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Analyzing EFL Writing Errors: Patterns and Challenges Among Saudi English Majors

Sultan Samah Almjlad
Languages and Translation Department, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Northern Border university, Kingdom of Saudi Arabic

تحليل أخطاء الكتابة في الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: الأنماط والتحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب السعوديون المتخصصون في اللغة الإنجليزية

سلطان سماح المجلاد
قسم اللغات والترجمة، كليه العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية، جامعه الحدود الشمالية، المملكة العربية السعودية

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify common and less frequent errors among Saudi EFL learners. It included 20 fourth-year male undergraduate students from the Department of Language and Translation at Northern Border University and ten EFL teachers who taught writing courses. The students, who had completed three writing courses, wrote three essays (200–250 words each). The study analyzed their written manuscripts to categorize errors and conducted interviews with ten EFL teachers to understand the errors and their causes. Findings revealed that students struggled primarily with grammatical and syntactic issues, including difficulties forming complete compound sentences, inconsistent verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement errors, and sentence fragments. Lexical challenges, such as article misuse and incorrect collocations, were also prevalent. Mechanical errors, like spelling and capitalization, were less frequent. Teachers used direct correction, indirect correction, and elicitation to address these errors. Frequent and targeted feedback proved effective in improving self-correction and reducing the recurrence of errors, highlighting the importance of teacher intervention in enhancing students' writing proficiency.

Keywords: Errors Analysis, Saudi Learners, Most Common Errors, Least Common Errors, Errors Taxonomy, Writing Essay, Correction Strategies.

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الأخطاء الشائعة وكذلك الأخطاء الأقل تكرارًا بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) من الطلاب السعوديين المتخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية. وشملت الدراسة على عينة من عشرين طالبًا جامعيًا من الذكور في السنة الرابعة من قسم اللغة والترجمة بجامعة الحدود الشمالية، بالإضافة إلى عشرة معلمين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ممن سبق لهم تدريس مقررات الكتابة لطلاب المرحلة الجامعية. حيث طُلب من الطلاب المشاركين في الدراسة، والذين أكملوا دراسة ثلاث مقررات أساسية في الكتابة ضمن خطتهم الدراسية، كتابة ثلاث مقالات يتراوح طول كل منها بين ٢٠٠ و٢٥٠ كلمة. حيث تم تحليل نصوصهم الكتابية لتصنيف الأخطاء التي وقعوا فيها، كما أُجريت المقابلات مع معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لفهم طبيعة هذه الأخطاء وأسبابها. وكشفت النتائج أن الطلاب واجهوا صعوبات كبيرة في القواعد النحوية والتركيبية، بما في ذلك تكوين الجمل المركبة الكاملة، والاستخدام غير المتسق لأزمنة الأفعال، وأخطاء توافق الفعل مع الفاعل، فضلًا عن الجمل غير المكتملة. كما برزت تحديات معجمية، مثل سوء استخدام أدوات التعريف والتراكيب الخاطئة والاستخدام غير الصحيح للكلمات المتلازمة، في حين كانت الأخطاء الفنية في الكتابة، مثل التهجئة واستخدام الأحرف الكبيرة، أقل تكرارًا. وأوضحت النتائج أن المعلمين استخدموا أساليب التصحيح المباشر، والتصحيح غير المباشر، والاستدراج لمعالجة هذه الأخطاء. كما أثبتت الدراسة أن تقديم التغذية الراجعة المتكررة والموجهة لأعمال الطلاب الكتابية كانت استراتيجية فعالة في تعزيز قدرتهم على تصحيح أخطائهم ذاتيًا وتقليل تكرارها، مما يبرز الدور المحوري للمعلمين في تحسين مهارات الطلاب الكتابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء، المتعلمون السعوديون، الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعًا، الأخطاء الأقل شيوعًا، تصنيف الأخطاء، كتابة المقال، استراتيجيات التصحيح.

Introduction

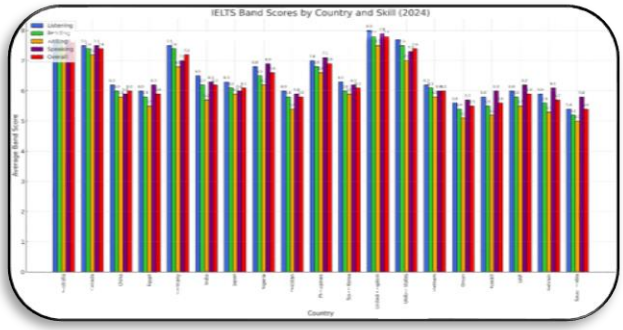
Mastering a foreign language, including English, involves developing four core skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Among these, writing is particularly critical for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as it requires targeted instructional strategies to achieve competence (Alenezi, 2022). Writing enables learners to communicate their ideas effectively, especially in academic and professional contexts. As Fageeh (2011) points out, proficient writing skills are essential for successful communication with native speakers through written modes such as emails and formal letters.

Despite the importance of writing, many EFL learners encounter persistent difficulties in this area. These challenges often stem from issues related to content development, organization, vocabulary choice, grammar accuracy, syntactic structure, and cohesion, all of which demand intensive practice and support (Abu Rass, 2015; Khodebandeh, Jahandar, & Seyedi, 2014). In the Saudi context, improving students' academic writing has been identified as a key objective within university English departments (Alenezi, 2022). Nevertheless, a substantial number of Saudi undergraduate students continue to encounter difficulties in written expression, even after completing dedicated writing courses (Grami, 2010).

Performance data from international standardized tests further highlights this concern. According to IELTS statistics, Saudi students consistently obtain their lowest scores in the writing component, with an average band score of approximately 5.0 (IELTS, 2024). In global comparisons, Saudi learners rank among the lowest achievers in writing proficiency (IELTS, 2024; Grami, 2010). These findings emphasize the urgency of addressing this issue through pedagogical research and reform.

Given these patterns, a critical question arises: Why do Saudi EFL learners continue to face persistent challenges in mastering written English, and why do they consistently underperform in international assessments such as TOEFL and IELTS (Al-Khairy, 2013; Grami, 2010)? This study seeks to explore the underlying causes of these difficulties and to propose effective strategies that can enhance the writing proficiency of Saudi EFL learners.

Figure 1: International Overview of IELTS Band Scores in 2024



The figure shows that Saudi learners have the lowest scores in both Writing (5.0) and Overall (5.4) among the countries analyzed. This highlights the challenges faced by EFL learners in overall language proficiency, particularly in developing formal English writing skills.

Questions of the Study

The present study addresses writing errors by examining written texts composed by advanced English-major students at a Saudi university to answer the following questions:

1) What are the most frequent grammatical, lexical, and syntactic errors found in the essays written by Saudi EFL university learners?

2) What are the least frequent grammatical, lexical, and syntactic errors found in the essays written by Saudi EFL university learners?

3) What is the cognitive or linguistic nature of the errors committed by Saudi EFL learners in essay writing?

4) What are the common strategies used by Saudi EFL learners to self-correct their writing errors?

5) How do teachers' approaches to error correction influence the errors made by Saudi EFL learners?

Objectives of the Study

1)To identify the most and least frequent types of errors made by Saudi EFL learners in their written essays.

2) To analyze the nature and causes of errors in the writing of Saudi EFL learners.

3) To explore the self-correction strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners

4) To examine the impact of teachers' error correction approaches on students' writing errors.

The Significance of Study

This study investigates error analysis in foreign language writing, identifying common grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors across proficiency levels. Its findings will help educators and coursebook designers create targeted instructional materials, refine teaching strategies, and provide practical solutions, enhancing learners' writing skills and confidence.

Literature Review

This study examines common EFL learners' writing errors, focusing on their nature, causes, and implications for teaching. The literature review is structured into: (1) error analysis in EFL writing, (2) challenges in developing writing proficiency, and (3) recent findings and trends in related research.

Error Analysis in EFL Writing: Insights from Interlanguage Theory

Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory offers a key framework for understanding errors in second or foreign language acquisition, especially in EFL writing. According to Selinker, learners develop an

evolving linguistic system—interlanguage—shaped by their L1, L2 exposure, and learning strategies. Errors are not random but systematic, reflecting developmental stages. In EFL contexts, limited authentic language use may lead to fossilization. Fossilization refers to the persistence of certain errors despite ongoing instruction, often resulting from reduced exposure to real-world communication. Albelihi and Al-Ahdal (2024) observed that Saudi EFL learners frequently exhibit fossilized errors in grammar and vocabulary due to negative L1 transfer and a lack of varied linguistic input.

This theory is particularly relevant in the Saudi EFL context. Studies show that Saudi students consistently produce grammatical, syntactic, and lexical errors influenced by negative L1 transfer and restricted English input (Alharbi, 2020; Alhaysony,2017; Alnujaidi, 2020, Alzahrani,2022). These patterns reflect interlanguage development.

Common errors include article misuse, verb tense inconsistency, and subject–verb disagreement—often due to contrasts with Arabic grammar. Lexical issues stem from limited vocabulary and direct translation, while syntactic errors involve fragmented or run-on sentences. Mechanical issues, such as misspellings and punctuation mistakes, also impair clarity.

These recurring patterns highlight the diagnostic value of error analysis. As James (1998) argues, identifying the sources of errors—interlingual, intralingual, or developmental—enables targeted instruction. Error analysis reveals the learner's interlanguage stage and informs responsive teaching.

Pedagogically, Raimes (1983) advocates integrating grammar and vocabulary instruction into writing tasks with structured practice and feedback. She identifies common issues in EFL writing: vague language, poor organization, and grammatical inaccuracy. Misused transition words often undermine cohesion and coherence.

Cultural and rhetorical conventions also influence writing. Arabic rhetorical patterns, which may favor circular development, contrast with the linear progression expected in English academic writing. Astuti and Rozi (2023) found that unfamiliarity with these norms affects essay organization.

To avoid errors, many learners rely on simple sentences, limiting syntactic development. Sardarianpour and Kolahi (2021) note that this avoidance impedes advanced writing skills. Understanding such challenges through interlanguage theory is vital for effective teaching.

Raimes also promotes a process-based writing approach—pre-writing, drafting, revision, and peer feedback—to build fluency and accuracy. Collaborative strategies like group writing and peer review enhance engagement and writing quality (Hameed, 2017).

Technology integration has also proven effective. Baker (2018) highlights how online tools and automated feedback systems increase motivation and help learners self-correct. Al-Zahrani (2021) found that targeted writing workshops significantly improved student proficiency.

Given Saudi learners' linguistic and cultural background, instruction must be context-specific. Al-Shammari (2019) recommends culturally relevant materials and localized tasks, while Al-Ghamdi (2021) emphasizes ongoing teacher training to address learner needs.

Instruction should address not only essay structure—as outlined by Oshima and Hogue (2006)—but also persistent linguistic issues. Ellis (2009) stresses that grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics are essential for academic clarity and appropriateness.

In conclusion, interlanguage theory and error analysis together provide a strong foundation for improving EFL writing. By examining learner errors in context, educators can apply targeted, culturally responsive strategies that foster greater writing accuracy, fluency, and confidence.

Error Types Faced by EFL Learners

Academic writing is central to higher education, particularly for learners writing in a second or foreign language. Hyland (2003) emphasizes that writing is both a mode of communication and a means of constructing academic knowledge. In Saudi universities, where English is often the medium of instruction, proficiency in academic writing is crucial for student success (Alenezi, 2022; Alharthi, 2020). Yet, Saudi EFL learners frequently struggle due to significant linguistic and cultural differences between Arabic and English.

Arabic lacks several grammatical features found in English—such as articles, complex tense systems, and consistent subject–verb agreement—leading to frequent grammar errors (Alqahtani, 2016). The two languages also differ in script direction, orthographic conventions, and letter formation. Arabic is written right to left with variable letter shapes and connected script, while English is left to right with fixed letter forms (Watson, 2004; Chacra, 2007). Arabic also lacks capital letters and has a more phonetic spelling system, making English spelling and vowel inconsistencies difficult for learners (Thompson-Panus & Ruzic, 1983; Watson, 2004).

Rhetorical differences also create challenges. Arabic writing tends to favor elaboration and indirectness, while English academic writing is concise, linear, and thesis-driven (Nasser et al., 2016). These contrasts highlight that writing is not only a technical skill but also a practice shaped by linguistic and sociocultural norms—requiring culturally responsive instruction.

Saudi EFL learners frequently make errors such as verb tense misuse, article errors, and incorrect

collocations (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997; Alshahrani, 2019). Punctuation problems like comma splices and run-on sentences are also common (Aydın & Bozdoğan, 2020). Sentence structure and word order errors reflect syntactic differences between Arabic and English (Al-Jarf, 2007), while spelling issues often stem from vowel misplacement (Mohammed, 2015). Learners also misuse cohesive devices, and literal translation can cause awkward phrasing (Tran & Nguyen, 2019). Other frequent errors include preposition misuse and inappropriate tone or register (Taha, 2020). These difficulties call for instruction that addresses both linguistic form and the cognitive demands of academic writing.

Empirical studies support these findings. Alolaywi (2023) identified frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and verb tense, and advocated for targeted feedback. Alzamil (2020) noted recurring problems with capitalization, article use, and spelling, suggesting updates to teaching materials. Khatter (2019) linked punctuation and preposition errors to both interlingual and intralingual causes. Research on Thai (Phuket & Othman, 2015) and Saudi learners (Sawalmeh, 2013) similarly reported translation-based errors and lexical challenges.

Recent research increasingly explores error patterns, causes, and instructional strategies. Al-Khairy (2013) found widespread grammatical and lexical errors among Saudi students due to L1 interference and limited exposure to academic English. Alhaysony (2017) categorized frequent grammatical and mechanical errors, including article misuse, verb tense issues, and punctuation mistakes.

Studies on Jordanian (Alzuoud & Kabilan, 2013) and Turkish learners (Tsoy & Gündüz, 2021) show similar difficulties with word order, articles, and morphology—indicating that such challenges are not exclusive to Arabic speakers.

To address these issues, scholars suggest several interventions. Hameed (2017) promotes peer feedback and collaborative writing to build fluency and reduce errors. Al-Zahrani (2021) found that focused writing workshops improved students' editing skills. Mahmoud (2013) showed that explicit corrective feedback is more effective than indirect methods in promoting grammatical improvement.

Beyond grammar, rhetorical issues are key. Arabic norms—such as repetition, indirectness, and elaboration—often clash with English expectations for clarity and linearity (Nasser et al., 2016). Arab students may delay main points or rely on implicit logic, weakening coherence. Cultural values like politeness and difference may also limit assertiveness in argumentation.

To bridge these gaps, Nasser et al. (2016) recommend instruction that blends L1 rhetorical awareness with L2 academic conventions. Ferris (2006) and Ellis (2009) also stress systematic error analysis to inform effective, context-sensitive pedagogy.

Despite growing insights, gaps remain—particularly in linking specific error types to culturally informed strategies in Saudi higher education. Few studies integrate quantitative error classification with qualitative analysis of cultural and rhetorical influences. Building on this, the present study applies a structured error analysis to examine Saudi EFL learners' writing and proposes context-sensitive recommendations to improve grammatical accuracy and rhetorical effectiveness.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the grammatical, lexical, and syntactic errors made by Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in their essay writing, with particular attention to the cognitive and linguistic nature of these errors. In addition, the study examines the self-correction strategies employed by learners and the influence of teachers' error correction approaches on the frequency and type of errors.

To address these objectives, the study adopts a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the patterns, causes, and responses to errors in EFL writing. Quantitative data will be gathered through error classification and frequency analysis, while qualitative insights will be obtained through interviews, reflective student writing, and teacher feedback reports.

Setting and Participants

This study involved two participant groups: twenty Saudi male undergraduate students and ten experienced EFL instructors, offering a comprehensive view of the academic writing challenges Saudi EFL learners face and the teaching practices that support them. The students, aged 21–24, were native Arabic speakers with intermediate to upper-intermediate English proficiency. All had completed introductory writing courses and were enrolled in an advanced writing module (Level 8) during their final semester in August 2024.

They were from the Department of Languages and Translation at Northern Border University (NBU), which offers BA and MA programs in English. The undergraduate curriculum focuses on translation, literature, and academic writing, while the graduate program prepares students for careers in teaching, translation, and research, supported by translation tools and language labs (see Figure 2 for age and proficiency data).

The instructor group comprised ten EFL teachers aged 40–55 from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Egypt, and Tunisia, all with 10–20 years of university-level teaching experience, especially in writing. Although they had not taught the participating students, their

familiarity with similar learners allowed them to share valuable insights. Interview findings (T1–T10) highlighted issues like weak grammar and vocabulary, reliance on memorization, limited engagement with feedback, and inadequate exposure to reading, writing, and critical thinking. Instructors also reflected on their strategies for error correction and writing instruction (see Table 2). Together, these groups offered a well-rounded perspective on the linguistic and rhetorical challenges Saudi EFL learners face and effective pedagogical responses.

Figure 2: Students' Age Ranges and English Proficiency Levels

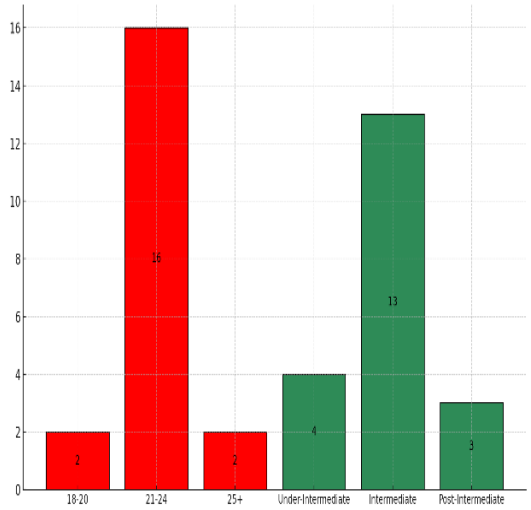


Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of student participants by age range and English proficiency level. The majority of students (16 out of 20) were within the 21–24 age group, with only a few falling into the 18–20 and 25+ categories. In terms of proficiency, most students were classified at the intermediate level (13 students), while smaller groups were identified as under-intermediate (4 students) and post-intermediate (3 students).

Figure 3: Teachers' Teaching Experience

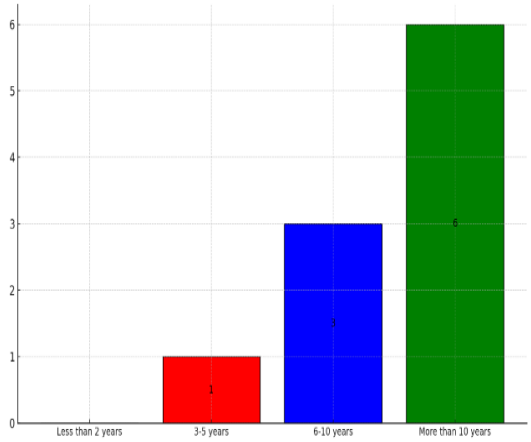


Figure 3 presents the distribution of the participating teachers' teaching experience. The majority of teachers (N=6) had more than ten years of experience in university-level English instruction, while the remaining four had between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience. This wide range of professional backgrounds provided diverse yet seasoned perspectives on EFL writing challenges and instructional strategies.

Data Collection

To ensure a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the writing challenges faced by Saudi EFL learners, this study employed three complementary data collection methods: surveys, content analysis of student essays, and semi-structured interviews. These methods worked together to triangulate and validate the findings.

- Surveys: Surveys were used to gather background information from both students and instructors. The student survey collected data on age, English proficiency level, and prior writing instruction. The instructor survey focused on teaching experience, approaches to writing instruction, and error correction practices. This contextual information supported the interpretation of both the writing samples and the interview responses.

- Content Analysis (Student Essays): Each student was asked to write three short essays (200–250 words) on general, non-specialized topics. These essays were analyzed using a structured framework to identify grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors. The analysis aimed to uncover common error patterns and examine possible influences from the learners' first language (L1) or instructional gaps.

- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten experienced EFL instructors to gain deeper qualitative insights. The interviews explored common student writing challenges and the strategies teachers use to provide feedback and correct errors. This method enriched the study by offering practical perspectives that contextualized the quantitative findings.

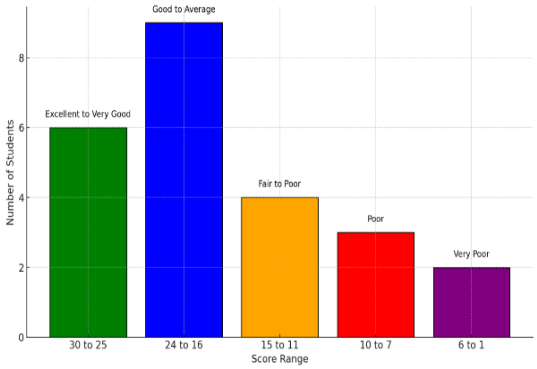
Together, these methods provided a well-rounded view of Saudi EFL learners' writing difficulties and informed the development of practical, context-sensitive pedagogical recommendations.

Procedures

Before the study began, all participants were asked to sign informed consent forms and were assured that their personal information would remain confidential. Following this, student participants were instructed to compose short essays, adhering to the standard structure of academic writing, including an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Each student was given one hour to produce a composition of 200 to 250 words.

Upon completion, the essays were collected and analyzed for grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors using a specially designed evaluation rubric. To ensure objectivity and accuracy in assessment, two English professors independently reviewed the essays. Their involvement supported a fair and thorough diagnosis of students' writing issues. Essays were graded out of a total of 30 marks, with evaluation based on five key criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. The grading aimed to capture both surface-level and deeper writing competencies. Once the essays were processed, scored, and categorized, the following grading scale was applied:

Figure 3: Grading Scale for Students' Performance Evaluation



The students' performance was assessed using a scale that divides scores into five levels. A score between 30 and 25 indicates *"Excellent to Very Good"* performance, reflecting high-quality work with minimal errors. Scores ranging from 24 to 16 are considered "Good to Average," showing competent performance with some room for improvement. A score of 15 to 11 is classified as *"Fair to Poor,"* suggesting that the work contains significant errors or gaps. Scores between 10 and 7 represent *"Poor"* performance, indicating major issues that need attention. Finally, a score from 6 to 1 is considered *"Very Poor,"* showing that the work is far below the expected standard.

Error Taxonomy Justification

This study adopted an error taxonomy that classified errors into four main categories: grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical errors. This classification was chosen based on widely accepted models in second language acquisition and error analysis research (e.g., Ellis, 2009; Ferris, 2011; James, 1998).

- **Grammatical errors** (e.g., verb tense misuse, subject-verb agreement) were separated to reflect core language rule violations.
- **Lexical errors** (e.g., misuse of articles, inappropriate word choice, collocations) highlight challenges with vocabulary depth and semantic selection.
- **Syntactic errors** (e.g., sentence fragments, difficulty creating compound sentences) reveal weaknesses in constructing cohesive and complex structures.
- **Mechanical errors** (e.g., capitalization, spelling, punctuation) affect surface-level text clarity.

The rationale behind using this detailed taxonomy was to enable a structured, systematic diagnosis of learner weaknesses across multiple linguistic dimensions. Such classification also aligns with previous studies on Arab EFL learners (Al-Khairy, 2013; Alhaysony, 2017), ensuring both theoretical grounding and contextual relevance.

Error Analysis Framework

The analysis employed a content analysis approach supported by a structured coding system. Each student's essay was carefully reviewed to identify instances of error, which were then categorized according to a predefined error taxonomy. Following Ferris (2011) and Brown (1994), essays were assessed based on six dimensions: content, organization, sentence structure, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics.

- Errors were quantified through frequency counts and classified by linguistic type.
- Patterns were identified to determine the most and least frequent error categories.
- In the qualitative phase, representative examples of each error type were extracted, corrected, and explained to provide deeper insights into learners' cognitive and linguistic challenges.

This dual quantitative and qualitative approach enabled the analysis to capture not only the frequency of errors, but also the underlying reasons for their occurrence, in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis guidelines. To ensure that the findings derived from this process were both valid and dependable, the study incorporated a series of reliability procedures designed to enhance methodological rigor.

Reliability Procedures

Several strategies were implemented to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis:

- **Triangulation:** Three data sources—student essays, surveys, and teacher interviews—were cross-validated to strengthen the credibility of the findings.
- **Multiple raters:** Alongside the researcher, two experienced EFL instructors independently evaluated the students' essays using the established coding framework.

- **Inter-rater reliability:** Agreement between raters was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, which yielded a high reliability score (>0.80), indicating strong consistency.
- **Clear coding guidelines:** Prior to analysis, a detailed coding manual was developed, including definitions and illustrative examples of each error type, to minimize ambiguity and ensure uniform interpretation.

Together, these procedures ensured that the data analysis was systematic, replicable, and objective, aligning with best practices for reliability in qualitative and mixed-methods educational research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Data Analysis

This study analyzed data from three sources: background surveys, student essays, and semi-structured interviews with EFL instructors. First, survey data were analyzed quantitatively to provide descriptive statistics on participants' demographic and academic profiles, with results visually presented for clarity.

Second, student essays were assessed using a 30-point rubric across six categories: content, organization, sentence structure, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics (Brown, 1994). The researcher and two EFL instructors identified, categorized, and tabulated errors to highlight common patterns and possible links to L1 influence or instructional gaps.

Third, interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The researcher began with familiarization and coding, then grouped codes into themes. These were reviewed for consistency, clearly defined, and named. The analysis culminated in a narrative report with illustrative excerpts supporting each theme in the findings.

Findings

This section presents the main results obtained from the analysis of student essays, survey responses, and instructor interviews. The data are organized to illustrate the types and frequencies of writing errors, as well as patterns and trends that emerged across the different sources, providing a comprehensive view of EFL learners' writing performance.

The written analysis for students' drafts

The students' written samples were analyzed using the outlined criteria, revealing key trends in writing errors among Saudi English majors. The most common errors were grammatical, syntactical, lexical, mechanical, and organizational, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Errors Committed by Saudi Learners in EFL Writing Tasks

Type of Error	Frequency of Errors	No of Students	Error Category	Percent
Difficulty in Creating Compound Sentences	122	19	Syntactical Errors	12.9%
Verb Tense	115	118	Grammatical Errors	12.1 %
Sentence Fragments	109	17	Grammatical Errors	11.5 %
Misuse of Articles	100	14	Lexical Errors	10.6%
Subject/Verb Agreement	95	12	Grammatical Errors	10%
Collocations	91	11	Lexical Errors	9.6 %
Capitalization	89	6	Mechanics Errors	9.4 %
Prepositions	85	5	Lexical Errors	9%
Pronouns	78	5	Grammatical Errors	8.3%
Spellings	61	5	Mechanics Errors	6.5 %
Total	945	20		100

The table highlights grammatical mistakes as the most common writing errors, affecting nearly half of the students. Examples of these errors, along with explanations of correct grammar and rules, are organized in tables in the following subsections.

Table 2: Syntactic Errors

Type of Error	Frequency of Errors	No of Students
Difficulty in Creating Compound Sentences	122	19
Total	122	19

This table shows that syntactical errors accounted for the highest rate of errors among the students, with a total of 122 errors. This clearly means that nearly all the students (N=19) were struggling with this issue, which reflects their difficulty in creating compound sentences. This weakness negatively affected their ability to produce good quality written text.

Table 3: Grammatical Errors

Type of Error	Frequency of Errors	No of Students
Verb Tense	115	18
Sentence Fragments	109	17
Subject/Verb Agreement	95	12
pronouns	78	5
Total	397	52

The table categorizes grammatical errors into verb tense, sentence fragments, and subject-verb agreement. Verb tense errors were most common (115), with 18 students struggling. Sentence fragments (17 students) and subject-verb agreement (12 students) followed. Pronoun errors were less frequent, affecting five students. Verb tense errors highlight challenges in conjugation across tenses.

Table 4: Lexical Errors

Type of Error	Frequency of Errors	No of Students
Misuse of Articles	100	14
Collocations	91	11
Prepositions	85	5
Total	276	30

The table indicates that lexical errors were the third most common, with 276 errors across misuse of articles (100), collocations (91), and prepositions (85**)**. Nearly 14 students struggled with articles and collocations, reflecting significant challenges in their proper use. Prepositions were less problematic, affecting only five students. These weaknesses negatively impacted text quality.

Table 5: Mechanics Errors

Error	Frequency of Errors	No of Students
Capitalization	89	6
Spellings	61	5
Total	150	11

This table indicates that students exhibited relatively few mechanical errors, such as those related to spelling and capitalization, in comparison to other error categories. Only six students had issues with capitalization (FE = 61), and five students encountered spelling errors (FE = 61), representing a small proportion relative to the total number of students.

Error Analysis in Students' Written Texts

In the following subsections, we present an analysis of common errors made by students in their writing. These errors have been collected to better understand the nature of the mistakes that frequently hinder students' abilities to produce high-quality written work. The mistakes are organized in tables that highlight the errors committed by students, the corrected versions of those errors, and the researchers' commentary on general rules that explain the corrections.

Verb tense employment

A considerable number of students consistently exhibited grammatical inaccuracies related to incorrect verb tense usage. This indicates that most students demonstrated limited awareness of appropriate verb tense application in their writing, as evidenced by the examples presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Verb Tense***

Error	Students Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Verb Tense	I love ***play*** football and ***visiting*** my friends.	I love ***playing*** football and ***visiting*** my friends.	Both tenses should be present participle.
	I ***visited*** Riyadh last summer and ***meet*** my cousins.	I visited Riyadh last summer and met my cousins.	Both tenses should be past tense.
	I like to ***playing*** and ***enjoying***.	I like to ***play*** and **enjoy**.	Infinitive and simple tense.

Subject-verb agreement

Many students made numerous grammatical errors related to subject–verb agreement. This suggests that some students did not pay sufficient attention to correct subject–verb agreement in their writing. Representative instances of poor subject–verb agreement are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***S and V Agreement***

Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Subject and Verb agreement	Each one of friends ***have*** a class uniform.	Each one of my friends ***has*** a class uniform.	The word **[Each]** should be treated as singular not plural.
	Large number of people ***was*** injured due to the bombing	Large number of people ***were*** injured due to the bombing	The word of [people] should be treated as plural not singular.
	He always ***go*** swimming in the pool	He always ***goes*** swimming in the pool.	When using a 3rd singular pronoun (like he, she, or it), the verb typically takes an [s] at the end in the present tense,(S.V agreement).

Capitalization

Some students struggled with capitalization. This suggests that they did not pay sufficient attention to the correct use of capitalization while writing. Examples of the nature of students' capitalization errors are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing:
Capitalization

Errors	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Capitalization	I have a desire to learn ***french*** and ***spanish.***	I have a desire to learn ***French*** and ***Spanish***.	The first letter of the names of languages should be capitalized.
	My name is ahmaed	My name is ***Ahamed.***	The proper noun should be capitalized**.**
	I always like to visit my family in *january*.	I always visit my family in Riyadh in ***January***.	The names of months should be capitalized.

Misuse of Articles

A common error observed among the learners was the incorrect use of articles. The students appeared to struggle with distinguishing between *a*, *an*, and *the* in appropriate contexts, which contributed to the overall weakness of their drafts. Representative examples of students' article usage errors are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Misuse of Articles***

Errors	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Misuse of Articles	I stayed for ten ***a days***	I stayed for ***ten days.***	There is no singular article like [an] or [a] that can be used with plural nouns.
	My dream is to be ***a engineer*** when I grow up.	My dream is to be ***an engineer*** when I grow up.	An article is used with singular nouns that begin with a vowel, such as a, e, I, o, or u.

Spellings

One of the less frequent, yet notable, errors made by the learners was incorrect spelling. This suggests that students lack sufficient awareness of how to avoid such errors during the writing process, leading to drafts with persistent spelling mistakes that diminish the overall quality of their work. Representative examples of students' spelling errors are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Spellings***

Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Spellings	My favorite ***hopy*** is reading	. My favorite ***hobby*** is reading.	The consonants after vowels are doubled in most cases like big-bigger, hot, hotter.
	I read children's **storyes.**	I read children's ***stories.***	The letter[y] should be replaced by [I] if the letter before it is consonant followed by [es].

One of the less frequent yet notable errors made by learners was the incorrect use of prepositions such as in, on, and at. Students often lack awareness of their correct contextual usage and struggle to avoid such mistakes in writing. This results in drafts containing prepositional errors that negatively affect the overall quality of their work. Examples of these errors are outlined in Table 11.

Table 11: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Prepositions***

Errors	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Prepositions Use	I visited Riyadh ***on*** January of last year.	I visited Riyadh ***in*** January of last year.	[In] is used with the names of months (like January, May, and July).
	I visit my grandparents' village ***at*** the winter.	I visit my grandparents' village ***in*** the winter.	[In] is also used with the names of months (like Winter, Automn, Spring and Summer).
	I sometimes watch a movie ***in*** the theater.	I sometimes watch a movie ***at*** the theatre.	**[**at] is used with certain places, such as work, school, and theater

A recurrent issue observed among learners is the inaccurate use of collocations—such as *pay a visit*, *do homework*, *make a decision*, or *take a vacation*. Learners frequently demonstrate limited awareness of appropriate collocational combinations and the semantic constraints governing their use. This deficiency often leads to recurring errors that compromise lexical accuracy and diminish the overall quality and fluency of written texts. Representative examples of such errors are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Collocations***

Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Collocations	I ***make*** my homework every day.	I ***do*** my homework every day.	Homework collocates with [do] not with take.
	I always ***get*** vocation to travel to London.	I always ***take*** a vacation to travel to London.	Vocation collocates with [take] not with get.
	I try to ***win*** my objectives.	I try to ***meet*** my objectives.	The best word choice to make sense is [meet] objectives, not win.

A prominent linguistic challenge encountered by learners pertains to the improper use of third-person singular pronouns, such as *he*, *his*, *him*, and *himself*. Learners frequently exhibit insufficient awareness of

appropriate pronominal functions, which results in recurrent errors that undermine grammatical accuracy and textual coherence. Illustrative instances of these errors are presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Pronouns***

Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Misuse of Pronouns	***Him*** is my best friend	I gave ***him*** the book.	[Him] is one of the objective pronouns that always come after verbs such as him, her, them etc.
	I gave ***his*** the book	I gave <u>him</u> the book	[His] is one of the possessive adjectives that always comes before a noun. Consequently, the sentence requires the objective pronoun of [I]to be placed after verb which him.

A frequently observed error among learners is the use of sentence fragments—structurally incomplete constructions that lack grammatical or semantic completeness, thereby impeding clarity and contributing to ambiguity in their written work. Learners often display limited awareness of this structural deficiency, resulting in its repeated occurrence and a consequent decline in overall textual coherence and quality. Representative examples of these errors are provided in Table 14.

Table 14: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Sentence Fragments***

Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	*Commentary*
Sentences Fragments	After I finished my homework. ***incomplete sentence.***	After I finished my homework, ***I watched TV***.	The sentence here is missing and should be completed with something meaningful, like [going out with my friends or watching TV].
	After I graduate from university. ***incomplete sentence.***	After I graduate from university, **I *plan to study English abroad.***	

Among the most recurrent errors identified in learners' writing was the inability to construct grammatically accurate compound sentences, which frequently resulted in semantic distortion and lack of coherence. Such structural deficiencies often yielded ambiguous expressions and disrupted the clarity and fluency of written discourse. Illustrative examples of these errors are provided in Table 15.

Table 15: Examples of Errors Committed by Students in Writing: ***Difficulty of Creation Compound sentences***

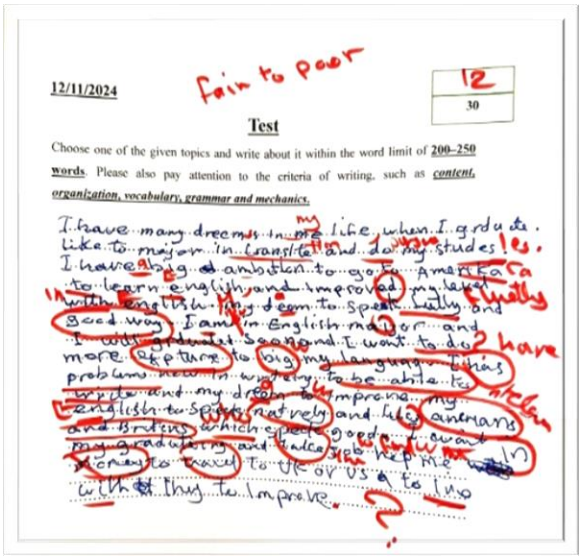
Error	Students' Errors	Corrected Answer for Error	Commentary
Difficulty of Creatin Difficulty Sentences	***When*** I studied hard, ***and I can passed*** the exam in higher grades**.**	***Because*** I studied hard, ***I passed*** the exam with higher grades.	It should consist of two independent clauses in one sentence joined by a coordinating conjunction such as [but], [and], [yet], [because], [however], etc.
	I studied for the English IELTS test, and ***I didn't not no*** pass.	I studied for the test, but I still ***didn't pass.***	A sentence should have two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction, like [but] or [and]. The word [still] indicates the continuation of the same situation.

Building upon the preceding analysis of students' writing errors, the following section provides authentic excerpts from three students' written tasks, accompanied by evaluative commentary and critical observations. These samples serve to illustrate the recurrent challenges identified in the learners' actual written performance, offering concrete evidence of the patterns previously discussed.

Samples of some assessed students' drafts

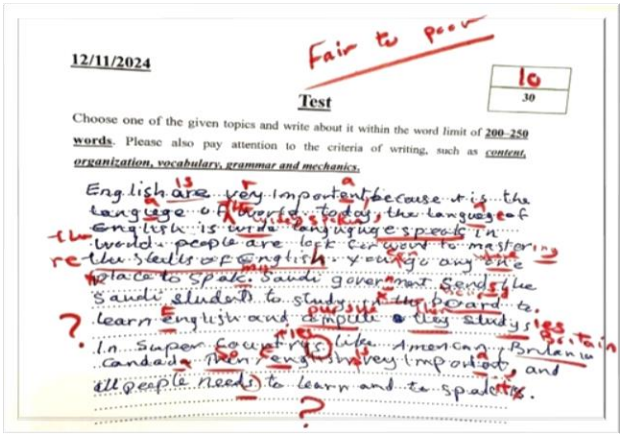
The following drafts, labeled as ***Student 1***, ***Student 2***, *and* ***Student 3***, were graded out of 30. These drafts serve as sample examples of the typical issues observed in the students' writing:

Figure 1: Student 1's Draft (12/30 - Fair to Poor)



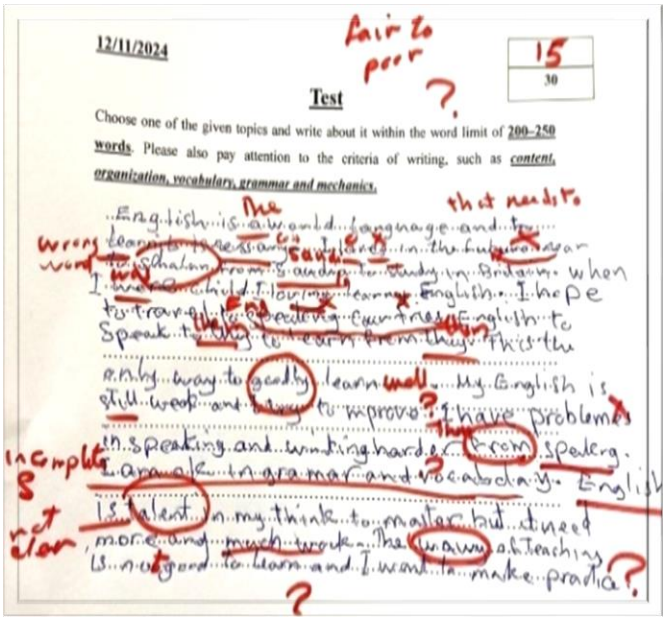
Student 1's draft received a score of 12 out of 30, categorizing it within the *Fair to Poor* performance range. Although the draft demonstrates a basic understanding of the topic, it is significantly undermined by frequent grammatical errors, inappropriate lexical choices, and disorganized sentence structures, all of which impede clarity and coherence. To improve, the student should prioritize the mastery of fundamental grammar rules and focus on developing clearer sentence construction and overall text organization.

Figure 2: Student 2's Draft (10/30 - Fair to Poor)



Student 2's draft received a score of 10 out of 30, placing it within the *Poor* performance category. The text is marked by fundamental errors, including the misuse of prepositions, run-on sentences, and inconsistent tense usage, all of which significantly hinder clarity and disrupt the flow of ideas. These issues reflects a lack of foundational writing skills, particularly in grammar, sentence structure, and tense control. Targeted practice in these areas is essential to enhance the quality of future written work.

Figure 3: Student 3's Draft (15 out 30)



Student 3's draft received a score of 15 out of 30, placing it within the *Fair to Poor* performance range. While some ideas are conveyed with clarity, recurring lexical errors, incorrect punctuation, and awkward sentence constructions disrupt the overall flow and coherence of the text. These issues negatively impact readability and hinder effective communication. Although the student demonstrates a general understanding of the topic, the writing lacks fluency and linguistic precision. Enhancing vocabulary, punctuation usage, and sentence structuring is essential to improve clarity and elevate the overall quality of future drafts.

Teachers' Perspectives on Students' Writing Challenges and Solutions

To complement the analysis of student writing, insights from experienced EFL instructors were gathered and analyzed. They identified key challenges faced by Saudi EFL learners, particularly in language proficiency, writing strategies, and learner engagement. Their selected comments offer valuable context and enrich the study's overall findings.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 1

Teacher 1 opened the discussion by emphasizing the foundational linguistic weaknesses among students. They particularly stressed the negative effects of memorization-based learning, the lack of engagement with feedback, and the urgent need for critical thinking and continuous writing practice.

"One major issue is the lack of a strong foundation in grammar and vocabulary. Despite years of English instruction, students often when they come to the university struggle with basic writing skills because the focus is more on memorization than practical use." **(T1)**

This observation highlights how deeply the effects of traditional memorization-based teaching continue to impact students' writing abilities even at the university

level. However, the foundational weakness is further compounded by the students' attitude toward feedback and revision, which T1 elaborates on.

"I also think there's not enough feedback and revision. Students often don't take feedback seriously or revise their work, which prevents them from improving." **(T1)**

Here, **Teacher 1** stresses that even when students receive corrective input, their failure to revise actively stagnates their writing growth. To address these issues, T1 proposes strategies aimed at cultivating better critical thinking and regular writing practices.

"We need to give them more opportunities to practice critical thinking and writing, perhaps through reading widely in English and writing regularly." **(T1)**

Thus, T1 concludes that providing students with authentic and frequent writing experiences is key to reversing these negative trends.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 2

Teacher 2 emphasized the limited exposure to English outside the classroom and indicated that active learning, peer engagement, and extensive reading could significantly improve students' writing skills.

"Many students don't use English outside the classroom, so they don't get enough exposure to the language, making it harder for them to write effectively." **(T2)**

Teacher 2 points out that the lack of real-world English exposure significantly weakens students' writing proficiency. Recognizing this gap, T2 indicates classroom-based strategies that can help students take the writing process more seriously.

"I also see that active learning strategies, like peer reviews and writing workshops, could help students take the writing process more seriously." **(T2)**

In addition to promoting active learning, T2 emphasizes that extensive reading can play a pivotal role in enriching students' linguistic resources.

"Also, I suggest that encouraging more reading can really help develop their vocabulary and expose them to different writing styles." **(T2)**

Thus, exposure through both active collaboration and wide reading is essential to strengthening students' writing abilities.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 3

Teacher 3 addressed students' test-oriented mindset, emphasizing the need for a holistic educational approach and stronger critical thinking skills.

"Students don't always see the value of strong writing skills. They focus on passing tests rather than recognizing how essential writing is for global communication." **(T3)**

Teacher 3 stresses that students' narrow focus on exams blinds them to the broader relevance of writing skills. To counter this, they advocate for a more comprehensive instructional approach.

"Improving writing skills requires a holistic approach, better instruction, more exposure, and a shift in how students view writing as a skill they need to develop." **(T3)**

Furthermore, **Teacher 3** links this need for change to the development of critical thinking, which they see as fundamentally tied to better writing.

"There's also a lack of critical thinking skills, which are crucial for writing. Students need more practice in organizing ideas and presenting arguments." **(T3)**

Thus, fostering critical thinking and shifting students' mindsets are crucial components in improving writing competence.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 4

Teacher 4 highlighted cultural influences that lead students to undervalue writing skills, resulting in weak independent expression and low motivation.

"Right, and culturally, writing isn't valued as much as speaking. Students focus on oral skills for exams, but writing is seen as secondary and doesn't get enough attention." (T4)

Teacher 4 identifies a cultural undervaluing of writing as a major barrier to skill development. This devaluation also has practical consequences on students' techniques.

"Students also struggle with paraphrasing and summarizing. They rely too much on direct translation or quoting, which impacts their ability to express ideas independently." **(T4)**

The struggle to express ideas in their own words, according to **Teacher 4**, is exacerbated by a lack of intrinsic motivation among students.

"*The motivation to improve writing isn't always present in the student, which negatively affects the students' ability to improve their writing.***" (T4)**

Thus, both cultural and motivational factors combine to inhibit writing progress among students.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 5

Teacher 5 discussed how low motivation, misunderstanding of writing processes, linguistic interference, and rigid teaching methods all contribute to poor writing outcomes.

"Another issue is the lack of motivation. Many students are focused on memorization and exams rather than developing their writing skills. Without intrinsic motivation, they don't put in the effort needed to improve." **(T5)**

Teacher 5 highlights how lack of internal motivation restricts serious efforts to enhance writing proficiency, linking it to misunderstandings about writing as a skill.

"Students also misunderstand the writing process. They don't realize it involves planning, drafting, and revising, which leads to rushed and poorly structured work." **(T5)**

In addition to process-related weaknesses, linguistic interference from students' first language further complicates their English writing.

"Additionally, they rely too heavily on Arabic in how to write in English. Thinking in Arabic and translating

*directly into English results in awkward phrasing and poor syntax." **(T5)***

Moreover, **Teacher 5** critiques the broader instructional methods that fail to encourage independent thinking and creativity.

*"Traditional teaching methods don't encourage creativity or independent thought, limiting students' ability to develop their own writing voice." **(T5)***

Thus, the combination of weak motivation, linguistic interference, and traditional methodologies poses serious challenges to writing improvement.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 6

Teacher 6 highlighted the passive learning attitudes among students and emphasized the value of connecting writing to real-world tasks for greater engagement.

*"The issue is that students often have a passive learning mindset. They wait for the teacher to provide everything instead of engaging actively in the learning process." **(T6)***

Teacher 6 criticizes students' passive learning attitudes, where initiative is largely absent, stressing the need for consistency and regular practice.

*"Writing requires consistency and regular practice, but many students don't invest the time to improve. They see it as an occasional task rather than a skill that needs constant development." **(T6)***

To combat this, **Teacher 6** suggests connecting writing tasks to practical, real-world activities to enhance relevance and student engagement.

*"To address this, I believe integrating writing with real-world tasks, like creating emails or short reports, can make the process more practical and engaging." **(T6)***

Thus, bridging classroom tasks with real-world applications is seen as a solution to passive learning habits.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 7

Teacher 7 identified over-reliance on templates and reluctance to experiment as key barriers to student development, advocating for a supportive classroom environment.

*"A major problem is the over-reliance on templates and examples. While these can help, students tend to copy without truly understanding the structures or how to adapt them to different contexts." **(T7)***

Teacher 7 observes that dependency on templates limits students' adaptability. Fear of experimentation further restricts linguistic growth.

*"There's also a tendency to avoid risks in writing. Students prefer staying within familiar language instead of experimenting with new vocabulary or sentence structures." **(T7)***

In response, **Teacher 7** recommends creating a supportive environment where students feel confident experimenting with new ideas.

*"Teachers need to create a safe space for experimentation, where students feel confident trying and failing without judgment. This approach can boost creativity and learning." **(T7)***

Thus, reducing fear and promoting creativity are crucial for advancing students' writing skills.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 8

Teacher 8 discussed poor time management as a major barrier to coherent writing, proposing peer collaboration and structured writing processes as solutions.

*"Time management is a huge barrier. Many students procrastinate and end up rushing their assignments, which leads to poorly developed ideas and disorganized essays." **(T8)***

Teacher 8 highlights procrastination as a significant issue leading to weak final products. They suggest that peer collaboration could offer partial solutions.

*"I think peer collaboration is underutilized. Having students critique each other's work can teach them how to evaluate writing critically and learn from their peers' strengths." **(T8)***

Moreover, **Teacher 8** insists on reinforcing writing as a process involving multiple stages of development.

*"We should also emphasize writing as a process, showing students how to build from brainstorming to a polished final draft through stages." **(T8)***

Thus, time management, collaboration, and process-oriented teaching are essential for improving writing outcomes.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 9

Teacher 9 discussed students' limited exposure to authentic English and recommended group writing activities and technology integration to make writing more interactive and purposeful.

*"Students often lack exposure to authentic English texts. They mainly rely on textbooks, which don't always reflect how English is used in real-world contexts." **(T9)***

Teacher 9 stresses that exposure to real English usage is crucial for authentic writing. Moreover, writing should not be seen as an isolated activity.

*"Writing is treated as a solitary activity, but it doesn't have to be. Group projects and collaborative writing can make the process more interactive and engaging." **(T9)***

Teacher 9 also encourages the use of digital technologies to increase students' interaction with authentic writing tasks.

*"Technology can be a powerful tool here. Encouraging students to use blogs or discussion boards to share their writing can make it more purposeful and interactive." **(T9)***

Thus, incorporating technology and collaboration can make writing practice more meaningful.

Extracts from interview with Teacher 10

Teacher 10 critiqued the restrictive, exam-focused curriculum and emphasized the importance of cultivating a growth mindset to overcome fear of mistakes.

"The curriculum is a big part of the problem. It's heavily exam-focused, leaving little room for creative or critical writing tasks." **(T10)**

Teacher 10 criticizes the curriculum for limiting students' opportunities to practice critical and creative writing. Beyond curriculum issues, emotional factors also hinder writing development.

"Another challenge is that students are afraid of making mistakes. This fear stifles their willingness to write freely and experiment with language." **(T10)**

Teacher 10 advocates for promoting a growth mindset where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities.

"*We need to create a growth mindset in students, where they see mistakes as opportunities to learn, not failures to avoid**."*** **(T10)**

Thus, both systemic reforms and psychological support are necessary to create a healthier environment for writing development.

Teachers' Strategies for Improving Writing

This section examines how teacher feedback influences Saudi EFL learners' self-correction strategies, drawing on interviews with ten instructors. It explores the strategies learners use and how teacher input shapes them.

Teacher 1: describes using a real-time, direct correction approach, stating:

*"I correct errors directly in real-time. I immediately provide the correct form when students make a mistake**."*****(T1)**

However, when asked about students' self-correction, he noted:

"They use grammar checkers and occasionally rely on tools, but they don't reflect deeply on why a mistake is wrong." **(T1)**

This highlights that, while direct correction may provide quick clarity, it may limit opportunities for learners to engage in deeper reflection or analysis, leading to surface-level revisions rather than meaningful learning.

In contrast, **Teacher 2** employs an indirect correction strategy, which aims to promote greater student involvement. He explained:

"I point out mistakes and ask guiding questions, encouraging students to figure out the correct form." **(T2)**

As a result, he observed:

"Students re-read their work or use online resources. The indirect feedback helps them become more independent in correcting their mistakes." **(T2)**

This approach contrasts with Teacher 1's, as it shifts responsibility to the learner, fostering critical thinking and long-term writing improvement.

Teacher 3, meanwhile, emphasizes peer correction, allowing students to become both reviewers and writers. He shared:

"Students review each other's work and provide feedback on errors." **(T3)**

This collaborative learning encourages accountability and reflection. He added:

"After peer correction, students often revise their work based on the feedback. They also use online tools, but I encourage them to think critically first." **(T3)**

By involving peers in the correction process, this method builds a sense of community and enhances mutual learning.

Teacher 4 introduces a different technique—**reformulation**—where corrections are modeled rather than explicitly explained. He described:

"I provide a corrected version of their sentences without pointing out each individual mistake." **(T4)**

He reported that:

"Students compare their original drafts with the corrected versions. This helps them understand sentence structure and internalize corrections." **(T4)**

This approach emphasizes implicit learning through exposure to correct forms, enabling learners to recognize and adopt more accurate language patterns.

Teacher 5 takes a hybrid approach, combining direct and indirect correction methods. He explained:

"For simple mistakes, I correct them directly, but for more complex ones, I guide students to self-correct." **(T5)**

This balanced method allows flexibility based on the nature of the error.

According to him:

"Students use online tools and focus on errors I've highlighted. They also try to apply the corrections themselves after receiving feedback." **(T5)**

His strategy attempts to provide both clarity and opportunities for independent revision.

Moving toward a more collaborative model, ***Teacher 6*** practices collaborative correction through real-time class discussions. He noted:

"I work with students to identify and correct errors during class discussions." **(T6)**

He observed that this approach has a noticeable impact:

"Students develop self-correction skills by reflecting on group discussions. They often refer to class notes and examples shared during the sessions." **(T6)**

By involving students in real-time error analysis, this method promotes shared responsibility and reinforces learning through dialogue.

Teacher 7 utilizes error coding, a strategy that encourages learner autonomy by prompting students to discover the nature of their mistakes. He explained:

"I mark errors with specific symbols or codes. This forces students to identify the type of error and correct it themselves." **(T7)**

He added:

"Students rely on the error codes to locate mistakes and cross-check their revisions with grammar guides or classroom resources." **(T7)**

This structured system enhances learner awareness and analytical skills by requiring active engagement with each correction.

Teacher 8 adopts a reflective feedback approach, focusing on the *why* behind the errors rather than just the *what*. He shared:

"I provide reflective feedback by asking open-ended questions about their errors, encouraging them to think about why they made the mistake." **(T8)**

This leads students to internalize learning, as:

"They write reflective notes about their mistakes and revisit them while revising their drafts." **(T8)**

This metacognitive strategy enhances students' long-term ability to self-monitor and adjust their writing habits.

Teacher 9 focuses on the writing process, embedding correction into the planning and drafting stages rather than addressing it only in the final product. He explained:

"Instead of correcting final drafts, I guide students through error detection during the planning and drafting stages." **(T9)**

He noted that:

"Students pause and review their drafts at each stage of the writing process. They use checklists I provide to ensure they catch and correct errors early on." **(T9)**

This proactive approach empowers students to take control of their learning journey from the outset.

Finally, **Teacher 10** emphasizes scaffolded correction, offering partial support to guide students toward independence. He described:

"I provide partial solutions or examples, helping students bridge the gap between their mistakes and the correct form." **(T10)**

He observed that:

"Students practice self-correction using scaffolds like sentence starters or guided examples and gradually work toward independent revisions." **(T10)**

This gradual release of responsibility builds student confidence and self-efficacy in error correction.

Discussion and Interpretation

This study aimed to identify the common writing mistakes of Saudi EFL learners and explore the strategies teachers use to address them. Writing in English poses unique challenges, particularly when learners' native language differs significantly in grammar, syntax, and usage. The findings reveal a variety of difficulties that hinder learners' academic progress and language proficiency. Understanding these challenges is crucial for teachers to design effective interventions.

One common issue is the inability to construct cohesive compound sentences. Many learners struggle to link related ideas, resulting in fragmented writing. For instance, a student wrote, *"I went to the market. I buy fruits,"* instead of *"I went to the market and bought fruits."* This issue stems from limited exposure to complex English sentence structures and differences in Arabic grammar. Teachers employing collaborative correction strategies, such as group discussions, reported improvements in students' ability to construct compound sentences. Collaborative exercises, as Zhang (2019) argues, actively engage students with sentence structures, fostering fluency.

Students also frequently fail to maintain consistent verb tenses, disrupting narrative coherence. For example, *"Last year, I visit my family"* should be *"Last year, I visited my family."* Such errors reflect difficulty in mastering English verb forms, compounded by Arabic's different tense distinctions. Teachers addressed this through explicit instruction and contextualized practice, supported by examples. Chen (2022) highlighted that practicing tense shifts in authentic contexts improves learners' accuracy and coherence.

Subject-verb agreement errors, particularly with collective nouns, are also common. For instance, *"The team are winning"* instead *of "The team is winning"* reflects linguistic transfer from Arabic. Targeted grammar exercises and real-world examples helped students internalize agreement rules. Baker (2018) emphasized that consistent reinforcement reduces recurring errors.

Improper capitalization, such as writing *"ahmad is a student at king saud university*," detracts from writing professionalism. These errors often arise from insufficient emphasis on capitalization rules in early language instruction. Teachers used explicit instruction and regular practice to address this. Zhang (2019) noted that focusing on capitalization improves technical accuracy and readability.

Mistakes in article usage, such as *"He is a engineer"* instead of *"He is an engineer,"* stem from differences in how articles are used in Arabic and English. Teachers provided clear explanations of article usage, supported by targeted exercises. Omer (2022) argued that such instruction clarifies the role of articles and enhances grammatical accuracy.

Spelling errors, like writing *"plejer"* for *"pleasure,"* are influenced by Arabic phonetics and reduce readability. Khan (2020) recommended using digital spelling tools and interactive activities to address these errors. Similarly, prepositional errors, such as "*on January of last year*" instead of "*in January of last year*," stem from structural differences between Arabic and English. Contextualized practice was effective in improving prepositional accuracy.

Collocation errors, such as "*make homework*" instead of "*do homework*," disrupt writing fluency. Abdullah (2023) emphasized the importance of teaching collocations as a core language skill. Teachers

incorporated contextualized exercises to help students internalize appropriate word combinations. Sentence fragments, like *"After I finished my homework,"* without completing the thought, disrupt the flow of writing. Exercises that focus on recognizing and restructuring fragments proved effective, as Alharbi (2020) noted.

Errors in pronoun usage, such as *"I gave his the book"* instead of *"I gave him the book,"* often arise from differences between Arabic and English. Targeted instruction helped learners better understand subject-object relationships.

Teachers employed various strategies to address these issues, including direct correction, indirect correction, and elicitation. Direct correction, where teachers provided the correct form immediately, was particularly effective for fundamental errors like verb tense and subject-verb agreement. Bitchener and Knoch (2008) noted this approach benefits beginners by providing clarity. Indirect correction, marking errors without offering corrections, encouraged students to engage with their mistakes. Ferris (2014) highlighted that this fosters independent learning and critical thinking. Elicitation, using guiding questions or prompts to help students identify and correct errors, aligns with Hyland's (2003) view that promoting autonomy enhances long-term improvement.

Teachers also provided detailed feedback, which significantly reduced persistent errors. Collaborative feedback and scaffolded exercises were particularly effective in fostering self-regulation. Conversely, minimal feedback led to the persistence of errors, underscoring the need for detailed and consistent guidance.

The writing errors identified reflect the interplay between linguistic differences and the challenges of learning English as a foreign language. Teachers can help learners overcome these obstacles through targeted interventions, explicit instruction, and constructive feedback. These findings align with broader literature emphasizing consistent practice and supportive teaching strategies as essential for improving writing skills. With sustained effort, Saudi EFL learners can make significant progress, achieving greater confidence and competence in their academic writing.

Conclusion

This study investigated the most common and least frequent grammatical, lexical, and syntactic errors in Saudi EFL learners' writing, explored the cognitive and linguistic factors behind these errors, and examined the learners' self-correction strategies along with teachers' approaches to error correction. Through content analysis of student essays and thematic analysis of teacher interviews, the findings provided comprehensive answers to the five research questions.

In relation to Research Questions 1 and 2, the analysis of students' written essays revealed that the most frequent errors were grammatical (verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and sentence fragments), syntactical (difficulty creating compound sentences), and lexical (misuse of articles and collocations). Mechanical errors such as spelling and capitalization were less frequent but still notable. These findings confirm the persistent struggles Saudi learners face at multiple linguistic levels despite formal instruction.

Addressing Research Question 3, the cognitive and linguistic nature of these errors was closely linked to negative transfer from the learners' first language (Arabic), limited exposure to authentic English input, and surface-level writing habits emphasizing memorization rather than critical engagement with language use.

Regarding Research Questions 4 and 5, the interview data with ten EFL instructors showed that students' self-correction strategies were generally weak, often relying on grammar-checking tools rather than deep linguistic reflection. Teachers' approaches to error correction — including direct correction, indirect feedback, peer correction, and guided reformulation — significantly influenced learners' ability to recognize and independently correct their errors over time. Strategies that promoted active learner involvement, such as indirect correction and collaborative error analysis, seemed more effective in developing learner autonomy.

Thus, the writing challenges observed among Saudi EFL learners reflect an interplay between linguistic complexity, instructional practices, and learners' cognitive engagement with the writing process. Targeted interventions — including explicit grammar instruction, contextualized vocabulary development, active writing practice, and enhanced feedback mechanisms — are essential to bridge these gaps.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that writing curricula emphasize integrated skills instruction, scaffolded feedback, extensive reading, and culturally responsive approaches that acknowledge learners' L1 influences while promoting critical thinking and self-monitoring in writing. Strengthening institutional support through writing centers and teacher professional development is also vital for sustained improvement in students' writing competence.

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