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An Investigation of Writing Errors Made by Saudi EFL Learners

Rawan Ahmed Alsoweed
Department of English, College of Education, Majmaah University
Al-Majmaah, 11952, Saudi Arabia
Email: rawan.alsoweed@gmail.com

Abeer Shujaa Alharbi
Department of English, College of Education, Majmaah University
Al-Majmaah,11952, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: as.alharbi@mu.edu.sa

Fahad Abdulaziz Alqusumi
Department of Strategic Planning and Transformation, Qassim University Medical City
Burydah 52571 Saudi Arabia
Email: fahad.alqusumi@gmail.com,

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Abstract

Grammatical errors remain a persistent obstacle for English language learners, often impeding their progress and causing frustration. Addressing these recurring issues requires a systematic understanding of their root causes, especially within specific linguistic contexts. This study investigates the grammatical errors made by Saudi learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) enrolled in the preparatory year program. Drawing on students' written compositions, the analysis aims to deepen learners' understanding of English while acknowledging that errors are a natural part of language acquisition. Developing accurate writing skills in English remains a challenge, particularly in the use of grammar and punctuation, both of which are critical for conveying clear and effective meaning. Using Byrd and Benson's (1994) comprehensive error taxonomy alongside Ellis's (1997) error analysis framework, the study categorizes the observed errors into three main types: most serious errors, intermediate errors, and punctuation and mechanical problems. The findings reveal widespread and repeated patterns of deviation, suggesting that many students struggle with specific grammatical rules due to insufficient comprehension or incomplete learning. Contributing factors such as omission, addition, substitution, carelessness, and first language (L1) interference are identified as key reasons behind these challenges. The influence of Arabic as the learners' native language is found to be particularly significant, often leading to structural and syntactical transfer that manifests in common grammatical and punctuation mistakes.

Keywords: Error analysis, error taxonomy, grammatical errors, linguistic challenges, L1 interference, Saudi English as a foreign language students, second language acquisition, writing
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Introduction

Mastering writing skills remains one of the most demanding tasks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly among Saudi students enrolled in university preparatory programs. Despite years of English study, these learners frequently commit errors in grammar, punctuation, and capitalization, which hinder the development of effective written communication. Writing demands not only linguistic competence but also the ability to organize and articulate ideas clearly—a challenge intensified when learners' first language (L1) differs significantly from the target language. As noted by Greenbaum and Nelson (2009), grammar involves a set of rules for constructing meaningful expressions, yet many EFL learners struggle to apply these rules accurately. Hermini (2014) emphasizes that while writing instruction helps develop grammar and vocabulary, many students still exhibit persistent inaccuracies in syntax and structure.

Saudi universities, offer preparatory year programs across various tracks—Medical, Nursing, and Business—with curricula tailored to students' language proficiency levels. Despite this instructional support, Saudi learners continue to face difficulties, especially in written compositions. Common issues include misuse of verb tenses, articles, prepositions, word order, punctuation, and capitalization. Moreover, writing errors are not random but frequently influenced by learners' native language. According to Ellis (1997, 2008), language learners often rely on L1 structures when acquiring a second language, leading to interference in various linguistic areas such as grammar and syntax.

Errors in language learning should not be viewed merely as shortcomings. Corder (1967) and James (1998) argue that they offer valuable insights into the learner's developmental process and can help educators identify learning gaps. Writing errors, in this context, become diagnostic tools for understanding how students internalize and apply English language rules. According to Moqimipour and Shahrokhi (2015), many mistakes stem from inadequate knowledge of language structures, which results in incorrect expressions that hinder comprehension. Effective teaching thus requires a systematic approach to identifying, classifying, and addressing these errors.

Error Analysis provides a structured method for uncovering the root causes of learners' mistakes. Several models exist, including Corder's (1967) steps for identifying and explaining errors, Ellis's (1997) four-stage process, and Gass and Selinker's (1992) six-step model. Byrd and Benson's (1994) taxonomy, which categorizes errors into three areas—most serious, intermediate, and punctuation/mechanics—offers a practical framework for instructional analysis and was adopted in this study. These approaches reveal that common causes of writing errors include omission, addition, substitution, carelessness, and L1 interference (Ellis, 2010; Hasyim, 2002).

This study aims to identify the most frequent grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors made by Saudi EFL students, explore the underlying causes of these mistakes—including the influence of the Arabic language—and offer practical recommendations for improving students' writing proficiency through targeted instructional strategies. This study seeks to answer two key research questions: What are the most common grammatical, punctuation, and capitalization errors made by Saudi EFL learners in preparatory year programs, and to what extent does the influence of Arabic as a L1 contribute to these recurring writing errors?

Literature Review

The study of writing errors among Arab learners of EFL, particularly Saudi students, has attracted growing attention in applied linguistics due to the persistent challenges learners face in mastering English grammar and mechanics. Writing, as a productive skill, often reveals deep-

seated difficulties that are not always visible in receptive skills. Numerous studies have emphasized that the difficulties EFL learners encounter in writing are often rooted in L1 interference, insufficient knowledge of English grammatical structures, or pedagogical limitations in EFL instruction. One major theme across the literature is the role of L1 interference in causing grammatical and mechanical errors. Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) investigated the writing of 266 Jordanian university students through translation-based assessments and found a high frequency of grammatical errors caused by direct translation from Arabic to English (p. 364). This study aligns with Ridha (2012), who analyzed the errors of 80 Iraqi university students and categorized them into grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanical, and word order errors (p. 31). These findings underscore the significance of interlanguage theory, where learners construct a transitional linguistic system influenced by their L1.

The Saudi context further supports these findings. Alsahafi (2017) conducted a study involving 70 Saudi female students and identified orthographic, lexical, and grammatical errors (p. 127). Among the orthographic errors, substitution was most frequent, while lexical errors often stemmed from literal translation and word confusion. Smith (2001) provided a broader perspective on common grammatical errors made by Arabic-speaking EFL students, noting that challenges often arose with consonant clusters, negation, modal verbs, word order, and article use. Smith (2001) particularly emphasized the omission of the indefinite article a, a recurring issue across different types of nouns.

Alhamadi (2015) further emphasized that many of the errors Arab learners made were rooted in intralingual causes rather than interlingual ones. Abdul Rahman (2021) offered insights from a different angle by surveying 100 English language instructors across Saudi universities. The majority of respondents identified verb tense, article use, and preposition errors as the most problematic areas for students. Similarly, Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) applied Corder's (1967) and James's (1998) error analysis frameworks to Iraqi pre-university students' writing. Their results highlighted frequent omissions, substitutions, and additions—particularly involving articles and verb tenses—and suggested that interlanguage development was the main source of these errors.

AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) investigated the writing of 80 Saudi EFL students and classified 1580 errors, of which 42.15% occurred at the sentence level (p. 178). The most common errors included grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization issues. The frequency and diversity of these mistakes revealed a lack of familiarity with standard written English conventions. Raba (2012) also examined punctuation errors among TEFL students and found that misuse of periods and commas was highly prevalent. For example, the Arabic comma is visually different and used differently than the English comma. Macarthur (1999) pointed out that transcription skills, including accurate punctuation and spelling, remain a challenge even for advanced learners, and that these aspects should be explicitly taught rather than assumed. Siddiqui (2015) conducted a focused study on capitalization errors among Saudi female students and found high frequencies of incorrect use.

Together, these studies provide a comprehensive picture of the error landscape for Arab EFL learners. The evidence consistently shows that both interlingual (L1 interference) and intralingual (learning-related) factors contribute to the errors found in students' writing. While grammatical errors—especially those involving verbs, articles, and sentence structure—are the most discussed in the literature, mechanical issues such as punctuation, spelling, and capitalization are also widespread and equally detrimental to effective communication. This study contributes to the existing body of research by exploring the writing errors of Saudi EFL learners. By employing

Byrd and Benson's (1994) taxonomy and Ellis's (1997) error analysis model, the study aims to classify the types of errors, investigate their sources, and offer pedagogical recommendations for grammar and writing instruction.

Methodology

This study investigates the most frequent grammatical errors made by undergraduate students enrolled in the preparatory year program in Al-Bukayriyah, Qassim, Saudi Arabia. The key objective is to identify, describe, and analyze the most commonly occurring grammatical errors in students' written English compositions and explore the underlying causes of these errors within the context of EFL instruction. To achieve this, the study employed Byrd and Benson's (1994) twelve-type error taxonomy as the primary analytical framework. These errors were grouped into three main categories: major grammatical errors, intermediate-level errors, and errors related to punctuation and mechanics. Due to the notable recurrence of prepositional errors, an additional subcategory under intermediate errors was introduced. For the analysis procedure, Ellis's (1997) four-step model of error analysis—comprising identification, description, explanation, and evaluation—was applied. A qualitative descriptive research design was chosen for this investigation. The analysis focused on understanding the specific types of errors and their frequency, and deriving pedagogical insights that can inform instructional strategies. The study was conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year and relied on authentic writing samples collected from regular coursework and examinations.

The participant pool originally included 80 students; however, only the writing samples of 56 undergraduate students were selected for final analysis, as only those who made grammatical errors were included in the qualitative assessment. These 56 participants were enrolled in Medical, Nursing, and Business programs. The selected sample consisted exclusively of female students aged between 18 and 22. Most of them had either recently graduated from Saudi high schools or completed a preparatory year before entering their respective tracks. The students' proficiency levels ranged from lower-intermediate to intermediate. They were taught by three different EFL instructors, each responsible for delivering instruction in their designated academic tracks. The writing tasks varied depending on course objectives and skill levels, offering a diverse data set across the three disciplines.

Data collection encompassed a variety of writing samples derived from different tasks, including pieces composed in class as assignments and those generated during the midterm examination. As indicated below, in table 1, each academic track submitted two writing samples representing the initiation of the course (task 1), the midpoint (midterm task) were students had an option of two tasks. The differentiation in tasks aimed to discern patterns and variations in error occurrence. Grammatical sentence errors were analyzed per conventional grammatical rules, utilizing the framework outlined by Byrd and Benson (1994), and the error analysis procedure delineated by Ellis (1997); the collected data underwent identification, description, explanation, and evaluation stages. Qualitative data analysis followed the three-step process of data reduction, data display, and verification of conclusions, as proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014). The errors were identified and calculated by the three instructors, then the types of errors were systematically categorized into omission, addition, substitution, carelessness, and L1 interference, with the classification of errors analyzed by instructors providing insights into the causal factors of the classification of errors.

Table 1. *A description of data collection from the tasks*

Track	Midterm Task	Classroom Task 1
Nursing	Write a paragraph about how you can study or describe a vacation trip	Write a paragraph about how you study
Medical	Write a descriptive paragraph: describe a painting or a famous person from the last hundred years	Write a letter inviting a friend
Business	Write an email for a job opening	Recommend an employee to join your team

Results

Grammatical Error Classification based on Byrd and Benson (1994)

A detailed analysis of the written compositions from 56 Saudi undergraduate students revealed three primary categories of grammatical errors: Serious Errors, Immediate Errors, and Punctuation and Mechanics Problems, as adapted from Byrd and Benson's (1994) classification. The study underscored that while all students exhibited grammatical mistakes, there were notable differences in the frequency and type of errors across the sampled cohorts.

The first category, Serious Errors, includes issues such as incorrect verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement failures, and sentence boundary problems, including run-ons, comma splices, and sentence fragments. For instance, in the sentence "My mother wanting me study in university," the verb form is erroneous due to incorrect tense and missing infinitive construction. Similarly, agreement issues appear in sentences like "She study every day," where the verb does not align with the singular subject. Run-on sentences such as "I want to take my IELTS exam I want to score of 5" indicate an absence of proper punctuation, while comma splices, exemplified by "I will plan a business event, the company is big, they want to invite many guests," further reflect sentence boundary confusion. Additionally, sentence fragments like "I student studying nursing" lack auxiliary verbs necessary to form a complete sentence.

The second category, Immediate Errors, encompasses a broader array of grammatical issues, including incorrect word order, misuse of word forms, article omissions, prepositional errors, and violations of parallel structure. A representative example is the sentence "My project business is solve problem company American," which illustrates disordered word placement leading to incoherence. Errors in word forms also surface in expressions like "I like reading about helping sick person, I like curing patient," where the plural forms "people" and "patients" are required. Article misuse appears frequently, as in "I am student", which omits the necessary indefinite article "a." Prepositional confusion, often influenced by first-language interference, is reflected in "The girl standing on the picture, is standing on the river," where the prepositions "in" and "on" are misapplied. Problems with parallelism are also evident, as seen in "I love study Nurse and helped patients," which requires consistency in verb forms, i.e., "studying and helping."

The third and final category pertains to Punctuation and Mechanics Problems, which includes errors in punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. The absence of proper punctuation is shown in sentences such as "I want to be a doctor I want to specialize in cardiology," where the lack of full stops undermines sentence clarity. Improper capitalization appears in "a nurse has 3 Job Responsibilities," violating sentence-initial and proper noun conventions. Spelling errors are rampant and include both vowel and consonant inaccuracies, as in "The desrptive picture has a beautful bakgrond with a mother and her childrn," where the words "descriptive," "beautiful," "background," and "children" are all misspelled.

Table 2 provides a taxonomy of all identified errors, including descriptive explanations and authentic examples from the student writing samples.

Table 2. *Grammatical errors classification (Bryd & Benson, 1994)*

Group of Errors	Error Types	Description	Examples	Error Explanation
Serious errors	**1.** Verbs	Making errors in verb tense usage or constructing passive sentences inappropriately.	My mother wanting me study in university.	Two errors, verb tense and infinitive from.
	2. Agreement	Making an incorrect form of the subject or the verb and pronoun usage.	-She study every day. -The IT companies didn't like the offer, it was expensive.	The subject she is singular. Correction: the verb: study, ends with s, studies.
	3.Run-on sentence	Combining two or more sentences without using the proper punctuation.	I want to take my IELTS exam I want to score of 5	Two clauses are combined in one sentence without any punctuation.
	4. Comma Splice	A comma is used to join two or more complete sentences incorrectly.	I will plan a business event, the company is big, they want to invite many guests.	The sentence should be separated by a full stop not a comma.
	5. Fragment	Writing a fragment (run-on sentence) instead of a complete one.	I student studying nursing.	In this example, there should be a verb- am in this sentence.
Immediate errors	**6.** Word order	Arranging a sentence's order in incorrect positions, including adjectives.	My project business is solve problem company American. Student has to hard study.	Words are ordered in a wrong way and resulting in other errors. Correction: My business project is to solve the problems for the American company.
	7. Word from	Misusing a word's form, including its tenses or single and plural forms.	I like reading about helping sick person, I like curing patient.	Word from should be plural: people, patients.
	8. Article	Misusing the incorrect article to convey the idea or omitting an article that is necessary to convey the meaning.	I am student.	The sentence requires a, the indefinite article.
	9. Prepositions	Misusing prepositions to convey movement, location, simple preposition and in phrases.	The girl standing on the picture, is standing on the river.	The preposition is misused, correction: in, on.
	10. Parallelism	Composing/writing words in different grammatical forms.	I love study Nurse and helped patients.	Its common to use the same from in the sentence, correction: studying/helping

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Punctuation and Mechanic problems	**11**. Punctuation	Making a punctuation error.	I want to be a doctor I want to specialize in cardiology.	A full stop is need to end the first and second part of the sentence.
	12.Capitalization	Inappropriate capital or small letter forms.	a nurse has 3 Job Responsibilities.	The letter case in the word from is incorrect, errors at the beginning, middle and ending of the sentence.
	13. Spelling	Misspelling words	The descrptive picture has a beautful bakgrond with a mother and her childrn.	The misspelling of vowels and consonants. Misspelled words: descriptive, beautiful, background children.

Frequency of Errors

This section presents an analysis of the grammatical errors made by Saudi undergraduate students in their English writing, as shown in Table 3. A systematic process was employed to identify and categorize these errors, enabling the calculation of both the frequency and percentage for each error type. The error identification and quantification were carried out by English language instructors, who assessed the students' written compositions and classified the errors based on their occurrences within each category. Following Ellis's (1997) error analysis framework, the process involved four key stages: identification, description, explanation, and evaluation, which will be elaborated in subsequent sections.

The results in Table 3 reveal significant patterns in student errors, indicating the need for targeted instructional strategies. A major finding is the frequent influence of Arabic linguistic structures on students' English writing, particularly among lower-intermediate learners, who demonstrated a higher number of errors due to L1 transfer.

Table 3. *The frequencies of errors committed by the participants*

The Most Serious Problem						Immediate errors					Punctuation and Mechanic problems		
Verb		Agr.	Ro. sentence	Comma S.	Frag.	Word order	Word Form	Art.	Prep.	Parall.	Pun.	Cap.	Sp.
No. of students	45	30	32	48	42	33	34	23	43	20	41	27	48
%	80.36 %	53.57 %	57.14 %	85.71 %	75 %	58.93 %	60.71 %	41 %	76.79 %	35.71 %	73.21 %	48.21 %	85.71 %
% of student errors	50 students= 81.86%					36 students= 64.29%					48 students= 85.71%		
Table abbreviation: Agr: Agreement, Run-on: RO, Comma Splice: Comma S., Parallelism: Paral., Punctuation: Pun., Capitalization: Cap, Spelling: Sp, Article: Art.													

The Most Serious Problems category, encompassing 81.86% of students, reveals errors that significantly impair reader comprehension. Chief among these are verb-related mistakes (80.36%), which reflect the challenges Saudi learners face with verb conjugation and tense usage due to

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fundamental structural differences between Arabic and English. High occurrences of run-on sentences (53.57%) and agreement issues (53.57%) further underscore students' struggles with maintaining subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent consistency. The prevalence of comma splice errors (85.71%) points to difficulties in punctuating compound sentences effectively, possibly influenced by Arabic writing patterns. Additionally, a substantial number of phrase fragments (75%) suggests an inability to consistently construct complete, cohesive sentences.

Intermediate-level issues were also frequent, with 62% of students committing errors that impacted individual words. These include word order mistakes (58.93%) and incorrect word forms (60.71%), both of which illustrate challenges stemming from differences in Arabic and English syntax and morphology. Article errors (41.7%) highlight the difficulty of mastering definite and indefinite articles in English, which function differently than in Arabic. Preposition misuse was also widespread (76.79%), reflecting the influence of native language interference. Errors in parallel structure (35.71%) further indicate challenges in maintaining grammatical symmetry within sentences, affecting the clarity and rhythm of students' writing.

The Punctuation and Mechanics Problems category affected 85.71% of students, compromising both readability and coherence. Frequent punctuation errors (73.21%) demonstrate uncertainty in applying English punctuation rules, likely resulting from contrasts with Arabic conventions. Capitalization mistakes (48.21%) show inconsistent adherence to English standards, again pointing to cross-linguistic influence. Spelling errors, present in 85.71% of student work, indicate the phonetic discrepancies between Arabic and English, which complicate accurate word spelling for learners.

Taken together, the findings suggest that while Saudi students possess foundational knowledge and are capable of constructing both simple and complex sentence structures, they continue to encounter substantial grammatical difficulties across both proficiency levels. Errors in subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and sentence cohesion hinder clarity, while spelling, punctuation, and capitalization mistakes affect the overall readability and formality of writing. Such issues can negatively influence how learners' written work is perceived in academic and professional settings.

Moreover, these results offer key insights into areas requiring targeted instructional attention. The recurring errors—especially in verb usage, sentence construction, and mechanics—highlight the importance of instructional designs that not only focus on correcting surface-level mistakes but also emphasize deeper grammatical understanding. Addressing these areas will enhance learners' ability to communicate clearly and effectively, a skill critical for academic success and future employability in Saudi Arabia's increasingly competitive labor market.

Ultimately, these findings underscore the need for strategic educational responses that account for the structural and cultural differences between Arabic and English. Integrating explicit grammar instruction, error correction strategies, and comparative linguistic analysis can help learners overcome these persistent challenges. The upcoming analysis will delve deeper into the causes of the most commonly observed errors and illustrate each with authentic examples drawn from students' classroom writing.

Grammatical Error Analysis among Saudi EFL Learners

English grammar comprises various parts of speech—nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and others—whereas Arabic grammar operates primarily through three main categories: nouns, verbs, and prepositions. This structural disparity often

causes confusion when Arabic-speaking learners attempt to translate or apply their native language patterns to English, particularly when dealing with morphological rules. Errors in morphology, especially the omission of critical morphemes in nouns and verbs, are widespread among EFL learners. As Atashian and Al-Bahri (2018) highlight, grammatical errors remain prominent in second-language writing, often due to negative transfer or insufficient morphological understanding.

The Verb "To Be"

A major grammatical challenge for Saudi learners involves the verb "to be," particularly in the present tense. In Arabic, the present tense is less morphologically marked than in English, which leads many students to omit "to be" in present constructions. This omission is more frequent in complex sentences, especially those containing relative clauses or multiple tenses, where learners focus more on selecting the correct tense and neglect auxiliary verbs. Students frequently confuse or switch between tenses and are more likely to drop "to be" than other modals like "can" or "will" (Chomsky, 1995; Pinker, 1995). Stromswold (1990) also noted frequent auxiliary-related errors among Arab learners, such as incorrect question formation or unnecessary duplications.

Examples:

- Omission: *She studying today in class.*
- Addition: *She is studied in class yesterday.*
- Substitution: *I is hungry* / *Norah are my friend.*

Singular and Plural Nouns

The singular/plural distinction in English presents difficulties due to the morphological complexity of pluralization. Irregular plurals, in particular, lack consistent rules, making them harder to internalize (dos Santos Gonçalves et al., 2020). Arab learners often struggle with derivational and inflectional morphemes in plurals (Altakhaineh & Zibin, 2017). They tend to either omit plural markers or incorrectly apply them to uncountable nouns, which reflects the influence of their native linguistic patterns (Ridha, 2012). Errors such as switching singular and plural forms or misapplying gendered and dual noun structures suggest an intralingual influence, often overlooked due to a focus on content over form.

Examples:

- Omission: *Teacher gave me many quizz.*
- Addition: *I enjoy going to many swimming pools.*
- Substitution: *I have many book* / *A Muslim pray 5 time a day.*

Adjectives

Adjective placement errors are common due to syntactic differences between Arabic and English. Arabic typically places adjectives after nouns (N+Adj), whereas English follows the Adj+N structure (Abushihab et al., 2014). This reversal results in frequent word order mistakes. Additionally, Arabic adjectives must agree with nouns in gender and number (Ryding, 2005), adding another layer of complexity. Many of these errors stem from literal translation or a lack of understanding of comparative and superlative forms (Jakobovits, 1969).

Examples:

- Misordered adjectives: *House blue* / *The house smallest.*
- Number errors: *I saw houses 3 blue.*
- Comparative/superlative issues: *She is taller than her sister, she is the tallest.*

Prepositions

English prepositions are notoriously difficult for Saudi learners, primarily due to differences in function and meaning between the two languages. Unlike Arabic, where prepositions may be more semantically flexible, English prepositions often require contextual understanding and syntactic precision (Scott & Tucker, 1974). Common errors include omission, redundancy, and substitution (Noor, 1996), often caused by direct translation or misinterpretation (Albanawi, 2018). While locative prepositions are typically used correctly, others—especially abstract or idiomatic ones—pose challenges.

Examples:

- Omission: *I'm waiting (…) my teacher (…) her office.*
- Addition: *We returned to home.*
- Substitution: *She is sitting in at my chair.*
- Interference: *She laughed on me.*

Articles

Articles are another problematic area for Saudi EFL learners. While Arabic includes a definite article, it lacks an indefinite one, which leads to both overuse and omission in English (Swan & Smith, 2001). Ridha (2012) and Rass (2015) note that article usage remains one of the most persistent sources of error, even at advanced levels. Shukri (2014) found frequent omissions of indefinite articles among Saudi learners, highlighting negative transfer from Arabic. Article errors are particularly prevalent when students attempt to translate ideas directly from Arabic, where such linguistic elements are either absent or differently applied (Alhaysony, 2012).

Examples:

- Addition: *I like to eat many (a) burgers.*
- Omission: *I come from (the) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.*
- Substitution: *My classmate started (the) college in September.*

Capitalization

Arabic writing does not differentiate between uppercase and lowercase letters, which contributes to widespread capitalization errors in English. These include inconsistent capitalization of titles, proper nouns, or the pronoun "I." According to Almurshedi (2014) and Ababneh (2017), such errors are due to unfamiliarity with the English orthographic system and limited practice with standardized capitalization rules.

Examples:

- *i am a student.*
- *burydah, unayzah.*
- *My Life In Saudi Arabia.*

Punctuation

Differences between English and Arabic punctuation systems result in frequent punctuation errors. Arabic typically uses fewer punctuation marks, with commas replacing full stops in many cases (Abdelmohsen, 2022). This leads to run-on sentences and improper use of commas and periods in English writing. As Abisamra (2003) noted, comma misuse is particularly common due to cross-linguistic influence.

Examples:

- Run-on: *I enjoy studying nursing nursing has 3 job responsibilities being patient and helpful to patients.*
- Series: *I love to drink coffee and tea and juice.*
- Coordinating conjunctions: *I don't want to study but my mother is forcing me to do so.*

A detailed analysis of grammatical, morphological, and mechanical errors made by Saudi EFL learners reveals the significant influence of Arabic linguistic structures on English writing. These errors range from misuse of the verb "to be" to challenges with pluralization, article usage, adjective placement, prepositions, punctuation, and capitalization. Most of these difficulties are rooted in negative transfer and intralingual interference, often compounded by literal translation strategies and limited morphological understanding. Understanding the nature of these challenges is critical not only for curriculum design but also for enabling learners to communicate effectively in academic and professional English contexts.

Factors Contributing to Errors

An analysis of the written work of 56 Saudi EFL students led to the classification of grammatical difficulties into three primary categories: Most Serious Problems, Immediate Errors, and Punctuation and Mechanical Issues. Using the analytical framework proposed by Ellis (1997)—comprising data collection, error identification, classification, analysis, and explanation—we systematically examined the nature of errors related to grammar, capitalization, and punctuation, as illustrated in the earlier examples.

The findings, summarized in Table 4, present a quantitative overview of the specific types and frequencies of errors. The most frequent error type was Addition, accounting for 55.36% of all errors, followed by L1 Interference at 51.79%. Omission errors comprised 32.29%, Substitution errors 21.43%, and Carelessness errors 10.71%. This distribution highlights the dominant linguistic challenges encountered by Saudi learners, with addition and first language interference emerging as particularly significant.

Saudi/Arab learners frequently experience difficulties with English grammar, capitalization, and punctuation due to several underlying factors. These include structural differences between Arabic and English, syntactic variation, and contrastive writing conventions. To effectively address these challenges and enhance writing proficiency, it is essential to implement targeted instructional strategies that directly respond to these root causes and promote greater linguistic awareness in the EFL context.

Table 4. *Distribution of factors causing errors*

Type of error	Percentage	Number of errors
Omission	32.29%	22

Addition	55.36%	31
Substitution	21.43%	12
Carelessness	10.71%	6
L1 interference	51.79%	29

Pedagogical Recommendations

Language acquisition is a gradual process shaped by trial and error. For Saudi and Arab learners, grammatical errors are not failures but necessary steps toward proficiency. Training teachers to recognize and address language errors, especially those that hinder communication, is essential (Alsahafi, 2017; Abdul Rahman, 2021). Systematic error analysis, such as that suggested by Divsar and Heydari (2017), helps educators identify common challenges and adapt instruction accordingly. Recognizing that errors often follow patterns (Smith, 2001) allows for more focused teaching. Traditional grammar-based teaching should be supplemented with authentic writing activities and self-editing exercises. These promote learner autonomy and help prevent fossilization of common mistakes while limiting L1 transfer. Given the structural differences between Arabic and English, targeted instruction on frequent problem areas—such as subject-verb agreement, verb forms, and punctuation—is crucial. Teachers should create structured, context-rich exercises that address these challenges.

Technology also plays a valuable role in enhancing learning. Language apps, grammar tools, and online platforms support independent practice and give immediate feedback (Shahbaz & Khan, 2017). These tools complement classroom instruction and cater to diverse learner needs. Cultural relevance is equally important. Drawing comparisons between Arabic and English structures enhances comprehension and engagement. When learners connect new language forms to familiar concepts, content becomes more meaningful. A supportive classroom environment that encourages questions and welcomes mistakes fosters greater confidence and motivation. Since Saudi and Arab learners face context-specific challenges shaped by L1 interference, teaching strategies must be tailored accordingly. Teachers can turn errors into opportunities for learning by providing clear explanations and consistent feedback. Finally, institutions may adopt mentorship or peer-assisted learning models to enhance student support. Pairing learners with more proficient peers builds confidence, reduces anxiety, and encourages continuous improvement. A balanced instructional approach—combining grammar instruction, digital tools, cultural awareness, and active engagement—can significantly improve writing proficiency among Saudi and Arab EFL learners.

Discussion

This study examined the grammatical challenges faced by 56 Saudi EFL learner, revealing persistent difficulties across three categories: Most Serious Problems, Immediate Errors, and Punctuation and Mechanic Problems, following Byrd and Benson's (1994) classification. The analysis showed that all participants exhibited errors, indicating the widespread nature of these issues among Saudi learners. Table 2 offered a detailed taxonomy of errors, providing practical guidance for instructors and curriculum developers.

Table 3 presents the Most Serious Problems were the most frequent, affecting 92.86% of the participants. Among these, verb-related issues, including tense misuse and incorrect conjugation, were particularly prevalent (80.36%). These results align with the structural contrast between English and Arabic, often contributing to tense confusion. Additional challenges such as

run-on sentences (53.57%), subject-verb agreement errors (53.57%), and comma splices (85.71%) further emphasize the syntactic and rhetorical differences learners face due to L1 influence.

Immediate Errors affected 62% of the learners and typically involved incorrect word forms and awkward sentence construction. Preposition misuse was especially frequent (76.79%), likely resulting from direct translation practices from Arabic to English. In the category of Punctuation and Mechanic Problems, high incidences were noted in spelling (85.71%), punctuation (73.21%), and capitalization (48.21%). These findings suggest not only mechanical challenges but also a limited awareness of English writing conventions.

The data strongly point to the need for focused instruction that addresses these specific problem areas. Teaching strategies should emphasize verb usage, sentence boundaries, subject-verb agreement, and punctuation accuracy. These findings are consistent with previous studies. Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) reported similar difficulties among Arab learners, especially regarding verb tenses and L1 interference. Abdul Rahman (2021) and Alsahafi (2017) confirmed frequent issues in preposition use, articles, and verb forms. Smith (2001) also provided a broader perspective on the grammatical challenges Arabic speakers face when learning English.

However, contrasting viewpoints must be considered. Scholars such as Mahrous and Ahmed (2010) and O'Sullivan (2004) warned against overgeneralizing across Arab contexts, while Lado (1957) suggested that not all errors stem from L1 interference. Moskovsky and Picard (2018) even reported proficiency among Saudi learners in tense usage, while Alangari (2019) argued that effective instruction can reduce L1 transfer. Despite such claims, this study shows that grammatical errors persist even after direct instruction, indicating deeper linguistic or cognitive factors at play.

Conclusions

To conclude, this research offers valuable insights for improving EFL instruction. Understanding learners' error patterns can help develop more responsive teaching strategies. Future studies should incorporate a broader participant pool, diverse teaching styles, and linguistic software tools to enhance accuracy. Longitudinal tracking of students beyond the foundation level would provide a clearer picture of grammar development over time. This study's limitations include its small, homogeneous sample, reliance on two drafts for progress assessment, and absence of corpus-based analysis. Addressing these in future research will contribute to more comprehensive understandings of Saudi EFL learners' grammatical development.

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were not used; rather, Grammarly's automated feedback was applied to enhance sentence clarity, punctuation accuracy, and overall linguistic cohesion. The output from this tool was reviewed and selectively incorporated at the authors' discretion. While the authors acknowledge the usage of AI, they affirm that they are the sole authors of this article and take full responsibility for the content herein, in accordance with COPE recommendations.

About the Author:

Rawan Ahmed Alsoweed is an English Lecturer at Sulaiman AlRajhi University in Saudi Arabia, where she teaches undergraduate English language courses in the Preparatory Year Program. She holds a Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics. Her research interests include writing pedagogy, teacher and learner autonomy, and the integration of AI tools in English language teaching and assessment. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5559-4235

Dr. Abeer Shujaa Alharbi is an Assistant Professor in the English Language Department at Majmaah University, Saudi Arabia. She earned her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the University of Southampton, England. She teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students, supervises theses, and has published widely in her fields of interest. Her research focuses on sociolinguistics, semantics, CALL, teacher and learner autonomy. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3985-0785

Fahad Abdulaziz Alqusumi is an Analysis and Strategy Planning Expert at Qassim University Medical City, Saudi Arabia. His expertise includes statistical data analysis for academic and applied research, healthcare systems evaluation, strategic foresight, and organizational transformation. His research interests focus on the practical application of strategic planning to support medical city objectives and national healthcare goals. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6840-1202

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