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It has been demonstrated that a lack of variety in general L2 vocabulary blocked the process of students' reading comprehension and impeded their progress when tackling subject-specific reading tasks (Chowdhurry and Haider, 2012; Al-Moallim et al, 2010; Cobb and Horst, 2001; Marshall and Gilmour, 1993). Research on students' perceived difficulty with academic writing has also shown that limited vocabulary gains (Zughoul and Husain, 1985; Chowdhurry and Haider, 2012; Al-Khairy, 2013b), grammatical accuracy (Al-Buainain, 2006; Hinkle, 2003; Hashim, 1997; Silva, 1993) and expressing ideas and organising paragraphs in a suitable way (Ahamd, 2010; Kaplan, 1966) are EFL students' main problems in writing. With respect to students' views about their own difficulties with academic speaking, many studies have shown that limited vocabulary knowledge, giving oral presentations (Chowdhurry and Haider, 2012) and speaking with subject-teachers fluently are ranked as the major sources of difficulty for the

EFL students (Al-Moallim et al, 2010). In respect to academic listening skills, it was found that decoding English sounds and converting these sounds into recognisable words, understanding grammatical structures and long stenches of listening (Hamouda, 2013) and writing lecture notes (Al-Moallim et al., 2010) are the main barriers affecting EFL students' listening comprehension.

Besides, this review reveals some of the potential causes contributing to the difficulties experienced in learning English. Students' native language interference contributes to students' difficulties in spoken and written English (Saigh and Schmit, 2012; Sabbah, 2015; Fakhri, 1994; Khalil, 1989). Prior English learning experiences have also been identified as a key factor leading to students' language struggle at the tertiary level (Evans and Green; 2007; Evans and Morrison, 2011a, 2011b; Al-Husseini, 2009; Taguchi & Naganum, 2006; Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2015; Al-Harbi, 2015; Al-Sghayer, 2014; Rahman & Al-Haisoni, 2013). The research, also, has indicated that motivation and lack of confidence (Krashen, 1987) as well as parental involvement in their children's second language learning could influence their learning of English (Gardner, 1985).

It follows from this review that the perceptions of EFL university students towards the appropriateness of the preparatory language programmes are discouraging. Several shortcomings were found to affect the quality of the language programmes, they include: shortage of qualified teachers, the use of teacher-centred approaches, limited hours of instruction resulting in improper coverage of each skill and activity, and inadequate assessment practices (Hessamy and Mohebi, 2014; Al-Kaff, 2013; Mohamadi, 2013; Zohrabi et al, 2012; Zohrabi, 2011). This certainly gives an indication of the need for improving language programmes not only to decrease students' identified language difficulties but also to accommodate their language needs, as this current study hopes to achieve.

Chapter Four

Research Paradigm, Methodology, Study Design and Ethical Issues

4.1 Preview

This chapter first introduces and justifies the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research methodology utilized. It also reminds the reader of the research questions. Next it describes the research sampling; the instruments used for data collection, and the data analysis methods used. It ends with the ethical considerations.

In order to conduct a clear research study, it is important for any researcher to consider the different available research paradigms. Indeed, researchers are encouraged to understand the value of articulating their philosophical positions and recognize that different methodological approaches to research inquiry are underpinned by different ontological and epistemological choices (Grix, 2004). Walker and Evers (1988) further argue that a clear epistemological position would lead to a study whose 'findings are expected to command attention, serve as a sound basis for action, or constitute legitimate knowledge claims' (p. 28). Mores et al. (2001) ,for example, argue that researchers should apply these philosophical assumptions to guide their investigation and assert that maintaining consistency between their stances and methods adapted would constitute a valid research. Moreover Grix (2004) argues that by:

> Setting out clearly the relationship between what a researcher thinks can be researched (her ontological position) linking it to what we can know about it (her epistemological position) and how to go about acquiring it (her methodological approach), you can begin to comprehend the impact your ontological position can have on what and how you decide to study' (p. 68).

Taking into account the focus of this study and the questions it aims to answer, it was clear that the appropriate paradigm is Guba and Lincoln's (1985) conception of Naturalistic Inquiry, which later becomes known as Constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). This perspective is elaborated on in the following sections with reference to its ontological and epistemological assumptions, methodology and quality criteria used for judging its trustworthiness.

4.2 The Research Questions

As described in the introduction chapter, the focus of this study is to present a holistic picture of the major language difficulties encountered by both female and male EFL students studying pharmacy through the medium of English at UQU. This study also focuses on uncovering the main sources of the students' language difficulties, including to what extent the English language preparatory programmes influence their academic experiences at the university, i.e. whether they facilitate their acculturation and employment of English in their degree courses, or not. On the basis of their perceptions about the teaching and learning which occurs in the English programmes, this study aims to explore what improvements could be incorporated into the English courses. This study therefore poses four research questions. These are:

(5) In terms of academic English skills, what are the main difficulties experienced by female and male undergraduate pharmacists when studying their degree courses through English-medium instruction?

(6) In the students' own view, what are the reasons for these difficulties in this particular context?

(7) What impact do the English language preparatory programmes offered by the English Language Centre have upon their academic experiences?

(8) In the students' own view, how might the English Language Centre best go about addressing their language needs to decrease the identified difficulties?

4.3 Constructivism as a Theory of Learning

Constructivism originated as a theory about knowledge and learning that has roots in psychology and philosophy (Fosnot, 2005; Glaserfield, 2005). It stems from the field of cognitive science particularly from the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (Fosnot and Perry, 2005). Constructivism views 'knowledge not as truth to be transmitted or discovered, but as emergent, developmental, nonobjective, viable constructed explanations by humans engaged in meaning-making in cultural and social communities of discourses' (Fosnot, 2005, p. ix). As a theory of learning, it is based on the idea that human knowledge 'whether it be the bodies of public knowledge known as the various disciplines, or the cognitive structures of individual knowers or learners is constructed' (Phillips, 1995, p. 5). Constructivism acknowledges learning

as 'an interpretative, recursive, nonlinear building process by active learners interacting with their surround - the physical and social world' (Fosnot and Perry, 2005, p. 34). From this perspective, learners are viewed as having an active role in the creation of their knowledge using their prior knowledge and experiences to construct new information, resulting in a personally unique reality. In a similar vein, Glasersfeld (1995) maintains that 'learning is not a stimulus-response. It requires self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction' (p.14). In direct opposition to constructivism, there is the behaviorist model, which explains learning as 'a system of behavioral responses to physical stimuli' (Fosnot and Perry, 2005, p.8). This perspective is consistent with objectivism, which has dominated the field of education for many years. Objectivism holds the view that knowledge 'should represent a real world that is thought of as existing, separate and independent of the knower; and this knowledge should be conserved true only if it correctly reflects the independent world' (Murphy, 1997, p. 4). Learners, therefore, are seen to be passive waiting to gain that objective knowledge which is transmitted and directed by the educators (Fosnot and Perry, 2005).

Several versions of constructivism have emerged and been used in a variety of ways, so that any attempt to focus on their distinctive features tends to be confusing to the extent that, in Phillips' (1995) words, 'it is difficult to see the forest from the trees' (p. 7). Yet, I think that the main issue in the constructivist debate seems to be the question what is knowledge and how can it be constructed? Knowledge construction can be seen as either an individual or a social activity (Blaike, 2007). Viewing learners as active creators of knowledge is linked to a version of constructivist thinking called 'radical constructivism', as termed by its developer, Ernst von Glaserfeld. Radical constructivism is based on 'the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it can be defined, is in the heads of the persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her experiences' (Glaserfeld, 1995, p. 1). In a similar way, Schwandt (1998) points out that 'we cannot know such a thing as an independent, objective world that stands apart from our experience of it' (239). This is a subjective approach because it claims that individual cognitive processes play an important role in the individual's knowledge development. The main goal of her/his cognition is to be 'adaptive and allows one to organize the experienced world, not to discover an objective reality'

(Murphy, 1997, p. 5). By focusing on the role of the individual, radical constructivism neglects the role of society and the ways in which social interactions influence the process by which an individual's knowledge is constructed (Glaserfeld, 1995).

In responding to this criticism, social constructivism places an emphasis on the 'world of intersubjectively shared, social constructions of meaning and knowledge' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240). It accepts the notion that knowledge is a human construction and also emphasizes the influence that social communication might have on knowledge construction. According to Au (1998), the meaning of social includes 'a wide range of phenomena, from historical, political, and cultural trends to face to face interactions, reflecting group processes both explicit and implicit with intended and unintended consequences' (p.299).

4.3.1 The Theoretical Framework - Constructivist Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified four paradigmatic perspectives: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism, which is also called the naturalistic, hermeneutic or interpretative paradigm. In order to understand the main differences between these paradigms, and their different philosophical assumptions, it is useful to examine how they respond to three questions: the ontology, epistemology, and methodology questions. Constructivism however has emerged as the main competitor to the conventional paradigm (the positivist paradigm), and has been viewed as 'the best "fit" whenever it is human inquiry that is being considered' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, 82). I am interested in finding out from the participants themselves what categories of difficulties and reasons for difficulty are real to them. Although there is perhaps some positivist element in this study in the use of a detailed questionnaire items, my research cannot be seen as quite a fit for positivism. For this reason I restrict my attention to this paradigm. Before I progress to explaining this paradigm, however, I will first look into the meaning of paradigm.

The term 'paradigm' derives from a Greek verb meaning 'show, exhibit' and has been translated into English to mean 'examples' or 'table of declensions and conjugations' (Husen, 1988, p. 17). This term used in a research context has been traced back to Thomas Kuhn. As Morgan (2009) points out, the meaning of this term varies as many scholars use different terms interchangeably to refer it. Morgan (2009) lists four

versions of this term as it is found in the social sciences; paradigms as worldviews, paradigms as epistemological stances, paradigms as shared beliefs among specialists in the same area and paradigms as model examples of research. Similarly, Lincoln (1990) described it as an alternative world view with such pervasive effects that adopting a paradigm permeates every aspect of a research inquiry.

Likewise, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) define paradigm in terms of 'a worldview, together with various philosophical assumptions associated with the point of view' (p. 84). Patton (1990) sees it as 'a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world' (p. 37). Morgan (2009) argues that seeing paradigms as worldviews seems to be rather a broad and vague concept simply because it may 'include virtually everything someone thinks or believes; instead it is important to clarify what is contained in a worldview' (p.52). According to Creswell (2014) 'worldviews arise based on discipline orientations, students' advisors/mentors inclinations, and past research experiences' (p. 6).

According to Khun (1977), on the other hand, paradigms are treated as 'a set of beliefs, rules and standards, procedures and practices that guides the worldview of a group of researchers' (1970, p. 11). Also, Guba (1990) uses paradigm to indicate 'a basic set of beliefs that guides action' (p.17). Similarly, Bryman (2004) identifies it as 'a cluster of beliefs and dictates which, for scientists in a discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done' (p. 453). A similar view is added by McGregor and Murnane (2010) who say, 'a paradigm is a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality' (p. 419). Although differences in defining paradigms have given rise to controversy, I believe that different conceptions of paradigms can be usefully united in this definition of Morgan (2009), which is the one I adopt:

> The model examples researchers use to demonstrate the key content of their field reflect a set of shared beliefs about both the research questions they should ask and the methods they should use to answer them. Shared beliefs about research topic and methods are, in turn, based on epistemological stances that summarize researchers' assumptions about what can be known and how to go about such knowing. And at the broadest level, assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality are an important component of each researcher's worldview' (p. 54).

4.3.2 The Constructivist Ontological Axiom

Ontology refers to 'the study of being' (Crotty, 1998, p. 10) or reflects 'what we think reality looks like and how we view the world' (Bailey et al., 2011, p.11). It asks 'the question of what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108), or as Snape et al. (2014) put it:

> Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what there is to know about the world. Key ontological questions concern whether or not there is a social reality that exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations and, closely related to this, whether there is a shared social reality or only multiple, context-specific ones' (p. 4).

In the social sciences, there are two opposing ontological positions: realism and relativism. Realists, such as adherents of positivism, argue that 'both natural and social phenomena are assumed to have an existence that is independent of the activities of the human observer' (Blaikie, 2007, p. 13). This reality can be objectively measured through applying methods that limit our personal biases. Relativists, on the other hand, adopt the ontological stance that 'no external reality exists independent of our beliefs' (Snape et al., 2014, p. 5) and 'the social reality consists of the shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their everyday lives' (Blaikie, 2007, p. 16).

Relativist ontology is supported within constructivism because constructivists aim to see 'the world of experience as it is lived, felt, undergone by social actors' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236) and maintain that what is real is 'socially and experientially based' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p110). In this sense, reality is individually and socially made by individuals' interaction with different social activities, societies and cultures in a given context. Each individual has her/his unique version of reality because their experiences, perceptions, expectations and values influence their understanding of reality. In this sense, the individual is not a passive recipient of an absolute world, but rather an active and reflective participant who participates effectively in the construction of meaning.

As each individual's understanding of the social reality could be different or similar from another individual's understanding, varied sets of meanings and interpretations are shaped, resulting in creating multiple social realities. Consequently, in contrast to

realism or objectivism, constructivism rejects the existence of an objective unique real world that exists independently of human activities. Rather, it believes that reality is not fixed but rather deemed to be 'pluralistic in the sense that reality is expressible in a variety of symbol and language systems; and plastic in the sense that it is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of intentional human agents' (Schwandt, 1998, p. 237). Given the assumption that there are multiple constructed realities, 'it is not surprising that different constructions of reality should not be taken as "truer" constructions' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 87). Unlike positivists, who believe in using empirical observations and statistical analysis to discover truth, constructivists find truth as 'the most informed and sophisticated construction on which there is consensus among individuals most competent (not necessarily most powerful) to form such a construction' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 86).

4.3.3 The Constructivist Epistemological Axiom

Epistemology, on the other hand, is 'a theory of how human beings come to have knowledge of the world around them' (Blaikie, 2007, p. 18). It is concerned with issues such as 'what the relationship is between the inquirer and the known' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 31). According to Snape et al. (2014) it reflects on the 'ways of knowing and learning about the world and focuses on issues such as how we can learn about reality and what forms the basis of our knowledge' (p.16). It is a branch of philosophy that asks 'How can we be sure that we know what we know?' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, P. 83).

Compared to the dualistic and objective positivist epistemology that eliminates any subjective influences, constructivism adopts a transactional, subjective epistemology, viewing knowledge as value-laden. It is based on the key idea that knowledge is 'the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people' (Blaikie, 2007, p. 22). It takes a subjective view because researchers play an active role in the creation of the knowledge. Furthermore, it is transactional because the inquiry tends to be naturalistic which requires 'a commitment to study naturally occurring phenomena without introducing external controls or manipulation' (Patton, 1990, p. 119).

It seems like a logical consequence, when Guba and Lincoln (1989) assert that dealing

with the epistemological question mostly depends on how the ontological question has been defined. Since this is so, the acceptance of the belief in the existence of multiple social realities would lead to acknowledgement that knowledge is seen to be constructed from multiple meanings derived from active interaction between the researcher and the respondents. Thus, the inquiry into these multiple realities is value-laden and influenced by the views and the perspectives of both the participants and the researchers. It seems obvious that constructivist researchers adopt an active role, but this is not in the sense of being manipulative or controlling researchers (Patton, 1990). The need for researchers to be involved in the process of the inquiry is likely to be seen at two levels.

On the first level, the outcome of the inquiry is constructed through building personal interactive communication between the researchers and those who are involved in the inquiry, or as Guba and Lincoln (1989) put it, 'it is precisely their interaction that creates the data that will emerge from the inquiry' (p.88). This interactivity between the researchers and the participants contributes to the emergence of a range of views and further details, adding more depth of the data gained, and thus allowing for multiple meaning constructions to occur during the inquiry process.

On the other level, rather than viewing themselves as objective observers in the research process, the constructivists believe that they are

> '…human, and cannot escape their humanness. That is, they cannot by an act of will set aside their own subjectivity, nor can they can stand outside the arena of humanness created by the other persons involved' (Guba and Lincoln,1989, p.88).

As such they are recognized as bringing their own subjectivity to the research process, particularly when determining the choice of the problem to be investigated and during the process of data collection and interpretation. Thus, a researcher's background, emotions, views and stance play an important role in the research. Since this subjectivity and bias cannot be eliminated, Guba and Lincoln (1980) argue that constructivists 'enter the frame as learners, not claiming to know preordinately what is salient' (p.175). Their main goal of inquiry is to understand the phenomena from 'emic' perspectives. The concept of emic links closely to 'verstehen' developed by Weber (1864-1920, as cited by Blaikie, 2007, p. 125). As indicated by Blaikie (2007) seeking to describe verstehen means seeking to achieve understanding of social

phenomena in terms of 'the situation where two or more persons are engaged in conduct wherein each takes account of behavior of the other in a meaningful way and is therefore oriented in these terms' (Weber, 1926, cited by Blaikie, 2007, p. 127). It also refers to 'understanding the life of the people whom you study from their own perspective, in their own context and describing this using their own words and concepts' (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 17).

4.3.4 The Methodology of the Constructivism Paradigm

Creswell (1998) argues that different methodological approaches are underpinned by the ontological and epistemological stance of the researchers. Therefore, at this point, it seems appropriate to make a distinction between methodology and methods as these two terms are often confused and sometimes used as synonymous (McGregor and Murnane, 2010). Wellington (2000) refers to methodology as 'the activity or business of choosing, reflecting upon, evaluating and justifying the methods you use' (p.22). Clough and Nutbrown (2007) make a similar point as they say; 'one of the tasks for a methodology is to explain and justify the particular methods used in a given study' (p.27). Silverman (2000) explains that 'methodology defines how one will go about studying any phenomenon' (p.79). Research methodology does not only refer to a set of procedures used in a study but it may also refer to 'the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie any natural, social and human science study, whether articulated or not. Simply put, methodology refers to how each logic, reality, values and what counts as knowledge inform research' (McGregor and Murnane, 2010, p. 420).

Having assumed a relativist ontology and an interactive epistemology, constructivist methodology constitutes another layer aiming to 'expose the constructions of the variety of concerned parties, open each to critique in the terms of other constructions, and provide the opportunity for revised or entirely new constructions to emerge' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 89). In order to meet the conditions outlined above, Guba and Lincoln (1989) contend that the methodology used is the hermeneutical and dialectical. Hermeneutics is 'an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudice shape the interpretive process' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 27) and it aims to achieve a 'deeper level of knowledge and self-understanding' (Gray, 2004, p. 23). In contrast, dialectics, within constructivism, aims

to represent 'a comparison and contrast of divergent views with a view to achieving a higher-level synthesis of them all' Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 149). Guba (1990) presents a detailed description of this approach:

> The constructivist proceeds in ways that aim to identify the variety of constructions that exist and bring them into as much consensus as possible. This process has two aspects: hermeneutics and dialectics. The hermeneutic aspect consists in depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible, while the dialectic aspect consists of comparing and contrasting these existing individual (including the inquirer's) constructions so that each respondent must confront the constructions of others and come to terms with them. The hermeneutic/dialectic methodology aims to produce as informed and sophisticated a construction (or more likely, constructions) as possible' (p.26).

Elsewhere, in their book, Guba and Lincoln (1989) point out that their approach, compared to the fixed and linear approach in conventional positivist research, is more open, recursive and interactive to the extent that the fact that 'it is the more difficult methodology to enact may be taken as axiomatic' (p.183). The goal of this approach is 'to reach a consensus when that is possible; when it is not possible, the process at the very least exposes and clarifies the several different views and allows the building of an agenda of negotiation (about which more will be said later)' (p.149).

4.3.5 Quality Criteria in the Constructivism Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) have indicated that paradigmatic differences between positivism and constructivism underpin the use of different criteria to assess the quality of the research. The conventional evaluative standards include internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, but these criteria are not in harmony with constructivism. As a replacement for the traditional standards, a range of criteria have been suggested for judging the 'goodness, quality', and they are labeled as '*parallel, or foundational,* criteria because they are intended to parallel the rigorous criteria that have been used within the conventional paradigm' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, italics in original p. 233).

The first criterion is the credibility criterion, which is more relevant to constructivist research than is internal validity from the conventional paradigm. It refers to truth-value 'interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers' (Hammersley, 1990, p. 57). Given the underlying

assumptions of constructivism, to test truth one needs to replace the focus on 'the idea of isomorphism between findings and objective reality' in the positivism position, with 'isomorphism between constructed realities of respondents and the reconstructions attributed to them' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 237). Thus, the researchers would need to verify that the interpretations made were consistent with the participants' own interpretations. Credibility can be achieved by: (1) prolonged engagement with participants; (2) persistent observation in order to 'identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued' (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, as cited in Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.237); (3) peer debriefing where peer researchers are used for the purpose of engaging in 'extended and extensive discussions of one's findings, conclusions, tentative analyses, and, occasionally, filed stresses' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.237); (4) negative case analysis; (5) progressive subjectivity that is 'the process of monitoring the evaluator's (or any inquirer's) own developing construction'; (6) members checking which is the most important technique for establishing credibility. It is used to assess the fit between the constructions shaped by the researchers and those who provided them, the participants.

The second parallel criterion is transferability, which is said to correspond to external validity or generalizability in the traditional positivist paradigm. External validity can be defined in positivist terms as to what extent 'the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or other subjects' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.234) of the same type as the sample used in the study. In constructivist research, transferability is accomplished when the researchers provide sufficient information about themselves, the research context and culture, procedures, and participants in order to enable the readers to decide whether the findings would be transferable to their own situations.

The third criterion, dependability, corresponds to the reliability in the positivist paradigm. Reliability refers to 'the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions' (Hammersley, 1990, p. 67). Dependability is achieved through using an audit trail which documents detailed information about the research activities, processes and any influences on the data collocation and interpretation. Then, peer

researchers, a student's supervisor or a colleague, would examine the audit trail.

Lastly but not least, the conventional criterion of objectivity is replaced by conformability, which means 'assuring that data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in the contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not figments of the evaluator's imagination' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p.243). This means that the researchers must tie together the data, analysis and the findings into 'structurally coherent corroborating wholes'. In this way, the reader is then able to confirm the quality of the findings.

4.4 Alignment of this Study with the Constructivism Paradigm

In line with the purpose of the study and the research questions presented (4.2), this study naturally accords with a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. The focus of this study is to explore the understanding (constructions) that students have about their language difficulties when studying their content subjects through English-medium instruction, with the goal of achieving better understanding of the impact of the English courses offered by the ELC in the preparatory year on their academic experiences. This leads on to illuminating the main improvements the students see as essential to be implemented to enhance the EAP provision, from different points of view.

Following the relativist ontological perspective, I understand that each student in my study, as well as myself, has her or his own unique educational, family and gender background. Each one of us could be exposed to the same EFL learning/teaching context but may react differently according to the shaped understandings, which we have developed from our differing backgrounds. According to their experiences with learning English along with their values, beliefs and priorities, their understanding of their English language difficulties and the quality of the preparatory English programmes may be uniquely constructed. Yet, this does not mean that these students interpret their experience of learning and being taught English in isolation from their social context. Each student is a complex entity as in my study she or he comes from a Muslim family, belonging to a conservative society and interacting with different individuals in a number of varied contexts, including home, school and university. All these components are assimilated by the students and may be expected to shape their

experience and evaluation of the preparatory English programmes. As a researcher, I am aware that students will develop a variety of different and similar constructions. At the same time, I am open to accept that the constructed meanings developed by the students about their English academic experiences do not provide absolute truth (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Influenced by constructivist epistemology, I adopt a subjective view of knowledge as being gained through interaction between the researcher and the study participants, the students and me. My aim is to elicit how undergraduate students enrolled in the pharmacy course, after they have completed a one year pre-tertiary mandatory intensive English course, construct their individual and shared understanding of their language difficulties, factors causing them, and the impact of that course on them. As a researcher, I am aware that researchers, as Guba and Lincloln (1989) suggested, are human beings and co-constructors of meaning. In this sense, researchers will be scrutinized regarding the impact on the findings of their biases and assumptions that reflect their own personal experiences.

In order to deal with subjectivity, reflexivity is used as 'a process that involves conscious self-reflection on the part of the researchers to make explicit their potential influence on the research process' (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 19). This implies that researchers are 'part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture they are trying to understand and analyze' (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, p. 43). My argument is similar to Levy's (2003) that it is used 'not in order to suspend subjectivity, but to use the researcher's personal interpretive framework consciously as the basis for developing new understandings' (p.94). Following Levy (2003), I practised reflexivity throughout the research process to reflect on any potential influence I may have on how I design the research, select participants, conduct the data collection and interpret the findings.

Within constructivism, there is also acknowledgement that inquiry should be carried out in a natural setting involving the hermeneutical and dialectical methodology. For this to happen qualitative data gathering methods tend to be linked to the philosophy of constructivism and interviews and focus groups are examples of its data collection methods. From this perspective, as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) indicated, purist positions have emerged associated with the constructivist and positivist paradigms. Constructivists may be seen as 'qualitative purists' and positivists have been termed

'quantitative purists'. Within the boundaries of the 'incompatibility thesis' concept, it seems obvious that I must establish consistency between the philosophical stance I take and the research methods I choose for this research inquiry. However, it is not entirely clear for me when my attempt to clarify why the adopted research methods are not preferred by my stance.

Yet, it was not easy for me to jump on a decision quickly. A month of confusion until I came to read that literature has suggested a number of attempts to solve this dilemma. Hammersley (2004), for example, suggests that novice researchers should be encouraged to become 'neither ostriches nor fighting cocks'. Patton (1980), on the other hand, argues that when making method decisions 'all kinds of variations, combinations and adaptations are available for creative and practical situational responsiveness' (p.39). Schwandt (2000) points out that the inquirers 'must employ some kind of method that allows them to step outside their historical frames of references' (p.193). Hammersley (1995) echoes Patton's view maintaining that the choice of methods should be fitted to the purpose of inquiry. He puts, 'selection among these positions ought often to depend on the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being derived from methodological or philosophical commitments' (p.51)

4.5 Constructivist Case Study as a Research Approach

For the purpose of my study, I adopted the case study approach, which is strongly associated with the constructivist perspective, and qualitative data gathering. Yin (2003) provides a series of important design considerations for case studies, based on the literature (Cohen et al., 2000). Firstly, the case must be a clearly defined 'unit of analysis' (p.22) including what is being studied and in what physical context. Secondly, the researchers should consider the most viable data collection methods within the case. Following this, the main unit of analysis in my study are the English courses in the preparatory year, i.e English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme offered by the English Language Center (ELC) at Umm Al-Qura University, involving participating female and male undergraduate students studying in the Department of Pharmacy. It relies on a variety of data collection methods including questionnaires with a larger number of students along with interviews with a smaller number of students and focus groups.

Case study has a number of evident advantages, particularly within the context of my study. Firstly, case study is compatible with the viewpoint of a constructivist. As constructivism focuses on an in-depth understanding of how meanings are created in a naturalistic setting, case study, in its true essence, explores and investigates 'a contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially within the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident' (Yin, 2003, p. 13). It allows the researcher to consider particular trends, theories, and hypotheses from within the situation in which they exist. As indicated by Adelman et al (1980, as cited in Bassey, 1999), 'case study data, paradoxically, is "strong in reality" but difficult to organize. This is in contrast to other research data which is often 'weak in reality' but susceptible to ready organization' (p.23). Secondly, it also allows the researcher to explore multiple perspectives and viewpoints in one study reflecting on how and why things happened. It enables researchers not only to describe or explore a real-life context, but also uncovers a wide range of complex topics of real-life situations, which may not be explored through experimental or survey research. Cohen et al. (2000) assert that, 'it provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles' (p.181). This view is also supported by Yin (2003), who contends that, 'case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events' (p.2). Thirdly, one important element in the case study is triangulation. Furthermore, it is flexible as it 'provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited timescale' (Bell, 2010, p.10). It also can accommodate different methods of data collection, both qualitative and quantitative. Supporting this view, Bell (2010) asserts that 'though observation and interviews are most frequently used in case study, no method is excluded' (p. 8).

Despite these advantages, case studies have been accused of providing very little basis for generalization. Yet, Denscombe (2003) was concerned about the potential to generalize, writing that 'the extent to which findings from the case can be generalized to other examples in the class depends on how far the case study example is similar to other of its type' (p.43). To Bassey (1981), however, relatability is far important in case study than generalizability. He argues that presenting sufficient details about the phenomena under the study would contribute to addressing the call for other

researchers working in a similar situation to relate their situation to that described in the case study. He makes it clear that he still holds to this view when he points out that if case studies 'are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable, and if by publication of the findings they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research' (Bassey, 1981, p. 86).

Although case studies are not immune to criticisms, they are likely to be supported by researchers in the field of EAP, including recent studies conducted by Evans and Morrison (2007; 2011) and Evans and Green (2007) to examine language difficulties encountered by students in adapting to the new English-medium contexts. Consequently, I could use Bell's words (2010) 'case study can be an appropriated approach for individual researchers in any discipline because it provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth' (p.10).

4.6 Research Instruments (1): Questionnaire

The main purpose of the use of the questionnaire in my study is to provide data to answer the first research question, as its use 'can provide answers to questions What? Where? When and How, but it is not easy to find out Why?' (Bell, 2010, p.12). The questionnaire is an efficient method of collecting a considerable amount of data from a large number of people in a relatively short time. It can reduce bias because each participant is subjected to the same set of items with the same range of responses. It can also increase truthful responses on the part of participants, if anonymity can be assured.

Thus, a self-report questionnaire was developed to elicit an understanding of students' perceptions about the English skills required in their content courses and their difficulties when they are exposed to English-medium instruction. The questionnaire was useful because it helped me to study a wide range of pharmacist students in a short period of time. Compared to interviews, it involves less thinking and is less time-consuming as it provides the students with space to rank their opinions in a flexible way. This had the advantage that student participants who might be engaged in a busy timetable needed very little time and effort to complete it.

4.6.1 Questionnaire Content (The English Version)

Fink (2013, p. 29) states that 'once you have decided that a survey is the method you want to use to gather data, you must consider the content or topics it will include'. Student questionnaires in my study focused on eliciting information about students' reported language difficulties in academic reading, speaking, writing and listening along with their views about the types of academic tasks which they are expected to perform in English in their degree courses. Cohen et al. (2000) pointed out that questionnaires should be clear, simple and understandable for the sake of getting satisfactory responses. Later, I translated the questionnaire into Arabic since all my participants were native Arabic speakers. Thus, there were two versions the English version, labelled as (E-ver.) (see appendix 4-1) and the other one was (A-ver.) which stands for the Arabic version (see appendix 4-2)

To enhance the clarity of the questionnaire, I included instructions on how to answer questions, tables and response boxes opposite each closed question, and suitable spaces for answering open-ended ones. To encourage cooperative responses, I also began the questionnaire with an introduction including an invitation with a short description of the purpose of the study, along with thanking participants for taking part in my research. It consisted of four sections: personal information, academic task requirements, difficulties in academic English skills and open-ended questions on the same topics.

 The first section (i.e. Part 1) covered the participants' personal information and it was divided into closed and open-ended questions. There were two closed questions asking about undergraduate level and gender. The other three open-ended questions invited students to write additional information about: how long they have studied English, what kind of study and how long they have studied English beyond general education and whether they have studied English in any other country where English is the first language.

The second section (i.e. Part 2) consisted of three questions: one was an open-ended question asking students to specify a specific pharmacy course which they were studying in their college where they were relying mostly on English for studying it. Bearing that course in mind, students were then invited to indicate whether or not they

were required to perform some academic tasks in English in that course and to indicate if are there other uses of English that I have not mentioned. The third section (i.e. Part 3) asked students to assess their own difficulties in each macro skill (reading, speaking, writing and listening) associated with their micro-skills (e.g., Reading quickly for the main ideas is a micro-skill for the macro skill, Reading). Finally, the fourth section (i.e. Part 4) consisted of open-ended questions, developed to give students the opportunity to comment and express their own views about any of the above (see appendix 4-1).

4.6.2 The Development and Piloting of the Questionnaire (The English Version)

The content of the questionnaire was carefully considered and went through several stages in its development process (Griffee, 1997). The first stage is the process of finding what items might be included in the newly developed questionnaire. Griffee (1997, p. 181) argued that one way in thinking about the items included in the questionnaire could be 'to ask students similar to those for whom the questionnaire is being developed for items'. Building on this, I personally contacted two female pharmacists and asked them about what problems they had with English in their pharmacy courses. Furthermore, Allen (1995) suggested that 'brainstorming items from researcher intuition as well as gathering items from the literature' (cited in Griffee, 1997, p. 181) could be another way. In accordance with this, I consulted research articles and textbooks in the field of ESP and EAP to see whether there were items to include or whether there were any questionnaires to draw on as a guide for constructing the new questionnaire: Evans and Green (2007), Ferris (1988), Ferris and Tagg (1996), Kirkgoz (2009), Hyland (2006), Jordan (1997), Dudley-Evans and John (1998), Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Using items already used in several studies may have the advantage that they were measured and pre-tested (Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg, 1998). Furthermore, Fink (2013, p. 68) concurred that 'one way to make sure that you are using a reliable and valid survey is to rely on one that has been carefully tested by other surveyors and researchers'. Hence, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire used for my study could be supported.

Secondly, I designed the first draft of the questionnaire including several questions formulated to suit the aim of this study. Thirdly, I consulted my PhD supervisor and two PhD students in the school of Education at the University of Sheffield for their

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opinions and suggestions. My aim was to elicit from them whether there were some necessary items missed or some inadequate ones that could be eliminated (Griffee, 1997). Fourthly, since the English version of this questionnaire was to be translated into Arabic language, my argument is similar to that of Griffee's (2001, p. 4) who asserts that 'the translation could not be valid since the original English language instrument on which it was based was not validated'. Taking this into consideration, I consulted an expert in the field from the department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex, so as to provide content validation. Based on their observations, I reworded some unclear items to elicit the right information from the participants. I also reconstructed the Yes and No responses in the second section, in question number (7), because asking for either positive or negative responses may lead to the participants' refusal to answer (Fink, 2013). Thus, a third response 'Somewhat' was added in between Yes and No responses.

Finally, I pilot tested the English version of the questionnaire to ensure that the participants would understand the questions easily. I personally contacted two female students, who had studied EAP courses and graduated from the Pharmacy College in 2010. I contacted through Apple Software 'WhatApp' and asked them to write me their emails so I could send them a copy of my questionnaire. Their feedback on its clarity and content was positive. However, they suggested improving the clarity of some words by giving examples for them. For example, in the third section (Part 3), item number 31, words such as ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion were not clear to them. Although the English version was not to be used in the main study, I took their suggestion into consideration when I constructed the Arabic version. Furthermore, they suggested some items, which had not crossed my mind. One item suggested by one of them was about the confusion resulted from changing the language of instruction from Arabic into English or vice versa. Based on their suggestions, items were written and changes were made. The second important step in the use of instrument in my study was translating it into Arabic. This will be expanded upon in the next subsection.

4.6.3 Questionnaire Translation and Piloting (The Arabic Version)

The main reason for translating the questionnaire is 'to be able to field an instrument not available in the language required for fielding' (Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg,

1998, p. 87). The other reason is to ensure that participants understand the content of the questionnaire and thus to increase their response rate and the accuracy of their responses. It is 'the most frequently adopted approach and certainly the majority of researchers see it as the most viable option' (ibid, .p 92). The translation of the questionnaire was carried out when the researcher went back to KSA for data collection.

The translation process was carried out by the researcher with the help of three translators working as one group. All the members were females, native Arabic speakers and had competence in English and knowledge of surveys. Two of them had Master's degrees in Translation awarded from UQU and also worked regularly as teachers at the same university. The third one was an external translator who is currently completing her PhD in Applied Linguistics at the University of Essex. The last one was the researcher of this study, myself. Working as a team to produce a translation is supported by Forsyth et al. (2006, p. 4115), who point out that 'team approaches generate more translation options and provide sounder and less idiosyncratic translation review and evaluation'. Information about the translation group and the assigned tasks is shown in Table 4-1.

Table 4.1
Details of the translation group members

Translator Code	Degree	Field	Task	Number of years of teaching English	Place of work
Ts1	MA	Translation	Arabic translation	10	UQU
Ts2	MA	ESP	Arabic translation	10	UQU
Ts3	MA	Translation	Back translation	14	UQU
Ts4	PhD	Sociolinguistics	Assess the back translated version and the original version	4	University of Hail

Since the translation process may inherit subjective interpretations from the translators themselves, Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) argue for the importance of providing translators with specific information on how to go through

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this process. This can be achieved through exchange of information between the questionnaire designer and the translators about 'what is required in terms of measurement, what is intended in terms of textual communication, what is possible in terms of translation versus other forms of adaptation, and where particular language and/or culture problems may arise' (ibid. p.97). Furthermore, Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) argue that survey translation should be 'covert translation'. Covert translation is the production of 'a target language text which reads like an original text of the given text type in the target language and thus does not signal that it is a translation'.

In order to achieve that, they suggested the following guidelines. (1) The translated questionnaire is 'required to ask the same questions and offer the same response options as a source text'. (2) The translated questionnaire should sound like the original target questionnaire. Thus, translation may require change, adaptation and compromise. (3) Avoid 'close translation' or 'direct translation'; that refers to 'word-for-word' translation where 'formations, words and syntax are copied or imitated across language'. (4) The goal of the translation is to 'convey the intended and most salient reading of a well-written question' (ibid, 92-96). (5) The translated questionnaire should be back translated into English language. This process refers to 'the translation of a translation back into the source language'. It can also be used as an assessment of the validity of the translated text. Its main aim is to 'compare/contrast the back translation with the source text, usually with a view to assessing the quality of a translation' (ibid, p.111).

Following Harkness and Schoua-Glusberg (1998) and Willis (2006), I therefore employed four steps: (1) Translators 1 and 2 translated the English version into Arabic language, (2) Translator 3 translated the translated questionnaire (A-ver.) back into the English language, (3) translator 4 evaluated the back translated version and compared it with the original one. (4) Translator 2 implemented the changes. The last step (5) was to submit the Arabic version to be assessed by a monolingual assessor. This assessor is a teacher teaching Arabic language classes in a secondary school in Makkah. The main aim of this step was to see whether the translated version is written in proper Classical Arabic text and can be easily understood by an Arabic reader. He identified some translation deficiencies and suggested more adequate

grammatical solutions for them. More specifically, various issues were checked such as its syntax, morphology, word order, spelling and punctuation.

Throughout the course of the translation process, there were equivalence problems, which arose from the fact that English and Arabic differ in their vocabulary, grammar and syntax. These discrepancies were given careful consideration because any difference in the translation might have considerable influence on the intended meaning of the questions (Sechrest et al., 1972). Thus, longer words in the Arabic language were used to attain grammatical equivalence and to convey the most accurate meaning. I have chosen one example that seems to be most appropriate. While the total words of item number 23 in the English version was 8 words, there were 10 words in the first and the second Arabic translated versions. However, after various discussions between translator 1 and me, different translations were proposed but we were satisfied with the final version which included 14 Arabic words. Item number 23, the Arabic translation examples and the final agreed translation are all presented in Table 4-2

Table 4.2
The translation process of item no. 23 from English into Arabic

The original Version	Translator 1	Translator 2	Translators 1+2
English version	1st Arabic translated version	2nd Arabic translated version	The final agreed version
23. Distinguishing the main ideas from the supporting details	معرفه الفرق بين الافكار الرئيسه والافكار الفرعيه اثناء قراءه الجمله	التمييز بين الفكره الرئيسيه والفكره الفرعيه اثناء قراءه جمله ما	التمييز بين ما اذا كانت هنالك فكره رئيسيه او فكره فرعيه في الجمله الواحده
(Literal translation)	To know how to distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting ones	Distinguishing between the main idea and the supporting idea when reading a sentence	Distinguishing between the main idea and the supporting idea when reading a sentence

The final Arabic version was emailed to translator 4 to translate it back into English. Because of her busy timetable and lack of time, translator 4 agreed to translate some chosen items rather the whole questionnaire. Since she volunteered her services for

free, I respected her decision. I was also pressed for time at this stage and felt that it would not be easy for me to find another translator at short notice. Furthermore, she was the best choice because she had an MA degree in translation and worked in the same context where I conducted my study where she had gained considerable experience in teaching translation courses to English major undergraduate students. On one level, her feedback concerning the adequacy of the translation was technically important. On another level, she helped me through the knowledge she had acquired from teaching students particularly about the nature of their struggle to master English in her classes.

The last step was for an expert in the Arabic language to examine the Arabic translated version. The assessor checked if there were any spelling or grammatical mistakes. He provided more accurate word choices and more meaningful Arabic expressions to make sure that the questions and the items would be understood as fully as possible. Taking the previous example item 23, the assessor started the sentence with this word: **ability=القدرة.** Starting with this word helped to produce a more accurate Arabic grammatical structure. Although the number of words increased to 18 words, compared to the final A-ver., the sentence was formulated in a more readable and understandable and accurate way. Table 4-3 shows the final Arabic agreed translation and the assessor's modifications.

Table 4-3
Final modifications to item no. 23 in the translated Arabic questionnaire

The English version	**The final Arabic version**	**The assessor's modifications**
23. Distinguishing the main ideas from the supporting details	التمييز بين ما اذا كانت هنالك فكره رئيسيه او فكره فرعيه في الجمله الواحده	القدرة علي التمييز بين الجمل التي تحتوي علي الأفكار الرئيسية والجمل الفرعية التي تشرح تلك الأفكار الرئيسية
(Literal translation)	Distinguishing between the main idea and the supporting idea when reading a sentence	The ability to distinguish between sentences which include the main ideas and the supporting sentences which explain those main ideas.

Finally, I pilot tested the Arabic version to ensure that my participants would easily

understand the questions. The questionnaires were distributed to nine female students studying pharmacy who were in their third year. I asked them to complete them while I was present in case they had any queries. Their comments were positive and they understood the questions easily. They took about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

4.6.4 Questionnaire Administration

The UQU instructors were consulted on the availability of students to respond to the questionnaire. Two classes were visited with 55 female students where the instructors generously offered 20-25 minutes of their class time for questionnaire distribution and collection. Although it was intended to hand out the questionnaire personally to the male students in order to maximize the response rate, I could not do that due to the strict legal requirement to separate genders in educational contexts. Thus, my husband distributed the questionnaire to the male classes. During the distribution of the questionnaire to the male participants, I was connected to the mobile phone of my husband so as to be able to supply any clarification, which might be required.

4.7 Research Instruments (2): Interviews

Interviews address many of the concerns that a questionnaire-based data collection method raises in the context of my study. As Yin (2003) has indicated, 'One of the most important sources of case study information is the interviews' (p.89). Thus, interviews can follow up on answers with questions that probe participants' behaviors, feelings and perceptions in greater depth' (Cohen et al., 2000). Furthermore, they 'are also useful where it is likely that people may enjoy talking about their work rather than filling in questionnaires' (Gray, 2004, p.214). The use of interviews is very compatible with the constructivist case study nature of my study.

Firstly, it draws on my epistemological assumptions, which emphasize that knowledge is individually and socially constructed through interaction between the researcher and the participants. This view is well presented by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) cited in Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p.57) when they state, 'respondents are not so much repositories of knowledge-treasuries of information waiting excavation as they are constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers'.

Secondly, and more specifically, I was interested in finding out students' perceptions about their academic experiences when adapting to the demands of English-medium instruction and their views about the impact of the EAP course on their language development. Ideally, one possible way to gather that information from the students was to conduct interviews. Interviews involve uncovering subjective meanings that my participants shape about their experience and that allow me to understand the process of how they make sense of their experiences. This view is in line with Wellington (2000) who points out that the interviews can be used as a means of 'allowing researchers to investigate and prompt things that we cannot observe like the interviewee's thoughts, values, prejudice, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives' (p.71). Thirdly, interviews are useful in they way they can explore 'the complexity and in-process nature of meaning and interpretations that cannot be examined using positivist methodologies' (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, p.56). I found that that some participants did not feel confident enough to reveal their feelings and perceptions on paper, particularly if they were being required to write about their experiences in a very limited time. Thus, interviews enabled my participants to be more open to talking about their language problems.

4.7.1 Interview Content and Design

In my study, face-to-face interviews were used to gather data from both female and male students studying pharmacy at UQU. The semi-structured approach was selected for conducting the interviews. Opie (2004, p. 118) makes a broad distinction between structured interviews, which often 'use large samples and are organized round a prearranged schedule of questions, which are short, direct and capable of immediate simple answers', and the unstructured interviews which 'presuppose nothing about the direction of the interview or what is to be learned'. On the other hand, Gray (2004) has five categories of interviews consisting of structured interviews, non-directive interviews, focused interviews, informed conservational interviews and the semi-structured interviews. The latter category of interview is a compromise between the two main types and often makes use of a prearranged 'list of issues and questions to be covered, but may diverge as new issues arise' (Gray, 2004, p.217). In this way, it was possible for me to use prompts to encourage respondents to expand on their views and opinions.

In the light of this, I felt that structured interviews were not suitable for the type of data I wanted to generate in my study. Since structured interviews involve using pre-prepared list of questions, participants are limited in the issues that can be raised and discussed. Furthermore, closed questions might influence their desire to expand on their answers and thus would restrict the depth of information obtained from them. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, use very broad open-ended questions which can be built upon according to the participants' flow of ideas and feelings. The participants are allowed to talk freely about their topics and thus there is a chance that interviews would drift away from the main themes of the study. For the purpose of this study, I felt that since I had prior knowledge about the themes that I wished to explore and at the same time I wanted to elicit a rich account of participants' opinions and feelings by providing the opportunity for further probing into the participants' views, a semi-structured format using an interview schedule would be the best approach (see appendix 4-3).

In line with the questionnaire, the content of the interviews was developed through three stages. Stage 1 involved close reading of the literature about types of language difficulties EFL students in general, and Saudi students in particular, may experience when learning English, especially at tertiary level (e.g., Liton, 2012). I also looked at studies conducted to assess the impact of an intensive preparatory English programmes on university students' academic experiences (e.g., Al-Shumaimeri, 2013; Zohrabi, 2011; Al-Seweed and Daif-Allah, 2012; Zohrabi et al, 2012). In stage 2, I thought that it would be better, rather than constructing a schedule solely based on relevant studies as a primary source, to ask the students themselves about what elements of the English programmes they found most beneficial and if there were any elements they considered to be of less benefit. I also asked a content course teacher teaching in the department of pharmacy about what she thought about the purpose and the impact of that courses on students' English language proficiency.

After the interview schedule was formulated, I translated it into Arabic. The interview translation from English into Arabic was co-conducted by translator 1 and the researcher. Based on prior experience with the questionnaire, I felt that using an expert assessor in the Arabic language was an important step. Consequently, the translated interview schedule was emailed to the same assessor to be checked in terms

of its grammar and style (see appendix 4-4).

4.7.2 Interview Procedures and Constraints

I came to know the second year representative students for both female and male students through the help of personal contacts. These representatives introduced me to the other students in their group and that helped me a lot in recruiting interview and focus group participants. Having been introduced by someone they already knew created mutual trust in me as a person not as a teacher or a researcher. In particular, I was able to obtain their personal contact numbers and email addresses.

I conducted interviews with an approximate time of around one hour for each interview. I used a pre-interview questionnaire covering students' demographic information and other personal details such as their mobile number and emails (see Appendix 4-5). The purpose of this sheet was to save time so that the interview could move directly to finding out what participants wanted to tell me about their English experiences and perceptions, rather than to spend time finding out their personal backgrounds. Furthermore, having their personal contact mobile and email addresses helped me to contact them when there was a need for that. I also used it as a memo for jotting down any emerging themes or important notes.

Deciding where to conduct the interviews with the female students was not difficult compared to the male participants. I conducted all the interviews in an office, which a colleague of mine kindly offered for conducting interviews with females. Nevertheless, I was confronted with two challenges in the conduct of the female interviews. One challenge arose when I had to reschedule interviews several times with one female participant who was unavailable due to transportation difficulties. In this case, we rescheduled and met at a later date at her house. The second challenge arose when two female participants were uncomfortable with the idea of audio-recording the interview. As I was not only interested in what they say, but also the ways in which they express themselves, including their body language, audio-recording the interview was therefore unavoidable. Furthermore, interviews require complete attention to what the participants say so as I could carefully listen to their answers and follow up interesting points when necessary. To deal with that, I successfully arranged an informal meeting with both of them hoping to familiarize

myself with them and to break the ice between us. I felt that they were reluctant because they feared that the information they provide would be used inappropriately. Finally, I managed to convince one of them to take part in the interview. The other one showed her refusal on the grounds that recoding her voice could be seen as *awrah*[10].

In addition to these challenges when carrying out the interviews with the female participants, it is unacceptable for male students to be interviewed face to face by a female since the idea of such proximity in an educational setting between a male and non-relative female in the KSA is considered culturally immoral and embarrassing. Due to this, male participants were also reluctant to take part in my study (for additional information see Chapter 1.). For instance, there was one male participant who was initially willing to express his views and feelings. Later on, however, he revealed to my husband how sensitive the situation would be for him if a female researcher were the interviewer.

There were two possible solutions: either to conduct telephone interviews or to use multiple interviewers. Oppenheim (1992) points out that one of the advantages of telephone interviews is that the response rate could be raised because the interviewer is invisible. In my study, telephone interviews tended to be useful but I felt the participants were not relaxed, particularly when I noticed the interview tended to be more like a formal conversation. Use of multiple interviewers, on the other hand, proved the best choice in my case. As Gray (2004) reports, multiple interviewers can be useful as each one is assigned to play different roles. The second interviewer was my husband who acted as a link between the male participants and me. He went to the male section and personally met with the male participants asking their consent to take part in my study. He provided them with the information about the interview time and place and responded to any concerns they might have initially. Unexpectedly, the male participants then positively agreed to be interviewed by me at my house. They kindly accepted our invitation and were warmly received by my husband and me upon their arrival at our house. I thought that being seated with me while I was wearing the *burqa* would influence the interactive discussion and the eye

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[10] 'Awrah' is a term used by Muslims refers to the 'intimate parts of the body, for both men and women, which must be covered with clothing' (Islamic Terminology Dictionary).

contact between us. Yet, *burqa* was very helpful as it helped me to look decent enough and hence they were encouraged to talk freely and to look at my eyes. In other words, it allowed normal eye contact and also did not hinder me from catching their body languages.

I also was worried that interviewees might be nervous about expressing their views or could be tempted to provide answers that I wanted to hear. My worries resulted from their awareness that I was an insider carrying out the study, particularly in a context where students are supposed not to challenge educational practices but are expected to adjust themselves to them. Interestingly, I noted that although some of them were quite reticent at first, they became open as they felt that they could trust me as a sister who they could share their stories with. This mutual trust allowed them to make frank comments about the quality of the English courses and other features such as the textbooks and teachers. When conducting interviews with both females and males, I noticed that using Arabic, (the Saudi colloquial) was not only useful as it left no room for misunderstanding of any type between the participants and me but also to encourage them to speak easily and sometimes to elaborate. Furthermore, it helped me to develop a genuine intimacy between us, which in turn, allowed for a natural flow of views, feelings and ideas.

During the interview, I used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews. In conjunction with audio recording, I took notes about the participants' body language and any other important points.

4.8 Research Instruments (3): Focus Group Discussions

The 'focus group interview is not a group interview. It refers to a group of people gathered to discuss a 'focused issue of concern'' (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, p. 81). Focus group discussions, according to Bailey et al., (2011, p, 136), provide 'a focus on specific issues, with a predetermined group of people, conducting an interactive discussion'. The participants in the group are asked a series of questions by the researcher so that they can share their opinions, attitudes and feelings (Denscombe, 2003). Thus, interaction between the participants is a unique feature in the focus group discussion and this constitutes the main difference between it and the individual interview. Hennink et al, (2011, p. 136) contend that 'the interactive nature of data collection found in a group discussion enables this method to generate more insights

on the research issues than a series of in-depth interviews with the same number of participants'. Focus group discussions can be used as a 'self-contained method' or 'in combination of several approaches'. In my study, I used focus group discussions in conjunction with questionnaires and interviews because I aimed with a constructivist perspective to explore students' personal and shared views about the nature of the EAP program offered by the ELC and how it can be improved to address students' language and academic needs.

A total of four focus group sessions with a total number of 20 participants were held in two different locations. Two of them were conducted with female participants in an office in the Department of Pharmacy (female section) at UQU. Each focus group comprised five females. To overcome communication difficulties and religious regulations, the focus groups with the male participants were held in the living room at my house in the presence of my husband. There were only two sessions, with six participants in the first session and four participants in the second.

The composition of the participants in a focus group plays an important role in the interaction process. It is argued that homogeneous groups would have something in common so that they would be more likely to discuss similar experiences. Thus, I decided to recruit students who are currently studying in the same year at the same department to be the focus group participants. The idea of using homogeneous participants is supported by Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005, p. 83) who assert that 'the reason for this is simple: They feel that others in the group can understand them better because of the shared experience'. I was surprised when some of the students who refused to take part in the individual interviews were willing to be included in the focus group discussions. I felt that their willingness to be included stemmed from the fact that they would feel more relaxed about talking with a group of people rather being put on the spot when individually interviewed. Since I anticipated that the focus group would last longer than an hour, I decided to provide the participants with traditional Arabic coffee with dates and deserts, as I thought that they would feel more relaxed and comfortable if they had the chance to eat and drink together. I was aware that the locations for conducting focus group discussions are supposed to be comfortable and free of distractions because if not the participants' contributions to the

discussion might be affected. Both locations, whether the classroom at the UQU or my living room at my house, were private and quiet.

I prepared a discussion guide (see Appendix 4-6), which served as 'a memory aid for the moderator to ensure that the key topics are covered during the discussion period' (Baiely et al., 2011, p. 141). I translated it into Arabic (see appendix 4-7). I introduced myself to the participants and outlined the scope of my study and its main objectives. Next, I moved to ask them key questions to generate discussion on the key topics corresponding to all the research questions posted in my study. During the discussions, I used a great number of probes to elicit detailed information from them. All focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder after I obtained their consent. I transcribed the data in Arabic and after that I translated it into English.

4.9 Validation

The use of triangulation is supported by Patton (2001) by stating 'triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches' (p.247). Although triangulation is used in the positivist paradigm for the purpose of generalizing findings to wider population, Guba and Lincoln (1989) do not disregard the notion of triangulation in constructivism and indeed it could involve a quantitative instrument since 'there is nothing in this formulation that militates against the use of quantitative methods; the constructivist is obviously free to use such methods without prejudice when it is appropriate to do so' (p.176). The declared aim of triangulation within constructivism is to 'clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But, acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable' (Stake, 1998, p. 97). For the purpose of my study and in accordance with the research questions being asked, I used three different methods of data collection.

The use of the 'triangulation by procedures' approach (Scaife, 2004, p. 70) enabled me to 'balance out any of the weakness in each data collocation method' as well as to form a richer understanding of the issues under study (Gray, 2004, p. 33). In line with Stake's view of triangulation, I looked for the occurrence of information on various issues relating to students' language difficulties and the impact of the EAP course on

their English academic experiences. The female and male students had their own perspectives about the English programme and its impact on their English level of proficiency particularly when they were taught their content subjects through English-medium instruction.

The concept of validity is affected by the researcher's choice of paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Within constructivism, Guba and Lincoln (1989) strongly recommend the use of credibility as 'a useful indicator of goodness in case study research' (Sturman, 1999, as cited in Gray, 2004, p. 71). Member checking is considered the most important technique for establishing credibility. It is used to assess the fit between the constructions shaped by the researchers and the ideas of those who provided the data, the participants. To implement this technique, I emailed all the students who took part in interviews seeking their feedback and comments on what was missing or misunderstood in their interview accounts. As my participants were all students who were preoccupied with other personal and academic duties, I made it clear to them that they could reply to my request at their convenience and their agreement to do so was based on a voluntary decision. When the students positively responded to my emails and agreed to look at their responses, I emailed the Arabic transcripts to each one of them. Their feedback was positive and there was no additional data to be included. I also used peer debriefing where I asked one Saudi Arabian PhD student studying at the School of Education at the University of Sheffield to review 10% of the interview transcriptions, the participants' quotations which I used in the report of findings so as to validate the translation, and the qualitative analysis.

4.10 Transcription

After the data had been recorded, I transcribed it in the original language –Arabic. Transcription involves 'making a written of record of an interview or group discussion (called a transcript) for data analysis' (Bailey et al., 2011, p. 211). During my MA degree, I had the chance to practise transcribing interviews conducted in English. Transcribing interviews conducted in my native language was less difficult. In each interview transcript, I checked each transcript against the original recording for any omission or misunderstanding.

All the interview transcripts, translated transcripts and my notes were saved and labeled with a filename in my computer. For example, (Arabic-MA) is a filename which relates to the Arabic transcript of a male participant whose pseudonym is Ali so his initial is A. Likewise, the translated transcript of the same participant was labeled with (English-MA) as its filename. Then, I combined all the transcripts along with my debriefing notes into one file document that was named (A+E MA).

This document file was divided into four columns, of which the first was used to identify who is speaking by using the initials - A for Ali and Z for my name. The second column contained the Arabic interview transcript. Next to that, the English translation was included in the third column. The last column was for any field notes I jotted down when I conducted the interview with Ali. These notes were written in the form of a shorthand summary and were used to indicate important verbatim quotations or additional information about particular events.

4.11 Data Translation

Translation is defined as 'replacement of text in a source language by text in target language *equivalent* in meaning' (Muller, 2007, p. 207). But, the term equivalent in meaning, to Muller (2007), involves complexity and implies 'the transfer of cultural meanings, embedded in linguistic expressions'. In line with his views, Grane et al., (2009) described translation as 'making sense of and transferring meaning from one space context into another; beyond the translation of language, it also involves translation of the meaning of social and cultural practices and artifacts' (p. 40). Thus, I did not translate word for word because literal translation into English may lead to loss of the subtle meaning. My position as an insider was helpful as it assisted me to easily identify and understand the contextual and cultural aspects of participants' responses.

The cost associated with data translation, in terms of time and effort was significant and intellectually challenging. Nevertheless, I decided to translate all recorded data into English by myself. I preferred to do that by myself, as I felt that my involvement in the interview and focus group process would contribute to a deeper understanding of my participants' words and expressions. Furthermore, given that I have first-hand

knowledge of the subject under study and had previous experience of translation (translating the questions of the questionnaire, interview and focus group guides), I thought that I would be able to undertake an accurate translation.

My first approach with translation was to listen to the recorded interviews and attempt to write the Arabic transcription and English translation at the same time. But, when I read the translated transcripts I found that there were some parts that did not make any sense. Therefore, I decided to transcribe the recorded data in my native language first and then translate it into English in a second transcript.

During the process of translation, I sometimes felt I was lost and not sure where to start. Translating the recorded participants' responses was not like translating the questions in the questionnaire or the interview or focus group guides. Unlike their responses in the questionnaire, the participants' answers to the interview and focus group questions were full of mixed emotions, long complicated narratives showing deep cultural, social and religious influences colored with interesting youthful expressions and slang.

Difficulties arose throughout the process of translation. One of these difficulties was related to the fact that there are some Arabic expressions that are associated with religious perceptions that could not be easily understood by anyone who is not familiar with Islam. This makes the task of translation harder and time-consuming for me as I consulted dictionaries to find the precise equivalent for them in English. A good example of these expressions was *Qadar Allah wa ma sha'a fa'al* (God's Will) or *Subhan'allah* (Exalted is God). Therefore, I wrote such words as they were said and included between brackets what they exactly mean in English. In addition to that, given that the participants of my study were young students who often have their own idioms and expressions that I myself sometimes could not easily understand, I felt that it might be quite ambiguous if I translated them literally. A good example of their use of these expressions occurred when a male participant described the way his English teacher used to teach him by saying that it was like *sob and kob* (literally means fill it and pour it). He meant that they were like empty vessels whose main role was to be filled with information through their teachers' instruction, which they then poured into their responses to exam papers.

Although the process of interview and focus group transcription and translation was immensely time consuming, it helped me to get immersed with the data so that I could interpret the meaning of what my participants said when analyzing their utterances. That involved multiple listening and reading and also examining some portions in great detail to ensure achieving a meaningful translation. I soon realized that translation is not fixed and requires subjectivity with 'a high degree of sensitivity to contextual factors, including cultural difference and similarity, and uneven power relations' (Smith, 2003, as cited in Grane et al., 2009, p. 40). In this sense, I felt translation was clearly associated with the constructivist philosophical paradigm applied in my study. To be able to translate the meaning not the words made me think about the social and cultural dimensions embedded in the participants' statements and that influenced the way I translated and then analyzed the data. Here again, I have an active role (Muller, 2007) since my understanding of their utterances is shaped by my personal experiences and thoughts.

4.12 Data Analysis

My study involved both quantitative and qualitative data, and thus the analytical procedures needed to be in line with the nature of the data collected. The thematic analysis framework propounded by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used for analyzing the interview and focus group data along with the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The closed-ended questionnaire questions were analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

Quantitative Analysis

I used this for the closed questions in the questionnaire. Prior to the analysis stage, I checked each questionnaire for completeness, that is to ensure that there was an answer to most questions. No statistical significance tests were performed since the use of questionnaires in my study was not with the intention of obtaining statistically generalizable results. The closed-ended questions were entered in my computer and analyzed using Microsoft Excel to draw summary of percentage in terms of tables and graphs.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis, within the philosophical paradigm of constructivism, 'examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The use of this method in my study was not only derived from the fact that it is flexible in relation to how it can be applied but also it fits well with research aiming to explore the language problems experienced by EFL female and male undergraduates when exposed to English-medium instruction and focuses on uncovering whether their academic experiences were affected by taking the ELPPs. Thematic analysis provides an analytical framework for 'identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data' (ibid, 79).

Data analysis started from the moment that I interviewed my participants, listened to and transcribed the recorded tapes, translated and read the interview and the focus group discussion transcripts. In order to be more familiar with the data, active reading was necessarily and that 'involved moving back and forth within and between the transcripts' (Bailey et al. 2011; p. 221) and reading between lines of each transcript in order to gain a detailed understanding of the data as a whole and for the purposes of searching for meaningful parts. I also took notes, which can be useful for the data analysis process. This phase was very time-consuming but I had to do it since it is 'the bedrock for the rest of the analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Next, I started to generate an initial coding which involves breaking data into meaningful items, categories or issues (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this stage, I started to code the data using manual techniques. This involved printing out a hard copy for each transcript, using highlighters and writing notes or short phrases in the margins of that transcript as well as referring to my notes made earlier when data collection took place. After that stage, I matched all the extracts to the generated codes using copy-paste in a MS Word file in my computer. A crucial step in the thematic analysis approach is the search for themes, which involves 'sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 89). The constant comparison between all the identified codes enabled me to identify how different they were. On the basis of contradictions found between the codes, I

was able to establish links and group them into key themes. The keys themes identified in the interview data are:

1. Reasons related to prior school English education
2. Reasons related to affective factors
3. Reasons related to limited opportunities to use English
4. Reasons related to linguistic differences
5. Reasons related to lack of awareness about the role of English from the family
6. Perceptions towards the nature of ELPPs
7. The influence of the ELPPs on English abilities
8. Teachers: teaching practices and attitudes
9. Assessment practices adapted in ELPPs
10. Factors behind the success of ESP instruction
11. The influence of ELPPs on the GPA
12. Poorly equipped classrooms
13. Improved transition to university life
14. Improved academic motivation
15. Implementation concerns

I conducted four group discussions, two with females and the other two were with males. In my research study, focus group discussion was used as a tool to gather data about what type of proposals students might offer to policy makers working in the ELC to ensure that the ELPPs met the type of skills actually needed in their degree studies. The keys themes identified in the interview data are:

1. Ability to choose relevant authentic Topics
2. More language skills classes
3. More oral presentations practice
4. Teachers and teaching delivery
5. Extended ESP course to be taught as a core course taught in the later years
6. In-sessional language programmes
7. Suggestions for assessment practices
8. Miscellaneous suggestions

There were three open-ended questions in the questionnaire, which were also analyzed using the thematic analysis approach. I began by recording their answers to

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each question and grouping similar ones together to form a theme for them. The identified themes were:

1. Perceived English Skills Needed for Success in the Pharmacy Course
2. Reading difficulties
3. Listening difficulties
4. Writing difficulties
5. Speaking difficulties
6. **Students' evaluation of the English Language Preparatory Programmes**

4.13 Research Sampling

The focus of my study is to gain an in depth understanding of the impact of the English language preparatory programmes on students' academic experiences whilst adjusting to the demands of English-medium delivery of their content subject courses. Thus, I used purposive sampling to access the target population in the current study. The target population of this study was aimed to include all students who had successfully completed the programme and started their major courses at the UQU. However, as Stake (2005, p. 102) asserts that 'even though the case is decided in advance (usually), there are subsequent choices to make persons, places, and events to observe'. The target sample of my study involved five female and four male second-year undergraduates studying in the Department of Pharmacy. Consistent with the nature of this study as a case study to examine the quality of the English language preparatory programmes, all of these students had completed a full-year preparatory year including an intensive English course prior to commencing their content degree programmes.

There are several reasons for limiting the study to participants pursuing their major in just one department, i.e. Pharmacy. First, the fact that this study examines students' academic experiences could raise sensitive issues in relation to teachers and their teaching approaches; their comments might draw more information about the quality of the department they are currently enrolled in and also about the abilities of its teachers. Hence I was looking for a department, which would welcome me as a researcher and where the staff showed a concern in the research focus. I proceeded by contacting the Head of the Faculty of Pharmacy about the possibility of seeking information from the students in his department. Interestingly, the response was

positive and I successfully gained access to carry out my research study in the Faculty of Pharmacy. The second main reason when selecting the sample of this current study was to include students from an academic field where English-medium instruction was used by most of the teachers. Based on my personal contact with the Head of the Faculty of Pharmacy and students who had graduated from pharmacy, English was mostly used by both the teachers and the students.

Third, choosing to focus on the experiences of second year students, who had completed English language preparatory programmes and started the first semester of their undergraduate major studies, helped to uncover a true picture of the impact of those courses on the academic experiences of these students. Because the period between completion of the programme and commencing their tertiary studies was quite short, they were better able to retrieve most important educational events during their English instruction. Moreover, with the benefit of having experienced academic life in the pharmacy courses, these students tended to have a better understanding of the skills required in their content courses and thus to be able to reflect on the greatest gaps in the English courses in relation to their current field of study.

Fourth, an increased demand for qualified pharmacists can be anticipated as the demand for pharmacy service has increased in the country (Kheir et al., 2009). In accordance with the 'Saudization' law, which has been introduced by the country to increase the employment rate among Saudis and to reduce reliance on expatriates, the need to train Saudi pharmacists effectively appears to be ever greater. Building on this, my research study aimed to examine one of the most important aspects in pharmacy education in the KSA: the students and their struggle with English during their English courses in the preparatory year and major studies. These students, I believe, are key players in the development of the Saudi pharmacy sector. However, their voices and presences have been rarely noticed.

Finally, a fairly minor matter. Despite the fact that the science of pharmacy is deeply rooted in the Islamic world (Tschanz, 2003), it has been only relatively recently established as a major in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Wazaify et al., 2006). In 1959, there was only one college of pharmacy established, in King Saud University. Recently, the kingdom has experienced a rapid expansion in the number of pharmacy

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faculties, a trend that quickly spread to include a total of eighteen pharmacy faculties established in different parts of the kingdom. In this sense, the future of pharmacy in the KSA depends on conducting studies aiming to offer a broad perspective on how to enhance the teaching and learning environment to produce pharmacist, with good command of English language.

4.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues related to my study were carefully considered. First, I received the permission to carry out this study from the Department of Education Studies Ethical Review Committee at the University of Sheffield (see appendix 4-8). Since my participants were not acquainted with the consent form, I verbally explained its purposes and the kind of information it may contain. Then, they were orally informed about the nature and the purpose of the study by giving them time to go through the participant information sheet (see appendix 4-9) and the consent form (see appendix 4-10) before they agreed to take part in my study. In the consent form, I introduced myself and provided my contact details. I also included a brief description of what the research was about and their roles and the outcomes that are likely to emerge from their participation. I made it clear for the participants that their participation is voluntary and they were free to withdraw from this research at any time without giving reasons for doing so. Ensuring anonymity is very important in this particular research because I examined the situations within the university the participants study and I work in. To this end, I used pseudonymous rather their real names. I also assured them that the recorded data would be kept on my own password-protected software, and no other third party could have access to that data except my research supervisor and me. Furthermore, I assured all the research participants that any recorded data were to be deleted from my computer after I competed my study.

3.15 Summary

To justify the choice of methodology and methods used in my study, I discussed the philosophical assumptions and explained why the constructivism paradigm was deemed appropriate for this study. I also presented the methods of data collections followed by a detailed presentation of the procedures of transcribing, translating and analyzing data. Finally, I concluded the chapter with justification of the study sample.

Chapter Five: Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Preview

In this chapter I present data generated through the use of different instruments, used with a group of EFL Saudi undergraduates studying in the College of Pharmacy at an English-medium university in the KSA. I present detailed information of the types of difficulties that these students faced in using English in their degree studies, and explain the possible factors that contributed to their language struggles. I report on the degree to which the English instruction they had previously received in the English language preparatory programmes (ELPPs) had adequately prepared them for the skills required in their content courses and suggest how to adjust the ELPPs to the needs of these students so as to help them overcome their difficulties.

This case study involves self-assessment questionnaires to gather data and respond to the research question about students' language difficulties in using the English reading, writing, listening and speaking skills they had been taught in the ELPPs during their degrees. It involves interviews to gather data and respond to research questions about the possible factors that contributed to their language struggles and the impact of the ELPPs on their academic experiences. Focus group discussions are conducted to gather data and respond to what type of improvement, if any, students could suggest to the English Language Centre (ELC) to ensure that the ELPPs will meet all the needs in these students' degree programmes. The participants were second-year Saudi EFL pharmacy undergraduates, both male and female, taking the first term of their content course.

5.2 Quantitative Analysis: Questionnaire

This section presents the overall findings derived from self-assessment questionnaires of 105 undergraduates from the College of Pharmacy at UQU. To answer the first research question, I identified the six main categories shown below and used them for analysing findings generated from the students' questionnaires:

1- Perceived English skills needed for success in the pharmacy course(s)
2- Reading difficulties

3- Listening difficulties

4- Writing difficulties

5- Speaking difficulties

6- Students' evaluation of the English Language Preparatory Programmes

5.2.1 Part 1: Personal Information: Current Level of Study

This section presents data generated from the first section of the questionnaire (Part 1). It provides details of the backgrounds of the study participants, including information of students' current level of study. This information helps to ensure that the questionnaires were distributed to pharmacy students in their second year of university and to exclude those students who were not studying at the same level. As discussed in Chapter 4, as the period between the completion of the English language course in the preparatory year and commencing their tertiary study was short, students in their second year should still be able to retrieve most important educational elements of their English course instruction. While this is the first reason for choosing to focus on the experiences of second-year students, the second one is related to the fact that these students tended to have a better understanding of the skills required in their content courses and thus are able to reflect on the greatest gaps in the English courses relative to their current field of study.

Since my study focused on this particular group of students, data gathered from students of higher levels were not intended to be included. I believe that the issue of different levels of study is nothing less than critical, because language proficiency could improve as students adjusted more and more to English-medium instruction. In line with this, the greater use of English might influence their views about their own strengths and weakness in writing, reading, speaking and listening skills, which could skew the results. Students' ability to reveal information about what a course lacks and what aspects should be improved might also be influenced. More importantly, given the strict legal requirements to separate genders at the university, I could not distribute the questionnaire personally to male participants, so there was thus a possibility that the questionnaires would be randomly distributed to students from different years of study. Asking students to indicate their level of study helped me to select only questionnaires that were completed by second-year male students and be more certain that only second-year female students were targeted. Analysis of the

current level of study confirms that all respondents were studying in the College of Pharmacy and were in their second year.

5.2.2 Gender

Given the fact that males and females are separated in the Saudi education system, students are supposed to be taught the same subjects by teachers of their own gender. In higher education, and when there is a shortage of female teachers, male instructors often teach female students through closed-circuit television (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, in the ELPP contexts offered by the ELC at UQU, students are supposed to be taught the same syllabus by EFL teachers of their own gender, so it could be assumed that female and male ELPP students are exposed to non-identical teaching practices and teacher attitudes, and supplied with different learning facilities and required to fulfil different requirements. Although this outcome could be expected in almost all language learning contexts, I was most interested in seeing whether any difficulties articulated by the female students differed from those identified by their male counterparts. To move beyond noting the number of female and male students who took part in this study, I was hoping to determine who found the course (i.e. ELPP) was helpful and who did not, what were the factors that influenced that decision, and whether they saw these factors in the same way or differently. In this sense, this study will be able to ensure that all perspectives are taken into accounts and all gaps are filled.

The analysis of students' gender indicates that males outnumber females, but this cannot be seen as a limitation imposed on the progress of the data collection procedures. These outcomes are produced for two main reasons. As indicated earlier, my husband took the responsibility of distributing the questionnaires to the male participants, and it appears later that involving someone of the same gender, in this particular context, for this job was useful in terms of increasing the number of male participants. Second, distributing the questionnaires to the male participants was not restricted to a particular time or location. Some males were more than willing to complete the questionnaires after finishing their morning classes because they were able to stay in the campus through the late hours. In contrast, there was less flexibility of time and place with the female participants. Of the total of 105 Saudi students who participated in the study, 54% (N=57) were male, and 46% (N=48) were female

(Table 5.1).

Table 5.1:
Number and percentage of students who participated in the study

Gender	Number (No.)	Percentage (%)
Female	48	46
Male	57	54
Total	**105**	**100**

5.2.3 Saudi Students' Experience of Learning English in the Saudi Educational System

Students were asked to indicate when they were taught English in Saudi schools. Seeking out such information from students revealed detailed insights into whether their prior language learning experience had an influence on how well they could cope with the academic requirements in the tertiary study.

First, nearly all of those surveyed (99, 95%) responded that they had started studying English language when they were in primary school. Four students (3%) reported that they had begun learning English at the kindergarten level (5 years of age). Two males (2%) commented that they had started learning English when they went to intermediate schools. These data are shown in Figure 5-1.
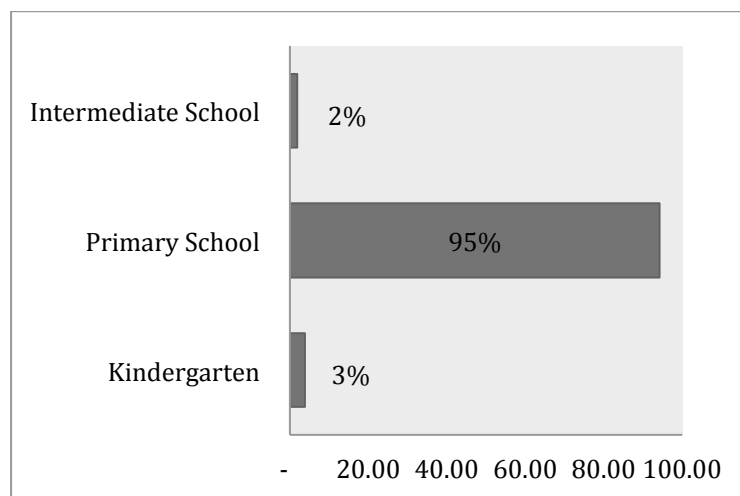
Figure 5-1: Respondents' first time in English classes (N=105)

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More precisely, seventy-nine (75%) of those who reported having their first English lessons in primary school reported that they had started learning English when they were in the sixth grade (10-11 years old); these students were likely exposed to learning English when it was first introduced in 2004 as a core subject in year 6 for 2 hours a week in KSA primary schools. Four students indicated that they started learning English in the first grade (6 years old). Six students learnt English when they were in the second grade (7 years old), six in the third grade (8 years old), four in the fourth grade (9 nine years old) and two had begun learning English when they were in the fifth grade (10 years old); these students likely started studying English in private schools because the mandatory English curriculum was not introduced in state primary schools until 2004 (see Chapter 2). Therefore, this result demonstrates that both female and male students started learning English at early ages (10-11 years old at most), when they were in the primary school.

5.2.4 Taking English Courses Before Commencing Tertiary Study

Additionally, the students were asked to report if they had taken English courses before commencing their academic study in university, and whether they had that course in the KSA or in an English-speaking country. They also were asked to indicate the type of courses taught and for how long they lasted. Regardless of whether English courses are taken abroad or at home, it can be assumed that extensive amounts of exposure to L2 learning might be considered a contributing factor to the acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence in the English language. In line with this, and for the purpose of this study, I was hoping to determine if there was a link between students' language difficulties and the influence of study abroad or domestically on their English language development. However, since the response rate of students taking courses in English language before they had entered tertiary studies was fairly low in comparison to those who had not studied it, it must be noted that the results on whether there is such a link between students' experiences with their own language difficulties and taking pre-courses in English tended to be inconclusive. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the number and percentage of students who took language courses.

Table 5.2
Number of students who took pre-university English courses in either the KSA or L1 contexts

Gender	Yes		No/ Unanswered		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No	%
Female	8	7.62	40	38.10	48	45.72
Male	6	5.71	51	48.57	57	54.28
Total	**14**	**13.33**	**91**	**86.67**	**105**	**100**

The majority (86.67%) of those who answered this question indicated that they had not had the opportunity to take any English language courses before entering university, while a small minority (13.33%) did have that exposure.

Table 5.2, shows that of the 48 female participants, only eight (7.62%) reported that they had taken English courses before commencing their tertiary study, seven at different language centres in the KSA and only one in an L1 country (an English-language course in Australia for three months). Of the 57 male participants, six (5.71%) had pre-university English language courses. Two reported that they had taken English courses presented by language centres in Makkah and Jeddah, in the KSA, whereas four reported studying English courses abroad. Students' responses as to the type of courses taken tended to be vague ('do not know', 'English language course' or left unanswered), so it proved impossible to quantify them accurately; however, it can be said that the duration spent in these courses for all students did not extend beyond three months, whether in L1 or L2 contexts.

Table 5.3
Number and percentage of students who took pre-university English language courses

Courses places	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
Home	7	2	9	8.57
Abroad	1	4	5	4.76
Total	**8**	**6**	**14**	**13.33**

5.2.5 Part 2: The English Skills Perceived as Needed for Success in Pharmacy Courses.

In the second part of the questionnaire, students were asked to select one specific pharmacy course that they were taking in their university in which English was the primary teaching and learning medium (Q6). Bearing that course in mind, students were then invited to indicate whether or not they were required to perform some academic tasks using English (Q7). In order to gain a better understanding of the results generated from the data in this section, it should be noted that pharmacy students are required to take eight courses in the first term in their second year of the academic study (see Chapter 2). Table 5.4 shows a summary of the courses that second-year pharmacy students are required to take.

Table 5.4
Courses required for second-year pharmacy students

Course Name	Theory	Practical	Total Credit Hours
The Holy Qur'an (101)	2	-	2
Islamic Studies (101)	2	-	2
Mathematics	2	-	2
Approaches to Pharmaceutical Profession	1	-	1
Physiology	2	1	3
Pharmaceutical Organic Chemistry (1)	2	1	3
Microbiology	2	1	3
Pharmaceutics (1)	2	1	3

As the study was conducted while students were in their first term, I looked only at courses taught in the students' second academic year. Two courses, namely the Qur'an and Islamic Studies, are taught and studied in Arabic. The remaining courses are supposed to be taught and studied in English, but because I could not always be certain about which language is used as the medium of instruction for pharmacy courses, or whether it might be a mix of English and Arabic, and because I did not always have first-hand knowledge of the courses in which students relied primarily on English, I felt that students themselves would be the most accurate informants in this

regard. However, students' responses were not as precise as I was expected, as what I gathered from their handwritten comments gave an indication that English was used in all courses required for pharmacy students with the exception of the Holy Qu'ran and Islamic Studies. Table 5.5 shows an overview of the results obtained from students' responses on Q6. The greatest demand for English went to all pharmacy courses (51.42%), Microbiology (42.9%) and Pharmaceutics 1 (13.3%). In addition, it is clear that the respondents of both genders responded that the use of English in courses such as Maths and Approaches to Pharmaceutical Profession was rare. In fact, these responses may raise an issue of contradiction when it comes to considering their earlier responses about using English in all pharmacy courses.

Table 5.5
Student responses to question 6

Courses	Female	Male	Total	%
All courses except Qur'an and Islamic studies	30	24	54	51.42
Mathematics	3	2	5	4.8
Approaches to Pharmaceutical Profession	1	4	5	4.8
Physiology	6	2	11	10.5
Pharmaceutical Organic Chemistry (1)	5	3	8	7.7
Microbiology	18	27	45	42.9
Pharmaceutics (1)	6	8	14	13.3

These results, however, are acceptable due to two reasons. First, in situations like higher education in the KSA, the use of both L1 and L2 languages, i.e. Arabic and English or 'code switching' in classrooms is quite common, which indicates that these students might consider the use of L1 and L2 in their pharmacy courses is the same as using an English-only medium of instruction. Second, even when L1 (Arabic) or switching between Arabic and English were used as the medium of instruction in some pharmacy courses, students are theoretically *required* to study them in English, which explains students' choice of using 'all pharmacy courses' instead of naming a particular course with the exception of Microbiology, which was described by most of

those who I interviewed as the course in which they were exposed to a purely English-only method of teaching and studying. The following comments are made by the male students

> *We have instructors here in our department teaching in Arabic and English, mostly in English I think in Microbiology. I prefer both since we can understand the subject easily (EM-Nader)*

> *You know he is a non-native Arabic speaker, a fact that makes some of the students hate attending his class, but to me and to some of those I knew, it was a good chance for us to practice English (EM-Ali)*

What the male students refer to here is that their Microbiology course is taught and studied in English, but in some courses the use of both L1 and L2 is also common. The female students made similar comments, making it very likely that the same instructor was teaching Microbiology courses for both male and female students:

> *I loved Microbiology since I entered the preparatory year programme, but here, sometimes I felt that [instructor's name]'s English is unclear (EF-Kareema)*

> *This course Microbiology is difficult for me, and yes, the instructor explains everything in English and we have to respond to him in English because he does not know a word of Arabic (EF-Lamees).*

Regardless of what the students really meant by 'all pharmacy courses' as an answer to Q6[11], their responses cannot be disregarded because they are less than totally specific. In fact, their responses reveal that use of English as a medium of instruction in their pharmacy courses was rare, thus less emphasis was placed on their English ability to tackle the tasks required from them in the courses that they were taking.

Students were then asked to respond to 20 yes/no items regarding the academic tasks that were required of them in the course(s) they had chosen in Q6. They were required to look at a statement, such as '1. Reading lecture handouts' and then rank it according to the degree to which they experienced having to perform this task. Table 5.6 shows the ranking for each of the twenty specific academic tasks, which were calculated by assigning a weighted value for each item. Each category was given a

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[11]Question 6: Please indicate a subject course that you are currently studying and relying most on English for studying it?

numerical value (1=Yes, 2=To Some Extent, 3=No) in order to facilitate mean calculations. A mean of m=1.98 or less indicates a group of regular academic tasks that the students were required to carry out, meaning that Yes or To Some Extent responses were chosen by a group of students, whereas a mean of m=2.0 or over indicates a group of less regular academic tasks, meaning that No responses were common. Table 5.6 presents the students' responses in ascending order of frequency, percentage and means and shows some surprising rankings for each of the twenty items. The overall frequencies in students' responses to these 20 items, as Table 5.6 suggests, that female and male second-year pharmacy students are required to accomplish a variety of academic tasks apart from 'Writing research papers' (item 19) and 'Talking to classmates in English' (item 20), which indicates that both of these items had the lowest rankings. Their means are both 2.05, whereas the means of other tasks range from 1.20 to 1.98, signifying that tasks apart from item 19 and item 20 were generally more needed by the students.

Table 5.6
Students' responses on required academic tasks (N=105)

Requirements	Yes		To Some Extent		No		
	No	%	No	%	No.	%	**Mean**
1. Reading handouts	88	83.8	13	12.4	4	3.8	**1.20**
2. Listening to the teacher lecturing	85	81	19	18	1	1	**1.20**
3. Reading (multiple-choice Qs.)	81	77.2	16	15.2	8	7.6	**1.30**
4. Reading (essay question Qs.)	79	75.2	20	19.1	6	5.7	**1.30**
5. Reading technical vocabulary	76	72.4	25	23.8	4	3.8	**1.31**
6. Reading pharmacy textbooks	74	70.5	27	25.7	4	3.8	**1.33**
7. Taking clear notes in English	65	62	28	27	12	11	**1.49**
8. Talking to lecturers in English	65	56.2	39	37.1	7	6.7	**1.50**
9. Listening to oral presentations	61	58.1	33	31.4	11	10.5	**1.52**
10. Writing lab reports	64	61.0	26	24.8	15	14.2	**1.53**
11. Asking and answering questions	56	53.4	41	39	8	7.6	**1.54**
12. Listening to recorded speeches	46	43.8	46	43.8	13	12.4	**1.68**
13. Expressing your own ideas	45	42.9	43	41	17	16.1	**1.73**
14. Reading articles	36	34.3	51	48.6	18	17.1	**1.82**
15. Writing essays	41	39	39	37.1	25	23.9	**1.84**
16. Doing library research	40	38.1	36	34.3	29	27.6	**1.89**
17. Individual oral presentations	29	27.6	50	47.6	26	24.8	**1.95**
18. Group oral presentations	30	28.6	47	44.8	28	26.6	**1.98**
19. Writing research papers	33	31.4	33	31.4	39	37.2	**2.05**
20. Talking to classmates in English	32	30.5	35	33.3	38	36.2	**2.05**

The results show some surprising rankings for certain required tasks. First, an overwhelming percentage of the respondents (88.8%) gave an affirmative answer to 'Reading lecture handouts' (item1), indicating that reading prepared handouts were the most common task that students were required to carry out in pharmacy courses, followed by 'Listening to lecturers' lecturing' (item 2); well over half of those who responded to this item (81%) answered affirmatively, and only (18%) reported that they needed it to some extent. As far as reading is concerned, the results also show

that pharmacy students were assigned to take a specialized subject exam in English, so the majority (92.4%; i.e. 77.2% Yes and 15.2 To Some Extent) indicated that they were required to read and answer objective questions (item 3), and (94.3%) (i.e., 75.2% Yes and 19.1% To Some Extent) and answered affirmatively that they were obliged to read and structure answers for essay-type questions (item 4). The results tell us that 'reading technical vocabulary' (item 5) and 'textbooks' (item 6) in the field of pharmacy were of real concern to all of the study respondents, as just over half of them, 72.4% and 70.5% respectively, answered positively and only 3.8% reported that there was no need for using these tasks in their pharmacy courses. 'Reading articles' (item 14) appeared to be of less concern, as only 34.3% of those who responded gave a positive answer, whereas around a half (48.6%) were not completely sure that they viewed it as a required task.

Writing down what is said or written on the board during a lecture may require much effort from the students, but in this context it seems that 'Taking clear notes in English' (item 7) was performed by almost two-thirds of the students (62%); 27% reported that they were likely to use note-taking in English, and only a minority 11 % of them indicated that they did not any take notes during their classes. Still on writing skills, 'writing lab reports' (item 10) was reported as more commonly required than 'writing essays' (item 15), with 61% of respondents reporting that they were required to produce lab reports, whereas 39% were affirmative about viewing writing essays as a required task. Closely related to writing skills, the results show that 'Doing library research' (item 16) is a common practice as a balanced proportion of students' responses can be seen between those who answered Yes (38.1%) and those who answered To Some Extent (34.3%), which indicates that these students need to look along bookshelves themselves to find their own books.

Concerning oral and aural skills, 'Talking to lecturers in English' (item 8) was chosen by most of the study respondents (56.2% Yes and 37.1% To Some Extent) and was more important than 'Asking and answering questions' (item 11; 53.4% Yes and 39% To Some Extent) and than 'Expressing your own ideas and opinions' (item 13; 42.9% Yes and 41% To Some Extent). Students were expected to give oral presentations; the results show that 'Listening to oral presentation' (item 9) was the most common listening task for the students, as nearly all of them (58.1% Yes and 31.4% To Some

Extent) answered affirmatively, whereas 75.2% (27.6 % yes and 47.6% to some extent) indicated that giving 'individual presentations' (item 17) was demanded. Giving 'group oral presentations' (item 18) in front of the class was a less common task as nearly half (44.8%) of those who responded to this item were only certain to some extent about its being a required skill and only 28.6% were sure it was required.

5.3.6 Part 3: Difficulties in Academic English Skills: Reading Difficulties

The third part of the questionnaire is divided into four sections, each of which contains various items about different sub-skills in reading, listening, writing and speaking skills. Each section asked the study respondents to assess the degree of difficulty they experienced with these sub-skills on a Likert scale range from 'very difficult'=1 to 'not needed'=6. In line with the calculation procedures applied in the earlier parts, each category was given a numerical value to smooth the way for mean calculations. I combined students' responses to very difficult (VD) and difficult (D) and grouped them under one category, namely (VD-D). I then assigned it a numerical value (VD-D=1) to calculate frequency, percentage and means. I followed the same procedures with both very easy (VE) and easy (E), as they were classified into the single category (VE-E) and assigned it a numerical value (VE-E=2). However, students' responses to the remaining categories, namely 'neither difficult nor easy' (NDNE) and 'not needed' (NN) were not merged. Therefore, all responses in these categories were counted separately and each assigned a different value (NDNE=3) and (NN=4). A two-level analysis was conducted. First, I analysed the responses given by all the study subjects in the hopes of finding out which sub-skills were perceived to cause the most struggle for the pharmacy students. Second, I conducted a separate analysis based on gender to examine whether there were any differences between female responses and male responses. The same procedures were performed on the four skills. Table 5.7 presents the students' responses to the 14 items in the reading skills part (items 21 to 35) in ascending order of difficulty in the form of frequency, percentage and means. A mean of m=1.90 or less indicates some degree of difficulty, whereas a mean of m=2.00 or over indicates some degree of ease.

Table 5.7

Students' responses to level of degree of difficulty of reading skills (N=105)

Reading Skills	VD-D		NDNE		VE-E		NN		Mean
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
27. Understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words	92	87.6	5	4.8	6	5.7	2	1.9	**1.22**
34. Understanding the point of an exam question	83	79	15	14.3	4	3.8	3	2.9	**1.30**
23. Distinguishing the main ideas from supporting details	74	70.5	12	11.4	19	18.1	0	0	**1.48**
29. Making inferences to get implied message in the texts	73	69.5	19	18.1	8	7.6	5	4.8	**1.48**
32. Understanding text structure/ organization	64	61	25	23.8	13	12.3	3	2.9	**1.57**
31. Understanding references in the text, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion	66	62.9	14	13.3	21	20	4	3.8	**1.65**
21. Reading quickly for the main ideas	30	28.6	58	55.2	14	13.3	3	2.9	**1.90**
26. Understanding the meaning of discipline terminology	36	34.3	35	33.3	32	30.5	2	1.9	**2**
28. Understanding technical concepts related to your specialized area of study	25	23.8	56	53.3	23	21.9	1	1	**2**
25. Identifying the writer's point of view	24	22.9	51	48.5	26	24.8	4	3.8	**2.10**
33. Understanding graphic presentations	28	26.7	36	34.3	39	37.1	2	1.9	**2.14**
24. Distinguishing between ideas, examples and opinions	21	20	42	40	35	33.3	7	6.7	**2.27**
22. Reading quickly for a specific piece of information	19	18	40	38.1	43	41	3	2.9	**2.29**
35.Taking relevant and clear notes from the text	21	20	38	36.2	26	24.8	20	19	**2.43**
30. Understanding punctuation	13	12.4	35	33.3	44	41.9	13	12.4	**2.54**

Table shows that items 27,34,23,29,32,31, and 21 gained mean scores between 1.22 and 1.90 confirming that students experienced a wide range of reading difficulties. The top area of difficulty is 'Understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words' (item 27), as it had a mean score of 1.22, and the least difficult area in the difficult range is 'Reading quickly for the main ideas' (item 21) with a mean of 1.90. The overall results suggest that attempting to identify the meaning of the non-field specific terms has a marked tendency to interfere with these students' reading comprehension and impede their overall academic, progress as it is frequently perceived by the majority (87.6%) of respondents as the greatest problem when tackling subject-specific reading tasks. In addition, as a number of the students' responses on the rest of the reading sub-skills make clear, understanding questions occurring in the pharmacy examination papers (item 34) was widely (79%) considered as another problematic area. In the process of reading, these students were more concerned with understanding the subject content of what they read but clearly lacked some of the main sub-skills utilized in reading, as almost 70.5% of the respondents reported finding it difficult to distinguish the main ideas from supporting details (item 23), and 69.5% finding it difficult to understand connections between paragraphs and sections (item 29). Understanding references in the text (i.e., ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion) (item 31) was also seen as a serious challenge, with almost 62.9% of the students indicated that they had difficulty in doing so. Many students (61%) also indicated that they experienced difficulty with 'Making inferences to get the implied message in the texts' (item 32). While 28.6% considered reading quickly to get the gist of the whole text (item 21) difficult, 55.2% thought it was neither easy nor difficult and 30.5% felt that it was easy.

Items 26, 28, 25, 33, 24, 22,35 and 30, meanwhile, gained mean scores range from 2.00 to 2.54, suggesting that students had little trouble with several reading sub-skills. For example, it appears that students' perceptions of understanding the meaning of the technical vocabulary (item 26) and main concepts in the field of pharmacy (item 28) improved as they progressed through their major courses. While 34.3% reported identifying the meaning of technical terms (item 26) as a problem, 33.3% perceived it as neither difficult nor easy and 30.5% indicated that it was an easy task. , and 30.5% perceived it as neither difficult nor easy. Similarly, only 23.8% identifying the

meaning of technical concepts in the field of pharmacy (item 28) as difficult, whereas the majority (53.3%) felt it was neither easy nor difficult and 21.9 found it easy.

For all the second-year pharmacist students, there was a slight variation across genders as to the level of difficulty experienced in various reading sub-skills. Table 5.8 shows the mean scores obtained by students' responses to all items regarding reading sub-skills.

Table 5.8
Differences in females' and males' mean scores across reading skills

Survey items	Female	Male
R21	2.27	2.56
R22	1.65	1.65
R23	1.90	2.35
R24	2.46	2.11
R25	2.27	2.56
R26	1.90	2.09
R27	1.15	1.28
R28	1.94	2.05
R29	1.56	1.40
R30	2.13	2.42
R31	1.40	1.20
R32	1.69	1.73
R33	2.26	2.39
R34	1.40	1.23
R35	2.11	2.16

By assuming that a mean score of 1.95 or lower indicates some degree of difficulty and 2.05 or higher indicates some degree of ease, it is clear that male students claimed higher reading abilities than their female counterparts, as shown by the mean scores they both gained in items 23, 26 and 28. While distinguishing between sentences that providing information about ideas, examples or opinions (item 23) was a minor problem for male students (m=2.35), female students had serious difficulties in overcoming this problem (m=1.90). Similarly, understanding the meaning of discipline-specific terms (item 26) and the key concepts in the field of pharmacy (item

28) tended to be easier for males (m= 2.09, 2.05 respectively) than females, who found that the ability to understand technical words and concepts caused them trouble (m=1.90, 1.94 respectively). Nevertheless, students from both genders generally felt the same degree of difficulty when reading the texts for seeking key information (item 22), as this item had identical mean scores (1.65) across the genders.

In addition, the mean scores shown in Table 5.8 suggest that female and male students had almost similar perceptions of the degree of difficulty in dealing with some reading sub-skills, such as item 27 (female=1.15, male=1.28), item 29 (F=1.56, M=1.40), item 34 (F=1.40, M=1.23). Students' problems with the remaining reading sub-skills (items 21, 24, 25, 30, 33,35) also reflect relatively similar mean scores, indicating that students from both genders find it easy to read quickly for a specific information (item 21; F=2.27, M=2.56), distinguishing relevant and irrelevant information (item 24; F=2.46, M=2.11), identifying the writer's point of view (item 25; F=2.27, M=2.56), understanding punctuation (item 30; F=2.13, M=2.42), understanding graphic presentation (item 33; F=2.26, M=2.39) and taking relevant notes from the reading test (item 53; F=2.11, M=2.16).

5.2.7 Listening Difficulties

Table 5.9 presents the students' responses to 13 items in the listening sub-skills part (items 36–48) in ascending order of difficulty in the forms of frequency, percentage and means. A mean of m=1.64 or less indicates some degree of difficulty, whereas a mean of m=2.00 or over indicates some degree of ease.

Table 5.9
Students' responses to level of degree of difficulty of listening skills (N=105)

Listening Skills	VD-D		NDNE		VE-E		NN		MEAN
	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	
39. Understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words other than specialized terminology	71	67.6	23	21.9	11	10.5	0	0	**1.42**
37. Identifying the topic of the lecture and following the topic development	51	48.6	47	44.7	6	5.7	1	1	**1.59**
40. Understanding information not explicitly stated by the lecturer	59	56.2	27	25.7	17	16.2	2	1.9	**1.63**
43. Understanding lectures despite shifts in the language of instruction from English to Arabic and vice versa	55	52.4	35	33.3	12	11.4	3	2.9	**1.64**
48. Understanding your notes at a later date to recall the most important points in the lecture	36	34.2	33	31.5	35	33.3	1	1	**2.00**
47. Taking concise and clear notes	32	30.4	43	41	28	26.7	2	1.9	**2.00**
44. Understanding irrelevant topics, jokes and digressions	40	38.1	20	19	44	41.9	1	1	**2.05**
45. Understanding classroom conventions, turn-taking, questions, requests	18	17.1	44	41.9	43	41	0	0	**2.23**
46. Distinguishing between important and less important points when taking notes	25	23.8	25	23.8	54	51.4	1	1	**2.29**
36. Identifying the purpose of the lecture	22	21	20	19	63	60	0	0	**2.39**
42. Following different modes of lecturing: spoken, recorded, and audio-visual	22	21	15	14.3	67	63.7	1	1	**2.44**
38. Understanding specialized terminology	9	8.6	34	32.3	61	58.1	1	1	**2.51**
41. Recognising function of intonation to signal relevant or important information	11	10.5	25	23.8	68	64.7	1	1	**2.56**

First, just as 'understanding the meaning of non-specialized terms' (item 39) was identified as their main problem area in the findings for reading skills, so it is in the findings for listening skills, as the majority of the students (67.6%) responding to this item reported that it caused them the most trouble. Second, students' inadequate listening experiences were not only due to their limited lexical knowledge but also to their inability to listen carefully to long, sustained stretches of English speech, hindering them from identifying the topic of the lecture and from processing the rest of the information (item 37). 48.6% and 44.7% of students responded to this item as 'difficult' or 'neither difficult nor easy' respectively. Third, a large number of students (56.2%) reported facing difficulty in understanding information not explicitly stated by the lecturer (item 40). This could also be traced to their limited knowledge of vocabulary, which inhibited their ability to infer meanings of tacitly delivered information. It is, however, surprising that half of the students (52.4%) think that using both Arabic and English as the medium of instruction made understanding the content of the lectures more difficult (item 43).

Nevertheless, the high rates of ease expressed by many students in response to other listening sub-skills indicate that listening is less difficult for these students than reading skills. This claim is further supported by the fact that most students found the last four sub-skills (items 36, 42, 38, 41) easy to a greater or lesser extent. In responding to their ability in 'identifying the purpose of the lecture' (item 36), 60% found it uncomplicated. Only 21% said it was difficult and 19% said it was neither difficult nor easy. The majority of students (63.7%) reported finding it easy to listen to lectures delivered through using mixed modes of lecturing (item 42), while 64.7% indicated identifying the purpose of the pauses and intonation used by lecturers for signalling the important points was not difficult (item 41). Understanding the meaning of specialized terms in the field of pharmacy (item 38) was identified as not a problematic area, as over half of those who responded to this item (58%) found it easy.

It is notable that students' responses to items 46, 47 and 48 reveal that second-year pharmacy students generally have confidence in their abilities to take notes in the lecture. However, if those three items are examined separately, the results reveal

different conclusions. In item 48, for example, the figures show that students' responses to this item are not identical, though they tend to occur with relatively similar frequency, as 34.2% said that it was difficult to understand their notes at a later date when looking for the most important points, 31.5% found it neither difficult nor easy and 33.3% found it simple. Meanwhile, about 41% found 'taking concise and clear notes using English' (item 47) neither difficult nor easy, and 51.4% found 'distinguishing between important and less important points when note-taking' (item 46) easy. This apparent conflict between these findings is likely due to the fact that these students rely heavily on using their lecturers' handouts as their sole post-lecture learning method or to students' use of their L1 (Arabic) when taking notes.

I examined the differences between females and males by looking at responses given to all the listening sub-skills (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10
Differences in females' and males' mean scores across listening skills

Survey item	Female	Male
L36	2.37	2.40
L37	1.56	1.61
L38	2.62	2.42
L39	1.35	1.49
L40	1.54	1.71
L41	2.58	2.54
L42	2.47	2.42
L43	1.50	1.77
L44	1.54	2.49
L45	2.12	2.33
L46	2.39	2.21
L47	1.91	2.07
L48	2.02	2.00

No major differences were observed between the responses of females and males to these sub-skills; there were fairly similar means across the genders, except for items 44 and 47. Mean calculations indicate that turning aside from the main topic of the lecture or using jokes during the lecture by the lecturer did not block males' listening

comprehension (item 44), whereas these did tend to cause females difficulty (F=1.54, M=2.49). Males claimed to take clearer notes (item 47) as it can be shown by the mean score of (m=2.07) than their female counterparts who had a mean score of (m=1.91). As I have argued above, it is possible that language ability in general, and understanding the meaning of the non-specialized terms in particular, is a key factor that influences students' ability to comprehend what they read and, in this case, what they hear. This influence was likely to be more obvious in females, who tended to have lower mean scores in their listening abilities, compared to that scored by their male counterparts.

5.2.8 Writing Difficulties

Table 5.11 reports responses related to the students' assessments of their writing problems in ascending order of difficulty. These problems are divided into eleven sub-skills (items 49–59). As the data reveal, a majority of students (79%) identified using the appropriate word (item 51) as their largest problem, whereas 7.6% said that was 'neither difficult nor easy' and 10.5% said it was 'easy'. The students' poor lexical knowledge also influenced their ability to express ideas in their own words appropriately (item 56), with 65.7% of reporters finding the production of idiomatic expressions difficult and only 5.7% finding it easy. This serious deficiency affects their ability both to link between sentences adequately (item 55) and, to a lesser extent, organize paragraphs suitably (item57), as 60% and 42.8% respectively of those who responded to these items found them difficult.

Table 5.11
Students' responses to level of degree of difficulty of writing skills (N=105)

Writing Skills	VD-D		NDNE		VE-E		NN		MEAN
	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	
51. Using appropriate and key words	83	79	8	7.6	11	10.5	3	2.9	1.37
56. Expressing ideas in idiomatic written English	69	65.7	27	25.7	6	5.7	3	2.9	1.45
55. Linking sentences adequately	63	60	26	24.8	12	11.4	4	3.8	1.59
57. Linking paragraphs adequately	45	42.8	36	34.3	21	20	3	2.9	1.82
52. Using accurate grammar in sentence writing	42	40	30	28.6	13	12.4	20	19	2.10
50. Writing paragraphs for an assignment	22	21	43	41	37	35.1	3	2.9	2.20
49. Writing an outline for a paper	17	16.2	26	24.8	62	59	0	0	2.42
53. Using correct spelling	23	21.9	10	9.5	47	44.8	25	23.8	2.70
58. Referring to sources	16	15.2	20	19	38	36.3	31	29.5	2.80
54. Using correct punctuation	6	5.7	20	19	61	58.2	18	17.1	2.86
59. Writing mathematical or statistical data in a report	17	16.2	26	24.8	62	59	0	0	2.88

Accuracy of grammar appeared to cause students little trouble (item 52), as 40% of the students said that it was difficult to present ideas in an accurate form, and 21% reported finding it was easy to write paragraphs for an assignment (item 50). This result is not surprising, because these students were more concerned with memorizing ideas rather than organizing them at the beginning of the writing process. Additionally, as discussed earlier in the results of the reading skills, many of the students reported finding it difficult to take clear notes when reading textbooks with the goal of extracting relevant information or ideas (see Table 5.8), which reinforces the fact that these students were not aware of how to take notes with an eye to ordering ideas to be used in producing a written work. Students also felt that accuracy in writing caused little trouble; they said so perhaps because their subject teachers tended not to show any particular interest in students' writing abilities, including

grammar. Rather, the teachers were more concerned with students' ability to retrieve important content knowledge. Therefore, these students tended to assess their ability in accuracy in terms of what was required in their content classes. Using correct spelling (item 53) and citing authors' work (item 58) did not cause them much difficulty, with 44.8% of the students responding to item 53 saying it was easy and 36.3% saying item 58 was easy. This is understandable because the practice of integrating the ideas of others and documenting the sources of those ideas are not tasks required of the students in this context.

I examined the mean scores for females and males across the 11 writing sub-skills (items 49–59) to find out if there were any gender differences. Table 5.12 shows the mean scores of students' responses to all items regarding writing sub-skills.

Table 5.12
Differences in females' and males' mean scores across writing skills

Survey items	Female	Male
W49	2.68	2.21
W50	1.85	2.49
W51	1.27	1.45
W52	1.87	2.31
W53	1.41	1.73
W54	3.12	2.64
W55	1.85	2.49
W56	2.75	2.76
W57	1.68	1.94
W58	2.33	3.19
W59	2.85	2.91

The most striking finding is that none of the 11 items have high mean scores of 3.0 or higher in either group, except for item 54 (F=3.12, M=2.64) and item 58 (F=2.33, M=3.19). This indicates that second-year pharmacy students claim to not have serious problems in using punctuation (item 54) or referring to sources (item 58) for the reasons discussed above. Although mean calculations suggest that the differences between the responses of the two groups is not large, females do appear to face some

greater degree of difficulty in finding appropriate lexical terms (item 51) (F=1.27) than males (M=1.45). The results for item 50 makes clear that females (F=1.85) experienced more difficulty in writing paragraphs than their male counterparts (M=2.49). In addition, using appropriate terms was not the only challenge facing females in writing; grammatical accuracy (item 52) is another serious challenge for them (F=1.87, M=2.31).

5.2.9 Speaking Difficulties

Table 5.13 shows students' responses to speaking sub-skills (items 60–68) in ascending order of difficulty.

Table 5.13
Students' responses to level of degree of difficulty of speaking skills (N=105)

Speaking Skills	VD-D		NDNE		VE-E		NN		MEAN
	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	
64. Expressing ideas in idiomatic spoken English	57	54.3	38	36.2	10	9.5	0	0	**1.55**
61. Answering questions and stating a point of view	59	56.2	22	21	24	22	0	0	**1.66**
60. Asking for more information or clarification	41	39	45	42.9	19	18.1	0	0	**1.79**
66. Expressing ideas fluently	43	41	37	35.2	18	17.1	7	6.7	**1.89**
62. Participating actively in class discussions	35	33.3	42	40	28	26.7	0	0	**1.93**
65.Expressing ideas with clear pronunciation	25	23.8	43	41	21	20	16	15.2	**2.26**
68. Presenting information from notes	25	23.8	27	25.7	45	42.9	8	7.6	**2.34**
63. Organizing and giving an individual oral presentation	19	18.1	30	28.6	47	44.8	9	8.6	**2.43**
67. Interacting confidently with professors in English	17	16.2	31	29.5	38	36.2	19	18.1	**2.56**

Most students (54.3%) reported communicating with others accurately (item 64) as their greatest difficulty, while 36.2% found that it was neither hard nor easy and only 9.5% said it was easy. Under 'Answering questions and stating a point of view' (item 61), 56.2% said it was difficult and 21% actually found it neither difficult nor easy, while 22% said that it was easy. In responding to item 60, around 39% of the students reported difficulty with asking for more information, 42.9% said that it was neither difficult nor easy and only 18% found that it was easy. Fluency (item 66) is another serious problem, as around 41% of students reported having difficulty with expressing ideas fluently in English, 35.2% said that it was neither hard nor easy and only 17% found it easy. However, students' problems with communicating with others accurately and fluently do not necessarily result in impeded ability to participate actively in class discussions (item 62), as 33.3% of students felt that speaking in class was difficult and 40% believed that it was neither difficult nor easy and only 26% said that it was easy. This is not surprising, because most students do not engage in class discussion, feeling that they might lose face when they could not formulate accurate and appropriate utterances. It also might be the case that students lacked the opportunity to talk much in class, particularly when exposed to content-focused and teacher-centred lectures. It also might be the case that students tended to use 'code switching' or their L1 (Arabic) when discussing the content with their teachers.

Nevertheless, according to the students, clear pronunciation (item 65) and presenting information from notes (item 68) caused them less trouble, with only 23.8% of the responses for these two items described as difficult. This may be at least partly due to the fact that assessment of good or bad pronunciation is often neglected in content courses. In fact, there is a general tendency that the need to help students learn content is more important than improving their spoken proficiency. Of equal concern, most were more concerned about their ability to speak clearly, as 41% found that it was neither difficult nor easy and only 20% found that it was easy. In sharp contrast, around 42.9% of those who answered item 68 indicated that they had no difficulty in presenting information from notes. It is possible that when students were required to give a short talk on some aspect of their studies, they memorized what they were going to say or read prepared remarks. Oral presentation and communicating with

their non-native speaking teachers in English caused the least difficulty. The students were clearly comfortable with their presentation skills (item 63), as 44.8% felt they were able to give oral presentations with ease, and only 18.1% answered that it was difficult. Finally, whereas 36.2% of the students considered interacting with their teachers in English to be easy, only 16.2% said that it was difficult. Table 5.14 presents females and males' responses to speaking sub-skills.

Table 5.14
Differences in females' and males' mean scores across speaking skills

Survey items	Female	Male
S60	1.85	1.73
S61	1.66	1.66
S62	1.76	2.08
S63	2.56	2.33
S64	2.43	2.26
S65	1.25	1.80
S66	1.68	2.07
S67	2.00	2.49
S68	2.70	2.43

With the exception of participating in class discussion (item 62) and fluency (items 66), the differences between mean scores for all the speaking sub-skills are not wide, indicating that females and males had very similar experiences in terms of speaking. The examination of mean scores showed that females were more likely to report problems with class discussions (item 62), as they had a mean score of 1.75 while their male counterparts had a mean score of 2.08. This examination also showed that females experienced more difficulty with fluency (item 66; F=1.68, M=2.07). These findings lend much weight to the need to track the factors that combine to hinder students' spoken abilities, women in particular. These factors will be supplemented by data from the interviews carried out with the students.

5.2.10 Part 4: Students' Evaluation of the ELPPs

The last section of the questionnaire explored pharmacy students' experiences of taking a preparatory English course prior to commencing their subject-area studies. In

the hopes of gaining a better understanding of that course's strengths and weakness and to promote much-needed improvements, three open-ended questions were posed. These questions offered a clear picture of students' perceptions about the relationship between their success in their chosen academic programme and the language course. It can thus serve as a general guide to recognizing the main gaps in the language course, enabling the identification of areas that needed further clarification in the interviews. Although there were very few handwritten comments, they addressed more than one aspect of the ELPPs. All handwritten comments were collated and analysed; they fell within two themes, students' evaluation of the course and suggested improvements for future versions of the ELPPs.

In Q1, students were asked to provide information about whether the ELPPs they took in their PYP prepared them for the skills they would need in their content courses. A notable majority of the students (67.6%) answered in the negative and only 34 (32.4%) found it useful. I then analysed the comments and found that they revealed useful information about student's experiences in taking an EGP course (1st term), an ESP course (2nd term) and with their tutors.

With respect to the EGP course, few students expressed overall satisfaction with the improvement they gained in grammar and vocabulary, but the comments of those who did like it make clear that they felt it was the EGP course that helped them learn and understand more accurate levels of language use. A further positive aspect in the EGP course was the acquisition of and use of everyday terms. The students did not indicate specific vocabulary that they learned in the course, however, referred to vocabulary in general terms. This includes references to 'everyday use vocabulary', 'general vocabulary' and 'vocabulary for everyday life'. The following comments are some examples that illustrate these points.

> *It was a good course. It helped me acquire new rules of grammar and also refreshed my memory by reviewing those I had previously learned in school. (M21)*

> *I learned new terms used daily (M33)*

> *My grammar and language improved. (F5)*

In sharp contrast, most of the students were either neutral or negative about the EGP course. The most prevalent negative aspect mentioned was the excessive length and

intensity of the course. In several cases, they expressed frustration at the long working hours and significant effort required. Second, most students pointed out that they did not see it as helpful because it focused heavily on grammar and reading, while speaking and writing were not suitably targeted. Finally, a number of students made similar comments about the use of too many textbooks as key sources for teaching and study. They felt that they were subjected to a heavy course workload resulting in putting them under intolerable time pressure. These comments support these views:

> *There was no time, too many textbooks to study. (M84)*

> *It was not useful because there was not enough time to study it properly. (F22)*

> *No, it was not helpful because I was required to study four textbooks in one term. (M95)*

> *The course was not comprehensible because it ignored teaching main skills (such as speaking and writing).*

Most students agreed that the ESP course enhanced their awareness of medical knowledge and enriched their medical terminology. However, there were some cases of disagreement upon the types of topics addressed in that course. On this point, the students clearly asserted that the topics in the textbooks handled different language demands and concepts related specifically to nursing and medicine. In addition, some students reported a lack of speaking practice as another major weakness in the course:

> *I benefited from nursing in learning some medical information (F28).*

> *Nursing was a good course but it did not help me with studying my subject matter (M45)*

> *It will help nurses and doctors but not me (M11)*

> *It lacks information about the field of pharmacy. (F30)*

> *Speaking skills did not exist. (M2)*

As to their opinions about their EGP/ESP tutors, it was surprising not to find any comments provided by these students that praised the tutors. Rather, most students tended to link their negative opinions about the courses to the tutors themselves or to

the methods used for teaching the EGP/ESP courses. One male student explained that the methods were 'very boring' and another one wrote that 'the methods employed by the tutors to teach the course were largely similar to the English instruction used in the schools'. Students, both female and male, repeatedly showed that they could not see the benefits of the course because most of the tutors were concerned with covering a large amount of material and finishing the syllabus within an expected time. As a result, they were not attentive to students' conceptual understandings of the materials. On this point, students wrote:

> *Finishing the textbooks was more important than learning (M1)*

> *Their (teachers) main aim is to cover the textbooks it was like a race (F30)*

Finally, I noticed that what the male students referred to more than their female counterparts was their tutors' accents. This interesting point will be highlighted when data generated from interviews conducted with the male students are presented. These are examples from males' questionnaires in relation to their tutors' accents.

> *He did not speak in English; it was his L1 not English (M8)*

> *Beside that the tutors are speaking English mixed with their L1 (M41)*

The second theme was suggested improvements, which involved Q2 and Q3. Q2 asked students to indicate if there were any other academic skills that they wished they had learned in ELPP they studied in PYP and to explain their answers. Q3 asked them if there were anything else they would like to add about the course. In responding to Q2, while only 37.1% answered no, the majority (62.9%) answered affirmatively, indicating that their language course had not properly covered the full range of language skills and that they perceived the need to place much more emphasis on teaching these skills. As to Q3, the majority of the students (86.7%) indicated that they did not have anything else to add; 13.3% chose to offer answers.

The few students who answered were able to articulate clearly what language aspects had been lacking in their language course. When the comments were arranged, a clear

pattern emerged. First, the two productive skills of speaking and writing were assigned the highest priority by most students, female and male. They knew well how important it was for them to develop their speaking and writing abilities and were convinced that these skills were essential for success in their academic courses and professional lives. As one female (F3) and one male (M12) student wrote:

> *Speaking and writing skills are considered the most important skills that any students studying pharmacy must master. I wish they had been given much attention (F3).*

> *What exactly we missed in the preparatory year is speaking and writing. More classes should be assigned for these key skills (M12)*

The second issue that the students brought was reading skills, expressing an interest in more practices in reading of topics related to discipline-specific areas. The students also felt that listening skills, especially their ability to receive and understand messages in the communication process, were important. They again expressed a desire for more classes to practice reading and listening skills.

Building on the analysis of their handwritten comments, little disagreement is found between females' and males' accounts with respect to what language skills were found lacking in their language course. However, what was striking about males in contrast with females was that males may have had clearer ideas of their future academic needs. For instance, one male student expressed his wish to learn how to use the library and how to do scientific research properly. Another expressed a desire for more emphasis placed on note-taking, though this might have been because his notion of note-taking is not clear, as he referred to it 'writing':

> *Writing is essential because we need to write what is said by the lecturers (M51)*

In addition to comments about specific language skills, there were a number of other suggestions offered by the students. One that occurred fairly often is a request to have a number of intensive speaking courses, permitting a substantial focus on verbal communication. Notably, both female and male students emphasized that more importance should be given to English conversation activities, while others suggested that it might be useful to look at speaking courses designed for students attending other Saudi universities:

> *They should use interesting speaking courses. They, for example, can borrow the one that is used at Princess Noura University or the one used at Jubail University College (F20)*

Another set of suggestions involved teaching medical terminology. Students believed that medical terminology was vitally important for them to assure a smooth integration into their academic study and professional life. Some pointed out that a course on medical terminology on its own would also be valuable:

> *A course on medical terminology should be included in the programme (M1).*
>
> *There should be lessons teaching medical* terminology *only (M40)*

As far as suggestions for improvement is considered, I noticed that males were more likely than their female counterparts to ask for more professionally qualified English teachers with clear and understandable accents, as this student wrote:

> *The tutors could not present the information in a good way; they were also very strict and teaching the course becomes a race to get the textbook finished on time (M40)*

5.3 Summary of the Quantitative Results

In the first part of this chapter, I presented and analysed the data generated from the questionnaires. The findings of this section could be summarised as follows

- ➢ The results confirmed that all respondents to the questionnaire were studying in the College of the Pharmacy and were in their second year.
- ➢ Of the total of 105 second-year pharmacy students who responded to the questionnaire, 54% (N=57) were male, and 46% (N=48) were female.
- ➢ The results revealed that female and male students started learning English at early ages (10-11 years old at most), when they were in the primary school.
- ➢ The results demonstrated that the majority (86.67%) (Female, N=40; Male, N=51) of the respondents had not had the opportunity to take any English language courses before entering university, while a small minority (13.33%) (Female, N=8; Male, N=6) did have that exposure.
- ➢ The results also provided an indication of the infrequent and simplicity of the academic demands which the pharmacy course placed on students' receptive

and productive English skills. There is evidence that English as a medium of instruction was less likely to be used in the pharmacy courses and the subject-matter instructors were more likely to place less emphasis on the quality of the students' English performance.

➤ The results showed that the first task in the pharmacy courses was reading pre-lecture hand-outs (83.8%), followed by reading the multiple-choice (77.2%) and essay-type questions in the examination papers (75.2%). In respect to the speaking tasks, the results showed that these students were required to handle a variety of limited speaking tasks. 'Talking to lecturers in English' played the most important role in the students' academic lives (56.2%), while delivering individual oral presentations and group oral presentations appeared to be somewhat less required in their courses (27.6% and 28.6% respectively). As for the academic requirements in listening skill, the study showed that students attached some degree of importance to 'Listening to lectures' (81%) rather than to listening to oral presentations (58.1%) or to recoded speeches (43.8%). According to students' perceptions of writing tasks, 'writing lab reports' was reported as more commonly required (61%) than 'writing essays' (39%) and 'writing research paper' (31.4%).

➤ Focusing on students' perceptions of their language difficulties, It was found that understanding the meaning of unfamiliar general L2 vocabulary students' greatest difficulty that resulted in their poor performance in reading, speaking, writing and listening skills.

➤ In reading skill, results revealed that most of the students encountered a wide range of difficulties in reading skill. The second area of difficulty in reading, after choosing understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words as their top area of difficulty (m=1.22), was understanding the main point of an exam question (m=1.30), followed by distinguishing the main points from the supporting details and understanding text organization when reading a text (m=1.48). In contrast, understanding the meaning of technical items and main concepts in the field of pharmacy were reported as less troublesome (m=2). While males tended to report higher reading abilities than females, understanding the meaning of non-specific terms tended to be perceived as their largest problem area, as it was given the lowest mean scores by both genders (F=1.15, M=1.28), followed by understanding the point of an exam question which had

the second lowest mean scores (F=1.40, M=1.23).

➢ The results revealed that understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words was reported as the students' top problematic area in listening skill (m=1.42). This deficiency hindered them not only from identifying the topic of the lecture (m=1.59) but also from understanding information not explicitly stated by the lecturer (m=1.63). However, the means calculations of the remaining listening sub-skills showed that many students found listening skill to be less difficult than reading skills. No major differences were observed between the responses of females and males to listening sub-skills

➢ In writing skill, it appeared that identifying the appropriate word was reported as students' largest problem when writing a text (m=1.37), followed by having difficulty in expressing ideas and linking between sentences adequately (m= 1.45, and 1.59 respectively). Accuracy of grammar appeared to cause students little trouble (m=2.10). This result is not surprising, because it is perhaps their subject teachers tended not to show any particular interest in students' writing abilities, including grammar. Rather, they were more concerned with students' ability to retrieve important content knowledge. Although mean calculations suggest that the differences between the responses of the two groups is not large, females do appear to face some greater degree of difficulty in finding appropriate lexical terms (F=1.27) than males (M=1.45).

➢ In speaking skill, results showed that communicating with others accurately was identified as students' greatest difficulty (m=1.55) followed by answering questions and stating a point of view (m=1.66). Results also showed that many students reported difficulty with asking for more information (m=1.79) and with expressing ideas fluently (m=1.89). Yet, clear pronunciation (m=2.26), presenting information from prepared notes (m=2.34) and giving an individual oral presentation (m=2.43) caused students less troublesome. The differences between mean scores for all the speaking sub-skills are not wide, indicating that females and males had very similar experiences in terms of speaking.

➢ Students' handwritten comments to the three open-ended questions about their perceptions of the impact of ELPPs on their academic experiences revealed that students had different views about the value of the EGP and ESP course. While a few students expressed overall satisfaction with the improvement they gained in grammar and vocabulary in EGP course, most students assumed that

they did not see it as helpful because it focused heavily on grammar and reading, while speaking and writing were not suitably targeted. With respect to their views of ESP course, some students claimed that ESP course enhanced their medical knowledge. However, there were some cases of disagreement upon the types of topics addressed in that course.

5.4 Qualitative Analysis: Interviews

This section presents the data generated through the use of interviews with a group of students, both female and male, studying in the first term of their second-year pharmacy programmes. The study sought to find out the reasons for students' difficultly in using English in their major studies and the impact of the ELPPs on their academic experiences. I will present the females' interviews followed by the males; each interviewee's data are presented individually.

5.4.1 Interviews with Female Participants

<u>Noor</u>

I carried out the interviews with the female participants on campus either in my office or in the library at the female students' building. I decided to allow the choice of where they felt more comfortable and wanted to have the interview. Both locations were suitable for conducting interviews, but I noticed that they preferred to have the interviews in the library. This may be because most students seldom visit the library, so it was more comfortable for them to be in a location where they were less likely to be seen. I met Noor on campus and we stopped for a chat to reveal topics of personal concern, such as the effects of conducting my research study during my pregnancy. After receiving her oral approval to take part in the research study, I let Noor choose the time for conducting the interview; she decided to do it after she attended all her classes, which ended at noon. When it was 11:00 p.m. and Noor had not arrived, I thought she had changed her mind and went home. I became more convinced after I made several phone calls but received no response. Noor came two hours later, but when I saw her coming to the office, I decided to make her feel very welcome and not to discuss why she was late. My discussion with Noor touched on aspects such as the reasons she encountered difficulties with language when adapting to the academic

demands required in her content courses and her perceptions of the impact of the ELPPs on her academic experiences.

Reasons related to Prior School English Education

Regarding the causes that led to encounter difficulty with using English in her content courses, Noor made it clear to me that her prior English school education hampered her in many ways. First, she reported that she rarely practised speaking and her schoolteacher not only did not encourage her to practise English in class but also allowed her to use Arabic in her language class. She indicated that her schoolteacher's main focus of the teaching was on teaching grammar and words. Noor further explained that her teacher devoted a great deal of attention to explaining grammatical rules fully and often she tended to spend more than one lesson on explaining the grammar rules. Noor told me that because she was required to carry out many exercises set out in their textbooks and in extra grammar worksheets provided by the teacher, she had to listen carefully while she 'kept her mouth closed' at all times. She said that listening was almost ignored and she had no chance to practise listening to native-English speakers inside or outside the classroom, so she was not under pressure to become competent in such situations. In the following comments, Noor pitied herself for being exposed to only grammar instruction in all three levels of her schooling:

> *In all three levels, I had grammar but no speaking or listening. I did not enjoy the English class because I did not like grammar. It might be good and nice to learn grammar but because I was exposed to too much grammar instruction, that made me hate English.*

Reasons Related to Affective Factors

Noor's English learning experience at schools determined her interest to take part in further learning English processes. She reported having a lack of confidence in herself, especially in her English speaking, to tackle what is a challenging activity in her classroom. She felt that she was less active and reluctant to express her views. Due to her constant fear of making mistakes and mispronouncing English words, Noor did not react positively to participating in class discussion. She disagreed that it was important to ask her teachers to provide more clarification either in or outside class. In the

following, she described her feelings when answering a question raised by the subject teacher and how her peers' reactions to her contribution made her feel bad.

> *Noor: I knew the answer; it was here [pointing at her head]. I raised my hand up and then the teacher called upon my name to answer that question. When I said 'the enzyme is…' they [her classmates] laughed at me. Not all the students, some of them, those students who think they are professional in English.*
> **Me: Oh dear, do you know why they did that?**
> *Noor: A close friend of mine told me that it was because I pronounced 'enzyme' incorrectly. I do not know whether it should be pronounced /iːnz iːm/ or / iːnzaɪm/ I do not know?*
> **Me: What happened then, could you tell me, please?**
> *Noor: I stopped speaking and began to speak in Arabic. I do not want them to laugh at me anymore. One day, I will prove to them that my academic ability is all about what I have in here [pointing at her head] not about how my English is good…I felt ashamed of myself and of my level in English.*

Clearly, a lack of confidence undermined Noor's attempts to use English or to improve her ability in it. I felt that Noor was completely frustrated, as she seemed to be unwilling to learn how exactly 'enzyme' is pronounced. She reported that her poor competence in English no longer affects the way she copes with the demands of her disciplinary classes. She, therefore, resisted feeling ashamed of her poor speaking ability and got rid of it by replacing that with areas where she was able to feel more confident and safe. Therefore, she was more determined about developing her understanding of disciplinary-specific knowledge because it might be the only key to save her from losing respect.

Reasons Related to Lack of Contexts for Using English

Noor felt that the use of English as the medium of instruction particularly in medical schools was unnecessary. Her first reason for not using English is related to her perception that students in medical schools would not use English in their clinical experiences since all their future interactions would be conducted in Arabic. The second reason is that the use of English in medical schools would inhibit students' attempts to understand the main scientific and medical concepts. She added:

When attending medical lectures, it is very important to understand everything said in the lecture because we will diagnose and treat diseases and prescribe medications to the patients. So there is a difference between acquiring medical knowledge for allowing students to pass the examinations and allowing students to implement what they have learned in an effective way. Therefore, I recommend using Arabic rather English because we will be able to understand what we learned and remember the lesson fifty years later.

Reasons Related to Linguistic Differences

When talking about her struggle with writing in English, Noor commented on the difference between Arabic and English in relation to the writing practices in both languages, namely the use of capitalization and punctuation. She said that 'we do not write like them [English-native speakers]. We start writing from the right side of the page while in English we start writing from the left side'. She also indicated that she ignored using full stops to separate sentences either because she does not know how or where to use them or because she thought that her teachers could easily read her composition even without placing any full stops. She added that, 'I do not use full stops because they distracted me and instead of using them I use lots of *and;* by using *and* I feel that the sentence was still meaningful.'

Second, Noor said that she was unable to see the difference between the meaning of some English words because they have similar pronunciations, such as *two, too* and *to*. Noor said that she could not know the difference between the auxiliaries namely *has* and *have* and she tended to rely on using *have* with all subjects, saying, 'my problem is with 'has' and 'have'. I use 'have' but rarely use 'has''.

Perceptions towards the Nature of the ELPPs

When asked to give any views regarding the quality of the ELPPs, Noor quickly indicated that ELPPs as 'not effective and was time-consuming'. The following excerpts illustrate her feelings:

It was another chance to practice English, but the English course [the ELPPs] did not assist me changing anything in my level in English like I was expected to. I wanted to be changed from nothing into something. I wanted to be a person who can speak, write and read. Nothing was

interesting in that course. It was useless and time-consuming, too. We spent our time for nothing and I can tell you that my ability in English has not improved. I cannot even write a paragraph or speak in a good way.

One of the issues I wanted to know was why ELPPs were not helpful to her so I decided to ask her this question, 'were there any things that contributed to not making it a useful language course?' Noor answered:

I had four EGP textbooks to study. Can you imagine yourself sitting in the same classroom, taught by the same teacher for four hours? It was quite awful; I was presented with lots of grammar rules and asked to carry out lots of activities. Too much pressure in the class and work; however, I could not concentrate on all that. What learning gains could there be if someone was placed under such pressure? I did not want to attend anymore but it was all about the grades.

From the above response, I understand that based on her result of the placement test, she was assigned to study EGP course from four textbooks namely, *New Headway Plus Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate* and *Intermediate.* She indicated that she was unhappy with being taught her EGP course by the same teacher and having to pay attention to the same teacher for almost four hours per day, a total of 16 hours a week. She felt that hours spent on the course were in themselves a barrier to effective language learning and in fact a key factor to drop the course as she said, 'I really wanted to drop the course because I felt that I would fail or get a low grade'.

I also enquired about Noor's views of the ESP course and she highlighted the following:

ESP was a helpful and interesting course. I studied two textbooks; Nursing 1 and 2. Both textbooks were good but I think the challenge for me was the content of ESP course. It was difficult for me to understand medical terms; they actually have Latin origins and are difficult to understand. I had not studied them or heard of them before. Overall...for me, it was an essential course for all medical students. I could not imagine myself having the ability to take pharmacy courses without the help of the ESP course.

Although Noor was happy with her ESP course and recognized its value for pursuing her discipline-specific area, she indicated to me that she was unable to cope with understanding the meaning of the medical words.

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

Another factor that led to a further decline in Noor's views of the value of EGP was the language teacher and her attitudes. Noor said that she wanted to feel valued, important and appreciated for her work. She wanted her EGP teacher to act like a 'sister' to provide her with 'support, love and respect'. She told me that her EGP teacher did not show any understanding or compassion for her struggle with language, which in turn affected Noor's interest to go to her classes as she voiced: 'I did not want to attend her class because I knew that I will be sitting as a passive person just like that wall [points at the wall of the room]'. Another issue Noor brought up was her EGP teacher's competence at teaching English. She noted that her teacher mispronounced some words and instructed her to write the English pronunciation of the difficult words phonetically in Arabic letters. Interestingly, Noor showed her disapproval for the use of such strategy and said, 'I am against using such a strategy. Since we were children in school we were prohibited from doing this'.

In contrast, her ESP teacher was classified as 'a sister and a friend' because she made Noor feel positive by saying 'do not worry; I have been a student like you and we are all in the same boat'. Noor indicated that her ESP teacher was not familiar with some basic medical concepts and terminology but, as Noor saw it, that was not her fault. Noor did not 'blame her [ESP teacher] for being unfamiliar with the information related to the medical fields because she was of great help and support' and also because she 'did not judge us as ignorant or careless students'.

The Impact of the ELPPs on English Abilities

When I asked Noor to refer specifically to the English skills in which she received no gains, she indicated that her writing and speaking skills did not improve. I, therefore, decided to tackle these two skills with her in a more detailed investigation. When I asked her about her writing problems, she reported that grammar was her greatest challenge:

I cannot write because I have many grammatical mistakes and that makes me feel scared of producing any texts in English. It is so unusual to write a sentence and give it a long stare with the hope of making the meaning clearer than your first attempt. However, even after many corrections the sentence still looks odd.

The above quote indicates that Noor felt her knowledge in grammar was not enough to construct sentences that she wanted to write and her attempts to correct it turned out to be futile. Turning back to the impact of the EGP course, Noor indicated that the lack of writing practice there impeded her writing ability. She complained that her EGP teacher did not devote sufficient attention to giving adequate writing instruction. She felt that the constant exposure to formal presentation of grammar rules in schools and in EGP made her not 'see the forest for the trees'. She asserted that she wanted to extend her knowledge in written grammar:

I am aware of some of the rules [grammar] but I could not adequately apply them in writing. I wanted to improve myself in writing. But, writing instruction in the English course [the ELLPs] turned into grammar instruction. I had had enough with grammar. It was too much focus on grammar to the extent that I cannot retain my previous knowledge of grammar or recognize the difference between has and have. It was confusing.

She complained about being dictionary-bound to find the right meaning of unknown words and admitted her inability to communicate her understanding of the subject matter in an accurate, well-written text. She felt that her writing might sound 'funny' and 'not clear' because there is 'one word in English followed by ten words in Arabic'. She also indicated that her teachers rarely marked her written work, adding:

We carried out a few writing activities in the EGP workbook during the class and if there was not enough in writing *to complete them, the teacher asked us to mark it as homework. Since we were not asked to submit that homework, I was more likely not to do them.*

I asked Noor to reflect on writing improvements, if any, she received from the ESP course; she felt she would have benefited more from writing on topics related to the field of pharmacy than writing on topics such as food types or street directions: 'it would be motivating if there was more practice in the medical way of writing'. When

I enquired about the types of the materials used in the EGP and ESP courses, Noor revealed to me that the materials used in the EGP course were based on everyday topics, whereas the ESP course highlighted writing practice that was more related to medical topics. I thus wanted to know whether she was successfully engaged in her writing activities in the ESP course. She replied:

> *Honestly, there was no writing instruction and no writing practice in the ESP course. Writing was not taught so I had no way to tell how effective it was in developing my writing ability.*

As far as speaking is concerned, Noor had similar concerns about the influence of the lack of opportunity to use English actively in her EGP classes on her speaking development. She attributed her low interest in speaking to her EGP teacher who was not 'patient and caring' and unable to 'understand that not all students have the same ability or learn at the same pace'. She added:

> *When I answered her question, she did not smile at me and her eyes were down pretending she was reading the textbook. When an excellent student interacted with her, she smiled and looked very happy. Why do I have to put myself in such a position?*

> *I also cannot speak fluently. My problem is that I can understand what they [teachers and students] are talking about but I feel myself unable to raise a single question or explain a point that I fully understood. If I speak in English I rely on using some Arabic words in the middle to express myself.*

Rama

Rama volunteered to speak about the ELPPs and we had the interview in my office. I made the necessary arrangements, which included offering snacks and drinks and ensuring the office was free from the constant interruptions of other staff members or students in the department. What follows is the presentation of the aspects we discussed.

Reasons related to Prior School English Education

Rama described the negative effect of her school education on making good use of English in tackling the demands of her subject area. She indicated that she had experienced negative circumstances with her schoolteacher and that affected her in

various ways. Unfortunately, she described finding herself in situations that led her to feel fearful and discriminated against. Because her schoolteacher was 'very tough, hard to please and had a sharp tongue', she no longer 'wanted to attend her classes and found a way to be excused by asking either to go to the toilet or to buy a bottle of water from the school shop'. She indicated that when her teacher became annoyed and no longer interested in patiently going over every detail to increase Rama's understanding of the lesson, Rama 'stopped listening to her teacher and suddenly gave a choked cry'. Rama expressed the desire to be exposed to teaching practices that would bring fun and joy into the class rather to go to a class that 'filled [her] with horror'. I wanted to find out how that affected her attitudes towards English and learning it at later stages of life, such as university. Rama explained:

> *I don't know what to say, it is very odd. Is it hate or love, no idea. But I would like to say that if I had a good background in English starting from school, I would have studied medicine. Allah has decreed and what he wills, he does.* Ahamdullillah [thanks be to Allah].

Reasons Related to Lack of Contexts for Using English

Rama reported a lack of practice in speaking and indicated that she was not required to demonstrate her disciplinary understanding in English either by participating in class discussions or giving oral presentations. She, however, expressed her desire to be a more fluent speaker because she felt that English was required for her professional development: 'we do not speak much in the [pharmacy classes], but I need it because it is important to communicate with my colleagues who do not speak Arabic at my future work'. She also referred to the limited use of language by some of her pharmacy instructors and explained that some of them made little effort to correct students' language mistakes:

> *They sometimes produce wrong grammatical sentences such as when they said 'they are work' instead of 'they are working'. They do not penalize students for making grammatical or spelling mistakes when submitting their assignments or when answering exam questions. This is unsupportive. Since these instructors do not object to their students' poor English performance, we will not be interested in overcoming our language difficulties.*

Perceptions towards the Nature of the ELPPs

Similar to her friend Noor, Rama was assigned four EGP textbooks in the first term. She was 'dissatisfied', 'unhappy', 'nervous', 'stressful' and felt her life turned into 'a terrible mess' because she had to do 'everything in haste'. She complained about not having any time available to complete the work that she was required to do in other courses. She found living under pressure for a whole year 'deadly boring and tedious'. She experienced feeling lost because her teachers 'jumped from one unit into another in one class' and she was not convinced of the soundness of the excuses for doing so, as she explained:

> *She [her EGP teacher] jumped from one point to another, from one unit into another without taking into consideration if I totally grasped the information. When asked why we had to do that, she had nothing to say but to tell us that we were lagging behind the other groups. That was not good for us or for learning English. I did not like that jumping at all.*

She emphasized that she suffered from trying to balance the demands of her personal life and that of her 'extremely heavy' coursework. Because she devoted significant amounts of time on studying the course at home, she failed to participate actively with other members of her family on the occasion of her sister's marriage:

> *It was the first marriage occasion that happened in my family. I should have helped my sister and stood by my mother who was in need of my help. I got home at 4.00 p.m. suffering from extreme fatigue and feeling lifeless. After waking from a short nap, I immediately began studying for hours on end.*

During my discussion with Rama I asked her to tell me how much time she needed to study the course:

> *The class began at 8:00 a.m. and lasted until 11:00; after 11:00, we had a break for lunch and the al-dhuhr ('midday') prayer. After that, we had to take one more class, physics class. It was four hours going to English. I was so exhausted and had no more reserves of strength or good cheer to participate in the physics class.*

From her response I read that Rama was not happy with having English instruction for so many hours and found it difficult to keep up with other courses. Turning back to the time needed to study the EGP course, she felt because of the pressure resulting from the heavy ELPPs workload, she spent longer study time on it than on any other subject:

> *Honestly, it was overwhelming and there were so many things to do such as studying grammar, new terms, and spelling. I think I spent all day studying the course and because of that there was no way to invest the proper amount of time for studying other subjects.*

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

One of the attributes that led Rama to have negative perceptions about the quality of the ELPPs was both her EGP and ESP teachers. As for the former, Rama told astonishing stories about how her EGP teacher treated her. I went on to ask her to comment on the long-lasting damage caused by her teacher:

> *One day I came to her class very late. My father is an old man and not a fast driver because his vision is too poor. In addition to that, my father had to drive my two younger sisters to their schools before taking me to the university. When I entered the classroom to give my excuses, she shouted at me, threw down her file onto the floor and dismissed me from the class. She should have accepted my excuse because she knew how difficult it was for my older father to drive three girls on time.*

I asked Rama whether she had requested the help of the ELC administrator and she answered positively that they had supported her and replaced the teacher with another EGP teacher. Rama, however, was still not happy with the new EGP teacher because she was, as Rama viewed her, more supportive and cooperative with students of higher levels of proficiency in English than with Rama:

> *When they interacted with each other, I got lost. She arranged with the students to have the first midterm exam after coming back from the Al-Hajj holiday. However, I did not prepare myself for taking the exam because I did not know that they were talking about the exam. She had to write that on the blackboard and consider those students who could not understand spoken English.*

It seems that Rama's poor English affected her not only in understanding her teacher but also in terms of feeling that there was no point in devoting much effort to improve her English competence. She tended to blame her teacher for not being attentive to the specific needs of students whose English was poor.

It also was of interest to me to know if her ESP gave her the kind of support that she asked for, but Rama made it clear to me that there was no support. She tended not to answer that question directly, however, instead highlighting an interesting point, namely the value of the ESP teacher's knowledge of the basic concepts of the medical fields in teaching Nursing 1 and Nursing 2 (the ESP course). She said:

> *I think teachers who have a good knowledge of the fundamental concepts of medical fields should teach Nursing 1 and 2 [the ESP course]. I have to say that because I suffered from studying hard Latin terms and unclear, difficult medical principles. I felt, of course that is my opinion, if a specialized teacher had taught me, I would have been able to gain more knowledge in medical fields and study Nursing 1 and 2 more effectively. It was difficult because it was new and thus I wanted her to make these new things easier and clearer for me to understand.*

Based on Rama's response, I learned that she had hoped to be taught by a teacher who had some basic understanding of the medical areas because she felt that they could bring that knowledge into their classes and support those students who might have no basic knowledge, sharing their own knowledge and actively promoting the learning process. Although she did not experience that, she made an interesting point that made me more interested in knowing how she came up with it:

> *I did not know about that until I started taking my classes in pharmacy. The professors here are very informative. I am learning from the experts, you know. They have the ability to describe several clinical features and define other medical concepts to explain more complex concepts. The more you understand about these concepts, the more they stick in my mind.*

Turning back to her ESP teacher, she emphasized that her ESP teacher needed to give up relying on grammar and turn to concentrate on teaching concepts in the medial fields. She assumed that her ESP teacher 'pretended to understand the course but I

found that she lacked that'. One more point that I wanted to explore was if Rama would hold a different view if a teacher with an adequate knowledge of the course had taught her and she explained as follows:

> *Yes, I think it is good to be taught by a teacher who is capable of teaching concepts and vocabulary in the field of medicine. A friend of mine who studied in [group number] was taught by a specialized teacher. I think her teacher was a nurse, or she had studied nursing before she became a teacher, I am not sure. Anyway, my friend was talking a lot about her and explained to me how her teacher's knowledge of diseases and treatments and stuff like that were very helpful, particularly in teaching Nursing 1 and 2 [the ESP course]. What luck!*

This hints at the fact that these students were exposed to diverse experiences in ESP instruction. For instance, Rama's view, as shown in her final comments, reflects her genuine interest in and concerns about having the opportunity to be taught by teachers who have at least some specialized knowledge. Moreover, she considered missing that chance to be bad luck. Rama's point regarding the value of ESP teachers' subject knowledge in the medical fields opened my eyes to exploring the views of those students who were taught by 'specialized teachers', as Rama called them.

The Impact of the ELPPs on English Abilities

I also asked whether Rama felt that the ELPPs adequately prepared her to use the four English skills. She explained, 'No, it did not adequately prepare me because the most important skills, writing and speaking, were ignored'. Rama indicated that her poor competence in the use of English not only led her to experience limited conceptualization of the subject matter but also to suffer from problems of being less certain of the course requirements and the demands of her subject teachers. For example, she reported her frustration at her inability to understand what her subject teachers were doing and felt that they considered her being 'as fluent as the students whom they had taught in their own countries'.

She indicated that writing examination answers posed difficulty and required a higher level of ability in English. She reported her frustration at being unable to express her views in the classroom. She felt that the course did not help her to

write examination answers in English. She believed that because her ESP and EGP teachers did not require any written assignments, her writing skills had actually declined since she had been in school. She felt that her writing style was 'weak' and the structure of her sentences 'lacked clarity', expressing a desire to learn how to write precisely and fluently. Rama pointed out that all the exam questions in the ELPPs were multiple-choice questions, so she lacked practice in writing answers for essay questions.

Additionally, Rama stressed that she needed to improve her speaking skills and indicated that she felt frustrated because she could not express her thoughts and her understanding of the subject matter. She stated that she had not been asked to do oral presentations, as students in other groups had. She felt that those students who had the opportunity to give oral presentations were 'lucky because they had the opportunity to speak and present their ideas':

> *My group was not lucky because our teachers were so stress-causing and did not require us to give oral presentations. However, the teachers, who taught the group next door asked students to choose one story to read from among the five stories and give a presentation on some aspects of that story.*

Assessment Practices Adapted in ELPPs

Rama indicated that her overall scores on midterm exams generally demotivated her, believing that they were above her actual level and contained questions and topics that had not been taught by the teachers. She added:

> *Midterm exams were so difficult because most questions were about topics and grammatical rules that we did not study. For example, when the second EGP textbook is finished [Elementary], we had to prepare ourselves for taking the second midterm exam. During that exam, we were frustrated and shocked because most of its questions were about topics and grammatical rules not included in Elementary but taken from the next textbook, Pre-Intermediate.*

She indicated that her teachers expected a lot from their students and thus did not take into consideration their students' low level of English when assessing them: 'they expected us to learn everything within three weeks. In fact, we still had language struggle that badly affected our grades'.

Najlaa

I planned to meet Najlaa in the library to carry out the interview. We scheduled to get together several times but they all fell through, so I decided to let Najlaa name any site that she felt would be more suitable for the interview. She then asked to be interviewed in her grandmother's house and I agreed. Upon my arrival, her mother, sisters and grandmother welcomed me. As should be done in any Saudi community, the coffee and dates were served, and after that tea and snacks were also served. I was planning to interview Najlaa as soon as possible but the family did not want to leave the room; rather they started to interview me. I then decided to ask the family to give me some space to interview Najlaa. Her mother and sisters left the room, but her grandmother preferred to stay until the end of the interview. The interview with Najlaa touched on the same aspects that I discussed with Noor and Rama. However, in Najlaa's interview I managed to capture some different views about her experience in reading subject-matter books and in being taught by an ESP teacher who had a good understanding of medical knowledge and was perhaps more likely to be qualified for teaching an ESP course. These issues are captured separately below.

Reasons related to Prior School English Education

I started the conversation by asking her to indicate if she encountered any difficulty in making good use of English to study in her pharmacy courses. Her first challenge lay in writing examination answers, and the ability to speak fluently and accurately was the second one. Najlaa attributed her weakness in English to her school and her first complaint was about the focus put on form-based instruction rather than on teaching speaking skills. Thus, the process of English learning, for her, was limited to working out some grammar activities, reading short texts and writing short answers rather than making use of speaking:

> *The way English is taught in the KSA is wrong. Throughout all nine years, I was taught grammar. It is, therefore, very normal for somebody to anticipate that after being exposed to grammar-based instruction for nine*

years, students would have become proficient in grammar. Unfortunately, most students including myself were not. This result is fair enough because how good students are at grammar depends on how good their teachers are at grammar teaching. Some teachers use enjoyable teaching practices to make their students happy and comfortable, whereas others have ways to make many students not care and feel demotivated.

She also indicated that her schoolteacher did not encourage speaking because there were more than 30 students in her class, so the teacher was unable to give every student the opportunity to practise speaking. Besides, she pointed out that her prior English school education did not encourage her to identify how English is best learned because she had to rely on memorization: 'I wanted to get an A grade and I knew that my results in English would be very high because I have a good memory'. She felt that the use of rote learning hindered her from developing deeper, meaningful learning of the most basic concepts in her content courses, especially when the use of English was not clear. She commented:

> *When planning to study a course, I memorize all the points that are put on the lecturer's slides. When the language used to explain drug actions is not clear, I often memorize every word written on that slide. However, if you ask me about the underlying meaning of that definition, I will not be able to give you an answer.*

Perceptions towards the Nature of ELPPs

Because she achieved higher grades in the placement test, Najlaa was placed into a higher-level of English proficiency class. Consequently, she was assigned reading from two EGP textbooks in the first term. Najlaa, however, felt using two textbooks was not necessarily 'a real blessing'; rather it was 'a problem'. She maintained that using two EGP textbooks could give others the impression that she had a large amount of time to balance between the time devoted to studying other PYP subjects and the EGP course. Although Najlaa did her best to balance the conflicting time demands to studying, she devoted more time to studying EGP course and sometimes 'an entire day was spent on studying textbooks from cover to cover'. She revealed that the other PYP subjects such as math, physics and chemistry were hard and time-intensive subjects because English is used in these classes. However, she indicated

that she had to use all the extra time she allotted for studying PYP subjects to the EGP course. She felt sorry for those students who were assigned four EGP textbooks and wondered what she would have done if she were in their places:

> *They were only two textbooks but it was like studying four textbooks. I pity [*Haram *in Arabic] those students who studied four EGP textbooks. I think they did not have enough time do everything that they needed to do. Allah saved me,* Alhamdulillah [Praise be to Allah]

Another issue Najlaa mentioned related to the ELPPs' failure to have her acquire the language needed to study other PYP subjects. In the following comments, she explained how difficult it was to study maths in English using English numbers along with English maths calculation symbols and how the ELLPs did not help her to overcome that obstacle:

> *At school, I studied math in Arabic; everything was written and said in Arabic. In my PYP, I was required to use 1, 2 [one, two] and +, : [plus, divide] in English. I felt that I was exposed to studying two types of English. While the first was used in the English course [the ELLPs] in the form of grammar; the second was the English used in the scientific field of study. EGP should support studying the other medical subjects required in the PYP.*

Factors Behind the Success of ESP Instruction

Najlaa's accounts of her experience with the ESP course, on the other hand, were positive and encouraging. She seemed fairly positive about the value of learning medical terms in the ESP course and felt that this aspect of her course had helped her learn the most. One important factor was the need to use teachers who had appropriate content knowledge when teaching ESP courses, namely Nursing 1 and 2. Najlaa placed a great value on her lived experience with being exposed to ESP instruction delivered by an ESP teacher who had familiarity with her specialization area, adding:

> *I think she [ESP teacher] was working as a nurse. I felt that she was the best option for teaching Nursing 1 and 2 mainly because she had good background about areas related to the medical fields. We never left the classroom until we had a true understanding of many important medical issues.*

Another factor that led to the success of the ESP instruction was the use of authentic materials and language activities that students would be exposed to in their major studies. She indicated that her teacher selected suitable materials for her ESP classes that helped to equip Najlaa with the knowledge that she would need in her future academic and professional life. In the following excerpt, Najlaa explains how learning to write a sample of a blood donor card helped to engage her language background with medical-based knowledge:

> *The ESP teacher taught us how to write personal information of blood donors on a blood donor card. I was so happy doing that activity and felt that it took all my focus. It opened my eyes on stuff that I am sure that I will be required to do in the future. I learned to write donors' names, ages, and their medical histories, such as writing about whether they had ever been exposed to blood transfusion or had a surgical procedure, stuff like that.*

Furthermore, she indicated that her ESP teacher narrated touching stories about hepatitis patients. Najlaa felt that she had received a brief overview of hepatitis, its symptoms and its treatments and expressed to me that these stories enhanced her awareness of the fundamental responsibility that she had for her patients. She added:

> *She told us stories about patients affected by hepatitis, how it affected their lives and how they successfully beat it. She told us that there was a lady who had Hepatitis C and she had to live with that disease. In every one of her classes, there was a new story about a particular disease and how people get infected and how it can be cured. The amount of medical information I received from her was more valuable than what was provided in Nursing 1 and 2.*

The third factor was the use of task-based instruction intended to engage students in activities such as pair work, group work, in-class open discussion and content-focused feedback. She explained to me that the use of pair-work activities helped to minimize the stress of speaking in class, which in turn increased fun and enjoyment:

> *When she found that there was some medical information that was not easy for us to understand, she tended to simplify it by using less complex English forms. She let us work together and gave us time to discuss issues related to what she was talking about. She checked our*

understanding of what she was talking about and accepted that we might fail to fully understand it. She encouraged us to talk with each other. She was so flexible in accommodating what came up during our discussion, allowing us to know the answers. It was really fun.

Despite her positive views about the ESP course, she felt that it was not the most appropriate course for students who are aspiring to study in the department of pharmacy. She justified her views when she found that some units that were most related to the field of pharmacy were removed from both ESP textbooks, *Nursing 1* and *Nursing 2*:

We did not study some units which I felt if we had studied, they would to some extent have helped us in the study of our major degrees. I cannot remember the number or the title of these units, but I think it was about types of medication and dosages. Not taking these units did not affect us badly at that time because we did not know that we would be studying pharmacy. Rather, we were happy over cancelling teaching some units in Nursing 1 *and* 2 *[the ESP course]. Anyway, I would suggest providing students with a course that might equip students who aim to study pharmacy with the necessary skills and knowledge.*

The Impact of the ELPPs on English Abilities

It appears from the data that the skill of writing examination answers has an important role in the pharmacy students' academic lives. This conclusion is supported by the data generated from quantitative analysis. Najlaa's answers were similar to those offered by Rama, as both indicated that the ELPPs did not develop their examination writing skills. Najlaa viewed this as 'the biggest fault in the English course [ELPPs]' and indicated that because she was exposed to only multiple-choice based-questions, she faced serious difficulties in producing clear written texts during her exams in pharmacy. Although students' subject teachers do not give much attention to the quality of their students' written performances, there is evidence that these students find it difficult to cope with the demands of writing exam answers, as Najlaa indicated:

In the English course [the ELPPs], I received no instruction in writing exam answers and I felt that it was its biggest drawback. When I entered [into pharmacy], I was shocked at the fact that there was no exam without

essay questions. At the moment I read an essay question, I gathered up in my mind the ideas and thoughts to answer it, but when I started to answer it in English, everything I had in my mind was completely lost. I felt my poor brain was under pressure of recalling all the information to answer the question and of structuring the answer into clear English. Beyond that, I had to complete both processes in a very limited time.

Najlaa indicated that due to her inability to write adequate essay examination answers in English, her grades were negatively affected:

In the physiology midterm exam, I was asked to answer only one essay question. It was about defining a chemical term. If I answered it in Arabic, I would need no more than 10 minutes. I wrote the answer in English 'it is help…' and then I wrote along with that many Arabic words to complete my answer. The answer consisted of four lines but the language is very poor; a child of 10 years old would have had a better performance than mine. , Alhamdulillah [Praise be to Allah] my subject teachers tended not to cut marks for spelling and grammatical mistakes. If I were a teacher, I would not accept that performance, especially from students at the tertiary level.

Najlaa raised an important aspect regarding the impact of the PYP English course on the ability to read her subject books academically. She revealed the course's failure to provide her with adequate training in reading books and articles related to her major studies. She indicated that although most technical words were familiar, it was difficult to reach deeper meanings through reading pharmacy books. She indicated that understanding the meaning of unfamiliar terms and comprehending sentence structures as her greatest problems, explaining:

In the English course [the ELPPs], we used to read short paragraphs based on everyday topics. The words and the language in the Headway's books [the textbox taught in the EGP course] were, to some extent, to me, simple. Here [in pharmacy] we are required to read from books and some scientific articles, which I cannot understand. One day, the physiology professor requested us to read about the respiratory system and chose to read it from a specific reference. When I read that reference, I found that most words were not clear and the sentence structures were complicated. I had to read word by word, sentence by sentence and often read one sentence several times to

*understand. To read about a general topic is not as difficult
as reading about a scientific topic. The verbs are different
and the language use is also different and difficult.*

Najlaa was the first and only participant who reported that she received no formal instruction in using the library. She felt that this academic aspect should be acquired at the tertiary level since it had not been adequately covered at school. Najlaa reported that one of her lecturers named a list of books and asked her to find them in the library. She, however, found it very difficult to locate the books:

*[A pharmacy lecturer's name] asked us to gather
information about a particular medicine, Nizatidine. She
named the books that she wanted us to read and asked us to
go the library to search for these books. I went to the
library and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't find these
books because hundreds of books were placed on the
shelves with numbers and titles, but there was no book
called Nizatidine.*

After hard work locating the book in the library, Najlaa indicated that she faced another difficulty. She felt herself unable to handle the information in the book:

*I couldn't dig up any information about Nizatidine because
I didn't know how to use a book index. Some pages had
information about medical treatments, but they did not
include anything about Nizatidine, whereas others covered
information about its role and possible side effects. I did
not know that I had to go forward and backward to get
what I needed. It took time.*

As far as listening is concerned, Najlaa perceived the positive impact of the listening input she received in the ELPPs on her ability to listen. She reported that due to the constant exposure to listening to long stretches of spoken English in the course, her ability to comprehend her pharmacy lectures increased and decreased the blocking effect of speech rates on her comprehension. Additionally, she felt that her EGP course helped her to develop 'a satisfactory awareness of grammatical rules and vocabulary'.

Najlaa did not report many problems in understanding her discipline-specific terminology. Her appreciation was for the ESP course, which fulfilled her need for technical knowledge development and making the information hard to forget:

The ESP course was good, as I learned medical terms that I had no idea about. Learning these technical terms in ESP courses fostered my understanding of my subject matter. Now, when I come upon words such as cell *and* membrane*, I do not need to consult a dictionary to know their meanings. Because I know what they mean, I easily understand and acquire the information I need.*

<u>Kareema</u>

The interview with Kareema was conducted in the university library. My discussion with her centred on similar issues as discussed with the other students. However, I managed to find out that Kareema's views about her prior school English education varied, particularly as she was enrolled to study in schools that were based on the King Abdullah Bin Abduaziz Public Education Development Project, known as the 'Tatweer School'. This project aims to improve public education in terms of implementing online, self-study and face-to-face training to ensure students have more flexibility to stimulate their learning. Moreover, it aims to develop their skills and hobbies through using extra-curricular activities, encouraging them to give oral presentations in different educational contexts such as local schools (see Chapter 2). I present below the issues that arose in our discussion.

Reasons related to Prior School English Education

Kareema reported various elements of traditional teaching methods that were still used in her primary school, such as the excessive use of repetition and drills. In primary school, Kareema did not enjoy her English classes at all because they were based on alphabet and grammar drills. She also reported that her primary teacher was not qualified in teaching English and her dependence on using Arabic to do sentence drills in her classes was a key support for her claim. She wanted her teacher to replace the use of repetitions with songs for teaching the alphabet, but believed her teacher might incorrectly gain the sense that activities such as listening and singing songs would not work best with her students' culture, so she picked those activities that were most appropriate for their culture and religion:

She was a very good teacher but her teaching practices were outdated. I do not mind using practices and drills, but it became boring when I was exposed to lots of drills.

> *Instead, she could have used songs and game. When she asked the students about their views of using songs, she felt that most students did not like the idea, maybe she felt that it was not acceptable to some students. I think that reasoning might change her mind.*

She indicated that the large size of her classes (35 students) made it difficult for the teacher to offer every student a chance to speak. She identified noise and disturbance as another problem with having large size classes: 'I could not hear the teacher because in the back of the classroom most students made noises and they were not controlled by my teacher'.

Notably, Kareema's views about her school English education changed when she studied at the Tatweer Secondary School. To understand how well Tatweer helped Kareema's English performance, I decided to ask 'in which way do you feel that the Tatweer project helped you to improve your English?' She answered:

> *We loved to be engaged in extracurricular activities in general and giving oral presentation in particular. There were five students who were chosen by the teacher to give presentations in another school. My teacher helped me to practise giving presentation several times; the first time I presented in front of the whole class and the second in front of all the school's students. It was not easy to speak in English in front of my teachers, the head teacher and the students, but I learned how to do that.*

From this, it appeared that the Tatweer School had helped Kareema in developing her self-confidence in giving oral presentations in English. However, her responses did not give me much information about how it helped her in acquiring the four core English skills so I decided to ask a more direct question: 'Well, could you tell more about how the other four English skills were taught in your school?' Kareem had this answer:

> *Look, my aunt's daughter studied in a traditional school. I learned that there were no marked differences between her [traditional school] and [Tatweer School] except for the use of extracurricular activities, as I told you before. In other words, students enrolled in both schools studied the same textbooks. However, we enjoyed some level of flexibility in the classroom. I mean, we were given time to talk with each other and do pair-work activities and present to other schools. However, we did not practise*

other than the writing models that our teacher gave us. I still do not know how to write properly. Sometimes I have a beautiful idea but because I lack the suitable words and structures so I cannot write. The words and sentences I learned from these models are still in my mind but when asked to write on another topic that was not included in those models, I fail to do that in a good way.

From this, it is clear that although the KAS is making serious efforts to reform its general education, including English, these efforts have so far ended up with less than satisfactory improvements in students' learning achievements. One reason, as Kareema indirectly indicates, is that the English syllabus is still centralized and controlled by the Ministry of Education. Consequently, all students, regardless of whether they are in traditional or Tatweer schools, receive the same textbooks with almost no attention paid to their specific language needs and abilities. In addition to having an identical English curriculum, the students might even receive similar instruction. Consequently, teachers might engage students in the same ineffective teaching methods as providing written models to memorize, as Kareema discussed. However, Kareema was sure that having the opportunity to make presentations in English was 'an excellent adventure that increased my confidence in my ability to stand up in front of an audience and speak in English'.

Reasons Related to Linguistic Differences

Kareema reported that mere exposure to English either in school or in the ELPPs was not enough to improve her speaking ability. She felt that she was unable to demonstrate her understanding of subject matter or her views with her teachers and classmates. She mentioned that she asked for assistance from her peers in terms of translating unclear points into Arabic.

Pronouncing medical terms correctly was reported as to be one of her main causes to feel anxious. She indicated that she lacked the courage to speak up because her teachers and peers would judge the level of her understanding of the subject matter according to her lesser language ability. She became frustrated when she had the right answer for her teachers' questions, but she needed too much time to formulate a response. Therefore, she tended to, as she put it, 'sacrifice my knowledge for the sake

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of not losing face'. Instead of giving the answer herself, she stayed in the back of the classroom, reluctantly passing the information to her peers:

> *Kareema: My life's problem is speaking. I understand the lectures, but when it comes to articulating a medical term, a hard one, I shut my mouth. One of the frustrating situations is when the lecturer asks us to define a medical term and I have rich information about that medical term but I can't pass it over.*
> *Me: Do you wait until your teacher calls upon you by name?*
> *Kareema: No, class participation is optional and I can use Arabic but there are occasions when English is required… please say this antihistamines.[12]*
> *Me: OK…[saying the term]. So, did you ask your friends' help?*
> *Kareema: No,* Wa' Allah [By Allah]. *I gave my friend a paper containing my answers written in Arabic and asked her to use it.*

Given the fact that her poor ability in English tended to cause her loss of face, Kareema perceived sharing the understanding of subject-matter knowledge with others as a useful device that might enable her to retain some of her dignity and self-respect.

Perceptions towards the Nature of ELPPs

Similar to other students that I interviewed, Kareema did not find her experience in studying English in the ELPPs was that different from her schooling and regarded both settings as 'mere grammar-focused instruction'. She believed that so much focus on grammar instruction did not stop her language problems, but turned out to be a source of confusion and of committing serious language errors. Although she did her best not to make any grammatical mistakes, her spoken style suffered from incorrectly structured sentences:

> *When carrying out a grammar activity in my textbook, I have a lot of time to think and rethink about how to answer it. But when I speak in English, I am more likely to think about how perfect my grammar is than what I am saying. One day, I wanted to say 'it will' rather I said 'it wills'. I studied that rule very well but because I wanted to be perfect I made that mistake.*

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[12]Due to her unclear pronunciation, a medical dictionary was consulted to show the word. I guided Kareema through WhatsApp to be certain that it was the exact term she used.

I tried to elicit Kareema's views of what grammar instruction she wanted in the PYP English course. She felt that it would be more beneficial to integrate grammar into real communicative settings rather than limiting its use to writing short sentences or correcting verbs:

> *It would be more interesting to use, for example, all those verbs ending with –ed [*regular past tense*] to describe the aches and pains when someone catches a cold.*

At this point, I took the opportunity to ask her to share with me her views about both her EGP and ESP teachers. She tended to talk more about her EGP teacher than she did her ESP teacher, and I felt that she was more pleased with her EGP teacher and the use of technology in EGP classes.

Kareema spoke against the length and intensity of the course, which negatively influenced her views of the value of the ELPPs instruction. She felt that EGP courses impeded her in three ways. First, she perceived receiving EGP instruction for three hours per day as being 'unfair' and 'killed the interest to redouble [her] efforts'. She complained about not having enough time either to absorb the course materials or to meet her other academic demands. She told me that every week she experienced a struggle to keep up with EGP assignments, exams and projects like oral presentations. Although at school she had found herself a hardworking student who had a strong drive to learn, she felt that EGP classes tended to be extremely demanding: 'I was a hard-working student at school but EGP classes was much more intense than what I had ever experienced'.

felt that having such intensive, class-heavy learning environments contributed to her reliance on rote learning as the sole approach to learning, since there was no space for her to foster the good learning habits which would enhance her language development:

> *When I found myself not having enough time to study for my next exam and to prepare myself for giving an oral presentation, I memorized everything I put my eyes on. I hate memorizing but I did not have any choice but to use it. There was just not enough time or energy left for me to use other learning habits.*

Third, and even worse, she explained to me that due to the pressurized learning environment that she experienced in her EGP course, she decided to postpone her tertiary education. However, she changed her mind and attributed her commitment to finish her PYP thanks to her family's encouragement:

> *I wanted a way to help me lower or end the pressure that I felt. I decided to drop my courses because I wanted to improve my English. I felt that if I enrolled in intensive English courses such as study in [the language centre], my English would improve. When I felt myself finally prepared and ready, I could enrol again in the PYP.*

Although her claim that the ELPPs made her think of dropping out may be a weak claim, I found myself more inclined to believe her justifications. She explained that neither the EGP nor the ESP courses equipped her with the language she needed to study other PYP courses. She felt that her ELPPs did not include teaching the language needed for maths and physics. This begs the question of whether it is right that the ELPPs should teach the language for maths, physics and chemistry, since these students were not used to learning scientific knowledge in English at school. She added

> *I wanted the English course [the ELPPs] to help me learn how to go about studying math, physics and chemistry. Because we were not sufficiently prepared for taking these courses in English, I first had to translate the information into Arabic and go through it several times to make sure that I clearly understood it. I also had to practice spelling and articulating some new items.*

The Impact of the ELPPs on English Abilities

Kareema indicated that the ELPPs, including both the EGP and ESP courses, helped her improve her knowledge of grammar. However, she felt uncertain as to whether it helped her. She reported that because too much attention was given to grammar instruction, all the ELPPs classes turned out to be 'boring' and 'dull'.

In terms of reading skills, Kareema indicated that she still faced problems with reading discipline-specific books. She felt that she still read too slowly and found that not much of what she read made any sense. She regarded reading as being 'effort-consuming' and made '[her] head ache', especially when five to eight pages were required:

For reading, I still read sentence by sentence and often repeat the same sentences once or twice until the meaning becomes clearer. I tried to do speed-reading but it doesn't work for me. When I read normally, I could not finish the text quickly but at least my understanding improved. When I speed up reading, I felt it is not effective, because I cannot think quickly of the meaning of the texts, so my understanding actually declines.

As for writing, she reported that the lack of practising examination answers influenced her ability to handle her discipline-specific exams:

I did not have practice in writing exam answers in English. Also, I had not been exposed to producing writing tasks under time pressure. I understand the question and how to answer it. But as I am pressed under time pressure, it becomes hard to get that knowledge into clear English. I had some writing activities, but they were assigned to be accomplished at home. At home I had a lot of time to Google the answers, check the dictionary and seek assistance from my sisters. Once I start answering in English, I gradually lose the information.

She explained that her subject teachers were more concerned with the content of their students' answers than the quality of their writing: 'they do not expect us to have good English; therefore, they do not cut grades for our poor language performance, such as grammatical mistakes or misspellings'.

With regard to listening, Kareema reported that her listening ability improved and felt that listening skills received the most stress in the ELPPs. She commented that when her subject teachers used an unknown term during a lecture, she wrote it according to how she heard the lecturer's pronunciation and then checked it at home: 'I studied it and looked for its correct spelling and its meaning. Most the words I jotted down during the lecture were spelled correctly'.

I took the opportunity to ask her to tell me whether her teacher required her to give presentations and whether her experience in giving presentations in school differed from what she may have had in the ELPPs. She had this to say:

In school, my teacher helped me in preparing what I should say and how I could present it in the right way. In the

English course [the ELPPs], my teacher gave us a story and required us to read it and to prepare ourselves for giving a presentation. She divided us into groups and each group was required to read one chapter; Chapter 3 was assigned to my group. In the English course [the ELPPs], I did everything alone without receiving any help from my teacher. I read the story, translated it and prepared what I would say; there was no way to practice presentation before doing the real one. I found that it was difficult for me to talk without reading my notes.

This is more evidence to suggest that her experience in giving presentations at school may have developed her confidence but not her fluency in English.

I also learnt from her that she did not value oral presentations in the ELPPs for two main reasons: first, she felt that the kind of language she was exposed to in these stories did not capture the use and the function of the words and sentences that she would most need to read her discipline-specific books effectively. Second, the stories did not include any topics related to medical fields as she said: 'the topics were not carefully selected. Topics such as transportation, mountains and fiction that had no link to medical fields, so what benefits could I get?' She said it would have benefited her more if she had not been limited to giving just one presentation. Beyond that, she reported that she did not know how good or bad her performance was because her teacher did not give her any feedback:

It was just one attempt but I wished I had had the opportunity to give many presentations. I wish I had given presentations on medical topics or about famous pharmacists or the human body. There was no feedback and thus I did not know if I had improved or not. I wish I had learned how to present and how to sound like an effective presenter.

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

Kareema reported that her EGP teacher was very active and worked hard with the students. She indicated that because her teacher taught every grammatical rule found in the students' textbook and carried out most workbook activities, Kareema felt it was 'boring'. However, she admitted that she valued her teacher for drawing some examples from her own culture within a lesson sequence, viewing it as 'a means of changing the mood'.

As for her ESP teacher, Kareema commented that her teacher did her best to learn the content of the ESP course. Besides the textbooks, her ESP teacher encouraged students to use her blog as another reference resource. This allowed the students to learn from integrated resources and provided additional time to review what they might miss in the class. Kareema explained:

> *She used to download some teaching materials in advance in her blog. For example, she downloaded materials about the types of blood in which she wrote the definition of blood, including some vocabulary exercises and short texts. It was new method, but it was very good for us to use technology to study the course [the ESP course].*

Assessment Practices Adapted in ELPPs

Kareema felt that all the ELPPs monthly and final examinations did not accurately measure students' performance in all four English skills. While the focus was given exclusively to assess students' ability in grammar, other skills such as writing and speaking were ignored. She told me that although she studied all the grammatical rules in the textbooks, the questions in the exams did not match her ability because they were 'difficult' and 'had little or no relevance to the grammatical rules I studied in the textbooks'. Additionally, Kareem felt that the ELPPs classes did not train her to cope with processing the different types of accents and texts involved in the listening assessments:

> *I listened to people using clear accents. In listening exams, however, the speakers tended to speak fast and their English was not clear. Honestly, the listening materials I had in the English course [the ELPPs] were not as difficult as those on the listening exams.*

Kareema felt that her experience with the placement test a 'shock'. She indicated that she entered the exam having no clue of what its function was: 'I entered the admission test having no idea about what I was up to'.

Lamees

This interview was held in the library after Lamees finished all her classes. Prior to the interview, we had a good lunch together in the university cafeteria. Having lunch

with Lamees helped to create a friendly atmosphere to ensure that she would freely share her views with me.

Reasons Related to Prior School English Education

Lamees spoke about her experience in studying English at school and how the teacher-centred method resulted in viewing her English classes there as 'a neglected subject'. She felt that those classes did not require much time or effort, because the schoolteacher gave the students handouts containing all the important grammatical rules and vocabulary that they were required to study for their exams. Lamees made clear that because she relied on rote learning, she obtained high grades in English at school and felt that she was treated like 'a copying machine', created to be filled with 'grammar, vocabulary and spelling' input and programmed to recall all of that on her exams: 'I entered the university like a blank page. My English is poor; very poor. I am weak in all four English skills'.

Reasons Related to Linguistic Differences

Pronunciation appeared to be a big cause of Lamees' struggle with speaking. She felt that when anybody could not understand her, she felt ashamed of herself. She indicated that her main problem in pronunciation is her inability to see the difference between the ð-sound and the θ-sound: 'they [ð-sound and θ-sounds] are written the same way but it is not easy for me see the difference quickly. For example, this word *therapeutic*, I know it is said with θ not ð but I am still reluctant about which to choose'. Lamees placed the responsibility for this difficulty on her schoolteacher, who did not help her to improve her pronunciation problems and did not offer her further training.

The Impact of ELPPs on English Abilities

Lamees indicated that because grammar was the backbone of the EGP course she felt as if she were being prepared to be an English teacher. She highlighted that grammar should not come before the four English skills, adding:

> *We are the victims of grammar-based instruction. We started receiving grammar instruction when we were*

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children at primary school until we entered university. Did all these years help to improve our grammar? The answer is 'no', because it depends on how good our teachers were at teaching grammar. Once again, we were required to study grammar during the English course [the ELPPs]. We do not need grammar because we are not going to work in schools teaching the English language.

In addition to that, she felt that her ability in writing did not improve because her teachers did not expose her to a variety of writing activities, such as how to write a CV. She indicated that the quality of her writing performance was not regarded as an important element in her content studies; however, she felt that she did need to know what is regarded as good writing.

As for speaking, Lamees felt that her problems with speaking had not been resolved in school and that she expected that the ELPPs would help her to fight her fear of speaking. She indicated that interaction with her peers and lecturers was her most challenging task and cited a lack of confidence in her spoken skills as the key factor which prevented her from participating in her classroom actively. In the following excerpts, she explained how she was frustrated when she was not able to keep up with the pace of discussion and make her own contributions:

Sometimes the lecturer wanted us to express our opinions about a particular medical topic; actually, she gave everyone the chance to air her own views. I loved to make my opinions known but I just could not say it as fast as needed, instead I did it word by word. I was afraid that the teacher would think that I was weak in English but I am not. I know the answer but I do not have the ability to say it quickly.

She expressed her dissatisfaction most strongly with the lack of using a variety of speaking activities, especially giving oral presentations:

Why did we not have the opportunity to give presentation as other students had? I think it was because our teachers thought that as we were poor in English we could not be able to perform such an activity. It was not fair.

With respect to reading skills, Lamees reported that the course included a diversity of general topics, but that she was expected to decrease the reliance on the use of textbooks and maximize the use of other resources such as newspaper and articles.

She indicated that the teachers dominated the language class and taught every item separately. I was interested in exploring her views as to whether she had been given the chance to read articles. In responding to this, she answered:

> *What would the negative results be if we were required to use articles? All the students studying on the medical track were going to be students in medical schools, and for this they must be exposed to professional articles and books related to their departments. My lecturer gave us an article and asked us to read it with deeper understanding because in the next class he would ask the students questions based on their understanding of the materials. I felt that neither translation nor memorization would be useful to help me understand the text. I had no idea how to read the article and did not know where to start. I felt lost and frustrated, too.*

Furthermore, she indicated that the ELPPs teachers did not engage students in a wide range of mental activities to encourage them to think for themselves, question what they read and express what they feel about suggested topics. She wanted to be exposed to topics that would provide real language use and involve exercises allowing for more complex thinking to be developed. Here is one of the most interesting things that Lamees said:

> *We spend two classes reading a long passage and carrying out many language activities. My brain stopped thinking, because every day I had to live with the same teaching patterns. When I was asked to read that article, it was not easy for me to understand a text that did not include either pre-set nor post-set comprehension questions to follow,*

In her view of listening skills, Lamees indicated that she still had problems in understanding some of her lecturers and classmates and explained what her main struggle involved:

> *I can understand the content of the lectures when the lecturers speak slowly. Sometimes they articulate new terms, but I can still understand what they were talking about. Some lecturers speak faster than the rate I was used to or speak too much. Because they did not realize how students like me struggle to understand them, they did not pay a lot of attention to slow down their speed. Therefore, I*

stopped paying the least bit of attention to what they were talking about and relied on reading from the textbooks or their slides instead. It is too much effort for me.

The Impact of ELPPs on the Final Results (GPA)

Lamees indicated that getting high final results, i.e., a high GPA (Grade Point Average) was her first aim in her PYP so that she could secure a place in the department of medicine. She indicated that neither being smart nor studying non-stop would help her obtain a high GPA. She reported that she was certain that the higher grades she obtained in the ELPPs, the easier it would be to raise her GPA. However, she felt from the start that it was an eminently unwinnable battle, saying that, 'I entered pharmacy because my GPA was lower. My score in the English course [the ELPPs) hurts my GPA and I lost my battle with English'.

Assessment Practices Adapted in the ELPPs

Another related point that made Lamees unhappy with the ELPPs was the assessment system it used, which she viewed as one of its worst aspects. She reported that none of the ELPPs monthly exams accurately demonstrated her actual ability in the four English skills. She complained about the difficulty of the exams and noted that all the questions were multiple-choice and were not based on assessing students' understanding of topics related to what she learned in the textbooks. She reported that all the exams focused on assessing students' understanding of grammar rules and reading, whereas students' writing and speaking skills were almost neglected.

She gave more detailed information explaining the reason why she was more inclined to feel that most questions of all exams appeared to be difficult and from outside of the syllabus. First, she reported that because her language teachers tended to treat the PYP English course as a grammar course, they put a heavy burden on themselves to carry out all grammar activities within a very limited time. Because of that, they tended to move quickly from reviewing some of the more common areas of grammar to explaining the more complicated grammatical areas. While some students did not object to being exposed to such a method of teaching, Lamees expressed that she was negatively affected and was more likely to rely on memorization as the only approach to learning grammar, rather than trying to develop a better understanding. Second, Lamees indicated that because she became so attentive to grammar, she got confused

to the extent that she was unable to understand questions and made silly grammatical mistakes::

> *I was very desperate because grammar was everywhere; it was taught in the classroom and it was assessed in the exams. The real problem was that my teacher tended to explain some grammatical rules quickly, believing that they were easy for us to understand but a lot of students did not fully grasp those grammatical rules either in schools or in the English course [the ELPPs]. For example, she did not spend much time on explaining prepositions; I still cannot use them properly. Instead of trying to understand them, I memorized them. All my mistakes were grammar-based mistakes and I lost most of my marks because of grammar. I read the questions several times, but I always made silly mistakes.*

Third, she reported that it might have been because the exam questions were prepared under the supervision of the male section and there was a common tendency to include questions about grammatical areas that the female teachers did not teach or on which they did not prepare their students very well:

> *When asked why we had to study a large amount of grammar in every unit, our teacher told us that the questions in the exams would not be prepared by the female teachers but by the male faculty members in the male section. Thus, she tended to teach us everything.*

Poorly Equipped Classrooms

Lamees complained about a number of problems in her language classroom. First, she reported that because the air conditioning system did not work effectively, the temperature in the classroom was either too hot or too cold, affecting her ability to concentrate during the lecture. Second, the classroom door did not close properly, allowing exterior noise to enter the classroom. Third, she indicated that because the classroom was not intended for teaching listening skills, there were no recorders or speakers. The teachers tried to solve this issue by using computer speakers when playing the listening CD on their laptops. In the following, Lamees described her poorly equipped classroom:

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> *The poor AC system made me feel very cold and sometimes*
> *very hot. The door was not properly closed; for this reason*
> *I was distracted by the students. I was able to see and hear*
> *the voices of the students walking in the corridors. It was*
> *not motivating to come to that classroom every day and stay*
> *in it for almost four hours.*

Improved Transition to University Life

Lamees reported that the ELPPs facilitated the process of her transition from school to university, noting that because she attended the ELPPs, she stepped into university life more confidently. She made reference to the abandoning of her old learning habits, translation, and began to develop study strategies for learning in harmony with the heavy demands of university study. She made it clear to me that her learning study skills extended not only to learning English in the ELPPs but also to learning in her content courses. In the following, she states that she stopped using her initial translation strategy due to time constraints and how she found working with other students to be useful:

> *I used to translate word by word but it took all my time and effort.*
> *When the teacher asked us to read a book, and it was about six*
> *pages to read, I felt that translating word by word took my time*
> *and effort; therefore I decided to work with other students. Each*
> *one of us was assigned to read a part; for example, I read page 1,*
> *another student read page 2 and so on. On a given day, we sat*
> *together and each of us talked about her part and explained to the*
> *others what she had understood. I felt that it helped us to exchange*
> *valuable information about the main points on the topic and also*
> *offered more opportunity for us to practice English. Most*
> *importantly, it saved time.*

Besides using group work as an alternative means of learning her pharmacy courses, Lamees indicated that she also used strategies to cope with the large amount of information. She felt that because she was faced with a constantly increasing amount of language learning, she intended to rely on memorization as another approach to learning. However, she felt that it was an ineffective way to learn and started to value understanding and application. A link appeared to be emerging between her language competency, with which the ELPPs helped her most, and using memorization. She explained:

I used to translate word by word and memorized the sentence to be sure that it would be in my mind forever. However, I could not retrieve all that information in the English exams. I later realized that it was the worst way of language learning because in English exams most questions required understanding. Now here in pharmacy classes, I have stopped memorizing everything because my English could help me understand the materials.

5.3.2 Interview Data of Male Students

Ali

Ali was the first male participant who showed a positive attitude to being interviewed by me. My husband invited him to come to our house to be interviewed and on 10 November I interviewed him in the living room. He came on time and was welcomed by my husband and our children. As it is common or may be called a tradition in my country, I arranged a proper place for Ali and on his arrival my husband served him coffee with chocolate and dates. In fact, the preparations I took in welcoming Ali to my house did not bother me, as I was used to hosting my husbands' friends. In fact, the idea of welcoming my study participants into my house was both interesting and challenging. It was interesting because I did not expect that the male interviews would take place in my house until I saw Ali knocking at my door. I found, however, that it was difficult because I had to strike a balance between putting Ali at ease and creating a good rapport so that he would feel comfortable enough to share his experiences openly with me, without being affected by my identity as a female and as a researcher who was conducting a study in a university where we enjoyed different educational positions. I entered the room wearing my abaya and burqa (see Chapter 1) and introduced myself. At the beginning, I noticed that Ali was looking at my husband when responding to my Arabic greeting. Therefore, I decided to break the ice between us by asking simple questions like what pharmacy course he most liked and what factors contributed to his positive attitude. This was a deliberate attempt from me to have Ali settle down and relax and to create an atmosphere that would facilitate discussion of the perceptions he had about the factors lying behind his language-related challenges and the quality of the academic preparation provided by the ELPPs.

Reasons Related to Prior School English Education

Regarding the types of difficulties that he had, Ali made it clear to me that his problems in using English were not a big issue. He then explained to me that many of the subject teachers shared the opinion that their students were victims of an unproductive educational system that actually failed to equip the students with the study skills needed for post-secondary education. They believed that their students' low level in English in all four language skills was a reason for using Arabic as the main medium of instruction and not to put much emphasis on students' English language abilities. He also indicated that those teachers who came from other Arab countries had prior awareness of the students' poor foundation in English and agreed, if unwillingly, to simplify information by either using simple Arabic words or repeating points several times. This may explain why listening skills appeared to be of less concern for the pharmacy students than the three other skills, as was shown in the quantitative findings. I asked Ali for clarification: 'Why do you think they did that?' He answered:

> At school we learn everything: science, religion, Arabic but nothing about medicine. We did not have the opportunity to be exposed to medical-based instruction at all. The English textbooks that we were taught from in all 13 years did not include a single lessoen that focused on presenting some of the most important medical-related issues, such as doctor-patient conversations or making an appointment.

He raised the need for more space to be made in the school's formal English curriculum to mirror the academic goals of students who planned to enrol in medical departments. Moreover, he believed that a large amount of scientific material had been covered at school, but they were taught in Arabic. Therefore, he felt that he was unprepared to be exposed to scientific topics through English. In the following excerpt, he indicates that he was still unprepared for handling scientific materials in English, regardless of how good he was at English:

> Even if you are good at English, scientific language is not the same. I found difficulty in adjusting myself to that. It was just like you are starting all over again. I started learning biology, chemistry and other subjects from the very beginning, but this time in English. It is all about shifting

your brain from Arabic into English. We were not prepared
for that; it is a pity.

Reasons Related to Lack of Context for Using English

A further reason that could explain why students experienced some difficulty in using English was their lack of opportunity to practise it outside the classroom in general, and in Makkah in particular. Ali commented that most of the time, students listened to their teachers' presentations and rarely had group discussions or the chance to practise speaking. He further explained that compared to Saudi Arabia's most cosmopolitan city, Jeddah, Makkah provides little or no chance to practise English either with people working in the public places or in the Holy Mosque:

> *People who live in Jeddah and Riyadh, for example, are*
> *more likely to practise English than us [the citizens of*
> *Makkah], because they is full of expatriates who speak*
> *English. Here, [in Makkah] most expatriates do not speak*
> *English and within two or three* no or *they learn to speak*
> *Arabic. You can see that most expatriates who work at Al-*
> *Haram [*The Holy Mosque in Makkah*] respond to you*
> *either in the Arabic or in their L1 language [Urdu or*
> *Indonesian] rather than in English even if you*
> *communicate with them in English.*

Perceptions towards the Nature of ELPPs

As I was talking to Ali, I found him very comfortable with his ability in English; however, in some responses, he expressed his desire to become better at the language so that he would not have to focus his finite cognitive resources on it and could focus instead on the intellectual demands of his content courses. I felt that speaking about his language abilities was a good time to raise the issue of the role of the ELPPs and how he viewed the academic preparation provided by the course. Regarding this, he said, 'It is for us and for improving our English. To help us in English because we are going to study our content courses in English'.

Ali highlighted putting much more emphasis on medical-related topics where the EGP course is involved. He suggested that taking English lessons that contain key expressions and vocabulary related to medical fields is more beneficial than learning key English sentences used for various scenarios in everyday life. What I understood

from Ali is that he was hungry for materials and skills related to his field of study. He, therefore, wanted to learn English not because it is on the class timetable, but, because for him it concentrates on material that is relevant to his content course:

> *Instead of learning conversation at the train station, learning conversation in the hospital or in a clinical centre is better. Why trains, even in our culture we almost have no trains? I would like to learn and practise medical English, which will assist me in my future job. For example, to exchange conversation about booking a train ticket with conversation about seeing a doctor or talking about medicine is my main need.*

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

Beside naming himself as responsible for his unsuccessful outcomes, Ali believed that his EGP teacher and his teaching methods were also to blame. He expressed that the teacher was not sensitive to the students' language abilities; rather he was strict and did not adjust his teaching styles according to their low level:

> *The EGP course had two main problems. The first was that because [the teacher] came from a different country, he had a belief that he would teach students with higher levels of English proficiency like the advanced students he had taught in his own country. Having gone through this experience of teaching English, he used teaching methods that could only work effectively with advanced students, not us. The second was the one which added fuel to the fire. He relied on a talkative approach* [a teacher-centred approach]. *I remembered that; he read the texts, read the listening task and answered the questions, talking all the time.*

The Impact of ELPPs on the Final Results (GPA)

Because he was hoping to study medicine, Ali placed a great deal of emphasis on his GPA and felt that attaining high grades was very important. It seemed it was 'the straw that broke the camel's back' when I asked Ali to reflect on the link between placing so much emphasis on his grades and the ELPPs. Ali explained:

> *Subhan' Allah [Glory to God, 'Wow'!] you made me remember things I do not want to. You know that pharmacy was not my first desire, and none of those students who enrolled in the department of pharmacy wanted to study it.*

This is so because undergraduates were distributed across Umm Al-Qura's faculties according to their final grades in the PYP. So, those students who gained higher scores in PYP were assigned to medicine, followed by dentistry and then pharmacy. It was unfair to those students who were good at thinking clearly and quickly and at gaining and using medical knowledge that they took courses that they did not want to take.

He made it clear to me that gaining a low score in the ELPPs influenced his overall result, i.e. GPA, thus increased the possibility to be allocated to pharmacy according to that score, regardless of his wishes. He added:

Because I was planning to enrol in medicine, I decided to devote a great deal of attention to study medical courses in the PYP. This was not right; if time repeated itself, I would have focused on studying the English course more than any other course, because of the role it plays in the overall grade. I had a very low score in English and that affected my overall result.

It seems that, when entering university, Ali was not given information that provided a comprehensive overview of the assessment protocol of the PYP, and particularly in the English course. At that point, I seized the opportunity to present to Ali two documents that I had printed out from the English Language Centre (ELC) Website (see appendix 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4,2.5, 2.6, 2.7) and asked him if he had known about them. These documents were created to provide PYP students with detailed information about the objectives of the EGP and ESP courses, their duration and credit hours and the assessment procedures adopted. He answered, 'I did not know that they were uploaded to the university's website. No, no idea about it'. However, Ali went on to blame himself for not putting in sufficient effort to studying.

The Influence of the ELPPs on English Abilities

I was keen to know if the EGP/ESP courses had had a positive impact on students' academic experiences, and how Ali perceived their impact. Ali felt that his listening skills improved as he was exposed to many chances to listen to English spoken utterances. He explained that he had the chance to attend English-language lectures for one year and listen to his teachers' instructions and his peers' presentations.

Therefore, he assured me that he did not find understanding his subject instructors difficult, presumably because he learned to understand simplified English or he accepted that he did not need to understand every word:

> *I can tell you that in listening I had improved. When I*
> *started the second year, I found the ability to listen to more*
> *English increased and understanding lecturers became*
> *easier.*

One of the questions of interest for me was to find out whether the use of an English-only method as a medium of instruction was used, so I asked Ali, 'You told me earlier that your lecturers used Arabic and English when teaching; if so, how would you relate that to improvements in your listening abilities?' Ali admitted that he was more capable of understanding American movies that he watched on TV than before. In addition, he commented that a number of subject teachers used visual materials written in English and delivered their lectures in English. For example, they explained new medical terminology using English and when that happened, Ali relied on guessing meaning from the context and making key connections.

Regarding speaking skills, Ali felt that he could manage daily conversation. In addition, he felt that the use of oral presentations in the ESP course improved his speaking abilities and he felt that he became confident as an effective speaker. Ali expressed a deep gratitude to his ESP tutor, who encouraged his students to present a given amount of information on a medical topic they selected in front of the class within the time allocated. He admitted that this key skill helped him approach some degree of individualized learning and realize the differences between the university student life and the life of a school pupil:

> *Frankly, although it caused a little pressure and took time,*
> *I feel I am a university-level student. [The presentation]*
> *was very useful for me because it killed my shyness, my*
> *fear of standing in front of the class and speaking in*
> *English. Also, being capable of giving an oral presentation*
> *about medical topics to university-level students and on the*
> *basis of my presentation, their understanding will be*
> *tested, all that increased my self-confidence; the feeling*
> *that you are in charge was what I liked most.*

Implementation Concerns

When asked whether he had any area of concerns that he wished to add at the end of the interview, Ali pleaded for the need to stop teaching English courses together with other medical courses that were required in the PYP. He felt that organizing a one-year, full-time English course for freshmen would bring its own advantages. Because there would be more time available for teaching that course, teachers' pace would be slower with more time devoted to covering most course components. Second, because the students would not have so many courses to take, they would no longer feel worried about the time and effort the English courses took from them, at the expense of their other courses. Finally, given that the students were recent school graduates, they were less skilful at coping with the enormous amount of work required in their first year. Therefore, Ali felt that the heavier the course workload they were subjected to, the more they felt frustrated and stressed:

> *Given the number of credits it offers, the English course is at the heart of the PYP. So, if [university officials] cancelled all the medical courses in the PYP and give that time to the English courses, it would be a good solution. In the PYP, medical courses are supposed to work as introductory courses. For example, biochemistry is divided into four levels and they are supposed to be studied by all pharmacy students in the following year of their degree study. So, what we studied in the Biochemistry during the PYP is nothing compared to what we are going to take in the following years. Also, students will have plenty of time to study their English courses very well. We had just graduated from secondary school and we were not well trained to tackle the amount of work required from us in the PYP. So, please show some mercy and start gradually.*

<u>Nader</u>

Through informal contacts with his best friend, I came to know that Nader had studied in an intensive English course at an English-speaking university for eight months because he was not happy with his English abilities after the completion of the PYP. Given the fact that he had been exposed to studying English in two very different learning contexts, Nader probably was able to reflect most critically on the different types of teaching styles, learning activities and learning styles that can be

adopted. I decided to contact Nader to ask him to take part in my study, because I was interested in exploring what perceptions he had about the ELPPs. He agreed to be interviewed by me at my house on 13 December. However, due to problems with his car, we decided to move the interview to 14 December. My husband offered Nader a lift because his car was still in the repair shop. When they arrived, my husband cheerfully walked along with Nader into the living room. When they entered, they found me sitting in the armchair. I decided to do that, because I felt that it would help to increase the amount of time spent with Nader and to raise his interview confidence. I welcomed Nader and expressed to him my deep gratitude for his participation.

Reasons Related to Prior School English Education

I was interested in finding out about Nader's perceptions of the nature of the difficulty he encountered in using English and the factors that contributed to them. Nader reported that he faced difficulties in using English in all four English skills, so he went to New Zealand to take an intensive English course for eight months. Nader made it clear to me that his experience of studying English in New Zealand was the best option he had undertaken to improve his English competence. Due to the information I had received from Nader, I decided to be more flexible about the questions I asked him and added the ones I needed. I asked him 'How long have you been studying English in the KSA?' Nader said that he had learned English in primary school, beginning in year six (10 or 11 years old). He then explained that his prior schooling should have served as a 'gateway' to facilitate his tertiary studies. Instead, he believed that he graduated from school with his English below the average that was required for tertiary studies. One key factor contributing to his poor English competence was the teacher who taught him English in primary school:

> *I remembered myself going to the English classroom like 'a donkey that carried a load of books but could not have a beneficial gain'. [His English language teacher] did not teach us properly and he did not help us or encourage us to learn English. He entered the classroom unhappily and unwillingly and asked us to respond to him very quickly. For me, he did not support me in learning English.*

He added that his teacher's absenteeism was a key factor that affected him because he received fewer hours of English instruction. I was interested to know if the school administration had addressed that matter, so I asked him if his teacher was replaced with a substitute teacher. Nader revealed to me that he and his friends were exposed to that situation throughout year six:

> *[His English teacher] was absent three classes every week. We either stayed in our classroom or joined another class on a different subject. At the end of the term, he gave us a paper asking us to study well because the final exam questions were based on what that paper had. I was thoughtless and foolish at that time; I was still young, you know; I wanted to play. At that time, I admitted that I liked the way he was with us. Now, what I can say, now I feel that his way of teaching affected me badly.*

From this, it appears that Nader's teacher's absenteeism was not the only factor hindering his English competence, but his teacher also encouraged him to use rote learning as the primary approach to learning.

Reasons Related to Lack of Context for Using English

Nader indicated that before he went abroad to study English he took English courses in two English language centres in Makkah, but they did not improve his English:

> *I felt that my English was still poor and poor means poor. Before going to New Zealand, I took an English course at [centre name] and at [centre name] here in Makkah. I went every day for six months in the hopes of improving my English, but my English did not improve. Unfortunately, I feel that all the centres in Makkah are commercial and are there for the purpose of making money. I, Alhamdulillah [praise be to God] had the financial ability to pay for that course. However, I think that those who spent six months learning nothing would lament spending that large an amount of money for nothing.*

The Impact of ELPPs on the Final Results (GPA)

Nader indicated that one of the main things that had played a key role in lowering his overall result in the PYP was the grade he achieved in the ELPPs. He also indicated

that he felt lost and unsure of what was expected of him, as he did not receive adequate information over how teaching was structured and how grades were allocated in the PYP:

> *If you achieve high marks in the English course, your grade average [the GPA] would increase because the course offers the most credits in the PYP. I obtained low grades in the English course, which affected my GPA; it actually decreased it*

The Influence of the ELPPs on English Abilities

Nader said that he had to study four EGP textbooks in the first term (*New Headway Plus Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate* and *Intermediate*). In the second term, he used two ESP textbooks (*Nursing 1* and *Nursing 2*). He showed his unhappiness that both EGP and ESP courses did not improve the English as he had expected. He felt that he could not speak accurately or trust himself to communicate his ideas accurately. He felt that it would shame him to study in a one-year English course but still be unable to write or speak properly. Nader revealed to me that his teacher did not try to encourage him to get involved in interactive events. He was disappointed to find that his teacher's views of the lack of students' desires to be engaged in class discussion influenced his attempts to use different methodologies to encourage interaction:

> *I thought that we were going to learn how to read, how to speak and how to write. Unfortunately, we learned to open the writing workbooks, read the writing text and copy it on a separate paper. When we asked the teacher about the meaning of an unknown word, he did not answer; rather, he asked us to find the meaning at home or ask a partner. I rarely talked in class; I did so only when the teacher called on me to answer a question.*

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

Nader revealed to me that three EGP/ESP teachers taught him in the PYP (two teachers for the EGP course and one in the ESP course), indicating that found it a most unpleasant experience. Although he was aware of inconsistencies in teaching ability between the three English teachers, he complained about all three taking

similar attitudes of 'just doing my job and what I am required to'. He stated directly to me that having a 'BA degree in English language was not enough to create a good English teacher and recruiting English teachers from outside the KSA did not guarantee proper ability in teaching English':

> *We expected to be taught by better teachers; we expected to have teachers who worked really hard at their teaching practices. I was taught by three teachers who did not want to give extra effort and did not notice that we needed more help from them. One of the three of them did not care at all and did not attend classes on a regular basis.*
>
> *In the second term, for the first two weeks, an English language teacher who was from [country name] was assigned to teach us the ESP course. When we saw him, we were all happy, believing that the time for proper English teaching had come. He told us that he had three ways of teaching English. The first one was… the second was…and the third one was…[barely audible utterances]. Then he asked us to choose one for him he could use. However, we were shocked by his ignorance at applying any of the teaching practices he promised us to use. He entered the classroom and covered everything, every activity in the textbook. He told us that we needed to be faster because we were late and lagged behind other groups and he had to do his job.*

Another factor that contributed to Nader's negative perceptions of the quality of the ELPPs was his teachers' accents. First, he maintained that difficulty understanding teachers' accents not only contributed to his inability to concentrate but also demotivated him from wanting to listen. Second, he felt confused and depressed because he thought that he was trying hard to learn not only the English language but also his teachers' accents. He indicated that holding his attention to lengthy, connected speech was no easy task, and it was like 'torture' when the teacher used unclear accents:

> *Because he came from [country name], his English was not clear. I needed to listen carefully but suddenly I found myself lost and unable to describe which activity he and my friends were doing. Sometimes he spoke too fast and when that happened, I stopped listening.*

Poorly Equipped Classrooms

Nader also talked about the unequipped learning and teaching environment. There are two separate buildings where first-year male and female students are allocated to study in the PYP. Although these buildings were new, there were some problems that affected students' learning interests and moods. For example, Nader indicated that listening classes were not taught in labs, as he had expected, but rather in poorly equipped classrooms. According to him, the classrooms had unacceptable lighting and were not fully equipped with the necessary equipment to teaching listening skills. He added that teachers relied only on two large wall speakers and the sound produced was not clear or loud enough to reach all 90 students. To make matters more difficult, Nader told me that one of the wall speakers did not work properly; it had a hissing sound and proceeded with a series of cracks when it was turned on. Nader put this way:

> *We expected to have headphones for each student, but instead we had two speakers that both were hung on the classroom wall. The first speaker was positioned in the front of the classroom and the other one was located behind the seating. It was behind my place, at the back. The sound coming from that one was unclear because it had that buzzing sound.*

Assessment Practices Adapted in ELPPs

Another factor that negatively affected Nader's perceptions about the effectiveness of the ELPPs was the use of traditional evaluation methods. He told me that in the first term he took four tests; each was supposed to be given after finishing each textbook. In addition, there was a final exam that took place at the end of each term. In the second term, Nader had two midterm tests because he studied two textbooks and had his final test, which was held at the end of the term. Nader made it clear to me that midterm tests were unfair because they were not consistent with the students' expectations and capabilities. He indicated that the tests were held together with tests in other courses taught in the PYP. Furthermore, they were more concerned with testing the students' rote learning of several grammatical rules and left out important language aspects such as speaking and writing skills:

> *We did not study that much in the first textbook [Beginner]; we had only a few lessons and suddenly were informed by the teacher that we were going to have the*

first midterm exam the next week. Then, we had to study the second book and within less a month, we had an exam. All these exams were about grammar and words, but speaking and writing were not considered. Some questions were so difficult for us to answer, it was as if they were brought from another planet. Unfortunately, there were other tests that we had to prepare for in subjects like chemistry, math and genetics that all required time and hard work.

Implementation Concerns

Nader indicated that English courses should not be taught along with other courses and described it as 'a nightmare' causing him 'depression and confusion':

Why do they want to confuse us? Actually they did confuse us. They said that I was going to study English in the PYP, which I believed that would be more helpful in developing my English. It was not right, it was like a nightmare, I did not know what to study, or where to begin and I felt lost. Have mercy on us!

Building on this, he suggested allocating the first term of the PYP to teaching students the EGP course, while the second term would be for teaching students the other courses. However, he felt that due to the students' poor level of English proficiency, they would require more than one term to reach the language level required:

It was a heavy demand on us to study English with other medical courses; give us some space and time for improving our English and then introduce us to the other medical courses. All the medical courses such as chemistry, physiology, genetics and physics relied on English and thus we were in need of improving our English first to be able to study them. Our lives were turned topsy-turvy.

<u>Bader</u>

My husband met Bader accidentally in the café at the pharmacy faculty and they had a friendly chat over a cup of tea. They talked about the future of pharmacy education in

the KSA and what reasons brought students to apply to the pharmacy department and what they were facing after graduation. When their conversation became more personal, they felt so comfortable that they exchanged mobile numbers so they could keep in touch. Unlike the other male participants I interviewed, Bader is married; he and his wife live in his father's house in Makkah. I contacted Bader through WhatsApp, introducing the focus of my research study and asking him to participate in my study. He agreed to do so.

Reasons Related to Lack of Awareness about the Role of English

Bader was born in Taif and had his school education there. His father served in the Saudi Arabian Army; after his retirement he moved to Makkah. Bader was raised in a family where the parents did not finish higher education. His mother got married before finishing secondary school, while his father dropped out of intermediate school to join the army. Bader is the youngest son and is probably his father's sole hope of seeing one of his children to achieve his dream of obtaining a higher education degree. Bader's brothers did not finish their tertiary studies and all fell far short of their father's expectations. Thus, the father decided to place a great deal of focus on Bader and his education and worked hard to secure what was best for him. At one level, I felt that his father's concerns were reasonable, because I believe that one of the main obligations that parents have to their children is to fight to give them every opportunity. However, on another level, I felt that Bader's father had a different story that needed to be approached with a higher degree of respect and gratitude. Bader helped me to see that, when he explained to me that his father's high expectations on his education placed an intolerable burden on his shoulders. That burden, however, contributed to Bader's desire to be more determined to get ahead in life and continue on for a better academic and professional future. As a result, he had to overcome his difficulties and the first one of these was English.

Bader further explained to me that his father regretted not putting enough focus on his children's education and for not encouraging them enough to obtain a higher education degree. He told me that due to his father's strong belief that learning English was only the school's responsibility, Bader's father did not work hard to direct his attention to the importance of learning English. He did not work hard to

raise Bader's awareness of the fact that English was a key element for achieving a successful integration into tertiary studies and in securing a good job:

> *My father is a retired solider who worked very hard to raise us adequately, but he was very late to acknowledge the value of learning English and to see the important role it has for our generation. He used to tell us that learning English was not so important, but after he noticed that my elder brothers struggled painfully and could not complete their studies in the departments they most desired, which was due to their inability to use English properly, he felt otherwise. Now, I have to depend on myself and redouble my efforts.*

Reasons Related to Prior School English Education

Bader indicated that his prior schooling English experience was uncomfortable. He recounted some painful stories about his teacher and his attitudes towards Bader and his friends. He was a very strict teacher who disliked mistakes or carelessness on the part of the students. He was strict to the extent that it terrified Bader and his friends to approach to him or feel free to ask a question in the classroom. His teacher's strict regime made Bader give the nickname 'bogyman'. Bader told me that he was unable to speak in English because he could not tolerate the fear of making mistakes or being humiliated. He tended to feel that any improvement in his English was impossible, and that it was only a collection of forces beyond his control that prevented him from developing his abilities in English:

> *I studied in [school name]. The English teacher was very terrifying. On the first day, he came to the classroom and at that moment I felt that he was very serious and tough. He was a bogeyman. He controlled the class; none of us could speak when he was in the middle of explaining something. Honestly, I was scared to speak because I wanted to avoid his putting me on the spot by asking me to explain why my answer was wrong.*

When he entered intermediate and secondary schools, Bader's English learning situation did not improve. The English teachers in the intermediate and secondary schools were careless and less encouraging. They spent most of the time introducing and explaining the meaning of new words and asking students to practise their pronunciation through drills. They presented all the grammatical rules explicitly and

considered learning grammar as the primary goal of mastering English, relying on Arabic to simplify the information for the students. Unfortunately, such formal instruction and the use of Arabic instead of English led to students' using inappropriate learning strategies such as memorizing grammatical rules and writing the English pronunciation of a word in Arabic, so that the students could read and pronounce them whenever necessary:

> *I studied English for seven years and my English level is still the same, sorry to say, but it is poor. When I was in intermediate and secondary School, I was not worried about taking English exams. [The teachers] were not encouraging; most of the time they taught us English in Arabic and we used Arabic when asking them for more clarification. I didn't open the English textbooks until the night before the exam because what we were studied was already in handouts prepared by the teachers. These handouts contained all the words and grammatical rules that would be included on the exam.*

He added that memorization was an ineffective learning strategy that did not support him in coping with the demands of the enormous workload required in his tertiary content courses.

Reasons Related to Linguistic Differences

Proper English pronunciation can be a larger problem for Arab learners than for some other L1 groups. According to Bader, distinguishing between some English sounds was identified as one aspect of difficulty that he had in English. This may be because English has some sounds not found in Arabic, so that Arab learners are not trained to produce these sounds. Bader told me that he faced such problems, particularly with sounds such as /p/ and /b/. He tended to replace the /p/ sound with the /b/ sound. He also reported having difficulty in spelling words with silent letters that do not match their pronunciation such as *know*. Grammar was another factor that caused Bader trouble. He told me that English was not clear to him because he did not easily grasp the idea that the number of the words in an English sentence exceeds that number used in Arabic sentences, resulting in writing problems. He added:

> *You have the, the English 'you are' consists of two words, but the single word 'Inta' means 'you are' in Arabic, which has only one word to convey that meaning.*

Perceptions towards the Nature of ELPPs

As indicated earlier, Bader used four textbooks in the EGP course, two which ran in the first term and two textbooks in the ESP course in the second term. Bader made it clear to me that he had difficulty adapting to the heavy workload at the PYP, above all to the way in which he had to cope with the demands of the intensive English courses and their long hours. Attending for four hours every day in the classroom to learn English at the institute and studying a large amount of materials at home exhausted him and contributed to feelings of pressure and stress. He described the challenges associated with having to balance devoting time to studying English and the other courses required in the PYP. Bader felt consistently 'tired' and 'fatigued' when he tried to do everything he had to and admitted that he hated studying English because he could not strike the right balance. He also illustrated that the situation prevented him from enjoying his social life and handling any more family commitments:

> [*In the PYP] you worked 24 hours, no social life and no enjoyment. I arrived at the campus at 8:00 a.m., and got back home after* al-Maghreb *prayer [in the evening] tired, sleepy and unable to visit with my family. Most of the time I could not take naps because I needed to do so many things. I did not have time to study; I returned home tired, prayed the* Isha *prayer, ate my supper and then slept.*

Mixed-ability classes were found to be another factor influencing the quality of the ELPPs. It happened that Bader was placed in a discouraging learning atmosphere where he was unable to feel secure or ask questions without feeling anxious. Bader added that all first-year students, female and male, were divided into their PYP classes according to their language performance on a placement test which they took before they joined the PYP. He said that due to his low score, he was placed in Beginner Level classes and was assigned to study three more levels in the first semester. However, he admitted that his class contained students who were not at the same linguistic level as he was. Due to the fact that students were grouped randomly regardless of their proficiency level in English, Bader felt that he was a slow learner or a 'handicapped' person who had to struggle painfully to cope with the level of the advanced students. He wanted to learn English but he could not handle so many demands above his English ability. He did not want to make any more mistakes or

speak because of his fear of being laughed at. Bader also remarked that rather than devoting substantial attention and offering special support, his EGP teacher was more concerned with teaching and satisfying the language needs of the advanced students or those students who were described by Bader as having 'clean brains'. In order to solve that problem, Bader tended to rely on seeking help from the advanced students, asking them to clarify unclear topics or to speak to his teacher on his behalf.

Teachers: Teaching Practices and Attitudes

The excessive intensity and length of EGP course not only affected Bader's quality of learning but also the ways which the EGP teacher used to teach it. Due to the enormous volume of material to be covered in a limited time, the EGP teacher tended to go too quickly and only briefly explained some of the most important materials. Bader expressed his wish to have a teacher who patiently went over the details and take the time to help him understand the required tasks and encourage him to find the meaning of every word. He further explained that the ultimate goal that his teacher aimed to achieve was finishing the first textbook so as to start teaching the next one, which resulted in his providing inappropriate learning experiences for Bader and his friends. He described feeling so frustrated that he wanted to leave the university. However, that was not the case when Bader was in the second term, because he believed that having only two textbooks gave him extra time to balance his many learning responsibilities:

> *When you study four textbooks in one term, and within a month or less than a month you were taught the first textbook, of course no one would gain anything. Due to lack of time, the EGP teacher explained two or three units in one class. He did not bother to be sure if we had learned anything. He only cared about finishing the textbooks. The textbook includes 15 units, of which 12 were taught in less than a month. I fought with the clock.*

The Impact of the ELPPs on English Abilities

When asked about the nature of the language-related challenges he encountered during his content courses, Bader indicated that the speaking practices that he had in the ELPPs did not make any difference to his speaking abilities. He also indicated that he did not achieve any improvements in speaking skills because neither participating

in class discussion nor having individual presentation was required in his subject field of study. In saying this, I felt that expressing that formal speaking was a problem reflected Bader's own notion of what was important and in what areas he lacked confidence rather than what his content classes actually required. In contrast, writing and listening skills were not cited as causing him any trouble. As was found earlier in the data, students no longer found understanding their lectures difficult, either because they developed their listening skills or because they adapted to the way their lecturers used Arabic and English as media of instruction. Instead, Bader perceived the need to develop his listening skills to understand daily conversations and news. As for writing skills, it seems that this was not a major issue, perhaps because it was not required in his content classes or because he felt that he needed more help with other important skills such as speaking; he reported facing difficulties in understanding the meaning of unknown terms and in processing certain sentence structures when reading a content-course text. Although he did not provide a clear indication of what aspects of the sentences gave him difficulties, he referred twice or more to having troubles with understanding the difference between the meanings of unknown general terms.

Bader indicated that he experienced circumstances in the ESP course that contributed to a sense of appreciation for the development he achieved, particularly in learning technical terms. He attributed that to two main reasons: the first was related to his ESP teacher and his teaching practices, the second to the fact that relying on two ESP textbooks in the second term allowed for more time and effort for the ESP teacher to explain the materials adequately and for Bader to study the course properly. In some responses, however, Bader emphasized the small amount of attention devoted to teaching the most important pharmaceutical terminology in the ESP course. Nevertheless, he admitted to me that he could not deny reaping the advantages of having learned other technical terms. First, it contributed to his understanding the content of certain reading texts. Second, due to his familiarity with some of them, he felt that he had the time and effort to learn and look up the meaning of new discipline-specific terminology rather than wasting time trying to understand the terms that he already knew: 'Not all [technical terms] were in the field of pharmacy. But, honestly, Nursing brought me big gains'.

In the earlier part of the interview with Bader, he indicated that he faced difficulty in terms of understanding the meaning of unknown general terms when reading a text. However, near the end of the interview, he reported some levels of improvement in his reading abilities. He said that the efforts he made to achieve that level of improvement were related to using the dictionary during the EGP course and to the reading activities he had to complete in that course.

Improved Transition to University Life

Bader also remarked that he faced difficulty in making the first move socially, describing himself as shy and not able to take the initiative to speak in English during the initial stages of taking the ELPPs. Although he felt that he encountered academic challenges as he tried to adjust to the demands of a course that required a mastery of English and using different study skills, he recognized the effectiveness of the course in terms of providing him with the opportunity to experience how to approach academic study and how to integrate easily into the social life at university.

On this interesting point, I asked Bader to explain more about how the ELPPs aided him in his transition to university life. He told me that during the EGP course he felt lost and was uncertain about what to do. He was profoundly affected by his previous learning experiences at school. He viewed it as a very poor experience in terms of the transition to university or enhancing his ability to reach desired learning outcomes. However, when he took the ESP course in the second term, he became a more confident and more persistent person who wanted to work hard to achieve success in academic life. He learned to adopt different time management skills to foster taking a deeper approach to learning through finding the meaning of the task at hand from different viewpoints rather depending solely on memorization. Bader was more likely to enjoy a much easier transitional experience in the second term than he was in the first one. This may be attributed to Bader's ESP teacher, who supported his learning in the course and having an unhurried pace resulting in an increased amount of time to secure effective and adequate learning. Bader felt that the ELPPs offered him a chance to experience university teaching, academic requirements and different assessment methods in much greater depth, resulting in facilitating a much easier transition to university life:

> *It was like a new move. At the beginning, it was not easy for me to be familiar with what was around me. Later, I started to understand that I was a university student and needed to become active, attentive and able to find my own way of learning. In school, teachers told us what to study and how to study. I did not learn many skills at school. Here, I learnt to depend on myself and be able to study 70 pages in one night.*

Improved Academic Motivation

Finally, it appeared that academic motivation played a key role in helping Bader develop a deep appreciation of the ELPPs. He reported that his attitudes towards English changed because he became aware of how English could help him in securing a place in the most desirable departments and in obtaining a good job. He indicated that in school, he used to look at English as a normal class like Arabic or religion, in which a student does not necessarily require much effort or critical thinking to obtain good grades. After the completion of the ELPPs, Bader acknowledged that English was an essential part of his long-term academic success and professional development. Because most primary resources in the pharmacy field are in English, he admitted that he needed to master it. Furthermore, he linked a good knowledge of English to 'a human need' and a way to become 'a literate and a developed person' who could earn respected status in society. A key factor that contributed to Bader's motivation was his ESP teacher, who was more interested in slow learners, and who placed more focus on the actual learning of those students rather than being a competitor who placed himself in a race against the clock to finish the textbooks before the term ran out. In contrast, his EGP teacher was 'cold', 'did not care' and 'not patient' and unable to submit clear presentations of the material. Another motivating factor for Bader was his family, particularly his father's expectations of what he could accomplish. He decided to work hard to satisfy all his father's desires. I felt that Bader genuinely wanted to pay his father back for believing in him and his academic abilities. Additionally, he considered that as 'a duty that a son must perform'. As a mother of four children, I was deeply touched by the way in which Bader talked about his relationship with father. However, I found that the idea that family could be a motivating factor for changing one's attitudes towards English very convincing:

In school we did not care about English class. We had final exam questions and we only needed to memorize them. But [in pharmacy] English is very important; everything in the university needs English. Without a knowledge of English you could not keep up in the university. I want to thank the ESP teacher; he helped me see that there was still hope for me to learn English. I wanted to improve myself for the sake of pleasing my father, I wanted to make him happy and proud of me. He's had enough of the constant disappointments from my brothers. Insha'Allah will do my best.

Qasim

I contacted Qasim through the WhatsApp application asking if I could speak to him about his views regarding the difficulties in using English in his content courses and the ones he took in the ELPPs.

Reasons related to Prior School English Education

Qasim made sure I knew that his school background placed him at a considerable disadvantage. He explained, 'I am sure that my English is not as enough as it should be to be able to easily adjust to English-medium teaching':

We studied math, science and sometimes English in Arabic for 12 years. When we entered university, we were shocked that we had to study those subjects in English. In university, lecturers speak so fast I found myself missing important notes because I could not catch that easily.

Not being trained to listen to long stretches of academic discourse in English and lacking a rich repertoire of general academic vocabulary, Qasim could not understand the lectures. As a result, he sought assistance and support from his classmates or from other students who were at higher levels:

Qasim*: I needed Arabic translations. The problem is when you hear a sentence that includes a word you do not know at all, or you have not come across it.*
Me*: What word?*
Qasim*: A general word. I need to use my mind and to transfer the English speech into Arabic first. When it is translated into English, the meaning becomes clear and the problem is solved.*

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When discussing his lecture experiences, Qasim identified two sources of irritation that badly affected his listening comprehension. First, some subject teachers relied on using Arabic to present their lectures but suddenly shifted into English. Qasim commented that 'When Arabic was used; wow! But, when [professor name] suddenly shifted into English, I feel confused'. Second, some other lecturers produced unclear English pronunciation (e.g., /vh/ instead of /w/ and /za/ instead of /th/)'.

Another factor explaining Qasim's poor English is related to the teacher who taught him English at school. The issue of English teachers in school turns out to be a common factor identified as a problem by the male participants in the present study. However, what makes Qasim's comment most important is the way in which he explained his attitude towards English at every level he studied in school, by using percentages. Unfortunately for Qasim, he reported descending percentages:

> *In primary school, my interest in English was 30% because I was scared of the teacher. In intermediate school, it became 20% because all [the teacher] cared about was to finish the textbooks before the term ran out of time. At secondary level, it became zero because the teacher controlled us using our marks. You know, it was secondary school; we hoped to graduate with high grades to secure a place in university.*

In order for English learners to use the language more successfully, they should be aware of the widest set of advantages they will have if they master it. Nevertheless, according to Qasim, teaching English in school did not enhance students' awareness of the language's importance in the field of higher education. Now, most departments in the Saudi universities are encouraged to use English as the medium of instruction. Consequently, they place an increasingly high value on knowing English on the part of the new entrants. The absence of such knowledge contributed not only to slowing down students' progress in learning English but also to decreasing their motivation to develop their English proficiency:

> *[By the name of God] Wa Allah, we did not think of English or take it into consideration. When we entered secondary school, they told us that without good*

knowledge of English we would not be able to gain a place in university or continue our tertiary studies. At that instant, we acknowledged that learning English was important, but it was too late for us. At that time, we started to think taking intensive English courses. But, I wished we had known when we were in primary school because a greater grasp of English can be achieved at that early stage.

The Influence of the ELPPs on English Abilities

I was interested in exploring Qasim's views about the ELPPs and how it impacted his academic experiences. Unlike the other male participants I interviewed, Qasim successfully passed his placement test and was placed in a higher level class, so he was only required to use two EGP textbooks. When asked whether he had done some preparation before the test or not, he reported that without the help of his friends who had completed the PYP, he would have been like a 'blind person'. He commented on the importance of the information they gave him in terms of increasing his awareness of why and how the test is conducted and what type of questions it included. Given the fact that he had prior information, he felt more comfortable taking the test. Additionally, he arranged to have a private tutor who gave him intensive English lessons a week before the test. He claimed that the test required no need to exert so much effort, not because he relied mostly on his language ability, which he estimated as weak, but because he was lucky. I asked him a direct question, 'How did your luck help you pass the exam?' He answered,

Qasim: *'And my success is not but through Allah. Upon him I have relied, and to Him I return'.[13] My mother always blessed me with lots of prayers.*
Me: *You are right. I felt that very convincing, but how did you do it?*
Qasim: *First of all, Allah blessed me with the help and support I needed. When questions appeared easy, I consulted my mind to answer them, but when I found the questions difficult or unclear, I gave a haphazard answer. It was my good luck.*

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[13] This is an English translation of stanza 88 from chapter 'Hud' in the Holy Qur'an

He told me that he was privileged over those students who were assigned to study four textbooks. Nevertheless, he felt that the EGP course provided him with little input and poor practical engagement of those skills that he had not covered at school, such as speaking and writing. He confirmed to me that his experience in studying English in the ELPPs was just like his experiences studying English at school. He repeatedly reported having few opportunities to practice speaking in English in the classroom. He still felt ill-equipped to speak as fluently or efficiently as he was desired. Lack of speaking practice contributed to Qasim's inability to form a question, justify an opinion, make a suggestion and clarify particular information:

> *Even now, I speak and pause and then speak; the number of the pauses are more than the number of the words I produce. I cannot ask, answer or justify my opinions. I have the ideas and knowledge in my mind but I cannot put them into understandable utterances.*

As far as writing skill is concerned, Qasim revealed that he does not know how to write properly. He described his learning of writing in the ELPPs by using the name of the activities he had in the EGP workbook. He described the usefulness of filling gaps, completing sentences and listing unknown vocabulary in writing short paragraphs. However, he confirmed that the use of writing workbook activities did not help him to write as accurately as he wished. He also expressed that the quality of his exam answers was lower than the desirable standards because he has poor writing skills. He stressed that:

> *I wish I had the ability to write in my own words. In my mind, I have the knowledge but I do not know how to express them into words in English. Thus, I wrote the technical term in English but the rest of the answer was in Arabic. It is not good, I know.*

With respect to listening skills, Qasim indicated that he 'started to feel confidence when I listened to the teacher' and found that this aspect of his English had improved more than before. He felt his increased confidence stemmed from the experience he acquired from being exposed to the high number of opportunities to listen to English in the ELPPs.

With respect to his experiences of the ESP course and how it influenced his English capabilities, Qasim commented that it was 'effective', but he was expected to learn 'hundreds of, no, thousands of technical terms'. He attributed his lack of technical term development to two factors. First, each ESP textbook includes 15 units (*Nursing 1* and *Nursing 2*) but most of the units were dropped. When I asked about the reasons that led to the deletion of some of the book units, Qasim highlighted the following:

> *I did not know who decided to cancel the teaching of these units, but I think that it was because the duration of one term was not enough to teach all the 30 units. Unfortunately, some of those units that were selected to be dropped were related to the field of pharmacy, like Unit 15, for example. I do not say, however, that the other units did not help me but I was expected to learn terms in pharmacy.*

The second factor that negatively influenced Qasim's technical vocabulary development was that his ESP teacher had no adequate discipline-specific knowledge. In fact, the ESP teacher's lack of a discipline-specific background appeared to have been vital for Qasim, who stressed that 'it is wrong to assign the teaching of Nursing 1 and 2 to a teacher who does not know anything about the medical fields'. Furthermore, Qasim indicated that his ESP teacher did not show interest in teaching the course or preparing him for discipline-specific language use:

> *He sat on his chair at his desk reading from the slides and giving the answers for all of the exercises. When asked about the meaning of a medical term or unclear concept, he did not answer because he had no background. He always promised to dig up the information for us and to tell us what he found in the next class, but he did not do that.*

Assessment Practices Adapted in ELPPs

Qasim indicated that he took two progress tests, each held at the end of the teaching of each of the two EGP textbooks (*Pre-intermediate* and *Intermediate*). Given that Qasim had two midterm exams to do in the first term, he clearly had enough time to balance studying the ESP courses and preparing for taking the tests. Qasim, however, had a different view about this assumption on my part:

Midterm exams were painful and caused pressure in head. It was not easy for me to study and prepare for taking a test in the English course; I had to take another test in Chemistry the following day. To prepare for the test in Chemistry, you need to study around 153 pages in English. I was required to find time to study well for the English course; I had to study the grammatical rules, words and activities in the workbook. There was no time but extra stress and fatigue. To make matters worse, there were many projects I needed to work on as well.

Clearly, Qasim remained unhappy with his experience in taking and studying for multiple exams while he was also working on different projects. As indicated in earlier comments, there are two factors to take into consideration. First, Qasim did not know how to organize his time and find a way to manage all the different demands he had on his time. Second, the ELPPs tended to guide Qasim into using rote learning as the main learning strategy and not to try other strategies. This is understandable, either because of the poor training input of the different learning strategies he was exposed to at school or because the lack of attention to promoting the acquisition and use of different learning strategies in the ELPPs. Given this fact, I assume that Qasim will continue to go about his major studies handicapped by a lack of adequate time management skills. Considering these factors, it can be argued that the ELPPs needs to devote much more attention to raising students' awareness of time management skills and increasing their understanding of different learning styles during their tertiary studies.

5.5 Qualitative Analysis: Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

As indicated earlier in the Methodology Chapter, I conducted four group discussions, two with females and the other two were with males. In my research study, focus group discussion was used as a tool to gather data about what type of proposals students might offer to policy makers working in the ELC to ensure that the ELPPs met the type of skills actually needed in their degree studies. In order to understand how the female and male students differed in what they perceived as being the most important matters for improvement, I planned to carry out focus group discussion with a group of students from one gender; the female students, followed by another focus group discussion with the male students. This approach made it easy for me to

break down data into incidents that consisted of similar and different proposals offered by the students from the two groups. From these incidents, certain themes emerged and were identified. In what follows, I present each theme followed by the discussions I had with the two groups. I expected that the students' proposals would be varied. However, the recommendations offered by the students from the two groups were not different. Numbers rather than pseudonyms were used to identify the students from the two groups: i.e. Student 1, Student 2, etc.

The first females' discussion was conducted in the library and consisted of five students, while the second took place in my office and also had five students. In each focus group, I started by welcoming students and explaining the purpose of the discussions and their roles. I did my best to establish a comfortable atmosphere so they could openly discuss their feelings and opinions. Due to limited time and a busy schedule, I was restricted to meeting the students after they had finished their classes. After spending a long day in the university, the students were exhausted and hungry. Therefore, I offered them full meals including sandwiches, juices and desserts.

Both of the two male focus group discussions were conducted at my house. The first focus group consisted of six males and the second consisted of five. In each case, I welcomed and thanked them for agreeing to take part in my study and coming to my house to conduct the focus groups. I highlighted the purpose and goals of the meeting, and offered them coffee with a variety of desserts and dates. Later, they were invited to go out for dinner with my husband.

5.5.1 Suggestions for Dealing with the Excessive Length and Intensity of the ELPPs

Females Discussions

A major finding from the first group discussion, which runs across all the female and male students, was to make changes in course length and intensity. I started the discussions by asking the females for their experiences in taking the ELPPs in their first-year PYP. Female students perceived that the EGP course was too intensive, as Student 1 said:

> **Student 1**: *it was too fast and broad for us to study and for the teachers to perform adequate teaching for the course content.*
> **Student 2:** *In order to support our English learning there should be a greater focus on the quality of teaching courses, not the quantity.*
> **Student3**: *I used to study for the EGP course while my brain was calculating how many pages were left to finish.'*
> **Student 4**: *I was spoon-fed' and 'my life was a race with time.*

When I felt students started telling me stories that were not relevant to the research focus, I raised my hand and then said, 'I think we have gone off-road here, and time is limited, so can I bring us back on track to our discussions about your suggestions for how to decrease the course hours'. At first, I felt they were shy about putting forward their suggestions, which I thought was because of me. Therefore, I decided to encourage them by making some remarks about how males brought very brilliant ideas and views into their discussions. After I created that type of competitive atmosphere, Student 5 decided to make the first contribution and said:

> *We can only study EGP course; it is easy because it was general and we had studied that at school. But, I would say no to taking the ESP course in the first year. It was so difficult, because it had a lot of medical terms. They needed to be translated; more time was spent on studying these new medical terms. I would say we were not qualified to study ESP course in the first year.*

After Student 5 gave her suggestion, a storm of valuable proposals was given by the other students. Student 2 disagreed with the views of Student 5, indicating that they were going to study in medical schools, so they should have some background in medical fields. She added,

> *I do not think so, we are now studying pharmacy and while I am reading some of pharmacy subjects I easily can understand the content because I learned some relevant medical areas in Nursing 1 and Nursing 2. It is important for us and for our subject study as well*

I was interested to hear some conflicting views coming from them, so I decided to ask, 'Well, do you mean no more EGP course or no more ESP course, does anyone

have anything else to say?' At first, they all looked at me for a while, before one student (Student 4) said,

> *No, we cannot only study the EGP course and leave the ESP course because, as Student 2 suggested, we need to have some background in the medical field prior to commencing our major studies. What I am trying to say is to teach the EGP course in the first semester of our first year alone. The other subjects that are supposed to be taught in the first term along with the EGP, such as human genetics and chemistry should not be taught in the first semester. Girls, what do you think?*

Students 1 and 2 answered positively, 'yes, it is good idea' and Student 5 gave the thumbs-up to show her approval. Student 3 interrupted, saying something that appeared to agree with Student 4's suggestion, saying,

> **Student 3**: *Yes, I would then have plenty of time to work on the EGP course even if I am required to study four EGP textbooks'.*
> **Student 1**: *Yes, so there would be no need to squeeze our time out of every second to study the EGP course at the expense of other subjects.*
> **Student 5**: *Yes, if we only have to study the EGP course in the first term we will certainly have plenty of time to study very well and we will be able to raise our GPA to secure a place in our most desired department'.*

I was keen to find out their views about when the ESP course should be taught, so I asked the question, 'You talked a lot about the EGP course, what about the ESP course, do you have suggestions for when it should be taught, please?'

> **Student 1**: *I think that the EGP course should be taught in both the first and the second terms, whereas teaching the ESP course should be in the second year along with other pharmacy courses. During the second year, we can study Nursing 1 in the first term, and Nursing 2 can be taught in the second term of our second year, in both the first and the second terms'.*
> **Student 4:** *Yes, that is good, but because we do not want to have so many courses to study in our second year, I suggest cancelling some subjects that are supposed to be taught in the second year, such as Qur'an, Islamic studies and mathematics. These subjects, however, can be taken as compulsory courses in the first year'.*

Student 5 decided to continue reflecting on Student 4's views and went on to say:

> *Right; because Qur'an, and Islamic studies are taught in Arabic, they are easy for us to study. So, if we have to study them in the second term of our first year, there will be much more time available to spend on studying [the EGP course]'.*

It appeared that these students were missing the point that if they were transferring these courses from being taught in the second year of their major study to their first year, they could have found themselves in a daunting year resulting from studying a large number of subjects. I, therefore, asked them, 'You missed something here; you are going to have a lot of courses then, because you are actually borrowing courses from your second year and adding them into your first year and all that for the sake of allocating a year to the EGP course, am I right?' Student 1 quickly echoed the point I made, adding:

> *If we are going to have ESP course in the second year, subjects such as chemistry and genetics (those are very hard subjects that they had in their first year) should be taken along with the ESP course in the second year. I feel that is a good combination because these subjects complement each other. Also, I think that to put teaching the ESP course along with chemistry and human genetics courses will facilitate learning these hard subjects and the other subjects in pharmacy'.*

Males Discussions

In line with their female counterparts, the males expressed similar concerns reflecting their dislike of the excessive intensity of the EGP course and its negative influence on the quality of their learning. The male students reported that the intensity of the course workload and long hours negatively affected the quality of their learning experiences. For example, Student 1 said:

> **Student 1:** *Honestly, I started studying pharmacy but I can say that I am not prepared adequately to study my content course because I was not equipped with the needed skills in pharmacy, there was no time for speaking practice.*
> **Student 2**: *Yes, we did not have time for good learning because everything in the class was done in haste.*

> **Student 3**: *My mind was stressed with memorizing everything.*

I asked about what led them to say that and received following comments: 'because we had to study from 4 books' (Student 2); 'we were required to study use four books and finish them within four months' (Student 3); 'I had no time to study everything' (Student 4). Student 5, however, had this to say:

> *I had to study from two EGP textbooks but I rarely succeeded in having enough time to study the English course [the ELPPs] well because there were other subjects to be studied. So I think that we were under pressure because we had to study other medical subjects along with the English courses, regardless of whether it was two or four textbooks that the students were required to study. I think that language learning does not come from exposing students to a large amount of content, but rather from long periods of exposure to a language.*

In accord with Student 5's view, Student 6 articulated that, 'True, it is impossible that within a period of four months, a student can use English adequately'; Student 1 shared the same view and added, 'I don't think we even learnt anything because we studied every book in a month. There was no time to cover each skill properly'. Then, I asked them to reflect on what could be done to decrease the pressure coming from the course intensity and the demands of other subjects.

> **Student 6**: *I am in agreement with what Student 5 said and I think it should be one year devoted to the English courses, a whole year just for that and no other subjects'*
> **Student 2**: *I totally agree with you. Taking any language course in any language centres abroad usually lasts no less than eight months, not four months like here. I suggest having a whole year for teaching the EGP course'.*

Student 1 pointed to the issue as to when ESP course and other subjects should be taught, if a whole year had been allocated for EGP course: 'What about the ESP course and the other subjects if the first year will be allocated for teaching only EGP course?' In response to Students' 1's question, Student 5 answered, 'The ESP course and other subjects could be taught in the second or third year along with the content courses'.

I was interested in finding out exactly what these students wanted to have in their EGP course, their ESP course and the other subject taught, so I put this question to the group: 'I got confused, what do you think of the consequences if teaching EGP course is allocated one year, whereas teaching the ESP course and other subjects takes place when you are in the following years of their major studies?' Students 2 had this to say:

> *It is difficult to take the ESP course and other subjects in the following years because, as you know, boys, our timetable is already full with the pharmacy courses, we have theory and practical classes. Three days we have classes starting from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. and two days starting from 8:00 until sunset. So if you add an ESP course and the other subjects required in the PYP into the timetable, when will we finish? I think that we will stay at university until 10:00 pm attending all those classes. This is real pressure.*

Following up his good point, I asked the following: 'It is a good point, you would have to live under the same pressure but I think you have some other ideas to sort out, right?' Student 6 was prompted to react and went on to say,

> *I think we can have EGP classes in the first semester alone, but teaching the ESP course and other subjects can be in the second semester. Teaching the ESP course with other subjects could facilitate our understanding of these subjects, since they are in English and full of medical terminology'.*

5.5.2 Ability to Choose Relevant Authentic Topics

Females Discussions

This sub-theme was reported in both females' and males' discussions. With the females, Student 4 stated that

> **Student 4**: *We should have opportunity to choose the topics that we will study in the EGP course.*
> **Student 1**: *Do you mean general or medical topics?*
> **Student 4:** *Both.*

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When I realized that the students were not keen to exchange their views freely, I decided to ask the more direct question, 'What did you miss most when you studied the topics in the EGP course?' This seemed to encourage them to offer their opinions; Student 2 said,

> **Student 2**: *Most of the topics in the EGP course were general but most were not interesting.*
> **Student 4**, **on the other hand, suggested**: *Yes, I would like to talk about cosmetic surgery rather than cars. I am not interested in reading about cars and famous models of cars.*

I was interested in having more suggestions about this issue, so I decided to ask them, 'What would you gain if you were asked to choose topics that you are most interested in?' Student 3 answered,

> **Student 3**: *If that really happened, we would be more interested in learning. We lacked deep understanding of what we read because we lacked interest in reading about topics that were not related to pharmacy.*
>
> **Student 6 interrupted, saying something that appeared to contradict student 4's view**: *We had medical topics in the ESP courses, but we did not know how to read the professional medical articles or discipline-specific books. We should have learnt how to read articles and books in medical fields rather than sticking to reading the topics in the books.*
> **Student 5**: *The topics in the EGP textbooks were general, whereas medical topics were included in the ESP course. I, however, think it would be better if we read from other sources, not only from the ESP textbooks.*

Males Discussions

Male students also reported that they were not happy with the topics they had in their EGP course, as Student 6 said,

> **Student 6:** *If they gave us the chance to choose which topics to write about, I would not choose to write about directions or about the rooms in a house.*
> **Student 1 added**: *We were required to read some stories as an extra-curricular activity. I chose to read a story about mountains but I was not interested in reading about mountains; I would be more interested if I was required to*

read a story about some famous doctors or a story about how someone falls from a mountain and gets injured, how bad his injuries are and how I could help him.

5.5.3 More Language Skills Classes

Females Discussions

Focusing on the impact of the ELPPs on their English skills' improvement, I went on to ask, 'What do you think about the value of studying the English courses [the ELPPs]?' Student 3 answered,

> **Student 3**: *Due to limited time, teaching English skills was neglected, such as writing and speaking. More focus should be placed on teaching us how to write a prescription, a report or a patient's medical history. It is not good to think that I am in the second year but I am still weak in writing such genres.*
> **Student 1**: *Yes, I remembered that my lecturer asked me to define a chemical substance, but I did not how to say that in English. I wanted to say that in English but I could not.*

I asked about suggestions for how the ELPPs could have contributed to their ability in writing. I got the following answers;

> **Student 5**: *Stop grammar-based instruction.*
> **Student 6**: *the whole first year was spent on teaching grammar and answering MSQ questions based on grammatical rules. What benefits do we reap from all that? None. I am unable to answer essay questions on pharmacy exams.*

To probe their suggestions further, I asked the following question: 'If you were in charge, what would you like to do to help students improve their ability in writing?' In response to this question, student 4 chose to be specific in her answer, saying,

> **Student 4**: *I would add a writing course teaching students how to answer essay questions and write a research project.*
> **In support of Student 4's views, Student 1 said:** *I agree with Student 4; teaching us how to write a research paper is important because we have to submit a research project before graduation but even now we do not know how to write six lines. We did not learn that in the English course, and I am worried about what will happen then.*

The students also presented their dissatisfaction with the way in which speaking was tackled in the ELPPs and called for more reading practice, as Student 3 said:

> *Despite having a good teacher who explained everything, the teacher failed to give us the chance to discuss our ideas either with her or with our classmates. Sitting silently in her class affected my confidence in speaking English in my pharmacy classes. I think classroom discussion and creating an interactive style are things that I really needed and were most lacking in the English courses [the ELPPs].*

Apart from that, there was also a feeling among the students that the ELPPs did not prepare them for the reading skills needed in their tertiary studies. This was clearly articulated by Student 6 when she said:

> *I didn't practice much; in pharmacy, we are required to read from articles and books, but the problem is that I do not know how to read eight pages containing large amount of information. I would suggest that instead of reading texts that do not exceed the one-page limit and answering questions, we could have to read professional articles or a chapter from a book.*

Males Discussions

I wanted to find out whether taking the ELPPs provided males with valuable preparation for tackling the academic demands of their content courses. All six students indicated that due to limited time, they did not have the opportunity to have enough speaking and writing practice; they expressed a need for more practice and provided the following suggestions. For example,

> **Student 3 shouted:** *More writing practice was we all needed! All we know about writing skills is that any text should have an introduction, a body and a conclusion, but we do not know how to write them.*
> **Student 2 shared the same view and indicated that**: *We call for more speaking practice. In order to be able to air out our opinions and question others' opinions, we have to be fluent speakers. We will work at hospitals and some of the large hospitals in the KSA employ non-Arabic*

speakers; we need to be good at speaking to communicate with them.

I followed up on this and asked, 'Well, are you asking for more speaking practice for the sake of your professional jobs?'

> **Student 5 said***: No, for both, it is for our professional and academic lives'*
> **Student 6 added***: Speaking is very important because in year 5 all pharmacy students will take an oral examination. The examiner along with three students will sit together around a table and the examiner will present a prescription that is written incorrectly. The three students will be required to identify the incorrect information and they need to get it just right. It is an oral assessment and any student who cannot convey the right information clearly would lose marks'.*

Student 2 went on to suggest that there should be a course for speaking skills, a course for writing skills, a course for reading skills and a course for listening skills, adding, 'I suggest having separate classes for these skills. Each skill should be taught separately so we can learn it in a proper way'.

5.5.4 More Oral Presentations Practice

Females Discussions

When asked how they viewed their experience in giving oral presentations, female Student 3 said 'it was effective and we liked the experience' and Students 1 and 2 appeared to agree with her. Students 4 and 5, on the other hand, had different views.

> **Student 4 indicated that she did not give any oral presentation***: I think you are like me [talking to Student 5]. We were not asked to give oral presentations like them and I think that it was because of the limited time during the EGP course. I studied four EGP textbooks, so there was not enough time for that.*
> **Student 3 shouted***, No, I think we were required to give presentations in the second term, not in the first term. During the second term, all students had two ESP textbooks to study.*
> **Student 4 proceeded to share her argument with Student 5 and said***, My ESP teacher did not ask us to*

give oral presentations, did your teacher do the same
[asking student 5]?

Student 5 indicated disapproval, indicating that her ESP teacher did not require the students to give oral presentations. I wanted to learn about the views of students who did not have the opportunity to prepare a presentation, so I decided to ask Students 4 and 5, 'How do you perceive not having the opportunity to present in your class? How does missing that chance seem to you?' They tried not to answer the question, but Student 4 did say, 'we would like to experience that like the other girls', whereas Student 5's answer was limited to 'we should have equal chances'. Consequently, there is an issue that not all the students had the opportunity to give oral presentations, and being exposed to unequal learning opportunities contributed to feelings of frustration and marginalization.

Another important suggestion emphasized by many students was the need to do more presentations in class, but only under certain conditions. First, students stressed the need to get careful instructions on how to give good presentations. As Student 1 said, 'When I was asked to give an oral presentation, I found it very difficult because it was for the first time I was asked to do so. Before presenting a talk, we should be exposed to sufficient instruction about the type of language appropriate for structuring presentations and we have to know the techniques needed to give effective presentations'.

In addition to having good knowledge about how to present, Students 1, 2 and 3 all suggested that having the opportunity to choose their own topics to present would help engage them more. Student 2 reported,

> **Student 2:** *I was required to read a story about cars; 'Formula One' was its title, and give an oral presentation on it. I was neither interested in reading it nor in giving an oral presentation about cars.*

Student 1 said that she was required to read a story about 'Sense and Sensibility' and Student 3 read a story about 'Nelson Mandela'. I went on to ask a more direction question, 'What I'm understanding here is that you were reading stories about cars and others; how do you feel about these stories?' Student 3 answered:

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> **Student 3:** *These stories were good, to some extent, but it would be beneficial if they gave us medical stories rather reading stories about general topics. Reading medical stories would develop our understanding of the medical fields and at the same time increase our interest in reading.*
> **Student 2 had a different view and said**, *No, let them choose for us which story, because they might know which story would match our English proficiency level.*
> **Student 3 tried to convince Student 2, replying:** *When we choose something we like, we will be more interested in reading it; have you tried that before?*

The three students indicated that there was not enough time in the period given them to prepare their presentations and fulfil other academic commitments, as Student 3 noted:

> *We had to read the story, translate some of its difficult words in order to understand its content, prepare what we to talk about and our PowerPoint slides; we certainly needed more time for all that. They told us that we were required to read a story and give a presentation on that story at end of the second term, when we really wanted that time for final exam preparations.*

In supporting Students 2 and 3, Student 1 added,

> *We had lots of things to do: we had to study for exams, submit a project in the Active Learning Course and prepare ourselves for the presentation, which was our most daunting task, as we had not practised giving a presentation.*

They all agreed with Student 1 when she suggested that

> *Students should be notified as early as possible or at least at the beginning of the term about the story and giving a presentation, so they would have plenty of time to read the story and prepare themselves for the presentation.*

Males Discussions

Focusing on whether male students had been asked to give oral presentations, I asked, 'Tell me about your experience in giving an oral presentation'. In response to this question, only Students 3 and 5 said that they were not asked to give presentations, whereas the other three students indicated that they gave oral presentations during the

second term, when the ESP course was held. Regarding the reasons for not being given the opportunity to prepare a presentation Student 3 said:

> **Student 3:** *It was because we lacked enough time; unlike all the boys sitting in this room, I studied three textbooks in the second term; Nursing 1, Nursing 2 and Intermediate [the fourth level EGP textbook]. In the first term, we were supposed to study four EGP books, but we actually only studied three, Beginner, Elementary and Pre-intermediate. Our teacher found that we were out of time, so he told us that we would have to study the fourth along with the two nursing textbooks in the second term.*
> **Student 5, on the other hand, had a different experience**: *We were required to read a story about trains but we were not required to give a presentation; rather, we were required to do summary writing.*

Hearing a reference to being engaged in a summary writing activity, I decided to ask Student 5 'Could you tell me more about your experience of writing a summary?' Student 5 answered:

> *I did not know how to summarise the story. With the help of my friends and Google translation software, I was able to condense the story into a one-paragraph summary.*

5.5.5 Teacher and Teaching Delivery

*Females Discussions***)**

Issues related to teaching were also identified by the females, who tended to believe that having sufficient knowledge in the medical field was essential for teaching ESP courses. Student 2, for example, stated that,

> *We read a text about blood circulation but we did not understand the whole text because our ESP teacher did not explain anything; rather, she went to ask each one of us to read the text and answer its questions. During the exam, we could not answer most questions because we were engaged in reading passages without gaining a deeper understanding of their content.*

In supporting Student 2's view, Student 4 suggested the need for having 'a teacher who has a basic background in the medical field, so she could teach English easily and interpret some of the main areas in the medical field'.

Student 1, on the other hand, did not attach any role of providing medical information to her English teachers; rather, she blamed the ELC for assigning teachers who did not have medical knowledge, saying,

> **Student 1***: she was an English teacher, it was not her responsibility to present medical information. She, of course, did not have a good background about what the function of the digestive system is or how the nervous system works in the human body. We ask for a teacher who has thorough background in the medical field so that she would be able to teach English language and at the same time transfer her understanding of medical information to us, which will build a better understanding of the scientific materials.*
> **Student 5 replied***: yeah! My ESP teacher was not sure about the correct pronunciation of most medical terminologies. Although she did her best at teaching Nursing 1 and Nursing 2, I feel that it would be more beneficial for us if we were taught by a teacher who was a specialist in the medical fields.*

Males Discussions

I became more interested in finding out what the males thought about their language teachers and their teaching methods. Student 6 chose to be the first speaker on this point, saying:

> **Student 6***: Honestly, I was not in favour of the use of a traditional lecturing style of teaching, because everything was coming from the teacher while we were sitting and listening. I would ask for new teaching methods that encourage interaction between the students and teachers.*
> **Student 5 reflected on Student 6's views and said***: We are fed up with the use of traditional teaching lecturing methods. The teachers were not prepared to enhance*

teaching and learning because they either read from their PowerPoint slides or taught straight from the textbooks.
Student 2 went on to say: *Well, this method of teaching cut off our intention to speak while we needed additional support to speak in English.*

Another point was raised by Student 3, who reported that his teacher lacked the ability to use teaching methods that could cope with the different language abilities of his students, adding:

> *When I started the course, I felt that it was above my English proficiency. Most English teachers, including my teacher, treated us as if we all had higher levels of English competency and ignored the use of methods that could help those students who had lower levels of English'.*

When I noticed that the other students did not clearly share the same views as Student 3, I decided to ask him this direct question, 'Could you tell me exactly what you missed most in the teaching you had in the ELPPs?' This seemed to help clear up his thoughts: Student 3 answered:

> *Teaching English should be presented on a gradual basis. Most students here graduated with a lower level of English competency but we were required to do things in a manner above our capacities. We were asked to study Beginner in two weeks and within a month we finished the second textbook, and within four months we studied all four textbooks. My teacher went through teaching the four books quickly and totally forgot to use an easy way to teach those four books'.*

I also heard the following comment from Student 1, who remained silent until he agreed, 'Yeah! My teacher used to speak fast and his accent was not pure English, he mixed his L1 with English'. Student 4 agreed with the other students' views and said,

> *As some of us were asked to give oral presentations, but most students did not because their teachers did not require them to do that, teachers need to be observed by the university [ELC] to make sure that they offer equal teaching to their students. They [ELC] should hire qualified teachers to teach the English course. I think the most important thing is their ability to speak English in a clear accent, use good teaching practices in their classes and provide support and guidance to their students.*

5.5.6 Extended ESP Course to be Taken as a Core Course Taught in the Later Years

Females Discussions

Another suggestion emphasised by the female students was the need for more ESP courses to be taken as core courses alongside their content courses. Student 2, who was positive on this point, went on to say,

> *We need to attend more language classes, especially the ones whose content focused on issues related to medical fields. We can enter these courses in the following years, the second, third, fourth and fifth.*

Student 3 explained that she attended extra classes alongside her ELPPs classes and added,

> *Because we had more free hours our teacher asked us to join some educational clubs held in the university [in the ELC]. These clubs were taught by English teachers and were held during daytime. Each club was assigned to teach one skill, so there was a writing club, a speaking club and a reading club; they were very helpful. There was also a club for medical terminology; that was the one that I attended.*

Students 1 and 4 responded, 'We did not know about joining any clubs for teaching English skills during the English course [the ELPPs]!' and student 2 said,

> *Me too. I think that was because we had to study four EGP textbooks in the first term, the teachers thought that we lacked the time to join these clubs. However, I think the students who did not attend these clubs should at least have the right to know about these clubs and then they themselves could decide whether they would like to join them.*

Student 4 reiterated some of the issues raised by Student 2 and added,

> *'Believe me, for me it was not because of a lack of time that I did not attend these clubs. I studied two EGP textbooks but I did not know about them.*

Student 6 went on say, 'My teacher told us about these clubs, but I could not attend them because there were clashes between their times and my core courses'. I followed

up on this point and asked, 'Would that be like saying that you would like to extend the language course after you finished your PYP? Am I right? Student 3 said,

> *Yes, but I think we all want to take ESP courses rather than EGP courses. It is enough for us to take the EGP course in the first term. We need to take a course that would facilitate our understanding of our content courses and prepare us very well to tackle the demands of our future careers'.*

In a way to support Student 3's view, Student 5 said:

> *I accept taking the ESP course in the later years as long as that course fulfils three conditions: first, there should be a recommendation not to use more than two textbooks; second, the course's content and exercises should be based on topics related to the medical field in general, and to pharmacy in particular; third, the course's credit hours should be no more than two hours; and finally the course teachers should have some basic background in the medical field and apply new teaching practices rather using a lengthy lecturing style'.*

Focus Group 2: Females' and Male' Discussions

5.5.7 In-sessional Language Programmes

Males' Discussions

While the females recommended that the ESP course should be a compulsory course that should be taught after they finished the PYP and before they graduated from their majors, the male students indicated that they not only needed the general knowledge on language use but also the specific knowledge of their subject matter. Student 1 said,

> *The organisers of the English course [the ELC] should offer two types of language courses, one focusing on teaching general English and the other emphasizing teaching students the skills needed in their academic contexts and in their future workplaces*

Student 2 echoed Student 1's view, adding, 'I prefer to join these courses but they should be scheduled alongside our content courses'. Students 1, 3 and 5 were in

favour of what Student 2 was saying, whereas Student 4 reported that attending additional language courses, along with students' subject matter courses, would put them under greater pressure, she added:

> *I feel these courses should be electives, so that students could access these courses whenever they needed help with their academic tasks or to improve their English.*

I was interested in learning what the other students thought about Student 4's suggestion, so I asked, 'What do you think of his suggestion? Do you think the idea of making these courses elective would encourage you to attend them?' The following answers were given by three students.

> **Student 2:** *I think that because we are studying our subjects, we are able to identify our academic needs and language struggles more accurately and are thus more likely to attend these courses to support us where we struggle the most.*
> **Student 1***: Yes, we are now much more aware of the need to have good English competence'.*
> **Student 5***: Just for the sake of improving their abilities in English, a lot of my friends travelled abroad and spent lots of money. Based on that, I do not think that these students or others would say no to attending English courses offered to them in their own countries, for free'.*

5.5.8 Suggestions for Assessment Practices

Females Discussions

I asked students to express their general feelings regarding the assessment practices adapted by the ELPPs. The first three students gave the following answers:

> **Student 1***: It was unfair; I did not know what purpose that test was for.*
> **Student 2***: It was the worst experience I ever had. During the test, my headphones stopped working and thus I answered the questions without thinking carefully*
> **Student 3***: Honestly, I did not expect to be placed in the higher-level groups, because lots of questions were difficult and I found myself giving haphazard answers.*

I realized that all three students were referring to the placement tests, which they were required to take prior commencing their PYP studies. I was also keen to explore their views about their progress tests, so I had to ask 'What do you think about your midterm and final exams?' Students 2 and 1 gave the following answers.

> **Student 2:** *Actually there were no quizzes at all, but only midterm and final exams.*
> **Student 1:** *I had four midterm exams and the type of questions asked in all four were about grammar and reading. Speaking skills, on the other hand, were not assessed.*

Lastly, I decided to ask students what they considered to be their main proposals for improving the ELC assessment practices. Student 2 clearly articulated her suggestion:

> *Because there was a lack of clarity around the placement test, I entered the test without intending to answer its questions carefully. When I found out that I would be placed into higher or lower English groups according to the results I obtained on the placement test, I wish I could have had the chance again. They should tell us so we could prepare ourselves.*

Student 5 said:

> *I would suggest this one: why do they not put official copies of past placement tests on the university [the ELC] website? The students would be able to purchase sets of past placement tests and practice them online so that they would feel more confident on test day.*

Males Discussions

I started the discussion by asking the males to talk about their experiences in taking both placement and progress tests. I had the following answer.

> **Student 1:** *I think the admission test that we had before we were accepted to study the PYP did not reflect students' real proficiency and thus allowed weak students like me to study with advanced students'.*

Referring to the midterm exams, Student 2 said:

> **Student 2**: *Even midterm exams did not really reflect our English proficiency because the types of questions asked in these exams were all multiple-choice.*

Student 1: *we should be exposed to a variety of questions*.

Student 3 tried to explain why he felt that the exams were unfair, saying,

> **Student 3***: I think the assessments used in the English course [the ELPPs] were unfair. The teachers did not give us the chance to see our exam papers and we did not know how we were assessed. I suggest, therefore, that each teacher should show his students their exam papers so they could learn from their language mistakes and know how they had been assessed.*
> **Student 2**: *Yes, it was not fair. I was absent on the day of the first midterm exam and I decided to go to the teacher to ask him to allow me to take the exam. He told me that there was no need for that but to prepare myself for the next midterm exam. He told that he would* use the *grade obtained in the second exam for the first one.*

Student 4 went on to say, 'Teachers should be more open with us, allowing us to see our exam papers and discuss our mistakes in order for us to learn from our mistakes'. Student 5, who became interested in speaking after Student 4 presented his point of view, added:

> *Some teachers were more supportive than others. They repeated recordings several times for the students so they were supported in the listening exams. Other teachers, on the other hand, played the recordings once.*

Student 3 asked, 'May I add something? I think the ELC should provide a new testing service. I think using online exams via students' online services is the best solution'. Showing support for the views put forward by Student 2, Student 3 said, 'there will be equal chances for taking exams, so no one can listen to the tape over and over'.

5.5.9 Miscellaneous Suggestions

Females Discussions (Physical Environment)

The female students indicated that their classrooms were not suitable, with Student 1 prompted to say the 'classrooms need more cleaning' and Student 2 added that the 'classroom ventilation was bad, and some ACs were not working'.

Student 4 supported the views of Students 1 and 2, adding: 'Some classrooms are designed with chairs permanently attached to the floor preventing us from moving them when needed'. . I also had the following responses.

> **Student 1:** *My classroom was not well equipped, but it had a blackboard. There were no computers; no overhead projectors and more importunity there were no audio tape recordings or speakers available. I do not mean that all classrooms were not equipped, because I knew that some classrooms had speakers. But, I feel that most classrooms lacked many teaching aids.*
> **Student 5:** *My teacher used to bring her laptop and small computer speakers into our classroom because it did not have built-in speakers.*

Lastly, I decided to ask them to reflect on what impact that had upon their language learning. I had the following answers:

> **Student 5**: *The malfunctioning ACs irritated me greatly. I feel that when heat was increased, our concentration was decreased.*
> **Student 3**: *It made me feel sleepy.*
> **Student 2**: *Sitting for more than four hours every day and being expected to stay alert and interested required being seated in clean, quiet and well-equipped classrooms.*
> **Student 3**: *Sometimes students sit on the floor in the corridor waiting for their next class. Those students who were sitting in the corridors absolutely annoyed the teacher and the students. I, therefore, suggest that the university provide a large common room for the students so we can sit together and not bother other students.*

Males Discussions

When asked about their views about the context in which they had their ELPPs classes, Student 2 said, 'I hoped that we could study listening in listening labs'. Student 1 said that 'listening labs are important for teaching listening but we did not have one'.

Males Discussions (Students' Feedback on the Course and the Teachers)

The male students asked me to provide them with more opportunity to express their views about the course content and the performance of their language teachers. Student 3, for example, said,

> *The people in language centre need to know how language teachers teach the course in order for them to know what necessary changes to make. As was discussed in our previous meeting, while some of the students were asked to deliver oral presentations, many students were not asked to do so, because I think the teacher did not care or was not interested.*

Directing his question to Student 1, student 4 asked, 'Do you think they [ELC] will be willing to take your feedback into consideration?' Student 1 replied, 'Yes, why not?' and Student 2 added, 'If they do not listen now, one day they will do so'. Directing his question at me, Student 4 asked, 'Do you think that what you collected from us in your research study will be considered?' I answered him, 'I'll do my best to make sure that will happen.'

Males' Discussions (Taking Language Classes in a Different Environment)

The male students indicated that they were keen to take their language classes in a different context, such as a hospital. Student 2 was the first to suggest the idea that:

> *It is enjoyable when we can study outside the classroom, like for example going to King Abdullah Hospital and practise speaking in English with different people like pharmacists, doctors and patients. It is more fun and interesting.*

Student 5 thought that going to a hospital is 'a difficult wish' and suggested that,

> *I think it might be difficult because of lack of time. I suggest having the language classes in the university library. It is a way to teach us how to find a book and also a kind of break in the routines that we have in our classrooms'.*

Language Centre Website

Student 3 reported how difficult it was to get any information about the placement test from the university homepage and went on to say,

> *They [the ELC] should put links online for the students to obtain information about what placement tests would be*

like. The ELC's website could also offer good idea about the assessment practices adopted on tests.

5.6 Summary of the Qualitative Results

After I analysed the data generated from the interviews and focus group discussions, the data were discussed through different themes that were classified under three main topics to be able to answer the three research questions 1) students' perceptions of the factors contributing to their struggle in using English (RQ2), 2) students' perceptions of the value of the ELPPs (RQ3), and 3) students' suggestions of improvements to the next ELPPs (RQ3).

Based on the analysis of the students' interviews, it was found that students' previous learning/teaching English at school, lack of contexts for using English, linguistic differences between Arabic and English, lack of confidence, and family's educational background seemed to impede making good use of English, and, thus, increased students' difficulty in using English.

Students' views of the impact of the ELPPs on their academic experiences seemed to be mixed. Some students viewed the impact of ELPPs as a positive, particularly in improving their listening ability, adjusting to the heavy work required in their tertiary study studies, and in increasing students' motivation for learning English. Some students, however, considered the ELPPs exerted a negative impact and felt that was attributed to five factors: the excessive length and intensity of the courses, unequal educational opportunities, teachers and their teaching practices, assessment practices, and poorly- equipped classrooms.

Based on students' group discussions, a number of valuable suggestions were offered. These suggestions included recommendations

(a) for dealing with the excessive length of the ELPPs,

(b) on the ability to choose relevant topics, more language skills classes, and more oral presentation practices.

(c) on teachers and teaching delivery

(d) on the assessments; and

(e) on miscellaneous topi