**Abstract of Paper for Submission to First International Conference on Assessment and Evaluation, 2 – 4 December 2012, Riyadh**

**An analysis of Saudi students' writing errors and a description of the process of development of remedial material to address these**

**Abstract:**

Saudi students’ writing skills are not on a par with their listening and speaking ones. International test scores demonstrate that this is a common characteristic among Arabic speakers, particularly throughout the Arabian Gulf (Cambridge ESOL Research Notes, 2009). In a forthcoming paper, Abanomey illustrates the contention that even Saudi students with good colloquial spoken English still only manage to produce written work that is often disorganized and riddled with spelling mistakes, as well as some basic mistakes and many complex grammatical errors. While there is a strong positive correlation between general aptitude in ESL and writing skills, the latter are universally weaker than any other area of attainment in the L2 (Hujailan, 2004). This finding replicates that of Jahin and Idrees (2012), whose recent study of EFL major students at the Teachers’ College of Taibah University demonstrates that writing proficiency is not linked either to positive motivational factors or attainment in other ESL skills. The authors complain of the dearth of research into poor results in writing proficiency in Saudi Arabia and lament the paucity of research linking attitudinal and motivational factors to writing.

Examinations in Saudi Preparatory Year Programs, involving thousands upon thousands of students, tend to rely on reading and writing skills, rather than listening and speaking ones, for logistical reasons. Results do not, therefore, reflect students’ communicative abilities in conversation and discussion, giving rise to disproportionately disappointing grades (Elyas, 2010; Kahn, 2011).

At KSU PY, a pilot survey was conducted to analyse twenty high-level male students’ errors and mistakes in topic organisation. Remedial materials were developed late in the academic year 2011-12 to address these and found to have very beneficial results, compared to control groups. The present much larger survey attempts to build on the success of the small-scale and narrowly focused one by examining four factors: grammatical scope and precision; lexical scope and precision; coherence and register; and organisation of material. Mid-semester exam essays at pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced levels, each comprising several hundred scripts, written by male and female students in humanities, engineering and medical streams are being analysed by teachers trained to use specially designed and piloted descriptors. Bilingual teachers fluent in both Arabic and English supervise this process.

Scripts are then analysed on a six-point scale to determine the level of the students’ writing. Errors are analysed by reference to the severity of impediments to communication and frequency of occurrence at four levels and by gender. They are also correlated to students’ overall GPA.

Sixty students at pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced levels will then be tutored with specially developed, level-specific materials to rectify the range of errors. Incoming students in study groups will be tested in their second week at KSU PY and in their ninth against control groups who have not received any special remedial tuition to determine the efficacy of the materials.

Focus groups of teachers and students will also be encouraged to identify which materials are most enjoyable to use and efficacious in eliminating error and improving overall accuracy and fluency of writing skills.