**Title: An Inquiry into Saudi Students’ Expectations of Tertiary Education and their Academic Skills prior to Preparatory Year at KSU.**

**Background:**

In the past two decades, the literature has abounded with studies into students’ attitudes towards and motivation for learning ESL (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1990 & 1994; Ellis, 1994; Hudson, 2000; Wu, 2003), drawing on influential work by Gardner (with Lambert, 1972; 1982; 1985; 1988). More recently, studies in the Arabian Gulf have followed suit with numerous investigations into Arabian and Iranian students’ motivation for ESL acquisition, often questioning whether integrative motivation matches instrumental, although with varying conclusions (Al-Alam Al-Zahrani, 2008; Al-Quyadi, 2002; Al-Tamimi, 2009; Al-Zubeiry, 2011; Moiinvaziri, 2007; Qashao, 2006)

Despite the intensity of academic focus on attitude and motivation in the Middle East and the overwhelming consensus that instrumental and (although sometimes contested) integrative motivation are significant factors in Saudi students’ approach to language learning, many commentators have noted disappointing levels of achievement (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Al-Seghayer, 2011; Al-Zubeiry, op. cit.). A similar study at King Saud University Preparatory Year (Abanomey, forthcoming) also finds ample evidence of high instrumental and integrative motivation in students but laments that this does not translate into similar levels of competence in English among the majority of (especially male) students.

This paper pays critical attention to Saudi students’ preparedness to study in tertiary education by investigating their expectations of university study, including their attitudes toward and motivation for studying English, but also their levels of competence in the academic skills necessary for success. The study is a pioneering one, as so little attention has been focused on this area to date, and especially significant as all male and female students’ opinions are surveyed on arrival. A survey of this size (approximately, 14,000 students) has rarely been conducted anywhere in the world.

The paper also proposes remedial action, based on the results of the test, through the development of materials for enhancement of study skills and analyses the efficacy of different types of intervention.

**Methodology:**

All 14,000 male and female students are tested on arrival at KSU PY by a questionnaire focusing on: prior experience of various classroom methodologies; attitudes of parents and peers to university study; motivation for ESL acquisition; and academic skills, including time management, critical thinking, and perceptions of literacy. The results of this survey are then correlated with students’ performance on the ESL placement test.

Following Dörnyei’s critique of the dominance of battery testing of students in this area (1994), interviews are conducted in Arabic with focus groups, formed according to ESL level at pre-intermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate standards, to gather more personal data on these themes. 480 students will be interviewed.

As a result of the information garnered from the questionnaire, classroom materials will be created in different formats to address unrealistic expectations, which the literature suggests are a major cause of poor ESL acquisition later (Hong, 2006; Siebert, 2003). Similarly, unfamiliarity with academic skills will be redressed. Follow-up focus groups at different levels of L2 acquisition will be conducted to determine how effective different forms of pedagogic intervention are, compared to control groups, and whether these result in improved language acquisition and more realistic expectations of tertiary education.

Teachers introducing remedial materials will be trained in their use prior to classroom delivery.