Original Paper

Saudi EFL learners' Perceptions of The Use of Corpora in Academic Writing Teaching

Turki Alsolami[1,2*] & Assrar Alharbi[1]

[1] English Language Institute, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

[2] Faculty of Applied Studies, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

[*] Correspondence, Turki Alsolami, English Language Institute, Faculty of Applied Studies, King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The study explores Saudi EFL learners' perceptions of the effect of applying corpus-based approach as a pedagogical approach on academic writing instruction. The purpose of the study is to evaluate students' perspectives towards using corpus-based activities on their academic writing learning, more precisely, their lexico-grammatical abilities. In the study, seven female preparatory year students at an intermediate language proficiency level participated. Learners were asked to compose written tasks during three weeks using corpus tools. To explore learners' attitudes, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The results of the interviews suggest that learners have positive attitudes towards the corpus-based approach to their academic writing performance. Based on the results of the interviews, four themes were found to be recurrent in learners' responses, which are: Increasing Learners' Confidence as EFL Writers, Fostering learners' Language Awareness, Providing Availability of Input, and Promoting Learners' Autonomy.

Keywords

Corpus linguistics, Academic Writing Teaching and Learning, Lexico-grammatical patterns, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

1. Introduction

Over the past half century, a remarkable development in the exploration of English has been accomplished by the utilizing of vast electronic archives of written and spoken naturally occurring language input stored on a computer to be observed and analyzed in which it is referred to by the term of corpora (McEnery & Wilson, 2003). The availability of such corpora has changed the working

practices of language, particularly when they are used as either as a method of language teaching and learning or as an approach to study languages. In the scope of language teaching and learning, corpora have been acknowledged for its value in the four language skills which are reading, writing, listening and speaking (Leńko-Szymańska, 2014). Writing is one of the basic skills when learning any language. In order for a person to be a good second or foreign language communicator, being a good writer is important. One of the essential features that shapes a well-written work is its quality. An excellent written essay must be lexically and grammatically error-free. This can be achieved when a writer initially starts with a first draft then followed by a second draft where errors are located to be corrected in order to reach the final product of the writing where there are no errors. Language learners sometimes are not aware where the errors are, as errors tend to be unintentionally.

Therefore, learners need to be guided on where the errors are. Instructors' feedback is one common way to do that. Many types of constructive corrective feedbacks can take place in language classrooms to help learners overcome their errors. However, feedback itself is not adequate, to avoid these types of errors in their writing, learners are encouraged to search themselves on how to solve their writing errors and not to have the emendation from the instructors. One suggested way to achieve this purpose of language awareness leading to a good quality piece of writing is the use of corpora (Tono et al., 2014). Green (2018) has defined corpora as systematically stored texts that have been taken from authentic natural resources (e.g., books, newspapers, journals, transcribed speech, etc.). Corpora are collections of spoken and written language that are derived to be available online as a reflection of the real use of the language.

Considering the value of corpora for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners; corpora offer plenty of examples within a context of an actual language that has been taken from real authentic resources in which they cannot be found otherwise (Chambers & O'sullivan, 2004). Corpora have its great value for EFL language instructors. To illustrate more, corpora can be used as an effective pedagogical tool for teaching a language. The application of corpora in foreign language classroom is widely followed in teaching the four skills and the other different components of a language (e.g., grammar and vocabulary). As writing is a skill that is developed by a redrafting stage where the errors are to be corrected, corpora can provide learners and instructors with a useful resource to search for writing problems from plenty of contexts and solve them based on corpus information.

The mastery of academic writing skills highly depends on having a high level of autonomy (Azari, 2017). Therefore, developing learners' sense of autonomy is of high importance in enhancing learners' academic writing skills. EFL learners in the Saudi context might have limited opportunities to reach language proficiency in their academic writing skills. This could be due to two main reasons. First, learners practice the language mostly within their classrooms. Second, learners lack having an access to language input that reflects precisely the way language is used in everyday situations. Learners might need to rely on this access as a linguistic reference inside and outside the classroom without the assistance of their teachers. In other words, they lack the opportunities to develop their sense of

autonomy. Providing EFL learners with an available access to naturally occurring language data where they can refer to inside and outside the classroom might contribute to a possible improvement in their overall academic writing quality.

Consequently, to deliver effective writing instruction in Saudi EFL language settings, teachers are advised to provide EFL learners with language data that precisely reflects the way language is used in real-life situations. One way of accomplishing this is through the application of what is called Corpus-Based Approach (CBA) (Yoon, 2011). This study aims at both exploring the relationship between Corpus Linguistics (CL) and English Language Teaching (ELT) and at exploring students' experience and perceptions on the pedagogical applications of corpora to writing instructions in the context of Saudi Arabia.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

When it comes to teaching writing to EFL students, teachers might face difficulty in promoting students' writing skill. This is due to the fact that writing is considered to be a high-order skill that needs the learners to think critically and be aware of the language lexical and grammatical features. Hence, due to the lack of compatible syllabus and effective teaching methods, learners have poor linguistic abilities in writing skill (Raja & Zahid, 2013). Writing instruction in EFL context mainly depends on some traditional teaching methodologies where the only source of knowledge either the teacher, old-fashion dictionaries or printed books, where there is no opportunity for the students to be independent and search critically within more engaged sources of information.

Thus, a pedagogical tool to enhance the students' writing skill by providing them with more opportunity to notice linguistic features independently is needed. Corpora can be used to improve students' writing skill by allowing them to search for lexical and grammatical patterns that would help them to create a well-written piece of writing. That is instructors are to focus on more essential issues of cohesion and coherence, where the teacher could contribute effectively to enhance them as corpora cannot easily highlight these two important issues (Glimore, 2008). Corpus tools provide basic linguistic features that are related to words and phrases. These features include frequency percentage, part of speech categorization, various discourses (e.g., academic, fiction, spoken, written, etc.) and over a different period of time. This information is useful for comparing similar or dissimilar linguistic items to help writers make more appropriate choices. Corpus tools have a valuable contribution to all stages of the writing process and are considered to promote learners writing skill autonomy and long-term language acquisition besides mastering the linguistic items (Charles, 2018).

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to explore learners' perceptions about the employment of corpora in their overall writing proficiency. The study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do students perceive the implementation of Corpus-Based Approach to their academic writing skill learning upon their lexico-grammatical abilities?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Corpora in ELT

CL as defined by Stubbs and Halbe (2013) is "the use of computer-assisted methods to study large quantities of real language" (p. 1). Corpus tools involve two main elements as follow: the corpus and the software to analyze it, which is called concordance. The software is used to store language data. Aided by computer technology, to electronically store language data, to access, and to retrieve this data through a software interface, most frequently has referred to as "concordance" (Breyer, 2011). A concordance is a tool that is often used in Corpus Linguistics to analyze language data. Johns (1994) defines a concordance as a computer software that is designed to search promptly for a target item (phrase, word, or morpheme) through a considerable amount of texts and to reveal all the related examples found in their contexts. Language analysis performed by a concordance leads to different types of functions. The main function of the concordance software is to generate a list of examples in which a significant number of authentic lines of the searched item/items, called patterns, consisting of the Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC), will be shown on the screen (Cheng, 2012). The most important and potential use of an interactive concordance is the analytical technique of Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC) which is most popularly used in language teaching. KWIC enables corpus users to consider a targeted word or phrase to be displayed for a simple linguistic analysis (Evison, 2010). KWIC examples allow corpus users to search for lexical and grammatical patterns and their co-texts in the various displayed examples (Reppen, 2010).

The first pedagogical applications of Corpus Linguistics in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) were indirect (Leech, 1997). The corpus-based researches and studies were mainly concerned with informing the content of reference materials and textbooks (e.g., Gardner & Davies, 2014). One major purpose of corpus studies is the use of corpus evidence as an essential resource for making decisions about EFL curriculum and teaching materials. However, from the 1980s, there has been an interest in more direct applications of Corpus Linguistics as both teachers and learners were seeking more interaction with corpora. Ever since the 1980s up to now, many studies and researchers have worked on the correlation between CL and ELT (e.g., Smart 2014; Yoon & Jo, 2014; Luo & Liao, 2015). Applying corpus linguistics in the classroom to teach language can be induced by the educators who prepare and use corpus-derived teaching material within their language classroom, or directly by learners who make corpus research studying various linguistic elements like grammar, vocabulary and discourse. Research suggests that the use of corpus linguistics as a pedagogical tool in the context of the language classroom is relevant and beneficial as it provides learners with authentic applied contexts of language (e.g., Yoon & Jo, 2014).

2.2 Corpora in EFL Teaching Writing

Corpora can be used at all stages of the writing process, pre-writing, during writing and, post-writing. The potential of corpus tools can be found in an inclusive variety of application in EFL writing classes, including learners' corpus utilization to enhance their linguistic knowledge about common linguistic

97

patterns (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004), to raise confidence as EFL writers (Yoon, 2011), to heighten learners' consciousness of lexico-grammatical patterning and rhetorical functions in EFL writing curriculums (Charles, 2007), to make writing improvements feedback based on the corpus data (Lessard-Clouston & Chang, 2014; Gilmore, 2008), to evaluate students' academic writing skills in EFL writing classes (Yoon & Jo, 2014), and to use direct observation methodology, i.e., computer tracking, and more other implementations (Pérez-Paredes et al., 2011).

Corpus users are required to understand how a given corpus was developed, annotated, and searched and which linguistic information can be detected. It is necessary to understand the potential (and problems) of corpus data. The key to a successful corpus consultation is the appropriate level of teacher guidance, time allowed, and the prepared materials that align with the learners' proficiency level. Thus, intense corpus training for both teachers and learners is important to achieve the skilled use of corpus tools. Learners might face difficulties while dealing with corpus data. Many studies have shown that learners, especially the low-level users of corpora, might face challenges to evaluate linguistic data due to the overwhelming of corpus data (e.g., Yoon & Hirvela, 2004).

While many empirical studies have revealed that corpus consultation can be highly useful and enjoyable for learners (e.g., Chambers & O'Sullivan, 2004; Alharbi, 2012; Smart, 2014; Yoon & Jo, 2014; Alharbi, 2015; Almutairi, 2016; Kotamjani et al., 2017; Alshehri, 2018), some students perceive it as time-consuming or difficult (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004). Therefore, learners should have appropriate training sessions on how to use corpus tools through teacher-guided tasks before undertaking independent work. Although to be a well-qualified EFL writer is in a great important, a lot of research studies conducted in various Saudi EFL contexts revealed that Saudi EFL learners seem to lack the competence of performing autonomous writers (Alkubaidi, 2014; Alharbi, 2019). That is learners face problems in writing skills that might hinder learners' academic progress. This deficiency of the writing skill could be due to two main different factors which are related to the influence of the teacher and the influence of the curriculum.

Regarding the influence of the teacher, autonomy is a key to life-long learning and an important outcome to achieve in educational settings. The concept of enhancing "learning-independency", "self-discovery", "self-learning" or "learning autonomy" in learning processes has played a significant role in the pedagogical researches of corpus-based approaches to language teaching and learning (Yoon & Jo, 2014). With regard to the teaching approaches, teachers struggle on how to teach students to write a well academic written text independently. Most of the learners' need teachers' help and feedback. Obeid (2017) has stated that Saudi learners face challenges in writing in a more standard proficient way. One main reason for this according to Obeid (2017) is that learners might learn in a non-effective way of teaching where they are not autonomously practicing enough or producing a piece of written text without the teacher's help. This resulted in weak and poor writing skills. As earlier mentioned in the introduction, the mastery of academic writing skills highly depends on having a high level of autonomy (Azari, 2017). Thus, those learners could find it very challenging to write essays or

98

any kind of composition as they lack the opportunity to rely on a well-reached resource in which they can use as linguistic reference to establish their writings without the teacher's help. English teaching and learning in the Saudi context are teacher-centered rather than student-centered, which prevents students from improving their English language skills successfully (Alkubaidi, 2014; Alrabai, 2016) In Saudi Arabia, the role of teachers in ELT educational settings are considered to be authoritative characters who play a dominant role in the learning process (Alrabai, 2016), and students, as a result, depend on them as the leading source of knowledge and are typically considered passive observers (Alkubaidi, 2014). Therefore, this teacher-centered approach (as opposed to student-centered approach) has led learners to the lack of opportunity to interact effectively and to be engaged in the learning process (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Another important factor is the absence of appropriate curricula.

Regarding the influence of the curriculum, the ability to effectively transfer what has learned inside the classroom to outside the classroom is another key element in EFL teaching and (Al-Seghayer, 2014). EFL textbooks seem to lack having authentic everyday-life related language input (Alattar, 2014). As a result, learners are not able to use what they have learned outside the classroom. Mohammad and Hazarika (2016) have stated one serious factor that can prevent EFL learners in the Saudi context from reaching language proficiency in their writings is that they are not able to use what they have learned outside the classroom. Such a practice limits their chances of learning the language and mastering the writing skill. Therefore, new methodologies and procedures must be implemented within the EFL classroom to enhance learners' abilities to apply what they have learned outside the classroom. It has been commonly reported that the curriculum used in several Saudi universities is modern and encourages the students to effectively be engaged in the learning process to grasp the target language, however, it seems to be less effective (Khan, 2011; Javid & Umer, 2014; Alrabai, 2016; Picard, 2018). As it has been stated by Picard (2018) that is in Saudi Arabia EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curriculum designers usually design courses based on their intended perceptions rather than on learners 'actual needs, goals, and real-life matters. Dörnyei (2001) asserts that one of the most demotivating factors that hinder learners from reaching satisfactory outcomes is the irrelevant content of learners' lives. Alattar (2014) and Al-Seghayer (2014) diagnose the status of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia and claim that it has always suffered from a lack of meaningful and authentic life-related material. The available EFL textbooks in Saudi Arabia tend to focus on the form rather than the meaning which hinders learners from reaching satisfactory language proficiency as they might not be able to apply what they have learned in communicative situations. Hence, more work is needed to be made to develop the process of EFL teaching and learning in the Saudi context in the four skills of language (speaking, writing, reading, and listening).

Writing instruction varied in its application, however, main element that would further assist Learners writing skill is the teachers' feedback. Ädel (2017) has stated that some instructors appeared not to give their students sufficient and valuable feedback. This can be due to the fact that feedback needs an effort and time from the teacher to each student which instructors may lack according to the heavy amount of

work and a large number of students. Thus, teachers need to train the students to be more independent and search for a better version of their writing by themselves. This will not help them in enhancing their linguistic features but also their critical thinking as well. It has been argued that learners critical thinking plays a vital impact on the quality of writing. Okada (2018) has investigated Japanese EFL lower-level students' ability to write a paragraph logically in English language. He found that most of the learners have acquired the fundamental skills for writing opinions logically despite their low linguistic proficiency. He concluded that learners' critical thinking skills can stimulate the learners to think reasonably and accordingly to write in a way that forces them to reflect their ideas. Another study has been conducted by Taghinezhad et al. (2018) to investigate the effects of critical thinking on enhancing learners' writing proficiency, he pointed out that there is a significant improvement in students' writing achievement when they seemed to be critical thinker while they are writing.

Furthermore, Alharbi (2012) conducted a study in which he investigated the effectiveness of corpus-based tasks to improve learners' lexical, grammatical, and lexico-grammatical abilities in writing skills. The participants consisted of only three students enrolled in an academic writing course at a university level. The data of the study were collected from the four following main resources: search queries of corpora and dictionary, learners' oral reflections, screen recordings, and learners' essays. A survey was demonstrated to leaners to explore their attitudes towards corpora. The researcher used two main corpus software, namely the English texts Voice of America (VOA) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The learners had a corpus training at three basic stages during the semester, the first stage introduced them to a general overview of corpora and concordance. In the second stage, they were taught how to get access to corpora tools themselves through guided instructions: they were trained on how to make searches in order to solve lexical, grammatical, and lexico-grammatical problems. In the third stage, the researcher gave personal sessions to the learners, providing them feedback on their drafts. During this stage, the participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions about any challenges and issues faced while consulting corpora and they were able to improve their drafts. The findings revealed that the learners showed evidence not only in terms of improving written performance but also in enhancing awareness of problem-solving process and developing grammatical, lexical, and lexico-grammatical competence. Moreover, leaners' confidence as EFL writers has increased.

Overall, it has been concluded from the previous studies that learners' deficiency of the writing skill can be attributed to many factors which are as previously mentioned, related to the influence of the teacher where learners are no giving adequate opportunities to be autonomous learners and the influence of the curriculum in which learners are not giving opportunities to apply what they have learned outside the classroom. To have those two factors into consideration would help instructors to solve these issues of writing within Saudi EFL classroom. Instructors should promote learners' writing skill by providing them with learning opportunities that stimulate their critical thinking to search for their linguistic problems and help them to be autonomous learners.

2.3 Benefits of Corpora

Employing Data-Driven Learning (DDL) as a pedagogical approach is believed to have the potential of providing access to authentic materials that promote the learners' autonomy and raise language awareness. DDL is an approach that exposes learners to a considerable amount of authentic language data for the purpose of helping them to inductively find patterns of language and reach conclusions by themselves instead of being provided with language rules deductively (Tono et al., 2014). Boulton (2012) has defined DDL as "any use of language corpora" (p. 263). In addition to its benefits as a linguistic tool, DDL mainly encourages the concentration on the process of learning, which increases the learners' cognitive abilities, mental activities, and metalinguistic awareness (O'Sullivan, 2007; Yoon & Jo, 2014; Crosthwaite, 2017; Leńko-Szymańska, 2017).

The concept of promoting "self-learning discovery" or "learner's autonomy" in the learning process has played an essential role in the pedagogical implications of CBA to language teaching and learning. Numerous studies have found that the employment of concordances can contribute to the development of learners' autonomy (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004; Liu & Jiang, 2009; Geluso & Yamaguchi, 2014; Yoon & Jo, 2014; Azari, 2017; Li, 2017; Obeid, 2017). Discovery learning using corpora might be more appropriate for advanced learners who are filling in gaps in their linguistic knowledge rather than setting down the language foundations (Hunston, 2002). Corpus consultation improves learners' autonomy by allowing them to take control over the learning process as they discover the forms and patterns of the language depending on themselves (Li, 2017). The use of corpora brings and contributes to the development and sustainability of learners' independence (Boulton & Cobb, 2017). Autonomy in learning and more specifically in writing is an important aspect in EFL classes (Azari, 2017). While the teacher is always there to instruct, the students' employment of the corpus technology enhances their autonomy, wherein the corpus-based teaching and learning turn the students from passive learners to "learners' researchers", a concept first proposed by Johns (1991) to refer to the role of learners in corpus-based learning. According to Li (2017, p. 165), "corpus-assisted learning can greatly contribute to the development of learners". This makes the corpus an important tool in enhancing the grammatical and lexical abilities of the learners. Students are encouraged to be engaged in an active analysis of data to uncover language usage patterns and to be responsible for their learning process in which they become learner-centered or autonomous learners through discovery learning (Yunus, 2017).

CBA to teaching and learning highly encourages the autonomous type of learning by allowing students to become more actively involved in the examination of the relationship between meaning and form (Reppen, 2010; Römer, 2011). Sinclair (2004) has suggested that learners should be encouraged to challenge assumptions about language by using evidence obtained from corpus data. In corpus-based tasks and activities, the teacher no longer invents artificial tasks that require students to produce information that the teacher and the textbooks already have. Instead, both teachers and learners are dynamically trying to detect solutions to language-related problems by using the information provided by corpus data. Consequently, by doing corpus searches, learners look for unexplored lexical and

grammatical information, feed up their curiosity, and improve techniques of self-learning that will be valued skills outside the classroom (Benavides, 2015).

In addition to the benefits of corpus data as a linguistic tool containing authentic data, corpus-based studies have also spotted the contribution of corpus integration as a cognitive tool to foster learners' language awareness in the learning process (e.g., Yoon & Jo, 2014; Kotamjani et al., 2017; Lie, 2017). As discovery learning takes place, it fosters the learners' consciousness of language rules and system (Kotamjani et al., 2017). The dynamic analysis of corpus examples as widely known by DDL (Johns, 1991) is supposed to not only foster learners' awareness of linguistic patterns but also improve students' learning strategies for inductive learning. Liu and Jiang (2009) have listed several benefits of corpus use to learners, including raising language awareness, developing a better command of the language rules and patterns, enhancing a greater recognition of the importance of context and register in making more accurate language choices, improving critical understanding of lexical and grammatical items (e.g., to be able to judge whether a lexical or a grammatical pattern is correct), promoting discovery learning, and turning the learning process into a more stimulating and successful one.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is part of a larger study on the application of corpus application on Saudi EFL learners' academic writing skulls. This study followed a qualitative research design to explore learners' perception regarding the use of corpora to their academic writing abilities. A qualitative method is established on the assumption that access to reality cannot be fully comprehended based on only objective point of view. Instead, reality is viewed and interpreted differently by individuals who experience the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In other words, the qualitative approach focuses on understanding subjective experiences rather than simply observing facts. By interviewing the participants, this study aims to understand the different aspects of corpus application to writing instruction as perceived by learners.

3.2 Context

The site of the study is at King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU), a public university in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, particularly, at the English Language Institute (ELI). The English Language courses provided by the ELI for KAU Preparatory Year Students (PYS) are based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) proficiency level descriptors. The courses are a good choice for the purpose of this study as the students can be more exposed to the writing skill. The English Language courses are to be considered as an English for academic purposes (EAP) courses, rather than a general EFL course, given its content and emphasis on disciplinary academic writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

Seven Saudi EFL participants took part in this study. Multiple sources of data collection are used to understand the perceptions of the learners about their writing academic skills learning experience,

including (1) written tasks, and (2) semi-structured interviews. This study was conducted with female learners. The level of the participants is at B1 intermediate on CEFR. The respondents of the study were selected using purposive sampling technique. This technique serves the purpose of the study. In purposive sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals, based on their knowledge of the population to obtain data in which they are interested (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

3.4 Instruments

3.4.1 Semi-Instructed Interviews

To answer the research question, semi-instructed interviews were conducted. The preparation of the interview questions is based on topics or sub-topics rather than specific questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The reason for selecting this type of interviews is to gain more valuable information from focused yet conversational two-way communication with the participants (Bryman, 2006). The interview questions were mainly derived from previous studies (e.g., Liu & Jiang, 2009). Participants were interviewed face to face. The interview questions are asked to explore the learners' assumptions and opinions of the utilization of corpus tools. For the purpose of reliability, the analysis of the interviews is to be completed within two different periods of time (Zohrabi, 2013). The results of the interviews have been analyzed on two different dates. During that period of time, no changes have been made.

3.5 Producers

3.5.1 Written Tasks

Prior to the interview, learners had a classroom intervention in which they interact with corpora. As learners have not had any exposure to corpora prior to the study, the application of corpus requires effective training workshops for the students. The purpose of the workshops is to provide students with essential techniques that they need to acquire a successful corpus consultation. During the intervention, leaners were asked to compose written essays. Then, learners were asked to revise their essays using corpus tools. The intervention and the training were conducted in five main sessions, each session has particular objectives that lead the learners to an effective use of corpus tools. The intervention materials were designed by the researchers based on an analytical reading of corpus literature related to "Using Corpora in Classroom" (e.g., Cobb, 2016).

4. Results and Analysis

The focus of this study is to explore Saudi EFL learners' perceptions on their use and reported benefits on the use of Corpora. Therefore, to answer the research question of the study seven participants were selected for an interview in semi-instructed interviews. The questions of the interview require the participants to reflect upon their learning experience in order to inspect the way in which they perceived the implementation of CBA to their academic writing skill learning. Based on the results of the interviews by implementing NVivo, four main themes were inferred, namely increasing learners' confidence as EFL writers, fostering learners' language awareness, providing availability of input, and

promoting learners' autonomy.

4.1 Increasing Learners' Confidence as EFL Writer

As part of the interview, the participants were asked to determine whether they found corpus classroom intervention advantageous to their overall learning. They have described the learning experience as prosperous and successful. The participants' success in self-learning has raised their confidence as EFL writers, which also contributed to boosting their motivation. This conclusion was further confirmed by one participant who declared the following:

> *"I think developing my writing skills in this way, it's much better than using the traditional way of teaching English because of the examples so I can see how they use it in many sentences, and it makes me more confident about my writing"* (Participant 4).

Other participants illustrated more with many details of what has contributed to the increase in their confidence. For example, some stated that it was the given examples that enhanced their confidence, which enabled them to determine the grammatical and the lexical accuracy of their writing by themselves. For example,

> *"the most useful in this website to know your mistakes, and I can see a lot of examples to learn from"* (Participant 2).

> *"the book is limited in which it has two or three examples, but the website has lots of examples and I can search more about anything I want"* (Participant 6).

Others conferred that their confidence was high when they were able to compare their writing to the corpus input in which they can make corrections. Moreover, some have pointed out that corpus features, like the colored codes and part-of-speech (POS) have enabled them to evaluate their writing on more accurate input. For example,

> *"most beautiful thing about the website is when I write one word and the website will show me many different meanings to the word"* (Participant 3).

> *"It shows me this, what part of speech is the world and it's very useful"* (Participant 4).

4.2 Fostering learners' Language Awareness

During the interviews, the learners were asked about the most useful and valuable benefits gained from the employment of corpus tools. Four of the participants responded that raising their language awareness was one of the most beneficial elements obtained. For example, one of the participants stated the following:

> *"I learned that I can distinguish between nouns and verbs and other classifications"* (Participant 6).

This distinguishing can help learners to realize the differences of lexis in terms of their meaning and usages. The other three participants responded that they needed more time and engagement with corpus tools to obtain the required linguistic awareness for recognizing the linguistic information offered by corpus data. For instance,

> *"Because I find using the website a little bit difficult, So I think I need more time, I will learn how*

104

to use it correctly because I will use this and the future" (Participant 5).

4.3 Providing Availability of Access

The participants were asked whether they prefer to learn the writing skills based on the assistance of corpus data or through the employment of traditional ways of teaching. Although this comparison is not one of the objectives of the study, it has been asked because the intervention did not use any traditional teaching method. Almost all of the participants reported that the CBA is more effective. Some stated that the most effective and useful feature of the corpus tools is that they can always refer to it whenever they need it. The availability of the corpus input can make learners ready to write and attain what they are supposed to achieve independently, without the teacher's help. For example, one learner stated the following:

> *"it's a good experience and it's a very helpful way and the website is always available to me"* (Participant 3).

4.4 Promoting Learners' Autonomy

Learners were asked if they would continue to use the corpus tools for their future writing. All of the responses were positive. For example, one of the learners stated that

> *"I am continue to use it because it's very easy, and I think it's like a teacher to me and it's very helpful"* (Participant 4).

Being able to use the corpus data without the teacher's assistance can provide the students with an opportunity to be responsible for their learning, which will promote their sense of autonomy. When learners are well-independent regarding their study, they will achieve better improvements, particularly with regard to their academic writing skills.

5. Discussion

The research question has been proposed because learners' perceptions of their interactions with corpus tools to improve their English language proficiency should be imperatively explored since they help in providing valuable insights on how to evaluate the application of corpus data for further improvements and adjustments. After the inspection of the overall impact of corpus tools on academic writing learning from learners' perspective, the qualitative results from the semi-instructed interviews revealed more positive views and provided an evidence that the utility of corpus tools can contribute to students' learning process of academic writing skills in different ways. Regarding the usefulness of corpus-based approach to academic writing skills as perceived by learners, the interview's results showed that students have positive attitudes. The participants' responses established four main themes as follows: increase learners' confidence as EFL writers, foster learners' language awareness, have availability of input, and promote learners' autonomy.

First, having available access to a reliable linguistic reference has improved the learners' confidence as EFL writers. When learners become less dependent from the teachers' assistance and can verify their writing based on corpus data, their confidence in their writing quality has improved. This finding of

105

raising learners' confidence confirm the findings of Alharbi's (2015) study in which participants have positive attitudes towards corpus tools to their writing skills as corpora helped them to be more confident EFL writers. The emerged themes, namely the learners' confidence, sense of autonomy, and the availability of access, are in line with the previous findings confirmed by Liu and Jiang (2009) and Yoon and Hirvela (2004) who stated that when learners have access to corpus data, the success in deductive learning increases their confidence, which contributed to enhancing their sense of autonomy. Moreover, Yoon and Hirvela's (2004) study showed that the students felt positive to employ the corpus tools for their writing as they perceived the corpus data as advantageous to the development of their writing skills and have contributed in increasing their confidence as EFL writers.

Second, fostering learners' language awareness is one of the main themes indicated by the participants' responses. As discovery learning takes place, it fosters learners' consciousness of language rules and systems. The dynamic analysis of corpus examples, as widely known by DDL, leads students to search for linguistic patterns and improve their learning strategies for inductive learning. Fostering learners' language awareness is one theme indicated from the interviews' findings which showed that when learners are provided with suitable training, guidance, and consultation of corpus tools, they are encouraged to participate more actively in the progress of their writing skills, which enhances their linguistic awareness as they rely on corpus evidence to judge their linguistics decision. The results of the current study confirm the findings of previous studies that explored students' attitudes toward using CBA to writing instruction (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004; Liu & Jiang, 2009; Kotamjani et al., 2017).

Third, corpus tools have enabled students to be engaged in the learning process in both deductive and inductive ways. For the inductive way of learning, the learners' responses revealed that their sense of autonomy has been promoted. To be able to form hypotheses, verify the hypotheses, review, edit and solve linguistic problems, and find alternatives by applying corpus tools, learners should be less dependent on teachers' help. Promoting learners' autonomy, as one benefit of CBA, is in line with previous studies in which the students' self-image as autonomous learners improves if the teaching materials and methods are adjusted to allow them to be more responsible about their learning (e.g., Azari, 2017; Li, 2017; Obaid, 2017). Lastly, having an open access to the corpus tools can help learners to refer to those tools when required. The results of the current study are in line with the findings of previous research that explored students' attitudes toward using CBA to writing instruction (Yoon & Hirvela, 2004; Liu & Jiang, 2009).

6. Conclusion

The current study has attempted to explore the effect of corpus-based approach to writing instruction. The study aimed at explaining the way learners perceive corpus-based approach instructions through one-to-one interviews with the participants. The findings revealed that the learners perceive the application of corpus-based approach positively, and the four themes were found to be recurrent in their responses which are: increasing learners' confidence as EFL writers, fostering learners' language

106

awareness, providing availability of input, and promoting learners' autonomy. Several implications were induced to improve the quality of language teaching and learning based on the current finding of the study. Curriculum designers and materials developer are encouraged to use Corpus-Based data as the main source for preparing classroom textbooks. Professional Development Committees and Qualification Assurance Sections are advised to consider the Corpus-Based Approach when planning professional programs and courses and when establishing the criteria for evaluating teachers' performance in the classroom. Another implication is to provide learners with training sessions on how to utilize corpus data and how to make effective use of corpus potentials. Moreover, as using corpus data need students to use computers or any form of devices, it is important to provide students with well-occupied classroom. In the Saudi context, the field of CBA on language teaching and learning is still considered as being under-researched, specifically in the area of Academic Writing Learning. Therefore, this area of research should be further investigated to reach more reliable findings. The current study has several limitations that lead to the suggestion of recommendations for future research. First, one of the central restraints of this study is the time restriction, three weeks of treatment might not be enough to achieve significant results. Thus, future researchers are recommended to conduct studies in which classroom experiment sessions last for a longer time. Including larger number of participants can lead to more reliable and generalizable findings. The third limitation involves gender. The participants of the study were only female. A comparison between the results of male and female gender might lead to more accuracy.

References

Alattar, A. (2014). *Content-based instruction and corpus linguistics curriculum for early advanced EFL Saudi students* (Unpublished MA thesis). University of San Francisco.

Alharbi, M. H. (2019). Saudi Arabia EFL university students' voice on challenges and solution in learning academic writing. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *8*(3), 576-587. https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v8i3.15276

Alharbi, W. H. (2012). Learners' Interaction with Online Applications: Tracking Language Related Episodes in Computer-Assisted L2 Writing. *Frontiers in Language and Teaching*, *3*, 96-107.

Alharbi, W. H. (2015). Does Corpus Size Matter? "Exploring the potential of a small simplified corpus in improving language learners' writing quality". C*orpus Linguistics*, *10.*

Alkubaidi, M. A. (2014). The Relationship between Saudi English Major University Students' Writing Performance and Their Learning Style and Strategy Use. *English Language Teaching*, *7*(4), 83-95. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n4p83

Almutairi, N. D. (2016). The Effectiveness of Corpus-Based Approach to Language Description in Creating Corpus-Based Exercises to Teach Writing Personal Statements. *English Language Teaching*, *9*(7), 103. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n7p103

Alrabai, F. (2016). Factors underlying low achievement of Saudi EFL learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *6*(3), 21. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v6n3p21

Alrashidi, O., & Phan, H. (2015). Education context and English teaching and learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An overview. *English Language Teaching*, *8*(5), 33. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n5p33

Al-Seghayer, K. (2014). The four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *4*(5), 17. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v4n5p17

Alshehri, A. H. (2018). Enhancing Sentence-Level Idiomaticity and Collocational Competence among Post-High school Saudi EFL Learners through the online Corpus of Contemporary American English. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, *5*(5), 200-210.

Azari, M. H. (2017). Effect of weblog-based process approach on EFL learners' writing performance and autonomy. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *30*(6), 529-551. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1329214

Benavides, C. (2015). Using a corpus in a 300-level Spanish grammar course. *Foreign Language Annals*, *48*(2), 218-235. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12136

Boulton, A. (2012). Corpus consultation for ESP: A review of empirical research. In A. Boulton, S. Carter-Thomas, & E. Rowley-Jolivet (Eds.), *Corpus-informed research and learning in ESP: Issues and applications* (pp. 261-291). John Benjamins.

Boulton, A., & Cobb, T. (2017). Corpus use in language learning. *A Meta-Analysis. Language Learning*, *67*(2), 348-393. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12224

Breyer, Y. (2011). *Corpora in language teaching and learning. Potential, evaluation, challenges*. Peter Lang.

Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done? *Qualitative Research*, *6*(1), 97-113. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794106058877

Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for Interview Research: The Interview Protocol Refinement Framework. *Qualitative Report*, *21*(5), 811-831.

Chambers, A., & O'Sullivan, Í. (2004). Corpus consultation and advanced learners' writing skills in French. *ReCALL*, *16*(1), 158-172. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344004001211

Charles, M. (2007). Reconciling top-down and bottom-up approaches to graduate writing: Using a corpus to teach rhetorical functions. *Journal of English for academic purposes*, *6*(4), 289-302. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2007.09.009

Charles, M. (2018). Corpus tools for writing students. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0554

Cheng, W. (2012) *Exploring corpus linguistics: Language in action.* London/New York: Routledge.

Cobb, T. (2016, January 19). *The Compleat Web VP*. Compleat Lexical Tutor. Retrieved from http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/comp/

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Crosthwaite, P. (2017). Retesting the limits of data-driven learning: Feedback and error correction. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *30*(6), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1312462

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Evison, J. (2010). What are the basics of analyzing a corpus? In A. O'Keeffe, & M. McCarthy (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Corpus Linguistics* (pp. 122-135). London: Routledge.

Gardner, D., & Davies, M. (2014). A new academic vocabulary list. *Applied Linguistics*, *35*, 305-327. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amt015

Geluso, J., & Yamaguchi, A. (2014). Discovering formulaic language through data-driven learning: Student attitudes and efficacy. *ReCALL*, *26*(2). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344014000044

Gilmore, A. (2008). Using online corpora to develop students' writing skills. *ELT Journal*, *63*(4), 363-372. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccn056

Hunston, S. (2002). *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Javid, C., & Umer, M. (2014). Saudi EFL learners' writing problems: A move towards solution. *Proceeding of the Global Summit on Education GSE*, 4-5.

Johns, T. (1991). From Printout to handout: Grammar and vocabulary teaching in the context of data-driven learning. *English Language Research Journal*, *4*, 27-45.

Johns, T. (1994). From printout to handout: Grammar and vocabulary teaching in the context of data driven learning. In T. Johns (Ed.), *Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar* (pp. 293-313). Cambridge University Press.

Khan, I. A. (2011). Learning difficulties in English: Diagnosis and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia. *Educational Research*, *2*(7), 1248-1257.

Kotamjani, S. S., Razavi, O. F., & Hussin, H. (2017). Online corpus tools in scholarly writing: A case of EFL postgraduate student. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(9), 61-68. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n9p61

Leech, G. (1997). Teaching and language corpora: A convergence. In A. Wichmann, S. Fligelstone, T. McEnery, & G. Knowles (Eds.), *Teaching and Language Corpora* (pp. 11-23). Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman.

Leńko-Szymańska, A. (2014). Is this enough? A qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of a teacher-training course on the use of corpora in language education. *ReCALL*, *26*(2), 260-278. https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834401400010X

Leńko-Szymańska, A. (2017). Training teachers in data driven learning: Tackling the challenge. *Language Learning & Technology*, *21*(3), 217-241.

Lessard-Clouston, M., & Chang, T. (2014). Corpora and English language teaching: Pedagogy and practical applications for data-driven learning. *TESL Reporter*, *47*(1, 2), 1-20.

Li, S. (2017). Using corpora to develop learners' collocational competence. *Language Learning & Technology*, *21*(3), 153-171.

Liu, D., & Jiang, P. (2009). Using a corpus-based lexicogrammatical approach to grammar instruction in EFL and ESL contexts. *Modern Language Journal*, *93*(1), 61-78. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00828.x

Luo, Q., & Liao, Y. (2015). Using corpora for error correction in EFL Learners' writing. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *6*(6), 1333-1342. http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0606.22

McEnery, T., & Wilson, A. (2001). Early corpus linguistics and the Chomskyan revolution. *Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction*, 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511981395.002

Mohammad, T., & Hazarika, Z. (2016). Difficulties of Learning EFL in KSA: Writing Skills in Context. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *6*(3), 105. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v6n3p105

O'Sullivan, Í. (2007). Enhancing a process-oriented approach to literacy and language learning: The role of corpus consultation literacy. *ReCALL: the Journal of EUROCALL*, *19*(3), 269. https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834400700033X

Obeid, R. (2017). Second Language Writing and Assessment: Voices from within the Saudi EFL Context. *English Language Teaching*, *10*(6), 174-181. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n6p174

Okada, R. (2018). Challenges in Teaching Japanese EFL Students to Express Themselves Logically. *Asian Education Studies*, *3*(1), 73. https://doi.org/10.20849/aes.v3i1.335

Pérez-Paredes, P., Sánchez-Tornel, M., Alcaraz Calero, J. M., & Jiménez, P. A. (2011). Tracking learners' actual uses of corpora: Guided vs non-guided corpus consultation. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *24*(3), 233-253. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2010.539978

Picard, M. (2018). The future of EFL and TESOL in Saudi Arabia. In *English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia* (pp. 165-185). Abingdon: Routledge.

Raja, Z. B., & Zahid, R. Z. (2013). Enhancing writing skills: An analytical study of obstacles in writing at BA level in Najran University, KSA. *Studies in Literature and Language*, *7*(2).

Reppen, R. (2010). *Using corpora in the language classroom*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Römer, U. (2011) Corpus research applications in second language teaching. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 205-225. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000055

Sinclair, J. McH. (2004). New evidence, new priorities, new attitudes. In J. McH. Sinclair (Ed.), *How to use corpora in language teaching* (pp. 271-299). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Smart, J. (2014). The role of guided induction in paper-based data-driven learning. *ReCALL*, *26*(2), 184-201. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0958344014000081

Stubbs, M., & Halbe, D. (2013). Corpus linguistics: Overview. In C. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 1377-1379). Oxford: Blackwell.

Taghinezhad, Ali, Mohammad Javad Riasati, Ehsan Rassaei, & Fatemeh Behjat. (2018). The Impact of Teaching Critical Thinking on Iranian Students' Writing Performance and Their Critical Thinking Dispositions. *BRAIN. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience*, *9*, 64-80.

Tono, Y., Satake, Y., & Miura, A. (2014). The effects of using corpora on revision tasks in L2 writing with coded error feedback. *ReCALL*, *26*(2), 147-162. https://doi.org/10.1017/S095834401400007X

Yoon, C. (2011). Concordancing in L2 writing class: An overview of research and issues. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, *10*(3), 130-139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2011.03.003

Yoon, H., & Hirvela, A. (2004). ESL student attitudes toward corpus use in L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *13*, 257-283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2004.06.002

Yoon, H., & Jo, J.W. (2014). Direct and indirect access to corpora: An exploratory case study comparing students' error correction and learning strategy use in L2 Writing. *Language, Learning & Technology*, *18*(1), 96-117.

Yunus, K. (2017), Corpus Linguistics: Pedagogic application in the 21st century, in *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, *6*(3), 137-152. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v6-i3/3167

Zohrabi, M. (2013). Mixed Method Research: Instruments, Validity, Reliability and Reporting Findings. *Theory & practice in language studies*, *3*(2). https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262