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Transforming writing education: WAC faculty experiences and challenges in Saudi universities

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Abstract

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) has been viewed as a movement that links several academic fields across various academic departments in different institutions. WAC has emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool for improving students' learning outcomes and critical thinking. While the practice of WAC as an independent learning unit is not formally implemented in all Saudi universities, teaching writing across the disciplines is pervasive. The principal objective of this research project is to inform writing specialists and policymakers in Saudi higher education about the status of WAC on Saudi campuses. Through five faculty narratives and group interviews, this research collects and analyzes faculty experiences, challenges, perceptions, and institutional expectations concerning writing practices across the disciplines at predominantly undergraduate, teaching-oriented Saudi universities. Findings indicate that faculty members utilize WAC to encourage critical thinking and improve students' overall linguistic competence. While instructors face challenges, participants reported the need to develop a community of practice to enhance WAC culture in Saudi Arabia. The study recommends that educators form cross-institutional teams to collectively design culturally sensitive, locally rooted, and responsive writing practices.

Keywords: Saudi writing education, Writing across the curriculum, EFL writing

Introduction

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) has piqued the interest of academics worldwide, encompassing changes in writing programs, university curriculum, and faculty teaching style in the classroom (MeLord, 1987). Its popularity has grown in several English-medium and non-English-medium universities, including the University of Washington-Tacoma, the University of California-San Diego, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WAC signifies an important change in campus culture in Saudi Arabia, where English is frequently considered a foreign language, emphasizing writing as a tool for active learning. WAC's flexibility to multiple fields makes it a helpful technique for developing writers (Craig, 2013), and it may be implemented in a variety of learning situations, including schools and universities (Cox et al., 2018).

While some Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions do not only use English as the primary language of instruction, certain universities also permit the use of both English and Arabic as the main language of instruction. In specific, English is utilized as the main

language of instruction for degrees in science and engineering. The educational system requires students to take four English classes, one of which is writing (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). The principal goals of English instruction in Saudi universities are to improve student's English language proficiency and to establish a foundation in English language learning that is relevant to their chosen academic subjects (Khan, 2011; Wubalem, 2021).

WAC classes teach students how to write successfully in real-world settings, expanding beyond the typical essay structure taught in English language education. It also helps students with professional writing in a variety of professions, including science, psychology, and business, which takes on a variety of styles and aims. Students in WAC courses learn also how to analyze diverse genres, identify common academic phrases, text structures, and organizational aspects relevant to academic or professional writing in their respective disciplines, and write in a variety of styles.

Saudi Arabia's approach to writing has traditionally been focused on mechanics, structural practices, and error avoidance, with little attention to composition and rhetoric studies (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). However, there has been an increase in the amount of research on Saudi EFL college-level English writing in recent years, covering topics such as error analysis, writing techniques, technology-assisted education, collaborative writing, and writing feedback (e.g., Alzamil, 2020; Shousha et al., 2020; Al Asmari, 2013; McKullen, 2009; Al-Maini, 2011; Alsmari, 2016; Al-Nafiseh, 2013; Albelihi, 2022; Alqurashi, 2022). To encourage writing as a tool for discovery and inquiry across all disciplines, academic writing teachers must foster a culture of responsibility in the scholarly community that encourages writing as a tool for discovery and thinking across all subjects on campus (Thaiss & Porter, 2010). Also, the lack of required composition courses for students makes it difficult to develop a mindset that regards writing as a tool for learning rather than a means of assessment. This pressure is placed on students' self-directed learning abilities, and it is worsened when departments see themselves as disciplinary instructors rather than writing teachers.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide insights into the practices of informal WAC in Saudi campuses and to investigate the spread of these practices beyond the English Department to other colleges, including social Science and Health, at two Saudi universities. This study, by promoting Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), intends to improve English writing practices in Saudi education and encourages stakeholders to reassess the curriculum while taking institutional circumstances and teacher experiences into account.

WAC as an informal practice in Saudi Arabia

As writing practitioners, we believe that WAC practices in Saudi universities are typically informal, with English departments assigning writing teachers to teach technical and business writing courses to students in other disciplines. While WAC practices in Saudi colleges may be informal, the value of formal writing skills for academic and professional success is becoming more widely recognized. As a result, attempts are being made to find a balance between strengthening students' talents to successfully communicate in their various disciplines and teaching them the formal writing skills required to succeed in academic and professional situations. This reflects a different approach to WAC administration and program development compared to other contexts where

WAC is formally recognized and promoted. In this context, the study of L2 writing can be used to extend and problematize informal WAC research, particularly in how multilingual/L2 Saudi writers and teachers negotiate different writing requirements across the curriculum. By reframing pedagogical questions around WAC practices and using multilayered analytical strategies, WAC instructors can better support non-English major students in their English writing skills. More specifically, faculty might focus on assisting students in identifying and applying the rhetorical methods of the discipline in which they are writing to their specific fields. Further, they introduce students to genre conventions and disciplinary discourse by providing hands-on exercises and examples to help them practice those conventions and provide feedback to aid their understanding of rhetorical choices in their work. Approaching WAC practices as part of a complex system that involves staff, faculty, teaching assistants, and students is an important aspect of the educational process. By exploring the possibilities, experiences, and complexities of teaching writing across the disciplines in this context, researchers can better understand how WAC can be effectively implemented in Saudi universities.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated writing theories and instructions that have influenced WAC practice (Behrens & Rosen, 2003; Luthy et al., 2009; Cho & Schunn, 2007), but these resources have not addressed theories related to WAC administration or program development in EFL context (Cox et al., 2018). The informal coordination reflects exactly what we mean when we refer to “informal WAC” practice in our study context. We consider L2 writing a lens through which informal WAC research may be extended and problematized, especially regarding how multilingual/L2 Saudi writers and teachers negotiate various writing requirements across the curriculum. Hence, the current study explores the informal WAC practices across Saudi universities to elucidate the possibilities, experiences, and complexities of teaching writing across the disciplines in a context where WAC is not formally recognized or educationally in vogue.

Purpose of the study

The Saudi government has invested heavily in education reform at all levels. One of the highest priorities in Saudi Vision 2030 is to improve teaching practices in the education sector to increase the level of students' performance in Saudi public universities. Yusuf (2017) stated that “the effective implementation of vision 2030 depends on effective training of different educational cadres” (p. 111). One of the most salient aspects of educational reform in the Saudi educational system is incorporating critical thinking in all educational programs, as Saudi scholars have pleaded for it since 1980s (Allamnakhrah, 2013). Recently, the Ministry of Education has launched 34 new curricula of critical thinking and new formulations for nearly 90 books. In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language (FL) at all educational levels, from elementary to higher education with less attention to English composition. According to Newton et al. (2018), English has become the language of technology, business, and commerce due to the global demand for communication (Grabe, 1988; Jenkins, 2014). Therefore, the classical practice of teaching English writing in the Saudi education system needs to be refined to enable teachers teach writing that meets the global and professional standards.

Teaching strategies must be adjusted, and major writing tasks must be integrated into WAC classes if students are to develop higher levels of critical thinking. Incorporating writing into their coursework is valuable for L2 students because it enables them to better comprehend and internalize the material they are studying. (Zilora & Hermsen, 2007). Writing also demands and encourages students to interact with the content more actively than simply reading or listening to the teacher's talk in the class. In fact, writing can be considered as a style of learning/thinking (Emig, 1977; Alharbi, 2021). In general, WAC can enhance educational quality by encouraging deeper learning, enabling the growth of critical thinking abilities, encouraging creativity, and enhancing communication abilities. Teachers may support students in becoming more engaged, considerate, and productive learners by integrating writing into the curriculum across all subject areas (Zawacki & Cox, 2014).

Thus far, there has been relatively little discussion about investigating EFL faculty members' perceptions of WAC practices and challenges in their classes across several colleges and institutions (e.g., college of medicine, business, applied mathematics, and engineering) (Craig, 2013). To fully understand the efficacy of WAC in the Saudi context and to identify the specific problems and opportunities connected with WAC implementation, this paper intends to unpack practitioner's perspectives and challenges toward teaching writing across the discipline. This study also aims to inform WAC specialists and policymakers in Saudi higher education about the status of informal WAC practice in Saudi Arabia and to put forward educational proposals that encourage the culture of writing to learn.

Theoretical and empirical background

Over the past fifty years, there has been a surge of interest in the topic of WAC, which has taken hold in different educational settings in the US. It is considered the longest-running curriculum reform movement in American higher education history (Russell, 2002). WAC incorporates writing into coursework in language arts and social studies, natural sciences, and applied disciplines. One of WAC's philosophical bases is that writing is a valuable learning tool (writing-to-learn) for university students by encouraging numerous practices of written language in classes to strengthen students' language ability, reflection, and critical thinking (Lashley & Wittstadt, 1993). McLeod and Maimon (2000) asserted that writing-to-learn in class, such as assignments, report labs, and essay drafts, should be used as a content learning tool as opposed to a test learning tool. As a result, students can further explain the target concepts to elicit critical thinking, with faculty acting as facilitators rather than judges. In other words, WAC asks faculty to utilize writing as a tool for learning/exploring by spurring students to learn unfamiliar content and enhance analytical habits of thinking, rather than emphasizing the technicality of writing (i.e., planning, structure, format, etc.) (Bazerman & Little, 2005). This affirms the significant impact of cognitivist psychology on WAC as a theory for the problem-solving process and the influence of the relation between thought and language (McLeod & Maimon, 2000). WAC represents a change from indoctrinated teaching approaches (i.e., product-based approach and teaching to assess) to methods that involve students in a more active engagement that is appropriate to their discipline genre via writing (teaching writing as a process and using writing as a form of learning). Students then discover

what they know about the content and what areas of the content need more attention without undue pressure from being graded on their writing as a product. More importantly, the practice of instilling a culture of writing across the discipline sharpens students' communicative skills in their respective fields of study (Bruffee, 1984). According to McLeod, this approach bids faculty members to heed the importance of constructing knowledge of the disciplinary discourse and genre theory in the student's specific discipline by allowing them to analyze, reflect on, and evaluate writing assignments. The approaches mentioned above—writing to learn and writing to communicate—are valuable aspects of WAC programs and can be implemented in classrooms.

L2 writing principles are in some ways related to WAC practices on campus (Zawacki & Cox, 2014), as Second Language Writing (SLW) research has concentrated on the writing experiences of second language (L2) students and writing teachers teach courses and content across the curriculum. Cox (2011) conducted a longitudinal study and concluded that most of the writing assignments presume that students are equipped with cultural and historical knowledge of the US. Teachers of writing also are not trained well to scaffold struggling students. A teacher also complained about a lack of time in the classroom. Cox asserted that the absence of alternative assessments for struggling L2 students was a major issue in WAC culture. This echoes a critical contribution by Kroll (1995), who gave a similar assessment when he analyzed eleven writing assignment descriptions. Aiming to promote accessibility and equality for L2 students, he suggested that L2 teachers as well as WAC instructors design assignments to be more accessible and related to student's historical and cultural values. Driven by a desire to understand how theory is translated into actual practice and specifically how teachers across the curriculum teach writing, Zawacki and Habib (2014) examined faculty responses to the perceived errors in L2 students' writing. Zawacki and Habib (2014) hoped to better understand "how faculty described the errors and why they seemed to be frustrated by particular sorts of errors." Their investigation reflected several complications in the relationship between faculty preparations and L2 writing practice, such as questions concerning students' retention of the subject matter and the fairness of holding L2 students' work to a different level than L1 students. However, as Zawacki and Habib noted, they also discovered that the professors who were least willing to negotiate meaning in L2 writing were frequently the professors who were most willing to spend time working with L2 authors on their writing. Additionally, they demonstrate that while some faculty members showed minimal tolerance for written accents, the majority reported ambiguity regarding the best ways to react to and assess the writing to scaffold L2 students' writing performance. Exploring other facets of WAC practices internationally, Dan (2014) interviewed ten faculty members representing four Chinese universities and six disciplines; this study offers a picture of writing in the disciplines in China. The study's goal was to investigate how faculty members perceived the roles that writing and other communication skills played at their schools. Results of Dan's interview study indicated that faculty members are interested in the potential for WAC to enhance the teaching of writing, student learning, and writing in the disciplines in both Chinese and English. The professors who were interviewed did not find the students' Chinese writing to be very satisfactory, especially by Chinese standards. Chinese teachers noted that, except for a select group of students and majors, this is the overall situation. High expectations

cannot be fulfilled as a result of such weak writing practices and performance. One professor suggested that WAC pedagogies had to be worth the time and effort and thus faculty should be compensated. Remuneration may be appropriate to acknowledge the faculty effort involved in attending the workshops and incorporating WAC practices for writing students.

Methodology

Data collection

This IRB-approved research adopted a qualitative strategy where the participants' narratives, lived experiences and values were qualitatively traced and coded as valuable data. Using Saudi universities' web pages and online directories, we identified the names and emails of faculty participants who teach at Saudi universities and emailed them each individually, inviting them to participate in the study. The study was conducted virtually via Zoom with an audio-recorded interview in English. As participants individually (individual interview) and collectively (focused-group interviews) articulated (in English) their perceptions of WAC practices and challenges in Saudi Arabia, we were attentive to critical issues, such as instructional and institutional obstacles, ideological stances toward WAC culture, and types of feasible and effective pedagogical methods in which WAC practices could be implemented at Saudi colleges. Each individual interview lasted for about thirty minutes with diverse faculty members writing across the disciplines.

Research question

To unpack WAC faculty's experience in the study context, the study aims to answer the following question: How do faculty across the disciplines/curriculum (WAC) at non-profit public higher educational institutions perceive the practices and challenges of the teaching writing to EFL undergraduate students?

Data analysis procedure

We constructively discussed underlying issues pertinent to teaching writing to a non-English major student such as: challenges, difficulties, hopes, and possible effective pedagogical and professional solutions. During the individual and focus group interviews (i.e., five teachers in both interviews), the interviewers also worked with selected interested faculty members to tap into issues related to the nature of students' academic performance, the culture of writing, the practices of grading these assignments, and how they can rework these practices in the most effective ways. Afterward, we stumbled upon patterns across the data and tried to pull out distinctive, overarching, and interrelated themes in each interview, thereby representing faculty perceptions and experiences in a panoramic fashion. We began data analysis by reading the interview transcripts inductively and deductively, and then we created thematic categories and codes on the basis of relationships between data points that emerged from participants' input.

An inductive thematic analysis approach provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the data. Two cycles of line-by-line coding were performed to comprehend and capture the core of the data (Saldana, 2015). Afterwards, the first author classified the codes according to semantically relevant categories based on the codes' patterns. In keeping with Saldana's (2015) method, the iterative process refined categories and

moved from concrete to abstract groups by grouping codes into potential themes. The second author then coded a transcript while blinded to the first author's topics, and ideas were developed through discussion among the researchers. The authors considered the impact of their beliefs and prejudices during data analysis, particularly their views that were informed by the concept of WAC.

Participants

A total of the five-faculty working across two different Saudi universities (see Table 1) were interviewed: three female and two male writing instructors. Their positions ranged from a full professor of English to a teaching assistant in the English department. These variables helped us depict unique experiences and rich data from our study participants. Moreover, the faculty in our study have a myriad of linguistic, pedagogical, and professional training backgrounds. The context, institutional setting, nationalities, and writing teaching experiences of our participants are all factors that may yield depth, the richness of data, and multidimensional aspects of writing practices across two Saudi universities.

Ethical considerations

The interviewers stated the goal of the interview, the terms of confidentiality, the format of the interview, and the estimated length of the interview at the outset. All the participants gave their permission for their interview to be audio-recorded and for the researcher to take brief notes throughout it. Virtually, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. The interviews (see "Appendix") began with an introduction to the study's principal purpose and a discussion of the WAC idea with the participants (e.g., What does "writing across the curriculum" mean to you?). During the interview, the interviewer gave the participants the choice of speaking the language with which they are most comfortable. Exclusion criteria (i.e., teaching less than one year at the college level) were used in the study, and all faculty who volunteered to participate were interviewed with no names or identifying information associated with their responses. They were informed that there are no known risks in this research.

Findings and discussion

The findings of this study show how participants in the two public Saudi university campuses viewed the practice of teaching writing and the culture of writing. These results are written in a thematic order as follows: writing as a tool of empowerment; effective and ineffective writing strategies for WAC students; challenges faced by EFL writing teachers; and suggestions for WAC improvement in the Saudi context. Five faculty members

Table 1 Participants' Backgrounds

Participant's name	Teaching college and department	Position/gender/and teaching experience
Ali	KS University/Medicine	Assistant professor/Male/10 years
Omar	KS University/Chemistry	Lecturer/Male/15 years
Sara	PN University/Engineering	Assistant professor/Female/2 years
Stephanie	PN University/Social science	Teaching assistant/Female/3 years
Reem	PN University/Computer Science	Professor/Female/8 years

from various racial, linguistic, and social backgrounds expressed ideas that both differed and overlapped, and they are presented below.

Writing as a tool of learning/thinking

Stephanie, Ali, and Reem can be seen as vigorous advocates for the reliance on writing as a platform for students' empowerment and for cultivating students' critical thinking. Participants strongly believe that they teach writing in their content classroom as a tool through which students can learn the common linguistic genre convention of their major. Professors reported that writing in the content area can eventually scaffold students to achieve a sense of empowerment and agency in the classroom (Zamel, 1982). In their classrooms, teachers in our study reported that the use of writing primarily helps students reflect and critically internalize the concepts they are engaging in during the semester. This approach to the use of WAC practices in the content classroom is projected in Stephanie's narrative, as she stated that:

Writing is a good way for students to develop deeper thinking. Through learning about how to construct an argument (state your position, provide evidence for your position, explain the importance of your position, etc.) students learn how to better explain themselves and how to better understand the subject.

She affirmed that writing in Saudi Arabia is much more needed than before because writing is crucial in today's world, with communication and professional success often depending on writing (emails, memos, journal articles, etc.).

In the same vein, Reem stated that:

L2 writers need to learn how to express their ideas by utilizing writing in the content courses. We live in an era of communication, so if they want to achieve something in their lives, they need to know how to write effectively in their respective fields. Mainly, they should know how to organize ideas, explain their main points, and critically support them with details.

Reem and Stephanie seem to promote a culture of writing-to-learn (Balgopal et al., 2012) which eventually facilitates students' self-empowerment as they not only know how to express their ideas but also how to organize them, support them with sound facts and learn the genre-specific discourses.

As Saudi society is moving towards modernization and its educational system is becoming a more neoliberal system, these participants are aware that their role as writing teachers is to prepare students to become effective communicators in a highly competitive job market. Echoing the same perceptions and beliefs about the purpose of the WAC course in Saudi Arabia, Omar narrated that,

Teachers of WAC in our college are encouraged to teach students about complex tasks of writing so that students can be well prepared for different occupations and jobs. This can be best achieved through the practices of writing reports, analytical writing, and so on.

Participants in the above quotes are collectively trying to teach writing to students with different majors to empower them intellectually and professionally and to prepare them

for the job market. Throughout our conversation with the participants, they seemed to share one common ethical goal, which is advancing the culture of WAC across campus to scaffold students into their potential level of development) (Zamel, 1982). Participants support their students by providing extensive writing practice and opportunities to analyze, write and think about content course material (Hirvela, 2011; Manchón, 2011). These purposes for teaching writing have been linked to a variety of factors, including context-specific constraints, distinct student requirements, and institutional expectations, as well as curricular and instructional objectives (Manchón, 2014). EFL instructors can navigate these complex demands and present writing that satisfies each of their objectives. Teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on certain forms of writing, either for effective communication in the job market or to express themselves through rigid-writing activities in a critical, sound manner. Such a stance assimilates what Britton et al. (1975) named 'expressive language to project writer's experiences or 'transactional writing' in which students learn to master writing for varying rhetorical and professional purposes (McLeod and Maimon (2000). Findings of the narrative reassure that writing is a platform through which EFL students along with WAC instructors can construct new identities and ideas in different writing conditions (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Galbraith, 2009).

Writing process, technicality, and writing culture

While the majority of the participants reported that they are advocating for students' success at their different campuses, many WAC teachers in this study reported that they are encountering a series of pedagogical and cultural issues pertinent to writing and teaching Saudi students. Ali, Stephanie, and Reem collectively stated that there are many issues and challenges when teaching writing to non-English major students for linguistic as well as pedagogical reasons. In what follows, we highlight some of the main hurdles WAC teachers reported in this study. Ali, for instance, indicated that Saudi students have extensive technical and cultural issues when it comes to learning writing, and he indicated that this is because,

They have insufficient practice in writing during their pre-university study. In particular, they face major problems in grammar and spelling. This gap causes frustration for students; the university teacher wants the student to think and reflect critically in writing when he [the student] fails to form correct simple sentences.

Another important perspective added by Stephine is that Saudi students:

Lack of understanding of the writing process. Students usually don't know about the process of brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising, and editing. I think this is also part of why students plagiarize. They don't know how to get the final product.

Complementing the above-articulated ideas, Reem, highlighted one cultural issue that,

Students are taught to participate orally in the class and the culture of teaching writing and reflecting via writing or even using writing as a tool of expression is almost non-existent.

Omar is on the same page with Reem, as Omar agreed that,

[Saudi] Students are not acquainted with such types of activities or assignments. I think the domination of oral culture and the absence of writing culture in pre-college life have immensely shaped their view towards learning as mere rote and mimicking a teacher's instruction.

Ali also related this issue to students' lack of reading and exposure to English, stating, "I think one of the challenges is that students don't read in English enough to be able to write clearly. The other thing is the lack of feedback." With all of these obstacles in mind, Sara also pointed out a critical lack of feedback in students' academic lives, as students were taught to write but rarely received constructive critiques from their teachers.

Considering the above challenges, WAC teachers are also aware of peculiar and complex difficulties when they teach writing in their science content courses. The technicality of the content, the domination of the oral culture and a lack of teacher feedback can greatly affect how students perceive learning to write in a content area. In addition to the aforementioned, challenges such as a lack of teacher feedback and the domination of oral culture over writing in the educational context, the absence of a culture of writing in higher education amongst Arab universities, is of particular concern to EFL writing teachers (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Alsehibany, 2021; Leki, 2001; Shukri, 2014). English writing in the Saudi context is focused on issues of mechanics, such as vocabulary and grammar rules. Students are encouraged to parrot vocabulary and mimic grammar rules to become effective writers in English (Alharbi, 2021; Jouhari, 1996) and the absence of teaching writing as a process and writing-to-learn pedagogy (Seloni & Lee, 2019) can pose a challenge for many EFL and AWC writing teachers as students are historically taught to imitate and deal with writing as a final-end product (Gabrielatos, 1993). Teachers should not utilize writing as a tool of assessment in their WAC courses. Norton and Starfield (1997) named this practice "covert language assessment," in which learners are assessed based on their language proficiency rather than knowledge of the subject matter. This approach could harm learners' motivation and accomplishments by forcing students to focus on writing conventions while reinforcing the notion that good writing is structurally correct writing, which is contrary to the principles of WAC.

Professionalizing WAC culture

While most higher education policymakers in Saudi Arabia may not consider writing and writing instruction a top priority, participants in this study affirm the need for extensive courses and workshops designed to equip writing teachers and prepare them to teach writing across disciplines more effectively. In Saudi, though there is no specific writing center that provides services to undergraduate writing students, the task of teaching business, engineering, and medical writing genres is carried out in the preparatory year program or English department. These writing-specific courses, which are designed for each major, are tailored to help students use writing as a form of learning and cultivate students' engagement in their specific discipline. Sadly, teachers of writing do not receive any form of weekly training, nor are they encouraged to perpetuate the culture of writing as a critical factor in thinking and learning. Stephanie reported that workshops currently offered are antiquated and do not challenge writing teachers or meet their actual needs. She stated,

I would like professional development to feel more community based, more connected to the teachers and their needs. In my experience, many teachers come to resent the professional development required by the department, which makes it hard for anything to improve and lowers my morale.

Community-based teaching environments in Saudi Arabia, for example, help writing teachers in a variety of ways to offer resources and opportunities for teachers to have collective conversations about possible issues and solutions facing writing teachers across campuses. Preparing effective workshops and building a community of practice across the campus with content teachers and teachers of writing would scaffold teachers with cutting-edge strategies. It can also help policymakers on campus to adopt a paradigm shift that recognizes the needs of teachers and students, especially in writing. Along with improving teachers' writing skills on campus, Ali also urged educators to "analyze students' needs and prepare remedial courses to address those needs in parallel with the university courses," as this may bridge the previously mentioned gap. Such a proposal can be effective if teachers and policymakers "recognize and analyze students' needs and provide culturally appropriate feedback," as Omar narrated. The inclusion of WAC culture as well as writing for specific major (WSM) courses in the student's academic plan, as Omar referred to in the interview, can greatly improve the overall culture of writing at Saudi universities.

The lack of administrative support and a community of practice are critical components that have been discussed by many WAC specialists such as Roberts (2008) McLeod and Maimon (2000), Zawacki et al. (2011), and Zawacki and Habib (2014). WAC pedagogy is meaningful with the explicit support of campus administration, faculty motivation, and ongoing training in WAC. WAC initiatives encounter challenges in obtaining the resources and funds required for success. As a result, it is critical for any successful WAC program to have the support of administrators and a community of practice. Discussions of writing as a learning and professional process go astray when policymakers neglect to specify the types of learning and feedback that writing might be expected to foster (Cox et al., 2018; Hall & Hughes, 2011; Miller et al., 2022). The findings reported in this study offer important knowledge of a wide range of L2 writing contexts and practices, which can provide a valuable perspective into second language writing theory, WAC researchers, and L2 writing instructors.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study highlights the importance of WAC in the face of globalization, a competitive job market that demands proficiency in the use of writing as a critical thinking and planning tool (Palmquist, 2020). Overall, the narratives from teachers in the interviews indicate that professors employ writing to facilitate reflection and help students critically internalize ideas and content they are studying throughout the semester. Writing is an effective way to learn and communicate, and teachers should promote WAC culture across campus to facilitate effective learning and help students make sense of their world through the tool of writing. While WAC holds promise as a tool for use in the Saudi higher education system, some teachers expressed frustration that there are many daily challenges when teaching writing. Students lack adequate writing experience from their pre-university coursework, and they struggle significantly with spelling and grammar.

This may lead to a significant drop-out ratio, and teachers place demands on students to use writing to reflect and think critically in their writing assignments.

EFL writing teachers are especially concerned about issues, such as a lack of teacher feedback, the relative absence of writing-to-learn culture in higher education at Saudi universities, and the dominance of oral culture over writing in the educational context. Alongside these challenges and experiences, the primary recommendation participants gave was professionalizing WAC culture in the Saudi higher education system. For instance, community-based learning can support writing teachers in various ways by providing materials and chances for teachers to discuss potential problems and solutions with writing teachers across campuses and colleges. Strategic pedagogical school development and teachers' involvement, likely through the implementation of steering groups, are necessary initiatives to complement the work of peer tutors. To spread the WAC culture in the Saudi system, educators must form a cross-institutional team that aims to cultivate the practices of writing to learn culture (Zawacki & Cox, 2014; Miller et al., 2022). These pedagogical practices must be culturally sensitive, locally developed, and responsive to varying institutional contexts and needs (Silva, 2016). Saudi institutions can lay a foundation for spreading WAC effectively by following the example of schools in the US and having a collective primary objective to spread the teaching of English WAC amongst faculties (colleges) departments, programs, and courses. English departments in Saudi colleges have to take the initiative to achieve this goal by, among other things, starting communities of practice (CoPs) with educators from other fields and developing writing workshops and materials that are discipline specific (Zawacki & Cox, 2014).

English writing teachers also can propose novel ideas, like the peer tutoring program and colleague-designed writing courses to expand and sustain WAC culture across the colleges. There is an exigency in the Saudi context to deconstruct students' silence that may spring from unfamiliarity with writing practices and peer judgment pressure and to phase out the commonly practiced pedagogy, rote learning, which stifles students' performance and thought process in education (Rospigliosi, 2022). In our contemporary globalized culture, the critique of the risks of a culture of rote learning and the banking education system (Freire, 1970) used in Saudi Arabia still warns teachers of writing that there is a need to promote the culture of writing-to-learn not only among students, but also for teachers across the disciplines as well. Indeed, a WAC workshop or seminar is a vital move for implementing WAC programs across two Saudi universities. Encouraging faculty to attend or even lead such workshops (with compensation) would help other faculty to gain a clear understanding of integrating writing into their courses in a way that helps students' thinking and learning processes. Another recommendation is to call upon writing consultants across the campuses who are available to help individual faculty design and sequence writing assignments and advice on evaluating writing with the help of English departments.

Appendix: Interview protocol

Interview Questions: (time and contextualizing clues from participants will be my indicator for the number of questions to opt for in each interview)

1. Tell me about your job/position at your school. What does a typical teaching day look like?
2. What does "writing across the curriculum" mean to you?
3. To what extent do you expect your students to write effectively in your class(es)? Please explain.
4. What do you value in writing? What is "good" writing in general, in your opinion?
5. As a WAC instructor, explain the reason(s) why do you think students need writing or to learn to write in their profession?
6. What are or would be motivations for using writing assignments or activities in your undergraduate courses?
7. In your opinion, why is the ability to write well important? (In your field, in college, in life, etc.)
8. What are challenges or barriers for using writing assignments or activities in your undergraduate courses?
9. What kind of writing-specific courses, workshops, professional development opportunities, etc. have you experienced (if any)?
10. Describe a writing assignment or activity that didn't go so well and why. Would you mind sharing these materials with me?
11. Describe a writing assignment or activity that you really like and why. Would you mind sharing these materials with me?
12. What (if any) are your biggest frustrations with regard to the task/skill of writing?
13. What kind of professional development support would you be interested in as it relates to your teaching?
14. Anything else you'd like to comment on regarding undergraduate students and writing?

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Author contributions

We both analyzed and interpreted the qualitative data regarding the writing education of WAC in Saudi and was both were major contributor to writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Availability of data and materials

Most of the data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article and we can provide the rest of the large data upon request.

Declarations

Ethical approval and consent to participate

All the participants in the study agreed/ signed a consent form to be part of this study either in the interview or by clicking "agree" at the time of answering the survey. The internal IRB board provided support and agreed to conduct such a study.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests.

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