

Division of labour and the development of professional literacies: Problematizing ESP learners' preparedness for workplace writing

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Abstract

The importance of workplace writing literacies has been well recognised in both academic and professional contexts. However, the ability to prepare learners for mediation of specialised knowledge and their L2 abilities has been contested in the literature due to the gap between these two contexts. We argue that both contexts should reconcile and play a role in this preparation. This chapter aims to problematize graduates' preparedness for workplace writing by investigating the perceptions of college engineer alumni and their line managers regarding preparedness for the demands of workplace writing. To this end, semi-structured interviews with twelve alumni working in five different private sector companies in Oman and four line managers were conducted over a period of eight months. The data reveal that the alumni and their line managers hold ambivalent views regarding graduates' preparedness for workplace writing, that is, while acknowledging the role of the ESP courses in equipping the graduates for the demands of workplace writing, the participants perceive this preparation as insufficient. The findings imply that there should be division of labour around preparing learners for workplace writing as both academic and professional contexts should play a part in it.

1. Introduction

There is a growing awareness amongst higher education researchers, ESP practitioners, and industrial bodies of the significance of written communication skills in the corporate world, especially in a country like Oman, where globalisation and rapid economic growth places an increasing demand on cultivating 21st century skills in its university graduates. Hence, it has been of paramount importance to prepare university graduates for the writing demands of the workplace. However, due to the situated nature of writing and noted disparity between academic and professional contexts, there has been an ongoing debate in the literature of social learning theories and previous research on the university–workplace transition of novice employees (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Pare, 1999) around the issue of preparing learners for the workplace writing and the role of the university in this preparedness. Other studies (Andre & Schneider, 2004; Artemeva, 2009; Bremner, 2012; Le Maistre & Paré, 2004), however, have highlighted the role of both university and workplace as contexts for learning. In fact, Artemeva (2009) contends that both formal education and workplace experiences are part of 'genre knowledge ingredients' that lead to genre learning outside its local context.

For the university-workplace transition to be successful, it requires the *recontextualisation* of writing skills. Recontextualisation is defined by Cheng (2007) as “Learners’ abilities not only to use a certain generic feature in a new writing task, but to use it with a keen awareness of the rhetorical context that facilitates its appropriate use” (p. 303). This notion is also echoed by Smart and Brown (2002) who preferred to use ‘transform’ rather than ‘transfer’ as the former suggests relearning and adapting old knowledge and skills to fit into a new environment. Similarly, Devitt (2004) and Johns (2015) emphasise the need for developing learners’ *genre awareness* (i.e. adapting previous genre knowledge to new rhetorical situations), rather than *genre acquisition* (i.e. mastering the generic features of a limited set of text types). According to Johns (2015), genre awareness is an approach “designed to assist students in developing the rhetorical flexibility necessary for adapting their previously held socio-cognitive genre knowledge (“schemas”) to ever-evolving contexts” (p.116).

This study problematizes graduates’ preparedness for workplace writing by arguing that both academic and workplace contexts should collaborate to prepare graduates for workplace writing. Thus, the study explores’ how preparedness is perceived by both in-service college alumni and their line managers to underscore the roles played by the university and workplace in this preparation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Perceived role of university and workplace in preparing learners for workplace writing

Many of the previous studies of university-workplace transitions have questioned the transferability of genre knowledge and skills gained in the academic context to the professional context and contended that the academic context does not play a role in preparing learners for the demands of workplace writing. This contention is largely based on the disparity between the academic and professional contexts in terms of the audience, purpose and other contextual elements which impact the content, format, style and other aspect of a text. However, merely based on the disparity between these two contexts, it would be excessively pessimistic to diminish the role academia can play in preparing learners (Al Hilali & McKinley, 2021). Certainly, some researchers recognise that both contexts play a role in learners’ preparedness for workplace writing.

Some researchers maintain that there are minimum opportunities for preparing learners for workplace writing (e.g. Dias & Paré, 2000; Freedman et al., 1994). For example, Dias et al. (1999) in their large-scale empirical study on the relationship between university and workplace writing, traced participants from business, architecture and law and concluded that these two contexts constitute different activity systems which are worlds apart from each other. According to them, “one activity, writing in school, is not necessarily preparation for successfully undertaking the other activity, writing at work” (p. 223).

Conversely, other researchers (e.g. Artemeva, 2009; Smart & Brown, 2002) argue for the possibility of teaching workplace communication outside its local context, and highlight the role of the workplace in enhancing graduates’ socialisation. For example, Artemeva (2009) acknowledged the role of the formal academic education in equipping learners with the written communication skills practiced in the workplace. She considered the college writing experience as one of the ‘*genre knowledge ingredients*’ that enables novices to become

successful genre users in their professions, among other ingredients, such as workplace experience or training. This idea is echoed by others such as Le Maistre & Paré (2004) who recognised the role of both college and workplace in preparing learners for workplace writing.

This debate on the potential role of college and workplace in preparing learners for workplace writing constituted the basis for shaping the current study. Given the situated nature of workplace writing, previous studies overly emphasised the disparity between the academic and workplace contexts and diminished the role of the college, whereas the current study does not view this disparity as an obstacle for preparing learners. Rather, it was decided to problematize graduates' preparedness for workplace writing by investigating university alumni and their line managers' perceptions of the role of the university and workplace in this preparedness. The study also seeks to identify what factors have contributed to shaping their perceptions to understand the role played by the university and workplace in enhancing or impeding alumni's preparedness for workplace writing.

2.2. Studies on perceived preparedness for workplace writing

In addition to the research into transition experiences of novice writers, other studies also concerned with identifying the differences between classroom and workplace writing investigated the contextual constraints influencing writing in both academic and workplace contexts (e.g. Dias et al., 1999; Freedman et al., 1994). These studies have echoed how the university has prepared or failed to prepare the learners for workplace writing, but few studies have directly explored stakeholders' (e.g. students, teachers, graduates, employers) perceptions of the university and workplace preparation for workplace writing.

One early example is Schneider and Andre's (2005) qualitative case study which explored the perceptions of nine students in three disciplines in a Canadian university. The findings revealed the perceptions of the students varied depending on their disciplines, and that their perceptions were shaped by several factors: their analytical skills, the instruction they received in specific genres, their experience in collaborative writing, and the feedback they received on their writing. Based on these factors, Schneider and Andre argued that the classroom does play a role in preparing the students for workplace writing by providing them with "a grasp of the basic conventions of common workplace genres" (p. 196). The authors also maintained that students' perceptions do provide valuable insights especially when their perceptions are informed by both academic and workplace experiences. Based on this argument, in the current study, rich insights are gained by exploring the perceptions of the alumni who are already in the workplace at various positions and levels of experience. So, their perceptions are informed by both workplace and college writing experiences.

A recent study by Moore and Morton (2017) investigated the perceptions of immediate supervisors and managers who closely work with college graduates in professional settings regarding graduates' written communication, the challenges they face upon their transition to the workplace and what can be done to better prepare them for workplace writing. Semi-structured interviews with twenty participants in a range of professions and firms in Australia revealed that graduates' written communication ability may not be as "overwhelmingly deficient" as generally reported in government and corporate surveys. What shaped the employers' perceptions is their acknowledgement of the differences between workplace and academic settings in writing practices, the difficulty to identify specific writing requirements due to the uniqueness of specific organisations, and the role of the organisations in training and inducting the novice employees into the workplace.

It can be noted that previous studies on perceived preparedness for workplace writing have mainly highlighted the role played by university in preparing graduates for the demands of workplace writing and overlooked the role of the workplace in this preparedness. Hence, this study directly probes the perceptions of graduates and their line managers *in situ* regarding the role of the workplace, along with the university's, to problematize the complex issue of preparing graduates for workplace writing. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1) How do alumni and their line managers perceive college preparation for workplace writing?

RQ2) How do alumni and their line managers perceive workplace preparation for workplace writing?

3. The study

This fully qualitative research was conducted in Oman at five different private sector companies (one telecommunications company and four oil and gas companies) where English is used as the official means of communications. The participants were 12 Higher College of Technology (HCT) engineer alumni and four line managers. The engineer alumni participants vary in terms of their educational degree and specific engineering specialisations. They also belong to various sectors and have a range of years of experience: 'new alumni' are those with 1-3 years of experience, and 'experienced alumni' are those with 6-9 years of experience. The title 'line manager' is used to refer to those managers who were interacting with HCT engineer alumni as their team leaders, supervisors or managers.

Two sets of semi-structured interviews were prepared: one for the alumni and the other for the managers. Alumni interview questions revolved around the learning experiences they went through in technical writing courses¹ at the college, whether they feel such courses have prepared them for meeting the demands of workplace writing, the learning experiences provided in the workplace (i.e. training and feedback). Similarly, the managers' interview questions mainly concerned their satisfaction with college graduates' written communication skills, college preparation for workplace writing, and writing training provided in the workplace. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

To analyse the data, thematic analysis (i.e. pattern-led categorisation of content) was used to identify patterns of meaning across the dataset in relation to the RQs. 'Data-driven' thematic analysis was used throughout the analysis to avoid obstructing participants' voices, and to allow the data to speak for itself. To enhance the rigour of analysis, sources of information (i.e. line managers and alumni) were triangulated to obtain multiple perspectives of the preparedness of college alumni for workplace writing.

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview data, six emergent themes were identified: 1) Expectations from the college, 2) graduates' personal factors, 3) acknowledgment of the basic knowledge (Genre awareness), 4) Deficiencies in college writing experiences, 5) formal training opportunities, and 6) feedback on writing. The findings are organised according to the given themes and categorised into two main sections: 1) perceived role of the university in graduates' preparedness and 2) perceived role of the workplace in graduates' preparedness.

¹ These courses are part of common core courses taught to students from various academic disciplines at HCT.

4. Findings

4.1. Perceived role of the university in graduates' preparedness

In the interviews, all alumni were directly asked whether their college writing experience prepared them for the kind of writing required in the workplace. Likewise, line managers' perceptions regarding HCT alumni preparedness for workplace writing were directly probed. The line managers stated that HCT graduates are not adequately prepared for the workplace writing demands. Similarly, the alumni mostly and generally felt dissatisfied with their preparedness for performing the writing tasks in the workplace. However, regarding the college preparation for the workplace writing, both alumni and the line managers shared ambivalent views. These views and the factors shaping them are elaborated and elucidated in the following sections.

4.1.1. Factors shaping line managers' views of alumni's preparedness

While the line managers asserted that the college does have a role to play in preparing learners for workplace writing, they stated that it cannot be solely blamed for graduates' lack of preparedness as there are other personal factors into play. These ambivalent views are shaped by their expectations from college regarding preparing graduates for workplace writing and partly shaped by managers' reflections on HCT graduates' personal attributes, such as motivation and family background.

4.1.1.1. Managers' expectations from HCT

The line managers expressed several expectations from HCT to yield well-prepared graduates for the demands of workplace writing. Since all the communications within the given private sector organisations are done in English, the line managers believed the college should equip graduates with necessary communication skills, such as writing emails/letters, as commented by one of the line managers, *"you need to make sure to focus on how to write a simple email or you can say a simple letter with the right words with the right spellings"*. They also expect more emphasis on writing for various audiences and purposes as stated by a telecommunication team leader, *"He [HCT graduate] needs to know about how to write an official letter to any organisation or to any it can be bank can be company"*. As it is not feasible to devise specific courses tackling hundreds of jobs available in the market, one of the line managers suggested that written communication skills, specifically email writing, should be included within technical writing/ communication courses.

Another manager expectation is to interact with the labour market and gain insights as to what is required in the workplace before developing writing courses. One of the managers from petroleum sector stated that he was not aware of the HCT writing curriculum as he had never had the chance to interact with the college in any form. Furthermore, a telecommunication manager suggested that the college should conduct discussion sessions with the labour market and *"involve [it] in drafting new topics"*. He also asserted that the managers' role is only to supervise and guide the new graduates, however, the "burden" falls on the college to prepare the learners.

4.1.1.2. Graduates' personal factors

The managers' expectations were modulated by their reflective thoughts about alumni's motivation as language learners and their educational and family background.

One of the telecommunications line managers maintained that all graduates are at the same level of English proficiency unless they possess the motivation and skills to improve and practice English, as he clarified:

but the majority to answer this question, for me, they are all in same level unless the person himself he has some skills and talents that he is we can say advanced in English, but this is not because of the college again it's because the person himself. I mean his knowledge his perceptions of English.

This line manager did not blame the college for graduates' lack of preparation, instead, he pointed out that what makes a difference is graduates' individual motivation to improve the writing skills and the extent of practice the graduates do in their real life.

Apart from graduates' motivation for improving their writing skills, graduates' family background was perceived by two line managers to be a contributing factor to their preparedness, as commented by a team leader at a telecommunications company, "*The atmosphere he lives in, for example, there is a person ... who actually lives in a home where everyone speaks English there, so the English language becomes easy for him...*". Moreover, another line manager argued that the accumulation of academic and personal experiences which graduates carry with them determines their preparedness for workplace writing.

This resonates with the different elements of genre knowledge mentioned by Artemeva (2009) in her study of engineers' stories of becoming successful writers after moving to the workplace. Although the current study focuses on two of these elements (college writing experiences and workplace writing experiences), the contributing personal factors emerged as an unexpected and interesting finding which could be further investigated in future studies. It also has implications for the perceived role of the workplace in graduates' preparedness (see Discussion).

4.1.2. Factors shaping alumni's views of preparedness

The alumni reflected on their college writing experiences in general and in Technical Writing courses in relation to their workplace writing preparedness. Although there are extreme cases, most of the alumni held ambivalent views of their college preparation for the workplace writing, such as: "If I say yes, it's not fair, if I say no, it's not fair", "Yes, in certain way" and "Let's say yes, I cannot say no ... because in the end of the day I have started learning about the writing there in the college ...". Such responses illustrate acknowledgement that, though not sufficiently, to a certain extent HCT, particularly Technical Writing courses did prepare them for workplace writing. These views are partly shaped by alumni's acknowledgement of the basic knowledge they gained at the college and their ability to utilise it in the new context (genre awareness) and partly influenced by deficiencies in alumni's experiences of the Technical Writing courses.

4.1.2.1. Acknowledgement of basic knowledge: Genre awareness

Alumni's views are substantively shaped by the conceptualisation of basic knowledge gained from college writing classes and their ability to adapt it to the new context of writing. Most participants did recognise that they gained basic or background knowledge of writing at HCT. For example, one admitted: "...*there are different types of writing actually, and if it does not make me expert at least it makes me knowledgeable, it gives me knowledge...*". In other responses, the types of writing learned in Technical Writing courses were perceived to be helpful, such as writing CVs, letters, process essay, part-by part description and descriptive essays, discussing charts and using linking words and punctuations.

While some recognised the value of essay writing at HCT, as elucidated by an alumnus who thought that such writing is useful for describing tools at the workplace: "... *for example, this phone I want to describe it like business essay, it's good because it allows you to show the main specification of the tool of the picture of the sample in front of you*", an experienced alumna in telecommunications grumbled that she only learned essays in the writing courses, and this was not helpful in preparing her for the workplace writing.

As one line manager commented, the basic knowledge gained from college remains within the graduates. It just needs to be triggered by opportunities in the new context to reapply it properly. This coincides with the view that basic knowledge needs to be *recontextualised* to fit into the workplace context, as depicted by an alumnus:

... the writing is writing, words is words, the sentence is sentence, but you know what is the difference? The style - the requirement of that nature of work...so, sometimes we have to write the comparison of materials we use ... so, will compare that in comparison style and will submit it to them. So, we learned this in our HCT, and some informative reports informative essays we learn them at HCT, and we are applying it in our work.

Thus, the argument here is that the evolving nature of professional genres necessitates that learners should be able to conceive the writing encountered at the workplace as new tasks having their own rhetorical context of purpose and audience. This indicates that generic knowledge gained from college needs to be *recontextualised* to be appropriate for the new context (Smart & Brown, 2002). The findings are in line with this view.

This *recontextualising* of genre knowledge previously gained is regarded as "a more sophisticated level of achievement" (Cheng, 2007, p.303) and a representation of writing performance and genre awareness (Devitt, 2004; Johns, 2015). In the above examples, some alumni did not perceive the value of their schematic knowledge of essays or emails (e.g. *not as needed at the workplace*) learned at college when they encountered new writing situations in the workplace. In contrast, others seemed to utilise their previous genre knowledge and adapt it to new context of situation.

4.1.2.2. Deficiencies in college writing experiences

Despite alumni acknowledgement of the role of college writing experiences in equipping them with the basic knowledge of writing, alumni still felt insufficiently prepared to meet workplace

writing demands. This view is grounded in the deficiencies in their experiences of technical writing courses.

The generic and non-technical nature of the Technical Writing courses are noted to be irrelevant to the kind of writing required at the workplace. For example, one new alumna commented: “...*I think we were given something which was not related to my work at all, like sometimes scientific reports, I am not science anymore; I’m not going to that department*”. Most alumni seemed dissatisfied with the irrelevance of what they studied in these courses to what they actually need at the workplace, and; therefore, did not find them useful, as commented by a new alumnus: “*They [technical writing courses] were not very useful because the things I got here are too much different from what is required at the workplace...*”. Most alumni stressed that Technical Writing courses did not include anything technical. An experienced alumnus maintained that Technical Writing courses were devoid of any technical content, as she commented, “*there were Technical Writing courses but as a name only not as content*”.

There is a consensus among all the alumni in this study that essays were the major and sometimes the only kind of writing practiced in Technical Writing courses. This lack of exposure to various workplace genres, such as email and reports, seems to lead to alumni’s lack of preparedness to produce required genres in their workplaces. Some experienced alumni expressed that once they joined the workplace, they had to write reports and other documents from scratch as there were not any templates they could rely on. Similarly, the most significant workplace genre which most alumni noted to be missing or not sufficiently taught in their college writing courses is email writing. This has formed a hurdle for most alumni writing at the workplace, as expressed by an experienced alumnus, “*Yeah, it was emails my big difficulties because that time I remember we mainly focus on letter we are not focus on email*”.

Furthermore, writing for various audiences is an essential characteristic of workplace writing which seems to lack emphasis at the college, as commented by one of the experienced alumni:

We used to write all this in the past, but here, of course, we don’t write in the same way. Here, we communicate; I don’t only write an email to a customer, but also to a colleague, to other departments. The way of communicating with various audiences is not emphasised at the college.

Most of the alumni admitted that they have learned to write for various audiences at the workplace as this was not practiced at college where they mainly wrote for their teachers who would read and assess. Some alumni faced difficulty when it came to writing for various audiences. Power relation with the intended audience makes a difference in the way alumni write, as elucidated by a new alumnus who found catering for various audiences ‘a big deal’:

It’s different when you write to someone, and just send email to someone in same level with you different than you write email to someone in higher management, just there send the small sentence and small description and there we have to write accurate each word you have to choose it.

The line managers have a consensus that the alumni face difficulty in addressing various audiences in their writing. For instance, a petroleum line manager stated the alumni in his team still struggle to cater for audiences with non-technical background, for instance, as he elaborated, in “*the use of abbreviations; if I write a report to you I know that you don’t have*

an engineering background, I should not use engineering abbreviations, so I know that mistake is happening over and over again”.

4.1.2.3. Lack of effective feedback

Another crucial factor is lack of effective and sufficient feedback in Technical Writing courses. Some alumni felt their teachers did not sufficiently attend to editorial matters in their written corrective feedback, whereas such formal accuracy is valued in the workplace as noted in managers’ responses regarding problems in alumni’s writing. Most of the alumni stated that language aspects, such as spelling and grammar, are some of the most significant challenges in workplace writing.

Some alumnus participants were dissatisfied with the feedback they received from their writing teachers. For example, one stated that he did not get enough quality feedback, and he disappointedly commented that *“so, I don’t know where I went wrong and what’s my mistake in grammar, I don’t know anything I don’t have any feedback from him”*. Furthermore, although some teachers did provide written corrective feedback, it was minimal and superficial, indicating a few simple errors, as an experienced alumnus commented, *“he did check for us but not many mistakes; just simple mistakes... though there were actually a lot of mistakes, he wouldn’t go deeper”*.

The alumni expected from their teachers to point out and correct all the grammatical mistakes they made. They did not seem to understand their teachers’ expectations from them to identify and correct the errors themselves. A consistent, standardised and mutually-understood form of feedback can be vital in training learners to be attentive to accuracy when they write in the workplace where there is mostly no tolerance against errors.

4.2. Perceived role of the workplace in graduates’ preparedness

4.2.1. Formal training for technical writing

When perceptions regarding the provision of formal training on writing were probed, both alumni and their line managers reported that although formal training sessions/courses on the English language were provided at the workplace, such courses would mainly focus on enhancing general English language skills. That is, no courses specifically related to technical writing/communication were provided in the given organizations. Several alumni felt the need for taking technical writing courses in the workplace, and one experienced alumnae stated that she requested a course on technical writing, however, such courses could not be arranged locally in Oman. This was corroborated by her line manager, as he asserted, *“I have been asking the higher management to provide courses on technical communication as they [engineering graduates] not only deal with technical stuff, but they also deal with customers, so they need to have good communication skills, including writing.”*

Some of the new graduates stated that they were not aware of any workplace courses though they highlighted the need for taking technical writing training courses. These findings imply that while the workplace organizations have always emphasized the importance of preparing graduates for the demands of workplace writing, they would seem to overlook the role the workplace itself should play in this preparation.

4.2.2. Feedback on writing

Providing feedback on writing is a form of informal training graduates get in the workplace. Guidance and feedback on new graduates' writing does occur in the workplace as a few alumni stated that they received feedback as newcomers, "*at the beginning they [supervisors] gave us feedback*". Likewise, the four line managers also stated that they provide feedback and guidance to the newcomers. This is mainly done to induct the new graduates into the required professional writing until they become independent writers. Some managers provide feedback on writing to save the public face of the company, as commented by an experienced alumna, "*Yes, first 3 months because you know she is responsible about me; if I'm sending any email would be shame if it has mistakes or something*". This statement was confirmed by line managers concerned with their company's image which necessitates checking employees' emails and reports especially if they are for an external audience.

However, when asked whether they received feedback when they first joined the workplace, most alumni said they did not, and a few reported occasionally receiving feedback when they instigated it themselves. What is surprising is that those of who denied receiving any feedback were mainly newcomers. This could be due to the limited amount of writing required from the newcomers or due to the busy nature of the higher management, as stated by another new alumnus when asked whether he gets feedback on his writing from his supervisor, "*... no no they do not clarify this because they are not free for this; they are so busy*". For these reasons, some alumni would be hesitant to ask for help and complete the task on their own, as stated by a petroleum new alumnus, "*... they don't know even that I don't know how to write I don't show I try my best to do it my own*". So, this alumnus would not show his manager that he was struggling with writing and needed his guidance, instead, he would try to depend on himself.

5. Discussion

The key findings of this study denote that both alumni and line managers acknowledge the role that the college plays/should play in preparing graduates for workplace writing. In response to RQ1, this view is shaped by the expectations the line managers have from the college in exposing students to genres required in the workplace, such as emails and reports, and in collaborating with workplace bodies in developing technical writing courses. Similarly, the alumni's views were shaped by deficiencies in technical writing courses taught in the college, such as lack of relevance of writing tasks and lack of effective feedback. The alumni criticised the tasks practiced in Technical Writing courses for not focusing on technical and communicative tasks and not emphasizing the importance of tailoring writing according to audience. These findings resonate with the those of previous studies (e.g. Schneider & Andre, 2005).

Another key finding is that genre awareness appeared to shape the participants' views of HCT alumni's preparedness for workplace writing. This approach is reflected in alumni's views of their college writing experience in preparing them for workplace writing as most of them acknowledged the value of the basic genre knowledge they gained in the college—findings which support previous studies, such as Schneider and Andre (2005). The basic knowledge recognised to be useful for workplace writing preparation by Schneider and Andre's participants was in a form of analytical and research skills, collaborative writing and formal knowledge of a number of workplace genres. In the current study, however, the basic knowledge has been identified only in a form of a host of workplace genres and their conventions. Nevertheless, what these findings suggest is that the academy does play a role in preparing learners for workplace writing no matter how different these two worlds are (Artemeva, 2009; Bremner, 2012; Le Maistre & Paré, 2004; Schneider & Andre, 2005). The findings also imply that Technical Writing courses should adopt a genre awareness approach

as opposed to genre acquisition (Johns, 2015). That is, more attention should be given to raising learners' awareness regarding adapting their genre knowledge to the new rhetorical context (Moore & Morton, 2017).

Alumni's perceptions of their college preparation for workplace writing are also grounded in lack of effective corrective feedback on their writing. This is in line with Schneider and Andre's (2005) findings that reported the influence of feedback on how graduate learners perceived their preparation for workplace writing. Two main implications can be drawn from these findings. First, feedback approaches followed in Technical Writing courses should be revised, and teachers must be encouraged to provide ample form-focused feedback on their students' writing. Second, learners' awareness regarding feedback and their teachers' expectations from them regarding treatment of feedback must be raised.

Regarding RQ2, two main factors shape participant's views of the role of the workplace in preparing graduates for workplace writing: formal training on technical writing and feedback on writing. The findings revealed that no formal training was provided to college graduates on technical writing in the studied organisations though some alumni and line managers stressed the need for such courses. This implies that while the line managers highlighted the value of preparing learners for workplace writing and have always complained about the inadequacy of graduates' written communication skills, the workplace context does not seem to recognize its role in enhancing graduates' preparedness. In fact, some line managers attributed graduates' lack of preparedness to personal factors (see section 4.1.1.2.) rather than to workplace's passive role in graduates' preparedness. Likewise, fresh graduates would not seem to understand the role of the workplace in their preparedness as some of them did not take an active role in seeking training courses. This is also reflected in lack of feedback provided by the line managers on graduates' writing in the workplace.

The findings pertaining to feedback have fundamental implications for the alumni, writing teachers and the line managers. knowing how to work constructively with others is essential for learning and understanding the workplace writing practices. However, given that feedback could be a way of inducting the novices, there seems to be lack of clarity about the role of the workplace community in training the novices to perform the writing demands of the workplace. The managers may not see providing feedback on newcomers' writing as their responsibility (Freedman & Adam, 2000; Ledwell-Brown, 2000), and the novice alumni might not approach feedback as a way of inducting them in the values and expectations of the new discourse community.

Learners should be taught how they should go about acquiring the workplace specific knowledge after moving to the professional context, e.g. establishing a comfortable relationship with their mentors (Freedman & Adam, 2000), seeking out templates or soliciting comments on their writing from supervisors and colleagues (Schneider & Andre, 2005) and not simply overlook learning opportunities in the new context, as Freedman and Adam (1996) maintained that students joining the workplace "not only need to learn new genres of discourse but they also need to learn new ways to learn such genres" (p. 424). Thus, students should be trained to take an active role in their socialisation and taught socialisation techniques, such as questioning (Bremner, 2012).

6. Conclusion

This study has endeavoured to demystify the issue of preparing learners for workplace writing and concluded that division of labour should be enacted by both university and workplace to prepare graduates for workplace writing. The findings imply that the issue of preparedness should not be viewed as solely the role of the university, rather, learning to write is an ongoing process which starts in the university but continues after joining the workplace (Ledwell-Brown, 2000). Additionally, the findings also imply that the line managers should play an active role in inducting the newcomers to facilitate their socialisation into the new discourse community.

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