

## **The Viability of Six-step Method in Teaching Academic Writing in EFL Context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

EFL learners, especially from an Arabic background, face many challenges in writing, which among other reasons can be attributed to a different orthography. For this reason, many approaches and methods have been adopted in order to facilitate the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language. One such method is a six-step method, which is also called Blank Page Method (BPM). This method is used in Caledonian College of Engineering among Foundation students who have enrolled for an Academic Writing course. As this method literally consists of six steps: thinking, researching, planning, writing, editing, and presenting, students are expected to master all the steps that are considered as logical strategies that will help them to successfully respond to any academic task. Therefore, this paper concerns with the viability of the six-step method in an EFL context. Interestingly, findings, indicate that this method helps learners to acquire soft skills. On the other hand, due to the assumption implied by the method, i.e., students only need a strategy through which they can organize their work effectively, their writing skill needs much more attention as they struggle to express what they should have achieved through the method. It is in this light that a strategy focusing on the development of a writing skill that will help learners realize the logic of the six-step method is proposed.

*Keywords:* Academic writing, EFL/ESL, process writing, Six-step method, soft skills

### **INTRODUCTION**

It would perhaps be appropriate to note that learners of English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) face deep challenges, particularly the acquisition of writing skills in the target language. The Omani EFL learners in particular, though are better in speaking skills, find it more challenging to write in the target language (English), which, among other things, should be attributed to the Roman script being different from

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the Arabic one (Swan & Smith, 2008). There have been many measures aimed at fostering the acquisition of a writing skill. Although contemporary methods of teaching EFL and English as a Second Language (ESL) adopt the integration of four skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking), such as the Grammar-Translation method in the past emphasized writing and reading skills exclusively. These skills were deemed necessary in translating, initially, classic languages: Greek and Latin into the mother tongue, which resulted in inability for learners to communicate in the target language, probably because the mother tongue dominated classroom interaction (see Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1989, p. 8, cited in Gazu, 2006, pp. 44-45). In reaction to this failure, many methods and approaches have been adopted in EFL and ESL teaching such as Direct Method, Audiolingual Method, and Communicative approach (Gazu, 2006). In this light, this paper investigates the adoption of the six-step method in the teaching and learning of Academic Writing at a University College in Oman. The study looks into students' essays that were produced following the six-step method. The paper first presents the six-step method and thereafter looks into students' essays results, explaining some benefits and challenges that students faced during the application of the method. However, it is expedient to consider the EFL context that characterized the teaching and learning situation where the study was conducted.

### *The EFL Context*

The majority of students in Oman colleges are native to Oman with a few from other Gulf regions; therefore, they speak Arabic as their first language (Ntombela & Dube, 2010). In other words, Arabic is the dominant language in the community and in the classroom. Although students are generally positive about learning English, they do not find it immediately practical to speak it among peers because Arabic is their common language. English, therefore, acts for instrumental purposes, and is limited within a classroom during the English period. This poses challenges in the speed with which they acquire English language. This is even more serious in writing as they would normally first think in Arabic, translate it into English and change the script that reads from right to left in Arabic to the one that reads from left to right in English. The main reason that students learn English is to be able to cope with tertiary education, where courses are offered exclusively in English. This is unlike the ESL situation where learners need the language to communicate with each other either in class or outside the class. In the Oman EFL context, communication in English is limited to teachers who do not speak Arabic and to expatriate community outside the classroom (Ntombela & Dube, 2010). Given this reality, students therefore have inadequate chances to practice English, both orally and in writing. This has necessitated novel approaches and methods to expedite the acquisition of the target language, the example of which is discussed below.

*Rationale of the Six-step Method*

The six-step method was developed by the personnel in the Caledonian College of Engineering, Oman. It is claimed to have been successfully applied in one other Higher Education Institute in Oman. The development of this method was largely a reaction to the feedback from Industry Interaction Group (IIG) that highlighted the lack of demonstrable soft skills among graduates of the institution where the study is based (Ntombela, 2010). The lack of soft skills among undergraduate students in the institution in question was further confirmed by Sivaraman *et al.* (2012) in a research where they studied differences between direct entry students and those who went through a Foundation programme prior to the introduction of the six-step method. In this regard, soft skills should be understood to mean the same thing as the generic skills that encompass such terms as core capabilities, key skills, transferable skills, essential skills, professional and personal skills (Ali, 2012). Moreover, these generic skills are regarded to be consisting of teamwork, communication, problem-solving, analytical and critical skills, etc., according to McLean (2010, as cited in Ali, 2012).

The six-step method (literally consisting of six steps: think, research, plan, write, edit, and present) rests on the premise that students need a strategy with which they can approach any academic work. Its application generally and particularly in the Academic Writing course is based on the belief that when students approach any academic work systematically, they will be able to master all

other tasks even in real life. Thus, there is a great emphasis on preparation, which occurs mainly during the thinking stage; in fact, the principal aim of the course that follows this six-step method is to have students think for themselves (Walker, 2009). This is because it is believed that many students fail by virtue of failing to think. The six-step method is therefore not much regarded as a teaching strategy, but a learning strategy; needless to say that students have to be taught and exposed to that strategy prior to applying it. In other words, since the six-step approach is only used in teaching English language modules at Foundation level in the institution where the study is based, a need has been identified to train other staff members who are teaching other modules so that they can use the same method (Caledonian College of Engineering, 2010). Thus, the success in using the six-step method relies on repeated exposure and practice (Caledonian College of Engineering, 2010). In fact, by the time students enrol for an Academic Writing course in Foundation 2, they would have been exposed to the six-step approach from Foundation 1. For instance, Ntombela (2010) conducted a similar study where the six-step method was used in teaching Project component offered at Foundation 1 level at the same institution.

In order to locate the six-step method within the approaches that are generally adopted when teaching writing, it is vital to note that writing approaches can be categorized into four schools: (1) product oriented or form-focused approach; (2) the reader focused approach; (3) the content-

focused approach; and (4) writer-focused or process writing approach (Canagarajah, 1999). For the purposes of this study, the form-focused and process writing approaches were taken into consideration. Whilst the form-focused approach, on the one hand, was characterized by activities such as sentence-combining activities and model essays; on the other hand, the writer-focused approach comprised of exercises such as generating ideas, organization, revision, etc. (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 148). However, both the approaches have their own criticisms. One of the criticisms of the process writing approach is that it tends to focus more on 'how' at the expense of the 'what' of writing (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 151). Similarly, the form-focused writing reduces writing into mere acquisition of the correct grammatical forms that through teachers' vigorous error correction may stifle "students' different rhetorical traditions" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 150). It must be emphasized that these are mere approaches adopted when teaching writing, i.e. students would still be expected to produce a piece of writing to be graded regardless of which method of teaching was adopted. For example, Hedge (1988), following a process writing approach, contends that when teachers look into students' writing, they need to ask questions such as "Is this a good piece of writing? What makes a good piece of writing? What skills do students demonstrate in their written work?" (p. 145). Therefore, the principal focus of this study was to analyse the impact of the six-step method as evidenced in

the analysed students' essays that were produced following the same method, and not necessarily looking at the development of students' essays throughout the process of writing which would warrant a different study on its own. That being said, it is imperative in the present study to ground students' academic writing essays that were analysed to the six-step method that falls within the ambit of one of the writing approaches discussed above.

The six-step method is thus located within the approaches to writing that pay attention to the process of writing, whereby students go through various stages such as pre-writing, editing, redrafting, and finally 'publishing' (Harmer, 2006, p. 257). White and Arndt (1991), for instance, advocate six processes that students go through during the act of writing - "generating, focusing, structuring, drafting, evaluating, and reviewing" (p. 6). Furthermore, it should be noted that this approach, which is also writer-focused - employing such pedagogical strategies as brainstorming, planning, and revising - has its roots in First Language pedagogy, which poses challenges and difficulties in its application and success in ESL/EFL context (Canagarajah, 1999). Notwithstanding, Harmer (2006) and White and Arndt (1991) notably agree that the process of writing is more complicated and may not sequentially follow the steps suggested. In fact, the main difference between the six-step method and the process writing model suggested by White and Arndt (1991) is that whilst these writers acknowledge the cyclical nature of the

process of writing, the six-step method is linear and expects students to apply it in the same sequence for it to succeed.

### *The Six-step Method*

As mentioned earlier, this method literally consists of six steps, namely, think, research, plan, write, edit, and present that students employ in writing a 1500 word essay. Another term for this method is Blank Page Method (BPM), which denotes the blank page that students begin with that must ultimately be filled with, in this case 1500 words – hence, the terms six-step method and BPM are interchangeably used to mean one and the same thing. The following discussion looks into each step and explains what students do in each.

### *Thinking*

Thinking is considered as an important stage as students only begin with a topic, which they must brainstorm. They are given a thinking strategy, which mainly teaches them how to break down a question into manageable elements. There are, in fact, six parts of the thinking strategy, and these are understanding the question where students must make sure unfamiliar words are checked using a dictionary; breaking down the question where students identify the two parts of a discursive essay being counter-argument and argument; thinking freely where students, using a spider diagram, brainstorm the ideas they consider relevant to the topic; limiting the scope where students consider the angle of focus by deleting elements they consider either too

wide or too narrow for their essay; grouping ideas under headings, where students use the ideas from the spider diagram to group them into introduction, counter-argument, argument and conclusion; and writing the summary of the answer where students re-consider the question and summarise the information they have gathered so far in, say four sentences, in which ideally the four would consist of introduction, counter-argument, argument, and conclusion (Walker, 2009). It should be mentioned that the Academic Writing course offered in the college where the research was carried out emphasized on the discursive type of essay as opposed to the descriptive one.

### *Researching*

The main questions answered in the researching stage are why, where, and how students are to look for information. By going through reasons why they should look for information, the importance of substantiating information is pronounced – showing them that even their own ideas (gathered during a brainstorming session) are likely to be supported or refuted by other writers. Students further learn about different resources that range from workshops, library, Internet, newspapers to journals, general public, conferences, and site visits that will help them gather information. The emphasis is made to the fact that a “resource can be a person as well as a place” (Walker, 2009, p. 3). More emphasis in this stage is also put on how students could use books in the library to find information. Different reading strategies such as skimming,

scanning, scrutinizing and reading for gist are discussed so that students would apply the appropriate reading strategy for the kind of information they are looking for. For example, they will need to skim the inner cover of a book to get publication details, and to browse the outer cover, i.e. front and back of the book for information such as why the book was written, etc. This stage includes how students could make notes once they have located the desired information and how they could record the source of the information, which is necessary in avoiding plagiarizing essays (Walker, 2009).

### *Planning*

The planning stage follows after students have gathered information from all the sources during the researching stage and they now need to organize it, i.e. how they will put it in writing. Therefore, this section details the need for a plan in order to avoid situations where later on the students realize that the information gathered during the research stage is either one sided or simply not enough. Therefore, this stage deals with the writing structure where different parts of an essay, such as title, introduction, counter-argument, argument, and conclusion, are identified. It is important that they identify these parts because there are signal words and appropriate punctuation associated with each part that they must use in order to maintain the academic flow of writing. Students are taught two kinds of plans - broad plan and detailed plan. The former one, on the one hand, requires students to

write in point form the information under the headings: title, introduction, counter-argument, argument, and conclusion; on the other hand, the latter expects them to incorporate all the information they have gathered during the research stage. This information must correctly appear under the appropriate heading, where each piece of information belongs, say introduction, counter-argument, etc. In addition to planning how they will write the information, they also plan the schedule that guides them in how they will complete all the assignments that are building up to the final essay, that is, they timetable all the tasks, complete with dates, days and timings (Walker, 2009).

### *Writing*

The next stage in the BPM is writing where students write the first draft of the final essay. Since the emphasis is on writing a discursive essay, students are guided in finding the right tone befitting the discursive type of writing. Also, because the institution where the study was conducted is an engineering one, students are expected to adopt a tone reminiscent of a scientific writing. This is why, among other things, the use of passive voice that promotes writing objectively is revised so that students could adopt it in their first draft. Along with the use of the third person, passive voice shifts focus from the 'actor' to the 'action'. In other words, students are encouraged to adopt a scientific writing style, as stated by Allen and Widdowson (1979), "the impersonal passive is very common in



scientific writing” (p. 17). The other element that is considered in this section is the effectiveness in communicating ideas which includes appropriate vocabulary and straightforward language, i.e. avoiding unnecessary repetition and redundancy. Due to the fact that most of the preparations would have been carried out during the three preceding stages, students are expected not to find it too daunting to write the first draft (Walker, 2009). Once they complete the first drafts, they must proceed to the next stage.

### *Editing*

During the editing stage, students correct their first drafts, but most importantly, they must attend to referencing. As it is normal that students will feel that the first drafts have everything they wanted to write and therefore do not need further editing, it is important at this stage that they are reminded of the reasons to edit, chief among which, are accuracy, meaning, length, relevance and references. They are not only given reasons for editing but strategies on how to edit. The key is that they should not rely on someone else for editing, although it should be utilized after they have done own editing. As mentioned, they are expected to correctly source all the information gathered from elsewhere so that they are not caught up in plagiarism. During this stage, therefore, students are given ways on how to do in-text referencing and bibliographic entries (Walker, 2009). Students should be aware that success on their final drafts relies on how careful they have attended to editing first drafts, which if done meticulously,

should make them ready for the next and final step, i.e., once a student has edited his or her first draft, he/she should be ready to present the final draft.

### *Presentation*

The main concern in the presentation stage is the layout of the essay. As per the remit, all elements must be laid out with appropriate font types, sizes, alignment and justification. That is, essays must retain the visual appeal. Moreover, since at this stage students are working on the final draft, they must see to it that all the elements picked up during the editing stage are attended to accurately. As students are expected to conduct an ‘oral defence’ for their final essay, they are given tips on how to make their essays presentable before the audience; however, this constitutes another element of the essay - it employs a BPM strategy on its own. In other words, students must use the BPM strategy to come up with an oral presentation of their essays.

The six steps presented above were the strategy used in delivering Academic Writing course for Foundation students in Caledonian College of Engineering. The next section discusses the findings from the students’ essays which were produced following the six-step method.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings reported in this section are presented according to each stage of the BPM. A total of 32 students’ assignments from full-time and part-time candidates were sampled. These assignments were

analysed according to the extent at which each BPM stage had been achieved. Each stage had specific items that students must achieve in the final essay; some stages had more items to be attended to than others and thus the weightage differed at each stage. Table 1 summarises the distribution of scores that students attained for each BPM step in their final essays. Each step shows the maximum points that a student could get down to the minimum, versus the number of students who got a particular score.

### *Thinking*

As mentioned, in this stage students used the thinking strategy, which they utilized in brainstorming for their final essays. In the completed essays the thinking stage would be demonstrated firstly by whether the title is eye-catching and appropriate. The second part would be whether a student managed to answer the question posed by the title. The last part would be whether a student's

essay has plenty of ideas and whether those ideas are interesting. These points carry a weightage of six marks in total. The above table shows that out of 32 students only one got 6 marks; four students got 5 marks; 11 students got 4 marks; 13 students got 3 marks; three students got 2 marks; and there were no students that got either 1 mark or zero.

### *Researching*

During the researching stage, students had to find information that would substantiate ideas generated during the thinking stage. Therefore, they needed to use resources such as the library and the internet where they would access books, journal and internet articles. This stage would be demonstrated in the completed essays firstly by whether they have made the most of their resources; secondly, whether they managed to exemplify meaningfully the major parts of the essay; and lastly, whether their

TABLE 1  
Students' essays marks distribution

BPM	Marks & Distribution										
Thinking	Marks	6	5	4	3	2	1	0			
	Distribution	1	4	11	13	3	0	0			
Research	Marks	6	5	4	3	2	1	0			
	Distribution	1	6	3	7	9	3	0			
Planning	Marks	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	
	Distribution	2	3	9	7	8	2	1	0	0	
Writing	Marks	4	3	2	1	0					
	Distribution	1	7	8	11	5					
Editing	Marks	3	2	1	0						
	Distribution	1	10	13	8						
Presentation	Marks	3	2	1	0						
	Distribution	2	10	16	4						



opinions are backed up with reasons and own experiences. Similarly, this category carries six marks in total. The table above indicates that only one student got 6 marks; six students scored 5 marks; three had 4 marks; seven got 3 marks; nine got 2 marks; three got 1 mark; and the other three without any mark.

### *Planning*

Once the information from research is collected, it needs to be categorized accordingly. It is during the planning stage that students organize the information, in which success in the completed essay is evidenced by whether there is a clear structure; whether the essay shows any sense of argument with points firstly against and then for the student's opinion; whether the student's opinion is obvious; and whether the points are organized into meaningful paragraphs. Unlike the previous categories, this stage carries 8 marks. The table above demonstrates that out of 32 students, only two scored 8 marks; three had 7 marks; nine obtained 6 marks; seven got 5 marks; eight got 4 marks; two got three marks; one student got 2 marks; and no student scored either 1 or zero.

### *Writing*

The writing stage means bringing together the information according to the structure envisaged in the plan. Most importantly, it is the stage at which students bring the language elements that will make the type of writing fit the scientific one. This will be demonstrated in the completed essays by

whether the language is clear without the reader having to work at understanding the meaning; whether the writer has a 'voice', i.e. whether a student managed to express information from other sources in their own words. The other aspect is whether the student attended to grammar expected in the type of essay they are writing and whether they had satisfactorily expanded the vocabulary. This stage carries a weightage of 4 marks in total. As indicated in the table above, out of 32 students, only one got 4 marks; seven got 3 marks; eight got 2 marks; eleven got 1 mark; and five students were without any mark.

### *Editing*

Prior to submitting the final essays, the students were expected to submit their first drafts where mistakes and errors were pointed out so that they could work on them before submitting the final essays. Whether students had managed to attend to editing issues in their final essays, it would be shown by whether they had made sufficient attempts to correct the mistakes and errors, be they grammatical or spelling. The other aspect was whether they had used a range of punctuation marks; and most importantly whether their essays had been properly referenced. This category carries the weightage of three marks in total. The results in the table above show that out of 32 students, only one scored 3 marks; ten had 2 marks; thirteen obtained 1 mark; and eight students were without any mark for this section.

*Presentation*

Before a student submits an essay, it is important that the layout of the essay is according to the expected prescribed format. The conventions of writing an academic work need to be meticulously followed. The rate of success in doing that is evidenced in the completed essay by whether the essay meets the required length, i.e. whether the bibliographic entries are correct and whether the whole essay looks good or with appropriate margins and paragraph breaks. Like the previous category, this stage also carries maximum three marks. The results tabulated in the above table show that out of 32 students, two got three marks; ten had 2 marks; sixteen scored 1 mark; and four students got no mark.

**INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

The students' assignments indicated that they did better in the thinking stage, with most students scoring 50 % and above in this category. This could be attributed to the thinking strategy that enabled them to break down the question, allowing them to generate ideas using a spider diagram. Since this is the initial stage, the students could come up with as many ideas as possible without, for instance, having to worry about whether there is any support for those ideas. This is important as it shows them that anyone can think, and in fact, they have already had many ideas relating to whatever topic they come across. The thinking strategy particularly allows them to think about what they are brainstorming, i.e.

even though they may have multitudinous ideas, they will have to realize sooner that some are not worth pursuing. Therefore, they learn to think critically, which is an important soft skill, arguably transferable to other areas of study.

On the other hand, the findings indicate that although just above 50% students scored 50% and above in the researching category, little less than 50% students scored below 50%; more disturbingly is the fact that the score attained by most students as compared to other scores is 2 out of 6. This tells us that many students' essays were poorly researched. This is a skill that is surely transferable to other areas of study and in academic writing, it is important in supporting arguments for or against the author's opinion. Students might have struggled with this stage because it required that they found information matching with the brainstormed ideas. In fact, it can be argued that the depth of each student's essay depends on how much research there is.

Nonetheless, students seem to have done quite better in the planning stage. There were fewer students who scored below 50%, with the highest number of students obtaining 6 marks out of 8. Planning is an important skill in any area of study, which in the Academic Writing course in this study is realized by the structure of a discursive essay (introduction, counter-argument, argument, and conclusion). All that students needed to do was to adhere to that structure and make sure that there is no mixing of argument points with those belonging to counter-argument or any

other sub-section. Therefore, planning in this case meant that students were dealing with information they already had at hand; slotting it into appropriate sections, which differed from the previous sections that were actually concerned with generating information.

However, the stage at which all preparation culminates proved somehow challenging for students as half the total number scored below 50%. In fact, the score that was received by most students as compared to other scores is 1 out of 4. If we are to go by the axiom that good preparation results in successful writing, then this situation does not support it. It seems that students lacked the language to express what they had achieved in the preparation stages. In fact, they struggled to attain a

'voice' in communicating their arguments. In order to demonstrate the extent at which students failed the writing part, we shall look at a sample of some paragraphs taken from some essays that scored 3, 2, 1 and zero respectively in the writing category.

Although there are obvious errors in the above extract in Fig.1, the message that the student is conveying can be understood. Perhaps, this student's drawback, other than grammatical incorrectness, is the limited range of vocabulary.

Whilst this paragraph poses itself as an example of a perfect one in Fig.2, it appears that it has been lifted verbatim, with no evidence of paraphrasing. Therefore, it lacks 'voice' and in fact does not support the claim that the student made prior to this paragraph that nuclear power plant is a clean

3

People should use antivirus to keep their computer away from trouble. Do not put your laptop in your lap without any protector because its damage for the health and it is also send electrical charges that affect to the human. Another thing put a protector to the monitor to keep your eyes safe and to do not lose your eyes. They should do or but antivirus for computer to be save from troubles.

Fig.1: Extract from an essay that scored 3 in the writing element

2

Some of the most serious impacts linked to the generation of electricity on land can also be attributed to nuclear plants. Whereas the amount of solid wastes generated at nuclear plants is relatively small, these radioactive wastes pose health risks that exceed that of any other source of electricity. It is quite possible that these radioactive wastes will be stored for a century or more at existing nuclear plant sites, a prospect that may preclude any re-uses of these contaminated lands. (Anon. 2011)

Fig.2: Extract from an essay that scored 2 in the writing element

electricity source. It looks like a classic case where a student came across information that is related to the topic and simply used it without considering its relevance.

The paragraph in Fig.3 shows a range of inaccuracies. The student seemingly did not successfully attend to editing prior to submitting, as there are incorrect punctuation and inaccurate sentence breaks. The first point in the topic sentence is immediately abandoned and another one unrelated to it is introduced and developed. It seems that the student copied information elsewhere related to the topic but failed to use it successfully in support of argument raised.

The paragraph in Fig.4 is a classic example of copy and paste without acknowledging the source from where the material has been copied. This was detected through Turnitin – a plagiarism detecting software used in the institution where the study was conducted which when the paragraph was uploaded received a 94% plagiarism score. Therefore, the student does not have his own ‘voice’. This is the

usual way out that students opt for when they find the writing task daunting or when they lack the necessary language to express what they should. However, the preparatory steps in thinking, researching and planning are meant to alleviate this problem which unfortunately persists. Part of the reason for that, as noted above, could be because of low linguistic proficiency that makes it difficult for students to accurately present what they have brainstormed, researched and planned.

Furthermore, the results show that majority of the students scored below 50% in the editing stage. This should not be too surprising as the quality of writing depends on the attention paid to it prior to submission. In fact, the underpinning theory in process writing, according to Maley in Hedge (1988), is that good writers go through processes such as “jotting down ideas..., organizing them, writing first drafts and revising” (p. 3) them which ultimately make the finished writing look as good as it could be. It should therefore be expected that students who have gone through similar processes should produce a somewhat good

1  
Fossil fuels also cause air, water and soil pollution, and produce greenhouse gases that contribute to globalwarmingAlso, the initial cost is quite high. Most of solar cells require large areas of land to achieve the average efficiency. Other solar techniques are passive. For example; big windows placed on the sunny side of a building allow sunlight to heat absorbent materials on the floor and walls. These surfaces then release the heat at night to keep the building warm. Similarly, absorbent plates on a roof can heat liquid in tubes that supply a house with hot water.

Fig.3: Extract from an essay that scored 1 in the writing element

piece of writing. Nonetheless, it should be reiterated that this approach has its roots in the teaching of mother tongue which some writers and researchers such as Hedge (1988) started applying it to the EFL/ESL context. Perhaps such a move was influenced by Krashen (1984) who prior to that had theorized that the processes in first and second language writing are similar; suggesting that the only challenge faced by writers in both contexts is the insufficient acquisition of the English language writing code. As it is, most students did not wholly attend to editing issues. In fact, there was an increase of students scoring zero. Also, in comparison to other scores in this category, most students scored 1 out of 3. One logical explanation to that is that if students found it hard to master the writing part, they would be at pains to edit the writing. It is crucial to note that editing these essays was based on the first drafts teacher's feedback. The

example below indicates how much editing a student failed to address

In this extract (see Fig.5), the student committed grammatical errors, did not appropriately attend to punctuation and failed to reference the source of information. Similarly, the students did badly in presenting their essays, with more than 60% scoring below 50%. Just like in writing and editing, most students scored 1 out of 3. The common problems in this category include inappropriate bibliographic entries, failure to fulfil length requirement and uneven paragraph breaks. Below is an example of an inappropriate bibliographic entry that many students adopted.

Such mistakes and errors in Fig.6 were prevalent despite input sessions that addressed them. That is, students were *inter alia* apprised with the appropriate methods of acknowledging materials according to the conventions adopted by the college

0

First, the engineering before the scientific revolution the forerunners of engineers, practical artists and craftsman, proceeded mainly by trial and error. Yet tinkering combined with imagination produced many marvelous devices. Many ancient monuments cannot fail to incite admiration. The admiration is embodied in the name "engineer" itself. It originated in the eleventh century from the Latin inseminator, meaning one with ingenious, the ingenious one. The name, used for builders of ingenious fortifications or makers of ingenious devices, was closely related to the notion of ingenuity, which was captured in the old meaning of "engine" until the word was taken over by steam engines and it is like. Leonardo da Vinci bore the official title of Ingegnere General. His notebooks reveal that some Renaissance engineers began to ask systematically what works and why.

Fig.4: Extract from an essay that scored 0 in the writing element

Medical field is more benefit that engineering in our life , it can make our life possible and save humanity from extinction , also it is very important in the communal life and it make our humanity continuation long time on this surface.. It encompasses a variety of health care practices evolved to maintain and restore health by the prevention and treatment of illness.

Fig.5: Extract indicating editing issues

Internet	2010	Available at <a href="http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%D9%83D8%AAD8%AA%D8AD%">http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=%D9%83D8%AAD8%AA%D8AD%</a> Access 2011
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Fig.6: Extract showing inappropriate bibliographic entry

where the study was conducted. The six-step method was also adopted to alleviate such problems, but since they persisted, there is a need to reconsider its application in the context of the type of students engaged and their linguistic background.

## CONCLUSION

The BPM in this study proves to have many benefits for students. In specific, it allows them to systematically approach their academic work which helps them gain necessary soft skills such as critical thinking, research skills, and planning (including time management). These skills that are undoubtedly useful in the Academic Writing course are immediately transferable to other areas of study. In fact, these findings bear similarities with those reported by Ntombela (2010) in a study regarding the offering of a Project course in Foundation 1 (in the same institution) following the six-step method, where the acquisition of soft skills such as team-work, time-management

and critical thinking were reported to have been promoted by the method.

However, the six-step method does not seem to be very successful in the Academic Writing course in enhancing proficiency in writing. Although students appear to convincingly go through all the six steps in planning, executing and polishing up their essays, there is not much progress made in the actual writing, which is crucial in expressing what they have prepared. Students have a language barrier that needs to be dealt with explicitly. The six-step method seems viable in cases where students have already acquired a working command of the target language. Perhaps the fact that the six-step method emphasizes the process that students go through as they produce academic work, there is not enough attention devoted to the product and that does not help them improve linguistically.

In the light of the conclusion, it is appropriate to suggest a balance between process and product oriented approaches, given the fact that in EFL context there is



less exposure to the target language which limits acquisition of the target language. Hedge (1988, p. 8), for example, suggests that teachers could come up with check lists that show the forms and functions of written texts and demonstrate to students how the features of these different texts vary from each other. Teachers would then be able to focus students on one or on the number of skills that would give them practices to produce a similar written text (Hedge, 1988, p. 9). The adopted approach or method should acknowledge students' limitations in writing skill and then works towards reducing those limitations whilst gradually exposing students to the process they must go through when attempting an academic piece of writing.

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