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The Status of ESL/EFL writing in Lebanon

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Research on writing in a second or foreign language has been growing rapidly, with around 2600 articles published in the past 15 years, an average of 170 per year (Silva, McMartin-Miller, Jayne, & Pelaez-Morales, 2011). While Lebanese scholars authored only about two percent of those publications, L2 writing research in Lebanon goes back to the 1960s, primarily in the form of MA theses. Since then, only one synthesis article had been published (cf. Bacha, 2007), but it remained narrow in its coverage. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview and synthesis of scholarship on L2 writing¹ in Lebanon. It presents findings based on a total of 72 sources from three major universities in Lebanon. The types of publications reviewed are categorized based on their focus, and they include journal articles, book chapters, and MA theses.

The chapter provides a brief description of the context for and history of second language writing (SLW) studies in Lebanon and the infrastructure supporting L2 writing. Then, trends in scholarship with regard to teaching and learning challenges, characteristics of students' writing, curricular and instructional developments and methods, error correction and types of feedback, WAC/WID studies, assessment practices, and writing centers are discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research are offered.

Introduction and Description of Context

¹ I will be using the terms L2 writing, SLW, and ESL/EFL writing interchangeably.

Lebanese scholars have often celebrated Lebanon as a “multicultural” and “multilingual” country (e.g., Shaaban & Ghaith, 2000, 2002; Diab, 2004, 2009; Bacha, 2000; Bacha & Bahous, 2011, 2013). Multilingualism is certainly present in Lebanese society though in various levels and degrees. This richness in languages is partly due to Lebanon’s trilingual policy where in addition to Arabic, the native language, students in Lebanese schools get to learn and use a foreign language (either French or English) as a medium of instruction in math and sciences in grade one and learn a second foreign language in grade seven or even four.

The extent to which students are proficient in the languages they presumably speak, however, is yet to be investigated (Esseili, 2011, 2014). To elaborate, some students may have learned English for twelve years in schools, but their English proficiency turns out to be basic at the university level. In addition, the majority of the aforementioned studies that are related to aspects of English language teaching and learning in Lebanon have been generally conducted in the capital’s most prestigious and affluent private universities where the total student population does not exceed 9,000 per university. Such universities are representative of only one portion of Lebanese society. Lebanon has 31 private universities, 10 university institutes and colleges, and only one public university (Ministry of Education, 2014). Table 1 shows the ranking of the major universities, which I refer to in this paper, in terms of the number of students enrolled for the academic year 2012 – 2013.

	University	Student population
1	The Lebanese University (LU)	75,000
2	The Lebanese American University (LAU)	8,138
3	The American University of Beirut (AUB)	7,982
4	The University of Balamand (UOB)	5,316

Table 1: Number of students for the academic year 2012 – 2013

Bilingual or trilingual students on Lebanese campuses come from a variety of backgrounds. They include students who were born, raised, and educated in Lebanon – these constitute the majority of the student body, and they could be either French educated or English educated; Arab students; international and exchange students; and first or second generation Lebanese immigrants who are native speakers of English (or other languages). These groups of students have different needs when it comes to writing in a second language. Some students may sound like native speakers of English, but their writing skills might need improvement. Others may have studied English as a second or third language and might need slight or extensive skill development depending on the nature of the contact level they have had with English at their schools. For the academic year 2011-2012, for example, 60% of the total number of schools in Lebanon used French as a medium of instruction while only 27% used English. The rest of the schools used both French and English. When we look at the student population, we find that around 60% of the student body learned French as a first foreign language, and 40% learned English as a first foreign language (Ministry of Education, 2013). A great number of these 60% of students choose to enroll in English-medium universities and are forced to function in English as a third language. Many of them attend universities where English is not used much outside of the classroom or even in the classroom where code switching might occur. Some of these universities are outside the capital, where English is mostly used as a foreign language (EFL) even though it would be used as a second language in the university itself. In other instances, English is used both inside and outside of the classroom in daily interaction. This can be seen in American universities and schools and in their surrounding neighborhoods in the capital, Beirut. English in this context is used as a second language (ESL). Many researchers in Lebanon often use the terms ESL and EFL interchangeably even when referring to the same institution (e.g.,

Diab 2005a, 2005b). Such a situation puts Lebanon in a unique place where, following the Kachruvian paradigm, the country is an Expanding Circle country but has some of the characteristics of an Outer Circle country (Esseili, 2011). In fact, the boundary between circles is not clear-cut, as the circles may overlap and might exist within circles (Berns, 1995, 2005); they could be described as “dynamic and changing” (Kachru 2008, p. 364). Thus, it could be argued that while multilingualism exists in such American universities, surrounding neighborhoods, and other areas (e.g. Armenian neighborhoods), this is not entirely the case for students in other universities and Lebanese residents in other geographic areas, such as in the North or South.

Like other contexts in the world that are witnessing a rise in the teaching of ESL or EFL, the teaching of writing in Lebanon is one of the most important topics at the tertiary level. In this paper, writing in a second language could be defined as any “writing done in a language other than the writer’s native language or languages” (Silva, forthcoming). Silva’s definition of SLW is inclusive of “writing done in both second language contexts where the language being learned is dominant, for example, learning Chinese in China, and in foreign language contexts where the language is not dominant, for example, learning Chinese in Brazil” (forthcoming). Based on this definition and on the above discussion of ESL/EFL, writing in English in Lebanon could be classified as writing in a second language.

In order to address the different needs of the aforementioned groups of second language writers, almost all of the universities in Lebanon have adopted a system whereby, depending on students scores on the SAT, TOEFL, or locally designed placement tests (e.g., the English Entrance Exam in LAU), they get placed in intensive English programs or test immediately into “the Communication Skills Program” (e.g., at AUB & NDU), or “the Composition and Rhetoric Sequence” (e.g., at UOB). The names of such programs differ, but in essence they are

supposedly similar in what they cover. All students are required to take first year composition (equivalent to Freshman composition) and an advanced writing course. Such programs do not only focus on developing language related skills; they also develop students' critical thinking skills and initiate them into practices related to academic integrity, among other learning outcomes. The writings of students in these programs and the teaching practices used have been the focus of a number of studies conducted by Lebanese scholars. The next sections will present major findings from these studies. First, the infrastructure supporting SLW in Lebanon is presented, followed by the methodology utilized in selecting data for this review.

Infrastructure

While prominent SLW scholars in the USA have worked hard to create the necessary infrastructure for SLW to flourish (such as the *Journal on Second Language Writing*, the Symposium on Second Language Writing, listservs, and various special interest groups at the CCCC and TESOL), a fraction of such a support system is still lacking in Lebanon for various reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the civil war which lasted for more than 15 years and which arguably finished in the early 90s is an important contributor to this shortage. The country has been limping from one conflict to another for the past 25 years. Such conflicts, with all their ensuing corruption and lack of stability, have not only affected the education system and its infrastructure, but also Lebanese students (cf., Oweini, 1998; Abu-Saba, 1999).

Professional organizations, committees or interest groups, conferences, and scholarly journals that are specifically dedicated to writing are still lacking. This lack of infrastructure seems to be slowly changing. In late 2013, the first symposium on the teaching of writing was launched by AUB. Professors and lecturers from a number of universities across Lebanon were

invited for a one-day session where they discussed three pressing issues: program needs, visions, and future plans. A listserv and a group on LinkedIn (Symposium on the Teaching of Writing) were created with occasional posts related to language learning in general. In addition to the symposium, AUB's 4th International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education dedicated a strand on writing instruction and research in higher education for the first time. They maintained this strand in their 5th international conference. Workshops on developing writing assignments for the college classroom and on assessing student writing across disciplines were conducted. Such venues are indispensable for the constructive exchange of ideas and the development of the field, and it is important that they are maintained.

Concerning graduate programs, all major universities in Lebanon have departments of English that house undergraduate and graduate programs in English language and literature. Some universities have certificates in TEFL (e.g., AUB) or in ELT (e.g., UOB). The past ten years have also witnessed a rising interest in writing centers or language centers. Thus, AUB, LAU, UOB, and NDU have all created such centers to support their students.

Methodology

For this chapter, MA theses supervised by ELT scholars in three universities in Lebanon were examined. These universities included AUB, LAU, and UOB. In addition, the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, which is considered the leading journal in the field, was surveyed for publications related to writing in Lebanon. The search, however, yielded no results. In fact, with the exception of two recent articles published in *Writing and Pedagogy* and *Assessing Writing* in 2010 and 2011 respectively, the majority of the articles on writing in Lebanon were published in venues related to teaching English in general such as in the *TESL Reporter*, *English Language Teaching Forum*, *ESP Journal*, *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *Asian Journal of*

ELT, the Asian ESP Journal, International Journal of Arabic-English Studies, TESOL Quarterly, and TESOL Journal; or in venues dedicated to issues related to other disciplines, such as *The International Journal of Business and Social Science, Research Papers in Education, The Linguistics Journal, and Business Communication Quarterly*. Table 2 summarizes the major findings by university.

	Book Chapters	Articles	MA Theses	Total
AUB	0	2	31	33
LAU	2	22	8	32
UOB	1	3	4	7
Total	3	27	42	72

Table 2: Type of Publication by University

It is worth mentioning that professors in the Education Department supervised the majority of the MA theses at AUB, and that a researcher who is now affiliated with LAU published the only two articles that are listed under AUB. The next section offers a description of major trends in L2 research in Lebanon.

Challenges

The challenges that teachers and students face in writing courses both in schools and universities in Lebanon was the topic of at least one book chapter, six articles, and five MA theses. Subthemes included the existence of different learning cultures (Bhuyian, 2012; Bacha & Bahous, 2013), issues of plagiarism and academic integrity (Bacha & Bahous, 2010; Bacha, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2010; Esseili, 2012), transfer from other languages (Hawrani, 1974; Diab, N., 1998; Bacha, 2000; Esseili, 2012), difficulty in motivating students (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011), and students' writing anxiety and apprehension (Zghir, 2007; Nazzal, 2008; and Kishli, 2007).

Transitioning from a high school to a university is often challenging to students on many levels but especially in regard to writing courses. Bhuyian (2012) used a case study to investigate this issue, and based on students' perspectives, she found that two out of four students felt they were unprepared, which might be the result of differences in background. This was further supported by the existence of differences in cultures of learning within the same educational system, which played a significant role in students' academic achievement at the university level (Bacha & Bahous, 2013). Those differences were manifested in three factors that students faced when they transitioned from schools to universities. According to the authors, schools in Lebanon do not emphasize "critical thinking, classroom interaction, and student centeredness" whereas universities that follow the American model do (p. 117). Another factor that posed a challenge to students is the conflict between their "social identity" that is tied to their native language, Arabic, and their "academic identity" which is related to the second language they have to use as a medium of communication in academia. A third factor is the conflict between the learners' collectivist spirit that is nourished in their culture and at school, and the individualistic spirit that is characteristic of the American university model.

This collectivist versus individualistic perspective prompted studies that investigated, among other issues, whether students cheat, or "help each other", because of their collectivist culture. One of these studies was conducted in high school (Bacha, Bahous, & Nabhani, 2010), and the other two were related to the university level. A common theme among all three studies was that most students did not believe that there was anything wrong with helping a friend in need. Students in high school admitted to helping their friends during exams by allowing them to copy. Such a practice is "reflective of the society that accepts this type of 'helping friends' type of relationship even if it is on exams, where if help is not offered it might mean negative

consequences for the friendship or [even] a break up,” the authors argued (p. 372). When it came to the university level, students admitted that, while they had been instructed about plagiarism and referencing styles, they were not provided with the necessary tools to avoid plagiarism, a claim which was of course not supported by teachers (Bacha & Bahous, 2010). Students’ justifications for cheating and plagiarizing varied from “because it was permitted in high school” and “I won’t get caught” (Bacha & Bahous, 2010), to lack of knowledge about referencing, lack of confidence in expressing ideas in students’ own voice and words, and the difficulty for students to write academic research papers (Esseili, 2012).

The third challenge, one that is often overlooked, and unfortunately, sometimes even dismissed by teachers as a mere “excuse” (Esseili, 2012), is the effect of other languages on students’ writing in English. As mentioned earlier, slightly more than half of high school students who choose to continue their undergraduate studies in an English medium university have studied French as a second language and English as a third language. Not only do such students face challenges in communicating fluently and accurately in English, but also their writing in English is affected. No wonder these students attributed their weak English skills to being “French educated” (Bacha, 2000; Esseili, 2012). This means that teachers have to deal with transfer in students’ communication skills from two sources: their native language, Arabic, and their second language, French (Esseili, 2012). Transfer could be positive, especially with cognate words, or negative when students, for example, think that the word has a similar meaning in the target language, but ends up being incorrect. When it comes to the Lebanese context, a number of studies concluded that errors in the use of connectives in particular may be the result of learners’ lack of knowledge or training rather than interference from their first language, Arabic (Hawrani, 1974; Carthy, 1978; Bacha, 1979; Bacha & Hanania, 1980;

Shalhoub, 1981). Diab, N. (1998) examined transfer from Arabic to English in students' writings. In her study, she focused in particular on syntactic, semantic, lexical, and grammatical errors, and excluded learners' use of connectives. The study attributed almost all of errors to transfer from L1. Such an attribution, however, is often hard to pinpoint because it could be the result of learners' restricted knowledge in the area as the abovementioned studies had shown. It also could be due to the fact that, in the Lebanese context, the shift in the language of instruction makes it harder for teachers to identify the "factors contributing to student language problems" (Bacha, 2000, p. 241). While proficiency in other languages could definitely be an advantage for students when learning other languages, there's no doubt that such students have different needs than students who learned English as a second language.

Motivation is a fourth area that affects students' writing skills. A number of studies focused on the role of motivation in learning foreign languages in general (e.g., Shaaban & Ghaith, 2000; Ghaith, 2003; Salem, 2006; Al-Asmar, 2008). When it comes to writing, it was found that the fact that first year composition classes are mandatory is demotivating to students (Esseili, 2012). Bacha (2000, 2002) concluded that students' lack of motivation to write was the main cause that hindered their skill development in such courses. Many learners found the English courses inadequate simply because they were unable to see how such courses could cater to their own needs in their disciplines (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011; Esseili, 2012). As a result, students might resort to plagiarism and cheating. Lack of motivation could also be attributed to uninteresting reading materials, in-class writing (rather than having students follow the writing process and write their papers outside class), and the inability to choose their own topics (Esseili, 2012). Another reason was that little to no writing was done in their disciplines (Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani, 2011; Nicolas & Annous, 2013). Bahous, Bacha, & Nabhani (2011)

questioned the use of first year composition when students end up writing technical reports, for example, in their future jobs. They also suggested that teachers might not be taking learners' individual differences into account, and concluded that "there is a clear need for selecting content that is more relevant to the learners' lives and also on an international level" (p. 39).

Other challenges included writing anxiety and apprehension. One study examined the relationship between writing anxiety and students' major (Zghir, 2007). Findings revealed that nursing students were much more likely to suffer from writing anxiety (fear of writing, evaluation, and of showing their own writings to others) than business students who showed higher levels of writing enjoyment. In another case study that looked at the relationship between SLW apprehension, writing self-efficacy beliefs, and the writing performance of EFL students, it was found that students' attitudes towards writing and their motivation to write, as well as their self-efficacy beliefs, were positively affected by a teacher's type of writing instruction, feedback, and assigned topics (Nazzal, 2008). Finally, a third study examined the effect of prewriting techniques on writing quality and writing apprehension among high school students. The study found that while such techniques improved the quality of students' papers, they increased learners' writing apprehension (Kishli, 2007).

Characteristic of students' writing

In the Lebanese context, there are at least seven studies or sections of studies that describe different aspects of Lebanese students' writing. Studies on the use of connectives in the Lebanese context revealed that learners have difficulty in using connectives along with correct punctuation, which might be the result of their restricted exposure to the use and variety of transition words (Bacha, 1979; Bacha & Hanania, 1980; Shalhoub, 1981). Carthy (1978) analyzed the use of transitional devices in the writings of native and non-native speakers of

English. While no significant difference was found in the frequency of usage among the groups, Arabic speaking students used coordinating transitions more frequently than native speakers. Bacha, Cortazzi, & Nakhle (2002) investigated cohesive patterns manifested in Lebanese students' essays, and found that such students used coordination, parallelism, repetition, and exaggeration excessively, and that they had limited academic vocabulary. The authors compared the lexical cohesive patterns in academic expository essays in 40 high and low-rated academic texts written by students in the EFL program, and they compared the results with Hoey's (1991) study on cohesive devices employed by native speakers. It was found that "both the high and low-rated texts were not quality texts by native standards as the high percentage of simple repetition indicated, especially in the low-texts at short distances" (p. 144). However, comparing the low and high rated texts revealed that the latter employed more lexical variation and sophisticated types of lexical cohesion (e.g., complex paraphrases, complex repetition, etc.), which is indicative of "good writing" (p. 144).

In a case study, students' writing at the secondary level exhibited an awareness of the topic they were developing, but their writing did not reflect "a level of thinking relevant to their class and age level" (Fakhreddine, 2007, p. 4). Students found difficulty in developing their ideas and using evidence to support their claims. The author listed a number of other characteristics such as inability to write specific titles that reflect the nature of their essays, absence of voice, and presence of errors in mechanics.

At the university level, and through the analysis of a corpus consisting of 1158 expository and argumentative essays, Bacha (2005) investigated the lexis that students used in order to identify the most frequent content and function words and the degree of repetition that occurred in students' writing. The author compared students' text with the model academic texts they read

in class. Results indicated that the word “the” is the most frequent word in both the model passages and students’ essays. However, students’ essays had fewer content words, and their vocabulary range, irrespective of genre or topic, was very limited with lots of repetition of the same word (synonyms were rarely used). The most repeated content words were “war”, “parents”, and “teenager”, which might be due to the assigned topics. The average letters per word was found to be four letters, which the author attributed to students’ limited lexicons. The author also examined sample writing from one class at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. Analysis revealed that “words appearing only once [were] not that ‘sophisticated’ indicating that between the first writing and the second there [was] very little improvement in lexical sophistication” (p. 133). This suggests that little development in terms of students’ vocabulary has taken place over the semester.

Muhammad (1968), El Mufti (1997), and Farhat (2008) identified the most common errors that students in a high school and the IEP at LAU make. Results from Muhammad’s (1968) quantitative analysis indicated that when it came to errors in function words, students tended to overuse prepositions, which constituted the highest percentage of the total number of errors. Errors in prepositions were followed by errors in articles, pronouns, and conjunctions. As far as content words were concerned, errors in the use of verbs (e.g., subject verb agreement) and nouns (e.g., omission of subjects or objects) ranked first. El Mufti (1997) and Farhat (2008), on the other hand, found that irrespective of genre, students were consistent in the errors they made and that such errors were of a morphological and syntactic nature and included errors in prepositions, verb tenses, word choice, and subject verb agreement. Findings also showed that students often translated from their L1 and were afraid to use the target language in class. The

authors suggested ways that could enable teachers to help their students improve their writing skills.

Curricular and Instructional Developments

This area of research has received extensive attention. Ten studies were restricted to the university level, while 16 studies were dedicated to examining effective teaching strategies in schools. At the university and school levels, studies examined a variety of techniques and approaches to teach specific writing skills or genres.

To begin with, Bacha (1979), Bacha & Hanania (1980), and Shalhoub (1981) explored the use of transitional words by learners and whether such skill could be taught effectively. They found that using appropriate instructional materials to instruct students was effective in improving learners' use of connectives. Moving to a more macro level approach, Bacha (2002) examined the use of task-based learning in order to develop students' general academic writing skills and considered its effect on motivating students to write and to develop their skills. She found that "practical research writing may be a motivating basis in helping lower-proficient learners to improve" (p. 169).

Four studies examined the use of certain approaches and techniques to teach specific genres such as argumentative essays and critique writing. Bacha (2010) offered an instructional approach to teach the academic argument where students have to argue on an issue by using different sources. Using qualitative analysis of students' papers, the author found that students showed improvement in their argumentative structures and were able to transfer the skill to new topics. Annous (1997) conducted an experiment in which he examined how role-playing can enhance students' argumentative writing. Results of the post-test revealed that the quality of students' written texts who used role playing was much better, and their texts had significantly

improved as opposed to the ones who received deductive formal instruction in the control group. In another study, Bacha (2011) used a scaffolded approach to teach critique writing. Inspired by Systemic Functional Linguistics, the author followed Feeze's (1991) model that emphasized peer and teacher collaboration to scaffold learning. Results revealed that by getting involved in interactive collaboration, students became more sensitive to other points of view and reassessed their original opinions in regard to a particular topic, an approach which develops their critical thinking skills and increases their "threshold of tolerance" (p. 175). Another approach to teaching critique writing was offered by Diab & Balaa (2009, 2011). The authors designed rubrics and assessed their effectiveness in improving students' critique writing based on students' perceptions and grades. Rubrics were found beneficial in locating students' strengths and weaknesses. Although students' grades on their second drafts improved, the authors were cautious in their interpretation of the results since improvement might have been due to other factors. Overall, students believed that grading was fair and they had a positive attitude toward rubrics. The students felt motivated and "empowered" because they were involved in designing the rubrics.

At the school level, using innovative techniques or strategies to teach writing was the focus of one journal article and 16 MA theses, 13 of which were experimental studies and three of which were descriptive in nature. The findings are summarized below:

- Deeb (1972) provided a description of a number of methods for teachers to use in order to foster creative thinking and creativity in students' writing. In addition, Abboud (1992) confirmed that selecting readings and other stimuli that were relevant to students' lives improved the practice of teaching writing, made students more interested in reading, and decreased their writing frustration. Along the same descriptive lines, Jabbour (2011)

offered a writing kit, which consisted of ideas and strategies to teach writing for grade eight learners.

- Shalhub (1991) investigated the effectiveness of using process writing with high-intermediate, pre-university EFL students in order to prepare them for university level writing courses. Results showed that using process writing was successful in preparing students for the university, but more time was needed.
- Fakhreddine (2007) found that using reading-writing activities played a significant role in students' overall ability to understand texts and improved their skills and the quality of their essays.
- Fidaoui (2008) and Fidaoui, Bahous, & Bacha (2010) discussed the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to motivate fourth graders to write and develop their ESL writing skills. Both students and teachers had favorable attitudes towards using CALL and agreed that it was both motivational and beneficial. "It enabled them to have fun, while at the same time attempting to produce creative, neat, organized, error-free written products. It helped them express their feelings and gather relevant information to fulfill the requirements" of the assignment (p. 164).
- The use of rubrics as an instructional tool was investigated by two studies. Houssami (2005) conducted a comparative study in which she examined the effect of gender and student-generated versus teacher-provided instructional rubrics on writing achievement among eighth grade ESL students. Results showed no significant difference between students who used their own generated rubric and those who used their teacher's rubric. A significant difference, however, was found between females and males where the former performed better than the latter, and between students who used teacher-generated

feedback versus ones who used the traditional teacher feedback in favor of the former.

Shehab (2011), on the other hand, examined third grade students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the efficacy of using rubrics, and found that the two groups believed that such a tool was effective. It enabled students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, a finding echoed by Diab & Balaa (2009 and 2011) at the university level.

- Obeid (2011) used a case study to investigate the use of fairy tales to improve third graders' writing skills and vocabulary repertoire. She found the careful selection of fairy tales and their accompanying activities to be effective in developing the intended skills and in creating a positive classroom atmosphere.
- By using action research, Zailaa (2011) found that the use of drama (role play and visualization exercises) in teaching process writing at the high school level was an effective tool to motivate students to write.
- At least two studies investigated the use of the writing workshop approach to improve learners' writing skills. Hachem (2005) investigated the way in which writing instruction was differentiated through the use of the writing workshop and found that the model served as a motivational tool to increase students' interest in writing and develop their skills. Likewise, Shami (2010) examined the effect of using writer's workshop as an instruction model to develop fifth graders' writing. The study also attempted to find out which proficiency level (below average, average, and above average) benefited the most from such a model. Results indicated that using this model was effective with regard to the writing progress of all groups, but the above average group benefited the most.
- The topic of the effect of journal writing or dialogue journal writing as techniques used to improve students' essay was the focus of four studies (Bazih, 1996; Obeid, H., 2001;

Idriss, 2002; and Kadi, 2004). Bazih (1996) and Obeid, H. (2001) examined the effect of journal writing in improving student writing fluency, complexity, and accuracy. While the first study revealed that students' writing had improved after nine weeks of journal writing with the exception of accuracy, which regressed, the second study found no significant difference. Kadi (2004) also examined the effect of journal writing on students' achievement and found that the technique improved students' fluency and overall communicative purposes. Finally, Idriss (2002) investigated the effect of journal writing on reading comprehension, writing quality, and writing apprehension. Findings revealed that journal writing did increase reading comprehension and improve their writing quality, but it did not reduce writing apprehension.

Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) / Writing in the Disciplines (WID)

A total of six studies were located on this topic, four of which are from scholars at LAU and two from UOB (Bacha, 2003; Bacha, 2012; Bacha, 2013; Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Nicolas & Annous, 2013; Nicolas & Annous, 2014). Although AUB implemented WAC requirements in their General Education Program, LAU and UOB have been the leading institutions in research related to WAC and WID. The next section presents research on writing needs of students from different disciplines at LAU, followed by those from UOB.

In a study that examined the perceptions of 1658 students and 48 faculty members in different disciplines in regard to the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Professional Purposes (EPP) skills and tasks they find most important and useful in their majors and future jobs, Bacha (2003) found that the perceptions of students and faculty differed in regard to a number of issues. Faculty and students did not agree on which language skill and individual tasks were more important and which type of English to be taught. Both faculty and

students, however, indicated that the English courses helped in students' EAP and EPP and improved their skills. The author concluded that the university's English program should play a better role in helping across the curriculum in various ways including "team teaching with other departments, helping underachievers, initiating students into the English type academic culture, and preparing them for work later where they will have to communicate in the medium of English" (p. 53).

In another study, Bacha (2012) surveyed teachers (n=40) and students' (n=257) perspectives on writing in the disciplines hoping that such knowledge would improve learning of disciplinary writing. Results revealed a discrepancy between students and teachers' perceptions. While students believed that they learned to write best when they were provided with models and explanation, teachers believed that students learned best through explanation and Internet sources. Also, students thought that their writing had developed over the course of the semester, in contrast to teachers who did not think that students were improving. Moreover, students considered their major problems in writing to be related to grammar and organization, in contrast to teachers who believed that students had problems in all writing aspects. Finally, students believed that they were not receiving enough help from the English and discipline teachers, but teachers disagreed. Students stated that help should come from their disciplinary teachers, but the latter disagreed and thought that help should come from the English teacher. Despite such a discrepancy in their views, the two groups considered reports and lecture note-taking to be the most frequent tasks required in their discipline, and that there should be a collaboration between the disciplinary teachers and the English teachers. The author concluded by stating that disciplinary teachers are neither qualified nor willing to teach English writing skills.

While Bacha (2003 & 2012) focused on the general language needs of students from different disciplines and compared teachers' and students' perspectives, Bacha & Bahous (2008) examined business students' writing needs and proficiency levels. Students complained that their English courses did not address their needs in their major, and faculty members complained that students had poor writing skills. Main areas of inquiry included importance of language skills, student language ability, student writing ability, frequency of writing tasks (essay writing, essay tests, letters, reports, research papers, summaries of lectures, and note taking), rate of writing improvement, and role of faculty in developing students' writing. A product rather than a process approach seemed to be followed by teachers in the discipline. Both students and faculty ranked listening and reading as the most important skills, followed by speaking and writing. In fact, students in business ranked writing as the least important skill. In addition, the two groups agreed that the major problems in students' writings were related to sentence structure and vocabulary. Similar to findings of previous studies, students rated their proficiency level higher than their instructors did. Business faculty believed that students' unsatisfactory language abilities did not enable them to perform "the business required writing tasks" (p. 82).

In more recent studies that examined WAC elements in Business syllabi at UOB, Nicolas & Annous (2013) found that little to no writing was being incorporated in the business courses. Through content analysis (review of 30 syllabi), it was found that only 30% of the syllabi required some sort of writing assignments, almost all of which were not well described (e.g., did not identify genre, length, or nature of assignment). Only six syllabi mentioned "essay" and "report writing", but with no clarity as to other requirements. In fact, a reference to any sort of "written communicative competence" and to assessment of students' writing was almost nonexistent in the learning outcomes of all thirty courses. As a follow up on this content analysis

study, the authors (2014) examined Business professors' views on students' writing abilities and the instructors' willingness to focus on the writing skill and found that such professors were neither willing nor expert enough to focus on writing. None of the 6 professors interviewed was able to explain what WAC referred to, and none of them "encouraged any drafting process" due to time constraints. All professors agreed that the heavy content in business encouraged minimal writing. Two out of six professors admitted to using Arabic in the classroom, and one of them allowed students to do the same when it came to asking questions. All professors agreed that students writing skills were weak and one described their skills as "catastrophic"! Some of the factors that contributed to such a state of affairs, the authors concluded, included the lack of preparation programs for teachers' in the disciplines to provide feedback on language related issues, teachers' belief that it was not their job to teach language skills, the lack of time to cover business content, the lack of emphasis on reading in the country, and the fact that English is being taught as a foreign language.

The previous studies examined how much writing was being done in the disciplines and looked at teachers and students' perceptions in regard to students' needs in the discipline and to what extent those needs were being met. Bacha (2013), on the other hand, surveyed 35 discipline teachers (Engineering and Architecture, Business, Pharmacy and Computer Science) and 289 students in order to have a better understanding of the type of feedback (local/mechanical and global/content) given and received, respectively. Results indicated that there is a discrepancy between teachers and students' self-assessments with the former believing that they give "more local language feedback than their students' perceived receiving" (p. 249). The two groups agreed that the final grade on their assignments was based on global language considerations with little or no feedback.

Error correction and Type of Feedback

Error correction is a controversial topic in L2 writing in general. In Lebanon, there are at least 14 studies published on the topics of error correction, students' and teachers' preferences, type of feedback, and the effect of type of feedback on students' development of writing skills both at the university and school levels.

Diab's (2005a, 2006) studies compared and contrasted students and teachers' preferences for error correction and teacher feedback on writing at AUB. While the two articles are published in two different venues, they complement each other in the sense that they essentially deal with the same data and rely on the same survey instrument, which is a modified version of Leki's (1991) survey. The first article is restricted to students' preferences. The second article (Diab, 2006) deals with the other half of the data, teachers, and it compares and contrasts students' and teachers' preferences. In line with some of the L2 literature on students' preferences, the majority of learners in Diab's studies were concerned about accuracy, and they seemed to believe that organization, grammar, and mechanics were of equal importance to content. The students also believed that their instructor should point out errors in grammar on their first draft and give a clue about it (86%) and should correct their errors on the final paper (82%). Students ranked grammar slightly higher than other features. As far as students' preferences for paper-marking techniques (proofreading symbols, red-colored pen), they were neutral. Diab (2006) compared students' preferences to that of teachers and found that there was a great discrepancy in the groups' responses, even among teachers themselves. Students and teachers had different views when it came to the importance of different writing features, feedback on first draft versus final paper, and the number of errors a teacher should respond to, among many other issues. In a similar study, Diab (2005b) examined teachers' and students' beliefs about responding to L2

writing. By using think-aloud protocols and semi-structured interviews with two students and one instructor, Diab found that both the instructor and the students preferred surface-level correction even though the former was familiar with research on L2 writing concerning the efficacy of error correction. In addition, there was a discrepancy between students' and teachers' beliefs when it came to responding to first drafts as opposed to final papers.

While Diab's studies were conducted in Beirut, Hadla (2006) examined teachers' and students' preferences in three universities in Bekaa, and El Joukhadar (2013) offered the perspective of students from a third region in Lebanon, the North. Hadla (2006) examined teacher practices and student preferences for error correction in three universities in the Bekaa region: The American University of Science and technology (AUST), The Lebanese International University (LIU), and the Culture and Education American University Institute (C&E). Hadla, like Diab, adapted his student questionnaire from Leki's (1991) study. Similar to the aforementioned studies, students preferred all of their errors to be marked by showing where the error was and giving a clue about how to correct it, a practice that was preferred by teachers as well. In contrast to Diab's study, however, Hadla's research revealed that students did not equate grammar, organization, and mechanics with ideas. Content and organization were not as important as grammar. Such findings are reasonable since the students who participated in this study were all in the intensive English program, whereas the participants in Diab's studies were students enrolled in English language courses, including students from Intensive English Programs. Student background is one variable that should be taken into consideration in future studies. In a study that examined students' perceptions of the effect of grammar correction in an English language course at UOB in North Lebanon, El Joukhadar's (2013) findings were somewhat inconsistent with previous studies where students were found to be divided in regard

to direct and indirect error correction during their interviews. However, survey results indicated that students preferred direct feedback. In addition, slightly more than half of students preferred to receive feedback on both content and grammar. Students reported that conferences with teachers increased their ability to understand their teachers' comments and their ability to self-edit their papers.

Six studies dealt with type of feedback explicitly at the university level and an additional two at the school level. Hamzeh (1996) examined the effect of diagnostic and non-diagnostic feedback on the development of the expository writing proficiency of L2 learners in the IEP at LAU. Her findings suggested no difference between the effect of diagnostic and non-diagnostic feedback on the development of students' writing. In addition, no interaction was found in regard to the type of feedback and the level of student achievement. On the other hand, by using action research, Shatila (2010) investigated the effectiveness of trained peer response on students' writing quality and revision types. The author found that peer editing enabled students to do more meaning-related changes than surface level changes in their second drafts, thus improving the quality of their papers. Similarly, Diab, N. (2009) examined whether the use of peer-editing was effective in making students become more aware of the criteria required for writing quality essays, hence enabling students to write better revised essays. Results indicated that students were able to perform better in the final paper without receiving any feedback, which might suggest that students have internalized the criteria needed to write essays. Like Shatila's study, students in this study gave favorable opinions about peer editing and thought it helped them improve their overall editing skills and the content and organization of their essays. In two more articles that complement each other and that were based on action research, Diab, N. (2010) examined whether peer editing or self-editing were more effective in reducing the percentage of

rule-based (e.g., SVA + pronoun agreement) and nonrule-based errors (e.g., wrong word choice and awkward sentences) in revised essays. Results indicated that the group that used peer editing was able to reduce rule-based errors significantly because their attention was drawn to the forms that needed improvement during form focused instruction sessions. It was found that “student collaboration during the editing sessions seemed to have increased student awareness of these errors [meaning and form], allowed them to negotiate possible alternatives, and to arrive together at correct linguistic forms, thus constructing new knowledge and reducing language errors in their essays” (p. 91). Students were also more “actively engaged in the writing process” (Diab, N., 2011, p. 286). The two groups, however, did not improve in non-rule based errors despite the fact that they received form-focused instruction. Training students in both peer editing and self-editing was effective in allowing learners to “revise their writing because the two techniques involve practice of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies that have been noted to bring writing development” (Diab, N., 2011, p. 286). Finally, Akouri (2011) conducted an action research study where she examined the effect of using collaborative e-portfolios (peer review and wiki use for e-portfolios postings) on students’ writing. Overall, students were highly motivated as a result of using technology and peer interaction in the classroom. However, they were divided as to the usefulness of e-portfolios, which the author attributed to students’ lack of “technical knowledge”. In contrast to Shatila (2010), Akouri’s students provided feedback primarily on grammar and mechanics rather than content and organization.

At the school level, rather than merely looking at students’ and teachers’ perceptions in terms of error correction, Kazem (2005) used a quantitative approach to investigate whether teachers’ use of error feedback was actually helping students improve their writing accuracy. She found that there was a significant difference between the coded and no feedback groups in their

ability to self -edit their errors primarily in errors related to sentence structure and noun-endings. Kazem also found no significant relationship between the students' explicit grammar knowledge and their ability to edit their errors, but the author was cautious in interpreting this finding. The author suggested that “using a consistent system of marking and coding errors throughout a learning class, paired with mini lessons which built students’ knowledge base about the error types being marked, might yield more long-term growth in students’ linguistic accuracy” (p. 50). This suggestion is especially important because it relates to El Joukhadar’s (2013) context where a similar suggestion was proposed. In investigating the effect of collaborative learning versus teacher’s feedback on the writing progress of grade ten students, Shaaban (2001) found that students who received the former type of feedback scored much higher than the group that received feedback from the teachers. Peer interaction enabled students to improve their content and organization, but not accuracy.

Assessment and evaluation

Many of the above reviewed articles dealt with the topic of evaluation in one way or another. However, there are only three articles that are strictly related to assessment and evaluation. One article focused on students’ expectations of grades compared to their actual final grades in introductory writing courses (Bacha, 2002). The other two articles dealt with using different tools to assess students’ achievement in writing courses (Bacha, 2001; Khachan & Bacha, 2012). Results from the first study (Bacha, 2002) revealed that there was a discrepancy between students’ expectations and the reality of the grades they earned. While students did not expect to fail in their essays and while they were overly confident, results showed that about 13% failed their two essays, and scores were generally lower than expected. Learners did not seem to be aware of or did not fully understand their teachers’ expectations in regard to what

they were being tested on. In another study, Bacha (2001) adopted two types of scoring instruments, analytic and holistic, for the purpose of checking which one was more effective in decisions related to promoting students from one level to another. Results indicated that holistic scoring uncovered little information about students' performance in regard to individual language components. The author recommended that a combination of both analytic and holistic scoring is needed. Finally, Khachan & Bacha (2012) used corpus analysis to evaluate whether students' scores on the English Entrance Exam (EEE), a locally developed university English proficiency test, were adequate measures of their active vocabulary, and were on par with other international tests such as TOEFL and IELTS. Results showed that the academic vocabulary used in EEE "[was] not as challenging as the international writing exams, indicating lower writing quality" (p. 69).

Writing centers

A total of three MA theses were written on the topic of writing centers. Honein-Shehadi (2007) investigated teachers' perceptions regarding writing needs and writing centers in four schools in Lebanon while Khater (2009) examined the need for a writing center at the Lebanese American University. The majority of teachers indicated that their students were in a great need of additional support from tutors in writing centers. Based on identifying the needs and expectations of students and faculty from different disciplines, Khater (2009) offered recommendations for establishing a writing center at the university. Geha (2008), on the other hand, investigated the perceptions of tutors and tutees regarding the effectiveness of tutoring services in writing centers in a university and in a school that already had writing centers. The majority of tutors in the two centers believed that their services played a positive role in students'

writing development, and the tutees perceived that their writing had developed as a result of their sessions with the tutors.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This chapter reviewed L2 writing scholarship produced by researchers and graduate students in three major universities in Lebanon. Excluded from this review were publications by scholars from other universities in Lebanon and abroad. This limitation is primarily due to feasibility and lack of accessibility of materials available in other universities at the time this article was written. In addition to examining research done by scholars abroad, future research should consider the work of scholars in the Lebanese University, which has a student body of more than 75,000, for a better representation of the status of English in general and second language writing in particular. Such scholars might publish their work either online as conference proceedings (e.g., the ELT conference organized by the Association of Teachers of English in Lebanon) or in Arabic.

Some of the above reviewed studies were either repetitive in nature (e.g. Diab, N & Balaa) or did not take previous findings in the same context into consideration (e.g. MA studies on type of feedback). This review should help future researchers to extend on previous findings and to identify gaps in the literature for future studies. In addition, this review shows the great need for research on how L2 writers are representing their identity and voice in their writing; how writing programs are, or are not, giving students the freedom to do so. Such studies with their pedagogical implications could have the potential to influence another under researched area, which is ways to motivate students to write in order to make writing their own, rather than imposed (e.g. imposing topics, genres, responses to uninteresting reading materials, etc.), and ways to make writing programs localized rather than imported models with superficial

adaptations. The student population in Lebanon might seem to be homogenous, but they are not. Thus far, studies have been restricted to particular assignments or genres, but none has examined the efficacy of a holistic approach to teaching first year composition.

WAC and WID studies suggest that teachers in the disciplines should be aware of their role in improving students' communicative skills. So far, none of the studies presented success stories. In other words, how are the teachers in English Departments helping, if at all, students' writing in their disciplines?

A common theme that runs through most of the above studies is that students often perceive their writing to be better than it actually is as compared to teachers' perceptions. This suggests that programs need to rethink their instruction strategies. Teachers and students should be on the same page when it comes to many writing issues including the importance of language components and providing feedback. Also, while perceptions, preferences, or beliefs of students are important, mixed methods research that examines the actual writings of these learners is needed. Such research can provide a more in-depth look into students' needs and their development as writers.

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