

TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED WRITTEN CORRECTIVE
FEEDBACK: EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS, PRACTICES
AND STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN OMAN

BY

AL MOQBALI ABDULLAH MOHAMMED KHAMIS

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Kulliyyah of Education
International Islamic University Malaysia

AUGUST 2022

ABSTRACT

Seven writing teachers and their 70 General Foundation Programme students took part in the research (GFP). Technology Mediated Written Corrective Feedback (TMWCF) beliefs and self-reported practices were investigated using semi-structured interviews with instructors. Classroom observation was used to have a better understanding of the teachers' real TMWCF practices. The researcher also utilized student text analysis to investigate instructor comments on students' work in an attempt to find triangulation. Finally, focus groups with students were held to find out what the students thought of TMWCF and what they thought their instructors were doing in terms of TMWCF practices. According to the findings of the study, teachers' ideas about error detection and repair matched up well with what they did. However, teachers' attitudes on redrafting, feedback explicitness, feedback volume, feedback source, and feedback emphasis did not match their behaviours. Similarly, the study showed that students' preferences mirrored their instructors' practices on the explicitness of feedback, the amount of feedback, and the source of feedback, although they were only partially congruent in TMWCF's correction of errors. On the other hand, two areas of incongruence were identified between the students' preferences and the teachers' practices concerning the focus of the feedback and praising comments. TMWCF experiences indicated that students agreed that their professors explained to them why feedback is important, they provided timely feedback, and they utilized various forms and amounts of feedback were sufficient for the students to agree on these findings. However, there were three areas where teachers' practices and students' viewpoints diverged, such as the difference in the focus of feedback, the students' knowledge of the error code and remarks, and producing a second draft. The contributions of this research include better insight into the link between the students' TMWCF experiences and preferences and their instructors' TMWCF beliefs and practices. In addition, several instructional implications can be proposed considering the findings, such as using technology-mediated feedback to create a social collaborative learning experience and favourable attitudes towards learning English writing. Based on the results and findings, the researcher offers these recommendations for future research.

ملخص البحث

شارك في البحث سبعة معلمين كتابة و 70 طالبًا من البرنامج التأسيسي العام. تم التحقيق في معتقدات (TMWCF) كتابة التغذية الراجعة بواسطة التكنولوجيا والممارسات المبلغ عنها ذاتيًا باستخدام مقابلات شبه منظمة مع المديرين. تم استخدام المراقبة الصفية للحصول على فهم أفضل لممارسات المعلمين الحقيقية ل TMWCF. كما استخدم الباحث تحليل نصي الطالب للتحقيق في تعليقات المدرس على عمل الطلاب في محاولة للعثور على التثليث. أخيرًا، تم عقد مجموعات تركيز مع الطلاب لمعرفة رأي الطلاب في TMWCF وما اعتقدوا أن معلمهم يفعلونه من حيث ممارسات TMWCF. وفقًا لنتائج الدراسة ، فإن أفكار المعلمين حول اكتشاف الأخطاء وإصلاحها تتوافق بشكل جيد مع ما فعلوه بالفعل. مواقف المعلمين من إعادة الصياغة ، شرح الملاحظات ، حجم الملاحظات ، مصدر التغذية الراجعة ، وتركيز التغذية الراجعة لم تتطابق مع سلوكياتهم. وبالمثل ، أوضحت الدراسة أن تفضيلات الطلاب تعكس ممارسات معلمهم في توضيح التعليقات ، وكمية الملاحظات ، ومصدر الملاحظات ، على الرغم من أنها كانت متطابقة جزئيًا فقط في تصحيح TMWCF للأخطاء. من ناحية أخرى ، تم تحديد مجالين من التناقض بين تفضيلات الطلاب وممارسات المعلمين فيما يتعلق بتركيز الملاحظات والإشادة بالتعليقات. أشارت تجارب TMWCF إلى أن الطلاب اتفقوا على أن أساتذتهم أوضحوا لهم سبب أهمية التغذية الراجعة ، وقدموا ملاحظات في الوقت المناسب ، واستخدموا أشكالًا مختلفة وكميات من التعليقات كانت كافية للطلاب للاتفاق على هذه النتائج. ومع ذلك ، كانت هناك ثلاثة مجالات اختلفت فيها ممارسات المعلمين ووجهات نظر الطلاب ، مثل الاختلاف في تركيز التغذية الراجعة ، ومعرفة الطلاب برمز الخطأ والملاحظات ، وإنتاج مسودة ثانية. هناك العديد من المساهمات في هذا البحث ، بما في ذلك اكتساب رؤية أفضل من خلال دراسة الصلة بين تجارب وتفضيلات الطلاب TMWCF ومعتقدات وممارسات معلمهم TMWCF. بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، يتم اقتراح العديد من الآثار التعليمية في ضوء البحث الحالي ، على سبيل المثال ، يمكن إنشاء تجربة التعلم التعاوني الاجتماعي والمواقف الإيجابية تجاه تعلم الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية من خلال استخدام التغذية الراجعة بواسطة التكنولوجيا. بناءً على نتائج ونتائج هذا البحث الحالي ، يقدم الباحث هذه التوصيات للبحث في المستقبل.

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Al Moqbali Abdullah Mohammed Khamis has has been approved by the following:

Mohaida Mohin
Supervisor

Ismail Sheikh Ahmad
Supervisory Committee

Zainurin Abdul Rahman
Internal Examiner

Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff
External Examiner

Akram Zeki Khedher
Chairman

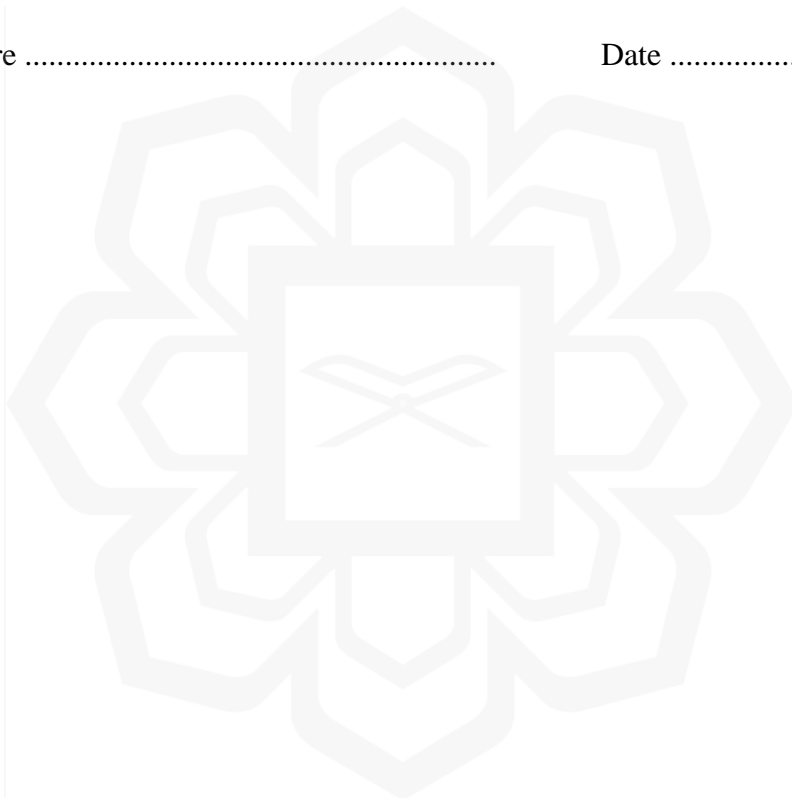
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Al Moqbali Abdullah Mohammed Khamis

Signature

Date



INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

**DECLARATION OF COPYRIGHT AND AFFIRMATION OF
FAIR USE OF UNPUBLISHED RESEARCH**

**TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED WRITTEN CORRECTIVE
FEEDBACK: EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND
STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN OMAN**

I declare that the copyright holders of this thesis are jointly owned by the student and IIUM.

Copyright © 2022 Al Moqbali Abdullah Mohammed Khamis and International Islamic University Malaysia. All rights reserved.

No part of this unpublished research may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior written permission of the copyright holder except as provided below

1. Any material contained in or derived from this unpublished research may only be used by others in their writing with due acknowledgement.
2. IIUM or its library will have the right to make and transmit copies (print or electronic) for institutional and academic purposes.
3. The IIUM library will have the right to make, store in a retrieved system and supply copies of this unpublished research if requested by other universities and research libraries.

By signing this form, I acknowledged that I have read and understand the IIUM Intellectual Property Right and Commercialization policy.

Affirmed by Al Moqbali Abdullah Mohammed Khamis

.....
Signature

.....
Date

I dedicate this work to the soul of my dad, Mohammed, who died last year. I would like to tell him on his grave that his son will always try to be a good heir to his father's name and to make him feel proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to Allah first for endowing me with the power and determination to undertake this journey from which I have learnt a lot. My sincere thanks and regards go to Dr. Sufian Trablsi who was the first one to encourage me to make this happen. He has been my idol and source of inspiration, and this reminds me of my experience of my MA under his supervision. I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank you.

I would like to sincerely thank my main supervisor Assistant Professor Dr. Mohaida Mohin, the Chairman, and the supervisory committee Professor Dr. Ismail Sheikh Ahmad. It was a great pleasure and honour to work with them and to learn a lot from them. I am obliged to them.

This work could not have been achieved without the help and support of my colleagues at the General Foundation Programme at Sohar University, the Sultanate of Oman. I would like to assure them that I am proud of them and being one of their colleagues working as a lecturer with them. My sincere thanks should also be extended to the scientific committee at Sohar University for granting me the ethical approval to let my research come into being. I can't and I will not forget our dear foundation students who volunteered in the study. I will tell them that their input to the study was so valuable.

My heartfelt thanks go to my family who has always been supportive of me and proud of my efforts to strive for better and my desire to achieve more success. A special and big thank you is addressed to my mom, my wife and my two boys who endured with me and tolerated my absence from being with them at certain times and my long hours sitting before the computer doing this work.

Sohar, July 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Abstract in Arabic	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
List of Tables	xv
List of Figures	xvii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study	1
1.3 Foundation Year English and Learners in Oman	4
1.4 General Foundation Program at Sohar University (GFP)	7
1.4.1 The Background of Technology-Mediated Written Corrective Feedback (TMWCF).....	9
1.5 Statement of the Problem.....	10
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	12
1.7 Conceptual Framework of the Study	14
1.8 Objectives of the Study.....	16
1.9 Research Questions.....	17
1.10 Definition Key of Terms.....	18
1.11 Delimitations.....	21
1.12 Limitation	22
1.13 Summary.....	23
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	24
2.1 Introduction.....	24
2.2 Defining Writing Corrective Feedback	25
2.3 A review of the Literature on Writing Corrective Feedback in ESL/EFL	26
2.4 Teacher Written Feedback.....	27
2.5 Impact of WCF	28
2.6 Views on Teacher Feedback.....	30
2.7 Direct vs Indirect Feedback	33
2.8 Use of Technology in the English Language Classroom.....	34
2.9 The Use of Technology in English Language Learning	36
2.10 Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching Writing	38
2.11 Technology-Mediated Written Corrective Feedback	39
2.12 Learning Management System (Showbie).....	40
2.13 Technology-Mediated Written Corrective Feedback Theories	43
2.13.1 Cognitive Writing Theory	43
2.13.2 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).....	45
2.14 The Theoretical Framework of the Study.....	47
2.15 An Overview of the Studies on TMWCF.....	53

2.16 Summary.....	64
METHODOLOGY	65
3.1 Introduction.....	65
3.2 Research Approach.....	65
3.3 Research Design	67
3.4 Site of the Study.....	69
3.5 Selective students writing samples	70
3.6 Instrumentation	71
3.6.1 Interviews Procedures and Protocol.....	71
3.6.2 Classroom Observation Procedures and Checklist	72
3.6.3 Students' Writing Samples.....	72
3.7 The pilot study	73
3.7.1 Aims	73
3.7.2 Participants	74
3.7.3 Instruments	74
3.7.4 Procedures	74
3.7.5 Implication for the Main Study	76
3.7.5.1 Implications for the selection of the Participants	76
3.7.5.2 Implications for the Teacher Interviews	77
3.7.5.3 3Implications for the focus groups	81
3.8 The Method of Data Analysis.....	85
3.9 Trustworthiness.....	88
3.10 Ethical Consideration.....	92
3.11 Research Matrix.....	93
3.12 Research Procedure	95
3.13 Research Timeline	96
3.14 Data Analysis.....	97
3.14.1 Setting	97
3.14.2 Gaining access to the research ethics and research site	97
3.14.3 The General Foundation programme	97
3.14.3.1 The GFP's members.....	97
3.14.3.2 Students at the GFP	98
3.14.3.3 The GFP's Curricula	98
3.14.3.4 GFP's exam system.....	99
3.14.4 The target population and the participants	99
3.14.5 My role as the researcher	101
3.14.6 Data Collection Procedure	102
3.14.6.1 Classroom observation.....	102
3.14.6.2 Interviewing teachers.....	104
3.14.6.3 Student focus groups.....	105
3.14.6.4 Analysis of student writing.....	106
3.15 Data Analysis Procedure	107
3.15.1 Familiarise the researcher with the data.....	109
3.15.2 Initiating coding	110
3.15.3 Themes search.....	112
3.15.4 Reviewing Themes.....	114
3.15.5 Define and name themes	115
3.15.6 Reporting Producing	118

3.15.7 The observations analysing	119
3.15.8 Analysing student writing	119
3.16 Trustworthiness of Research.....	120
3.16.1 Assertion of Credibility (Internal Validity).....	121
3.16.2 Transferability (External Validity).....	121
3.16.3 Dependability (Reliability).....	123
3.16.4 Confirmability (Objectivity)	124
3.17 Summary.....	124

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION..... 125

4.1 Introduction.....	125
4.2 The teachers' beliefs regarding TMWCF	127
4.2.1 Promote learning through communication using various tools.....	128
4.2.2 As assessment in teaching and learning.....	130
4.2.3 Use error correction.....	130
4.2.4 Saving time and effort.....	131
4.2.5 Discussing students' errors individually.....	132
4.2.6 Praising boostS students' confidence	133
4.2.7 Praising motivates students.....	134
4.2.8 Valuing by Applying feedback and thankful comments.....	136
4.2.9 Making survey to know students' preferences.....	136
4.2.10 Academic cheating	137
4.3 The Teachers' self-reporting of TMWCF practices	138
4.3.1 Writing a second draft as a requirement	139
4.3.2 A mixed types of feedback.....	140
4.3.3 The source of feedback	142
4.3.4 The Timeliness of feedback	143
4.3.5 The challenges faced in giving feedback	144
4.3.6 Summary	146
4.4 The Teachers' Practices Regarding TMWCF.....	147
4.4.1 Introduction	147
4.4.2 The Teachers' Actual Practices Regarding TMWCF	147
4.4.2.1 The practice related to the Identification of Errors.....	147
4.4.2.2 The Practice Related to the Correction of Errors.....	148
4.4.2.3 The Practices Related to Praising Comments.....	148
4.4.2.4 The Practices related to Writing a second draft.....	149
4.4.2.5 Practices relating to the amount of feedback.....	149
4.4.2.6 The practices related to the Explicitness of feedback.....	152
4.4.2.7 The Practices related to the focus of Feedback	154
4.4.2.8 The Practices related to Conferencing.....	156
4.4.2.9 Preferred Methods for Receiving Peer Review	156
4.4.2.10 Additional Practices.....	156
4.4.3 Summary of the Finding about the Teacher actual TMWCF practices	157
4.4.4 Summary	167
4.5 The Teachers' TMWCF Beliefs in Comparison to Their Practices	167
4.5.1 Introduction	167
4.5.2 The Teachers' TMWCF beliefs and practices	168

4.5.2.1	The beliefs and practices regarding the identification of error	168
4.5.2.2	The beliefs and practices regarding the correction of errors	168
4.5.2.3	The Practices and Beliefs regarding the use of Praising comments.....	169
4.5.2.4	The Practices and Beliefs regarding Writing a second draft	169
4.5.2.5	The practices and Beliefs regarding the amount of feedback.....	170
4.5.2.6	The Beliefs and Practices regarding the Explicitness of feedback.....	170
4.5.2.7	The Beliefs and Practice regarding the focus of feedback ..	171
4.5.2.8	Summary of Teachers' practices and Beliefs Regarding TMWCF	171
4.5.2.9	Summary	177
4.6	The students' TMWCF preferences	177
4.6.1	Introduction	177
4.6.2	The importance of receiving feedback in improving writing.....	179
4.6.3	The Focus of Feedback	179
4.6.4	Providing comments and codes.....	180
4.6.5	Errors should be identified	181
4.6.6	The Importance of Peer Feedback.....	182
4.6.7	The Teachers should be the source of feedback.....	183
4.7	The Students' experiences of the Teachers' TMWCF Practices	184
4.7.1	The satisfaction of the teachers' explanation	185
4.7.2	The timeliness of feedback.....	185
4.7.3	A variety of techniques applied	185
4.7.4	Varying the focus feedback.....	186
4.7.5	The Explicitness and Clarity of feedback	186
4.7.6	The Effectiveness of Feedback	187
4.7.7	Consulting the Teacher for clarification	188
4.8	The students' TMWCF preferences and experiences in comparison with the teachers' practices	188
4.8.1	Introduction	188
4.8.2	The focus of feedback	188
4.8.3	Writing a second draft as A requirement	189
4.8.4	A mixed types of Feedback.....	190
4.8.5	The source of the feedback	191
4.8.6	The timeliness of feedback.....	192
4.8.7	The Sufficiency of Feedback	192
4.8.8	Unclear feedback.....	193
4.8.9	Lack of motivation	194
4.8.10	Summary	194

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION	195
5.1 Introduction.....	195
5.2 The teachers practice TMWCF.....	196
5.2.1 Promote learning through Communicate using various tools	196
5.2.2 As assessment in Teaching and Learning	196

5.2.3	Use error correction.....	197
5.2.4	Saving time and effort.....	197
5.2.5	Discussing students' errors individually.....	198
5.2.6	Praising boosts students' confidence.....	198
5.2.7	Valuing by Applying feedback and thankful comments.....	198
5.2.8	Making survey to know students' preferences.....	199
5.2.9	Academic Cheating.....	199
5.2.10	Summary.....	200
5.3	The teachers' self-reported practices regarding TMWCF.....	202
5.3.1	Introduction.....	202
5.3.2	Type of feedback.....	203
5.3.3	Source of feedback.....	203
5.3.4	Obstacles to implementing TMWCF.....	203
5.3.5	Summary.....	204
5.4	The students' TMWCF preferences.....	204
5.4.1	Introduction.....	204
5.4.2	The importance of technology.....	205
5.4.3	Methods of feedback.....	205
5.4.4	The role of technology in providing feedback.....	206
5.4.5	The main source of feedback.....	206
5.4.6	Peer feedback.....	207
5.4.7	Summary.....	207
5.5	The students' experiences of the teachers' TMWCF practices.....	208
5.5.1	Introduction.....	208
5.5.2	The explanation of the purpose of feedback.....	208
5.5.3	The timeliness of feedback.....	209
5.5.4	The type of feedback used.....	210
5.5.5	Varying the focus of feedback.....	210
5.5.6	The explicitness and clarity of feedback.....	210
5.5.7	The effectiveness of feedback.....	211
5.5.8	Consulting the teacher for clarifications.....	211
5.5.9	Summary.....	211
5.6	Comparing the students' preferences and the teachers' actual practices.....	212
5.6.1	Introduction.....	212
5.6.2	Second draft.....	213
5.6.3	Types of feedback.....	213
5.6.4	Source of feedback.....	213
5.6.5	Timeline.....	214
5.6.6	Amount of feedback.....	214
5.6.7	Unclear feedback.....	214
5.6.8	Lack of motivation.....	215
5.6.9	Summary.....	215
5.7	The Discussion of the research in Light of the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK).....	215
5.7.1	Introduction.....	215
5.7.2	Conception of IOHK (Islamisation of Human Knowledge) in IIUM.....	216
5.7.3	The finding in light of the Islamisation of Knowledge (IOK).....	217
5.7.4	Summary.....	217

5.8 Conclusion	218
5.8.1 Summary of this Study	218
5.8.2 Implications and Recommendations for Instruction	220
5.8.2.1 Promotion of a student-centred Approach to TMWCF	222
5.8.2.2 Teaching students on self-edit strateg.....	222
5.8.2.3 Maintaining Positive feedback	224
5.8.2.4 Feedback on Specific Error Patterns.....	224
5.8.2.5 Making survey students' TMWCF Needs.....	225
5.8.3 This Study Contributes to knowledge	226
5.8.4 Pedagogical Implications for EFL teachers	227
5.8.5 Future Research Suggestions	228

REFERENCES.....	230
------------------------	------------

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS.....	260
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS.....	266
APPENDIX C: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION	271
APPENDIX D: TEST	274
APPENDIX E1: TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS THEMES	275
APPENDIX E2: STUDENTS INTERVIEWS THEMES.....	284
APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE HEAD OF THE GENERAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMME.....	295
APPENDIX G: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS.....	296
APPENDIX H1: WRITING RUBRIC	299
APPENDIX H2: WRITING RUBRIC	302
APPENDIX I: STUDENTS INTERVIEWS' QUESTIONS WITH TRANSLATION	303
APPENDIX J: SAMPLE OF TMWCF.....	307

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
1.1	Learning Outcomes of Five Elements Source: Oman Ministry of Education, 2016	3
1.2	The weightage of the five elements: Oman Ministry of Education, 2016	3
1.3	The objectives of writing skills in each level in GFP	8
3.1	Teachers Interview Questions Changes	77
3.2	Students Interview Questions Changes	82
3.3	Research Matrix	93
3.4	Research Procedure	95
3.5	Research Timeline	96
3.6	Education background and personal details of the teachers participating in the project	100
3.7	The student participants' educational background and personal information	101
3.8	As a primary study, observation was used	104
3.9	Teaching interviewing in the main research	105
3.10	Student focus groups were used as a part of the primary research project	106
3.11	The researcher's collection of student portfolios	107
3.12	Thematic analysis is highly encouraged (Braun and Clarke, 2006:87)	109
3.13	For instructors' interviews	113
3.14	Students' focus groups interviews: First analytical framework	113
3.15	Final codification plan for interviews with teachers	115
3.16	Students' group interviews coding scheme	117
4.1	The teachers' beliefs regarding TMWCF	127

4.2	The Teachers' self-reporting of TMWCF practices	138
4.3	On the 70 student texts, seven teachers provided feedback (including comments)	150
4.4	Here are a few feedback features of the 70 student texts	151
4.5	Teacher comments (indirect/direct) on the 70 student texts were as explicit as possible	153
4.6	The seven professors' input on the 70 student texts focused on the following areas	155
4.7	Teacher classroom observation and student text analysis were used for comparing teachers' self-reported practices in interviews with their real ones	160
4.8	Analysis of student writing	172
4.9	Analysis of classroom observation	174
4.10	The students' TMWCF preferences	178
4.11	The students' experiences of the Teachers' TMWCF Practices	184

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure No.</u>		<u>Page No.</u>
1.1	Conceptual Framework of TMWCF	14
2.1	Theoretical framework based on The Flower-Hayes Writing Model (Flower & Hayes, 1981)	48
2.2	Theoretical framework based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1986)	51
5.1	The teachers practice TMWCF	201
5.2	The teachers' self-reported practices regarding TMWCF	202
5.3	The students' TMWCF preferences	206
5.4	The students' experiences of the teachers' TMWCF practices	209
5.5	Comparing the students' preferences and the teachers' actual practices	212

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The introduction will deliberate on two main parts; to provide readers with a wide overview of the study and the reasons behind choosing the topic. First, it will provide a clear picture of the education system in the Sultanate of Oman. Second, after placing the study in context, it will state the problem, the importance of the study, the objectives of the study, and the research questions. Finally, the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the study, the definition key of terms, delimitations and limitations will be provided.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The English language is an intercontinental language that can be used as a means of communication with different people all over the world. Gulf countries, (Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman) just like other countries, attempt to improve their students' skills and capacity in the educational field and their command of the English language in particular. In the Sultanate of Oman, the English language has been given remarkable attention. English is considered a foreign language (EFL) that is used widely in trade and higher education (AL-Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2012). The government of Oman strongly believes that English is the language of knowledge, used in the fields of medicine, trade, literature, and communication. Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Oman

(henceforth MoE) has started teaching the English language from kindergarten to Grade 12, which is the last year in school before furthering their education at institutions of higher education.

About twenty years ago, the role of the English language as a foreign language witnessed a huge change in Oman (Al Issa & Al Bulushi, 2012). The Ministry of Education established the Basic Education System (henceforth BE) in 1999 to replace General Education (henceforth GE). BE represented a major reform of the schools, training, assessments, aims curriculum, and programmes to equip learners with more skills and cope with international and local changes (Oman Ministry of Education, 2016). It was decided that English should be taught in Grade One, which is at the age of seven. In addition, education in Omani schools is divided into three categories: Cycle One (Grades 1-4), Cycle Two (Grades 5-10) and Cycle Three (Grades 11-12). Grade 12 is the final year in the school stage. This stage is very critical as it represents the harvest of 12 years of studies, where English as a subject is given great importance in helping students find good prospects for their future. The country, community, and families look forward to seeing Grade 12 students complete their studies with proper knowledge and excellent scores in the final examination results.

Table 1.1 displays the outcomes Omani students in Grade 12 are required to achieve in the English subject. Such learning outcomes consist of five elements: grammar and vocabulary, listening, writing, reading, and speaking (Oman Ministry of Education, 2016).

Table 1.1 Learning Outcomes of Five Elements Source: Oman Ministry of Education, 2016

Elements	Grammar and vocabulary	Listening	Writing	Reading	Speaking
Key learning outcomes	Students can use and understand vocabulary and grammar	Students can understand a variety of spoken transcripts	Students can write letters and respond to emails	Students can read independently	Students can give presentations

Writing skills cover 35% out of 100% of total marks, while continuous assessment makes up 10% and 25% of the final exam. Al-Mahrooqi (2012) stated that a low percentage in writing skills is considered one of the reasons behind the lack of good writing abilities among Grade 12 students. Table 1.2 shows the weightage of the five elements.

Table 1.2 the weightage of the five elements: Oman Ministry of Education, 2016

Elements	Grammar & Vocabulary	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Total
Continuous Assessment	5	-	10	5	10	30
Semester Test	10	15	-	20	25	70
Total	15	15	10	25	35	100

Moreover, teachers concentrate more on teaching writing, and most of them use teacher-centred methods in teaching writing. Such teachers care more about the writing product than the writing process because of the time-consuming stages in the

writing process approach. Many students struggle in writing composition because teachers only focus on the theoretical side and ignore the process. Al-Mahroqi (2012) found that almost 80% of high school graduates admitted to higher education had taken the English language subject in the Foundation Programme (FP) before embarking on their majors. The FP is a pre-session program that is considered an integral part of almost all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It aims to give students computer, numeracy skills, English language proficiency and study skills required for university academic study (000A, 2009) (Al-Hajri, In press).

1.3 FOUNDATION YEAR ENGLISH AND LEARNERS IN OMAN

Many Omani students who left secondary schools with high grades in the English language have not been able to achieve much in English-speaking countries. When they began to pursue their university studies, they could not pass the English Language exams. This is despite the fact that such students have studied the English language in Oman as a foreign language for twelve years before enrolling in colleges and universities (Al-Issa, 2006, p. 218). Al-Issa (2006) states that the problem might be mainly due to a lack of exposure to the English language outside the classroom. With limited exposure, learners receive very few opportunities to apply the English language in authentic communicative situations and hence, are unable to increase their confidence when speaking in front of other people (Al-Issa, 2006). They feel anxious and apprehensive whenever they are required to talk in an open forum or publicly.

In a study of 82 English language teachers from different nationalities, Al-Toubi (1998) found that the reason which may account for the difficulties Omani students in mastering speaking skills is the curriculum of the Omani higher education

institutions. It does not provide adequate classes for speaking skills and it fails to prepare the learners for oral communication in the English language due to limited speaking activities. Discovering gaps in study skills and English language at the undergraduate level studies at Oman's Majan College and the Foundation Program (FP), Tanveer (2013) mainly concentrated on addressing areas of learner weakness in study skills and English language after they have completed the FP and start on their undergraduate subjects. The main gaps stated were associated with reading and writing skills. Such skills remained stagnant mainly due to the lack of vocabulary and exposure to the English language. Moreover, Tanveer (2013) proposed these explanations: (i) students only want to pass rather than excel, (ii) students are not efficient at transferring skills, (iii) their social and personal use of the English language is minimal, and (iv) the time is limited to achieve the required English proficiency level for higher education.

The lack of computer and information skills is the third point which should be taken into consideration. Weerakkody (2011) explained that Official e-Government efforts in Oman (e-Oman) started in 2003 with the establishment of a government organization called 'Oman Digital', but most of the students have not applied such skills effectively. Tuzklukova, Ginosyan, and Gafer (2017) stated that insufficient computer, language and information technology skills are still hindering learners' progress during coursework. In general, a portion of foundation program learners was shown to have an inadequate level of digital literacy and general content for the English language courses' activities and tasks They needed development in online information search, editing, typing, formatting, and word-processing, which are important study skills needed to utilise online resources for academic purposes.

Inadequate English language proficiency hinders students' progress in their information technology classes, worsens negative situations, and leads to stress and challenges within the classroom. The results of such a study support the implementation of cross-disciplinary dialogue among the faculties representing the information technology and English language areas of the foundation program. Moreover, the blending learning approach, using both the in-person learning experience and online, can be applied when teaching students (Blending Learning, 2017). It offers a workable solution to the problem of engaging students in course-specific tasks that require the intense application of computer skills, study, and language. Therefore, it could improve their literacies and contribute to their adjustment to university life. Such a solution may give students more chances to apply a skill in a more effective and balanced way. Moreover, it promotes a positive learning and teaching environment in which students feel more comfortable and become more confident.

Based on the studies mentioned above, it can be noticed that Oman's higher education sector, particularly the foundation programs, needs to become better prepared to meet the adjustment needs of the students and offer appropriate support for their performance, learning, and mitigation of their transitional experiences. The individual experiences of Omani foundation program learners during their transition from school to higher education include challenges related to several themes, such as socio-cultural issues. Such issues include a combination of cultural and social factors, for example, cultural and social knowledge and skills related to getting to know the university, understanding the university setting, learning what is expected from an individual as a student, settling into the courses, discovering social and activities

opportunities, making connections with teachers and making new friends, technology issues, language issues, issues with content, and learning knowledge.

1.4 GENERAL FOUNDATION PROGRAM AT SOHAR UNIVERSITY (GFP)

Sohar University consists of seven departments which are Engineering, Computing and Information Technology, Business, English Studies, Education, Arts and Law, and General Foundation Program (GFP). The research context of this study is the Sohar's General Foundation Programme Department. The role of GFP is to equip and prepare high school graduates with the capacity and skills to help them qualify for admission into the faculties in the departments mentioned. The program is based on the standards set by the Oman Accreditation Council and emphasizes four areas of academic competencies, i.e., Mathematics, Computing, and English.

The English subject aims to develop students' integrated general English language across the skills areas of listening, speaking, writing and reading. It has three levels with a focus on basic search skills, writing and reading skills. Critical thinking skills and study skills are embedded in the course. By the end of the course, students should have an English language equivalent of IELTS 5. The second program is Mathematics, which provides an opportunity to study some pre-calculus topics which is useful for the students when they join their faculties. Some students who study at faculties that use English as the standard study English should study Mathematics in English as this will help them understand the mathematics terminology used when they study at the faculties. The third program is computing which provides computing knowledge and skills to support the students to carry out computer-based tasks and operations effectively with a clear understanding and a good level of computer skills.