An Analysis of the Most Common Essay Writing Errors among EFL Saudi Female Learners (Majmaah University)

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Abstract
This study was conducted to explore and analyze the most common essay writing errors among Saudi female learners at the departments of English, Majmaa'h University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the aim has been to identify those difficulties from an error analysis standpoint and identify the sources underlying them. An analysis of a written corpus of forty students' written essays was thoroughly conducted. Types of errors were categorized, and the factors that contributed to them were analyzed. *The participants were English majors in their third year of study* enrolled in an advanced writing course during the first term pertinent to the academic year 2018-2019. *Three essays were given to each participant to write about two to four pages* using the narrative, descriptive, and compare/contrast organization. A writing difficulties questionnaire was further employed. *The findings showed that the most frequent types of errors made by the participants were*: punctuation errors forming the most troublesome area, followed by spelling errors, preposition errors, article errors, wrong verb tense, wrong word form respectively. The findings suggested that writing in English as a foreign language is quite challenging for students. Interlingual and intralingual transfer was found to be the source underlying the most common errors.
Keywords: English as a foreign language*, error analysis,* interlingual, intralingual, *Saudi learners, writing*

Introduction

Being able to write in (EFL) has been thought of as a critical factor in FL learning and acquisition. EFL writing is a significant area of interest within the field for the following reasons: reinforcement, language development, learning style, and, most importantly, writing as a skill in its own right, just as important as speaking, listening and reading (Harmer, 1998, p.79). Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis, and Swann (2003) support the view that reasons for writing include writing as an assessment; as an aid to critical thinking; understanding and memory; extending students' learning beyond lectures and other formal meetings; improving students' communication skills; and training them as future professionals in particular disciplines.

Nevertheless, writing has always been difficult and challenging for EFL learners because the writing process includes many issues: the generation and organization of ideas, drafting, revising, and editing. Mozaheb, and Beigi (2012), Alsamadani (2010) as cited in Seifoori, Langan (2005) and Nunan (1989, p.35) assume that "…learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult of the macro skills for all language users regardless of whether the language in question is a first, second or foreign language". Furthermore, producing a coherent, cohesive, well-organized piece of writing is a challenging task which is intensified by the fact that the rhetorical conventions of English texts such as the structure, organization, lexis and grammar differ from those in other languages and particularly in Arabic (Leki, 1991 & Santos and Suleiman, 1993 as cited in Ahmed, 2011).

Consequently, errors in writing are unavoidable. Ellis (1997) stated that fossilization of learners' grammar does not occur in second language (L2) acquisition but is unique in L2 acquisition. Furthermore, one of the headaches that the EFL/ESL teachers might face in classrooms is how to teach writing- particularly nowadays when learners are becoming more and more digital and visual learners.

Research questions

The research aimed to address the following questions: What are the most frequent types of error found in the essays written by EFL University Saudi female learners? Which factors underlie the recurrence of these errors?

The Significance of the research

This study aims to contribute to the growing area of research in error analysis by exploring the most common errors FL learners commit and investigating their sources. The results can yield fundamental insights that could contribute to more beneficial guidance for coursebook designers while developing teaching materials and suggesting teaching methodology. The results can help teachers understand what grammar or any other linguistic aspect is problematic for learners and include them in their teaching. The findings can also be essential in terms of suggesting some possible solutions for the challenges that L2 learners encounter in writing.

Objectives of the research

EFL learners' errors should be carefully analyzed because they are normal, and they show the progress in the process of learning a language. Thus, the primary objective of this study was to

investigate and analyze the errors repeatedly happening in the participants' written compositions. The second was to identify the sources of the most common errors occurring in their writing.

Review of the literature
Errors versus mistakes

It has been argued that an error and a mistake are not the same. In Brown (2000), a *mistake* refers to a performance error in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly whereas an *error* is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. Corder (1967), James (1998) and Norrish (1983) as cited in Hourani (2008) reveal the criterion that: A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot. Errors are 'systematic,' i.e., likely to regularly happen while mistakes are defined as the 'inconsistent deviation.' In agreement with the same view, Brown (2000, p. 170) and Harmer (1983, p.35) as cited in Andrian (2015) explain that a *mistake* is less serious since it is the retrieval that is faulty, not the knowledge. Gass and Selinker (2008) define errors as 'red flags,' (i.e., warning signals that provide evidence about the knowledge of L2 learners).

Richards (1971) as cited in Andrian (2015) classifies errors as: errors of competence (the result of the application of rules by first language (L1) learner, which do not correspond to the norm of the (L2) and errors of performance (the result of a mistake in language use and manifest themselves as repetition, false starts, corrections or slips of the tongue). James (1998, p.83) defines an error as being an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and is self-corrigible; a mistake is either intentionally or unintentionally deviant and is self-corrigible, however.

Significance of errors

Since making errors is a natural language developmental process, students' errors are excellent sources for improving both teaching and learning. James (1998) strongly supports Corder's (1967), who indicated that errors are significant in three ways. First, they tell the teachers how far towards the goal the learners have advanced and what remains for them to learn. Second, they provide the researchers with evidence of how language is learned and what strategies the learners are employing. Third, they are indispensable to the learners because making errors can be regarded as a device they use to learn.

Hamada (2008) argues that the learners' errors are no longer considered sins that need to be avoided at all costs. Contrarily, they are seen as indicators that a learning process is going on; therefore, they deserve to be analyzed. Norish (1982) as cited in Hamada (2008) regards errors as positive aids to learning. Errors themselves may even be a necessary part of language learning. Furthermore, the fact that learners do make errors, and that these errors can be observed, analyzed and classified led to a flow of study of learners' errors, called error analysis (Brown, 2007 as cited in Hamada, 2008).

Error analysis
Definition of error analysis

Several researchers have already discussed error analysis from different perspectives. The first to focus attention on the importance of studying learners' errors was Corder (1967). Corder and Brown (2000) reported that language learners' errors are important to study because it shows

the state of the learners' knowledge. Errors (not mistakes) made in both L2 learning and child language acquisition provide evidence that a learner uses a definite system of language at every point in his development. This "built-in syllabus" may yield a more efficient sequence than the instructor-generated sequence because it is more meaningful to the learner. Besides, more effective language instruction might occur when the learner's innate strategies domineer the language syllabus rather than predetermined notions of what ought to be learned.

In agreement with Corder's view, Alobo (2015) contends that errors are not only an inevitable but also, very importantly, a necessary feature of learner language, without which improvement cannot occur. Corder coined the term 'transitional competence' to indicate the essential dynamism of the language learner's evolving system. A learner's errors represent the difference between the transitional competence of that learner and the target language.

Brown (1987, p. 17) as cited in Mourssi (2013) and Brown (2000) define error analysis as a process through which researchers observe, analyze, and classify learner errors to elicit some information about the system operating within the learner. For Richards and Schmidt (2002) as cited in Seitova (2016), error analysis compares 'learner English' with English (L2) itself and judges how learners are 'ignorant.'

Types of errors

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the different types of errors as follows: Brown (1980) as cited in Hasyim (2002) classifies sources of errors into the following categories:
1.   Interference transfer: the negative influence of the mother tongue,
2.   Intralingual transfer: the negative transfer of items within the target language,
3.   Context of learning: this overlaps both types of transfer, and
4.   Communication strategies: the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learner.

James (1998) adds 'Induced errors': the result of being misled by how teachers give definitions, examples, explanations, and arrange practice opportunities. 'Unique errors' that are neither developmental nor interference is one more category highlighted by Dulay and Burt (1974) as cited in Heydari and Bagheri (2012).

Olsen (1999) as cited in Somchai and Siriluck (2013) note that errors could be due to the inadequacy of syntactic and lexical competence. Similarly, Weigle (2002, p.35) proposes that the constraints of limited L2 knowledge may hamper L2 writing due to the need to focus on language rather than on content. Jie (2008, p. 36) as cited in Somchai and Siriluck (2013) supportively explains how L2 learning is affected by L1 because "language is taken as a set of habits and learning as the establishment of new habits, a view sprung from behaviorism." James (1998) and Soetikno (1996, p.181) as cited in Muhsin (2016, p. 83) propose that different types of learners' errors can relate to omission, overinclusion, misselection, misordering, blends, addition, and misinformation.

Johansson (2008, pp. 118-119) divided errors into *lexical errors* which involve the misuse of individual words in the target language and *equivalence errors* which arise because a word in

the target language is wrongly equated with a word in the mother tongue. Dulay et al. (1982) as cited in Abushihab (2014) point out that there are four major linguistic categories of errors: orthography, lexicon and semantics, syntax and morphology and discourse.

The sources of error in EFL writing

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the causes of error in L2 and FL writing. Johanne (2002) argues that whether an error, mistake, or 'derailment,' awkward discourse can occur for different reasons: learners may translate from L1 or they tend to over-generalize the rules when acquiring new discourse structures. Moreover, they might lack familiarity with new rhetorical structures and the organization of ideas.

Among the factors that impact language learning are the social and cognitive ones: if learners experience success, they will have their positive attitudes, motivation, and concrete goals reinforced. Likewise, learners' negative attitudes may be nourished by a lack of success (McGroarty, 1996 as cited in Johanne, 2002).

Senders (1992) and Richards (1974) as cited in Alobo (2015) assume that sources of error include: the learners, teaching materials or methods, difficulties inherent in the language, interference from LI and L2, and use of L2 in the community. For *learners*, errors result from learners' innate ability to learn language from hypotheses which are tested and manifest themselves in the formation of wrong analogies. Regarding *teaching materials or methods*, errors appear to be prompted by the teaching process itself. Concerning *difficulties inherent in the language*, there are 'myths' that some languages are difficult.

Previous relevant studies

The objectives of the studies reported below were to identify and classify the most common errors committed in FL learners' writing and their sources. Their findings seem to be consistent with one another in that L1 interference (interlanguage) underlies the repeatedly recurring errors in the learners' writing, as shown below:

In 2012, Alhaysony examined written samples of 100 first-year female Arabic-speaking students in the University of Ha'il, KSA. The findings showed that students made a considerable number of errors in their use of articles, especially, the omission errors, whereas substitutions were the least frequent.

In 2012, Ridha investigated the errors in English essay writing of EFL Iraqi college students. The errors were categorized into grammatical, lexical, semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors- mostly led by Arabic interference. Grammatical and mechanical errors were the most serious and frequent ones.

Ahmed's (2016) investigated the writing errors of 20 Saudi EFL university students at King Khalid University. The study identified and analyzed the errors, determined their causes, examined the factors that contributed to their occurrence and suggested suitable solutions for the problem. The findings revealed that the writing errors were committed due to L1 interference, besides

insufficient activities and practice of basic techniques of writing in addition to the lack of follow-up to the students' writing performance.

Seitova's (2016) investigated common English language errors made by Kazakh and Russian L1 speakers in a corpus of 32 compositions and 32 translations written by 32 participants. The seven most common errors committed were: pluralization, subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, wrong choice of words, omission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, misuse of like+Ving form.

In 2016, Ngangbam examined the English syntactic problems persistent in the written performance of 60 first-year English language class of Mutah University. Fifteen categories of errors were classified. Results indicated performance problems committed were due to Arabic (L1) interference, misuse, sentence fragment, overuse, lack of grammatical knowledge, formation, and developmental errors.

In 2016, Naikoo, et al. investigated the most common linguistic errors which Arabic speaking learners in Jazan University, KSA encounter. The common errors were in copula, concord, number, tense markers, aspect, infinitival to, prepositions, articles, and conjunctions.

Concerning the studies below, there are similarities between their findings where the sources of errors were either interlingual or intralingual or both:

Tizazu's (2014) reported the dominant linguistic errors that occurred in the written productions of Arba Minch University students. A sample of paragraphs was collected from students ranging from first-year to graduating level. The results showed that orthography, morphology, syntax, mechanics, and semantics had been affected by the errors, including both intralingual and interlingual causes.

Na Phuket and Normah's (2015) study explored the primary sources and types of errors in the writing of EFL students. Results showed that the most frequent types of errors were translated words from Thai, word choice, verb tense, preposition, and comma. The errors derived from an intralingual source were found to be the dominant ones.

Sermsook et al. (2017) examined the language errors in the writing of 26 English majors in a Thai university and explored their sources. One hundred four pieces of writing were collected and analyzed. Results showed that the most frequently committed errors were punctuation, articles, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and fragment, respectively. The primary sources of the errors were interlingual and intralingual interference, limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and students' carelessness.

Though the studies listed below were carried out in different contexts, their findings are broadly consistent:

Chan's (2004) investigated the errors in Hong Kong Chinese student writers' writing to examine how syntactic transfer affected the effectiveness of students' writing performance. Five

syntactic structures were problematic: the copula, placement of adverbs, relative clauses and, verb transitivity.

Ibnian's (2017) explored the difficulties that university students face when they write. The sample comprised 82 English majors from the World Islamic Sciences and Education University, Jordan. The results revealed that 'lack of ideas' topped the difficulties, followed by 'the incorrect use of mechanics of writing. ' 'Lack of clear assessment instruments and marking schemes' occupied the third rank, while 'time restriction' ranked fourth. 'The unsuitable methods of teaching writing' and 'vocabulary restriction' occupied the fifth and sixth ranks respectively, while 'topic inappropriateness' and 'lack of materials for consulting' occupied seventh and eighth ranks. 'Grammar difficulties' and 'lack of teacher's help' ranked ninth and10th, respectively.

In (2016), Mohammed explored the problem area of grammatical errors and their reasons among 70 learners (31 males and 39 females) EFL majors in the University of AL-Mustansirih, Iraq. The common types of grammatical errors were verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, and pronouns, plurals, and auxiliaries, respectively.

Barzanji's (2016) investigated the most common writing errors made by 58 Saudi undergraduate students. Whether the type of prompt affects the frequency of these errors was examined. Each student wrote two timed essays. The findings revealed that missing/unnecessary word was the most frequent type of error, followed by spelling errors, wrong choice, article, wrong noun form. The type of prompt did not affect the number of errors.

Alfaki's (2015) identified 20 university students' writing problems in English and suggested ways of solving them. The findings revealed language problems at the levels of morphology and syntax, usage errors, and mechanical mistakes, lack of several writing development skills, cognitive problems, and graphomotor problems.

Ababneh's (2017) examined specific EFL writing difficulties faced by 50 female Saudi students at the University of Tabuk. The errors were classified into four main categories: grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical types. The most frequent types of errors were in the categories of grammar (tenses, singular/plural, articles), syntax (subject-verb agreement), and substance (spelling).

In Zheng and Park (2013) study, errors in 168 English essays written by Chinese and Korean university students were identified. The analysis showed that the negative transfer from learners' L1 caused 'run-on sentences, the omission of articles and plural suffix-s, and sentence misordering.' Meanwhile, learners' creative construction caused the misformation of verbs and nouns.

Method
The research method is described in terms of participants, data gathering tools, and method of data analysis. To achieve the study objectives, a corpus of 120 English essays written by 40 female university Saudi students was used for data collection and analysis. A students' writing difficulties questionnaire -adapted from literature- was used as well. The research was administered

in the department of English, College of Education, Zulfi, Majmaah University, KSA during the first term corresponding to the academic year 2018-2019.

Participants were native Arabic speakers who learn EFL. They were English majors in their third year of study. They were all in the same age group. They have had studied English for at least six years before joining the department of English. Thus, they have developed a specific FL proficiency. They were enrolled in an advanced writing course where the study was conducted. All of them have already passed two writing courses and three grammar courses as pre-requisites for advanced writing. The participants' exposure to English is approximately 20 hours a week. The medium of instruction is English; some instructors use Arabic, though.

The tool for data analysis is error analysis, which falls within the descriptive research method. Errors were analyzed following Corder's (1967) model: data were collected, and the errors were identified by carefully examining all erroneous sentences. Then, the errors were described and classified into different types. Finally, findings and conclusions were drawn from the analyzed data.

To answer the study questions, the researcher reviewed the related literature in the field of TEFL in general, EFL writing and error analysis in particular. The participants were assigned three essays in three genres: *narration*, *description*, and *comparison*/*contrast* of 2-4 page each. Participants were given three prompts in each genre. The writing was done inside the classroom. The selection of genres was based on the advanced writing course specifications. The three topics were not supposed to cause participants difficulty in their L1. One hour of each day of administration was allotted for each essay. The researcher further surveyed the proposed writing difficulties encountered by the participants using a questionnaire comprising ten questions. To ensure the questionnaire validity, it was submitted to some experts in the field. Clear instructions were provided to respondents, and it was assured that the information they provide would be used only for research purposes.

Findings and discussion

The types and total numbers and percentages of the errors committed by the participants are reported in Table 1 (Appendix A). Having examined the linguistic aspects which represented the most recurrent errors, 16 types of errors were identified. The total number of errors in each aspect is shown in parenthesis. It was evident that punctuation errors (607) formed the most troublesome area, followed by spelling errors (522), preposition errors (178), article errors, (163), wrong verb tense (119), wrong word form (104), pluralization errors (69) and wrong word choice (63), concord (59), pronouns (38), translated words from Arabic (35), unnecessary copular *be* (28), missing copular *be* (26), word order (18), conjunctions (11), and infinitive and gerund (5) (the least troublesome area) respectively. Thus, the findings seem to support previous research.

Below are sample recorded errors from the different erroneous linguistic aspects explored and their sources justified.

Punctuation marks errors

Mechanics included capitalization (remarkably at the beginning of sentences), end punctuation in particular, and spelling. Punctuation was the most erroneous aspect of the writing of the research sample. Students had problems with the proper use of commas. They always confuse the full stop with the comma (e.g., It *is not the same as the other jobs,* [**.**] *People only work* [**.**]). Also, they confused the colon and semicolon. A common problem was the use of comma splices, (i.e., joining sentences by a comma instead of using a full stop or conjunction). For example: *and advanced countries, also they try different kind of transportation, cars, planes, trains and buses.* [*and advanced countries. They also try*] Participants omitted the bound morpheme ('s) as a possessive marker as in: '*My sisters favourite food is*'[*sisters'*].

Spelling errors

There were many spelling errors due to the many irregularities of L2 spelling besides learners' carelessness about memorizing words. Errors involved letters which can stand for similar sounds, (e.g., *outcide* [*outside*]; *nessery* [*necessary*]). The following common words were found to be confusing: The preposition *of* and the adverb/preposition *off* were confused as in: '*It was an of* [*off*] *day'*. They confused the possessive determiner *its* and the contracted verb form *it's* as in: *it's* [*its*] *lecture rooms*. They further confused the possessive determiner *their* and the adverb *there* (e.g., *there* [*their*] *language*). Participants added or omitted space in a single word as in '*Every one has*; *under stand* [*Everyone has; understand*].' Errors also resulted from the insertion of an extra letter, the absence, or the substitution of a letter in particular words as in: *'My favorit* [*favorite*] *vacation*'; *achive* [*achieve*]; *handel* [*handle*], *anyone my* [*may*] *lose it for DNA causes* ('it' = one's memory); *They always but* [put] *lines and rules*; *begen* [*begin*]; *taim* [*time*]; *matereal* [*material*]; *imprtion* [*impression*].

Preposition errors

Using the appropriate preposition is one of the special difficulties for EFL learners due to the literal translation from Arabic (L1) into English (L2). There were many errors in the appropriate use of prepositions because they are commonly used, and they are often bound to a preceding word; some nouns and adjectives require prepositions, and many verbs require a particular complementation pattern, (e.g., *belief in, angry with, take care of*). Instances from the research written sample are: *listen* [*listen to*] *the music*; The *lectures are different about* [*from*]*; and have different types from* [*of*] *pasta; The employees were so angry from* [*with*] *us. I was searching* [for] *my friend.*

The analysis of the collected data has revealed that the errors in the use of prepositions accounted for their omission, addition, and substitution. In the cases of substitution, the following represents the samples in which a wrong preposition was selected instead of the correct one: *and offered the meals for* [*to*] *us for days. Don't be afraid about* [of] *anything in college; colored with* [*in*]. The following are examples of a preposition omission error: *I don't know where go.* [*where to go*]; *yelling in a loud voice to tell us stop* [*to stop*] *making noise. In the morning we were ready to go Makka* [*go to Makka*]. What follows are examples of a preposition added where it was not required: *I saw many **of** students. Me, my mother and my sister went **to** shopping.*

Article errors

Articles also proved to be an erroneous aspect of the participants' written sample. For instance, in English abstract nouns are used without the definite article ' *the'*, (e.g. beauty, confidence, courage) whereas in Arabic the same words are preceded by the definite article equivalent to *'the* ' (i.e., اللياقة -الشجاعة- الجمال(ال) In the example below, a definite noun phrase is used where an indefinite form is needed: *and play the music.* [*play music*]. Sometimes, an article was unnecessarily added (e.g., *The travel* [*Travel*] *changes the personality of the person.*). They omitted a required article, (e.g., *College is* [a] *big place. It's* [*a*]*different building. It was* [a] *rough behavior. in* [*the*] *morning*). They further misused an article, (e.g., *get a good marks.* [*good mark**s**]*).

Verb tense errors

In the recoded list of erroneous verbs, a past tense verb form was used instead of a simple present tense verb form; only a few errors were recorded. Errors identified resulted from the incorrect use of tense that does not precisely indicate the time of an action. The message the participant tried to convey did not match the verb tense they used (i.e., although participants recalled past actions in their compositions, they used present tense verb forms) as in '*On the first day at college, I wear* [*wore*]. *My first day at college is* [*was*] *very hard. Finally, we arrived and I'm* [*was*] *so excited to see New York'*.

Participants made errors in the use of the correct form of the verbs as in: *but it have* [*it has*] *some cafeterias*. They didn't use fundamental grammatical structures, i.e., omission of the regular past tense maker (-*ed*) as in *'stay* [*stayed*] *there for a week'*; the use of present *copular be* to express past events as in '*When I am* [*was*] *a child'*. Although the inflectional suffix -(e)d, past marker is usually added to verb stems to mark the simple past tense, some verbs do not abide by such a general rule as in '*They teached* [*taught*] *me a lot of things.'*

There is no equivalent of the English primary auxiliaries (*do, does and did*) in Arabic. Thus, the following is an instance of a missing primary auxiliary: *Other people* [*do*] *not choose to be teachers.* The participants used or added one of the different conjugated forms of the verb " *be*" as a filler with simple present and simple past tense forms as in '*They are give* [*give*] *me what I need. I was asked* [*asked*] *one of the students. I was searched* [*searched*] *for my friend'*. Errors in this aspect are interlingual because the simple present tense in Arabic conveys the meaning of both simple and present continuous tenses in English. Moreover, English full verbs can have five forms: base, the third person singular (-s /es), past tense, past participle, and present participle -ing., e.g., *We chatting* [*chatted*] *for a long time*.

Word form errors

Participants made errors in the use of the correct form (s) of the words. Errors in the word form included confusion of adjectives and adverbs, nouns and adjectives, -ed and -ing adjectives. Examples are*: I am afraid to lose my healthy* [*health*]; *I like to be carefully* [*careful*]; *tired* [*tiring*].

Pluralization errors

With singular and plural markers, participants erroneously omitted the plural morpheme 's' even in the presence of plural quantifiers such as ' *many* ' and *'all'* as in '*There are many reason* [*s*]*to love it*'. '*I have three sister*[*s*].' '*There are famous brand* [*s*] *and restaurant* [*s*].' '*McDonald's serves many different kind* [*s*] *of foods'*. The source of error could be intralingual because Arabic

speakers tend not to pronounce the plural 's' morpheme. Conversely, they tend to add the plural 's' morpheme to some English words where it is unnecessary especially irregular plural nouns (e.g., *informations, advices, homeworks*); these words take the plural form in Arabic, and they are plural both in form and signification (معلومات، واجباتن صلعئح.).

Word choice errors

The written compositions had many sentences with inaccurate vocabulary choice, which deviated the meaning of the written text from the writer's original intention: *'We sit two weeks there.'* The writer means *'They stayed there for two weeks.'* The source of the error here is the literal translation for the Arabic word يجلس, which is used to mean both *'sit'* and *'stay'* in English. Here, errors are due to using the wrong words, not the wrong forms as in '*coloured in a light* [*bright*] *yellow.'*

Concord errors

The most common grammatical error type was the lack of concord between subject and verb. Another was the deletion of the (-s) 3rd person singular pronoun marker or adding it unnecessarily (e.g., *We takes* [take]). FL learners usually use the present simple marker or add it unnecessarily as in '*Memories are important because it have* [*has*]; *He understand* [*s*] *how life is different.'*

Pronoun errors

Some pronouns were wrongly selected. The misuse of many pronouns can be attributed to interference from (L1) as in*' and the central building which we take general subjects in it.'* The pronoun *'it'* is unnecessarily used. In Arabic, it is possible to use a verb with its embedded pronoun as one word as in *'katabtu'* كتبت *wrote*; whereas in English two separate words or more can stand for one Arabic word.

Moreover, English pronouns are usually problematic because there are no exact equivalent counterparts in L1. For instance, the pronoun *'it'* as a neutral pronoun is not available in L1. Hence, learners use *'he'* or *'she'* for inanimate objects or concepts. Object pronouns are also confusing because the word or morpheme may represent both an object pronoun and a possessive adjective, (e.g., *There are some ideas in them (their) mind*).

Interlingual errors

First, language interference is deeply thought to impact L2 learning and acquisition; it occurs when learners transfer their own syntactic knowledge into the use of L2. One technique that Arab learners use in acquiring EFL skills, including writing, is a literal translation from Arabic into English and vice versa. For instance: *'As what we know Kuwait City is'* is a literal translation for the Arabic equivalentكما نعرف مدينة الكويت تتكون. *'Travel makes the person more social and learns more cultures'* is a literal translation for السفر يجعل الشخص اجتماعي اكثر ويتعلم ثقافات اكثرThe Arabic word اجتماعي means both *'social'* and *'sociable'* in English.

Word order errors

Errors included a noun and its adjective (s), adjective position, and adverbs describing verbs. There are significant differences in word order patterns between English and Arabic. The

most frequent word order in Arabic is (VSO). The students' inability to recognize word order differences between English and Arabic accounts for such errors as in *'Ago two years,'* [*Two years ago,*]. The error source here is intralingual because the time marker precedes the period of time in Arabic *'فذ عامان'*.

Copular 'be' errors

Some errors can be attributed to non- existence of the copula in Arabic as in' *The college system* [is] *different*. Example errors in the use of the copular *'be'* where it was missing or added unnecessarily are: *You should* [*be*] *independent*; *She is love* [*loves*] *to help people*.

One recorded error in conjunctions is: *I have an old mother which* [*who*] *is so kind*. An instance of an error in the use of a gerund where an infinitive was required is: *to learning* [*learn*] *better*. The following were errors in parallelism: *I drank coffee and eat* [*ate*] *pizza. When we arrive* [*arrived*] *at the college and met my friends.* An example of using a circumlocution strategy is: *'The place of the breakfast'* [*the cafeteria*]. An example of a sentence fragment is: *'Are house is usually walking distance to the ocean.'* [*Our house is only a very short distance from the sea.*]. *'I felt cold so do my parents'.* [*I felt cold. So did my parents*].

In terms of lexis, some of the participants struggled with basic vocabulary. Lexical errors involved individual words misused in the L2; either they were spelled wrongly as in *socil* [*social*] or *studens* [*students*], or there were mistakes in the use of words as in fell [*feel*] or our *live* [*life*].

In terms of equivalence errors, many errors were interlingual and arose because some words in L2 are wrongly equated with others in L1 as in '*We need to happiness.'* [*We need to be/feel happy*]. This is a literal translation for the Arabic equivalent نحن بحاجة لطلس عادة

Writing difficulties questionnaire sample comments

The questionnaire comprised ten questions, and it required respondents to justify their answers as much as possible, and Table 2 presents an overview of the results.

In response to question four, participants commented: *'Sometimes I don't have some ideas in some subjects'; 'I can writ but I have gramar problem and spleing'; 'I need to practice writing more. Also I need to learn more vocabulary'; 'I can't faind vocabulary. I have idea but I don't know how to writte it'; 'because I don't have the enough vocabulary for any topic'; 'Because I don't have the vocabulary in the new Topic.'*

Responding to question six, 37.5% marked *'Content and ideas'* commenting: *'because that is where I feel I have weakness in and I need her* (i.e., the teacher) *to correct me'; 'Because I have some idea but I can't write'; 'To understand what I write'; 'ideas are very important'; 'because the content and ideas is important in paragraph'; 'because I take much time when I writing with my perefect ideas, and I need focus on my ideas'.* 22.5% marked '*Vocabulary and expressions'* commenting: *'Becouse I need learning more for vocabulary'; Because i Always made mistake in vocabulary'; 'because the lexical mistakes very difficalt'.* Three participants marked all the options commenting: *'because I want improve my language'; 'I think all of the skills is important to have a clear written work'; 'because is important for understand the ideas'.*

In response to question seven, 25% said they were given enough time in the classroom to write and commented: *'because the time to class isn't enough'; ' time isn't enough; 'I want give idea and write'; ' the time is not enough'; 'writing should never have enough time and the time we take is not enough'.*

Commenting on question nine, the participants who chose 'Both types' commented: *'Because English international language';' easy for me'; ' because I use colloquial english with friends, but formal english use with my jop'; ' I use both according to what I need'; ' sametimes the people speak English writing English'; ' I watching English movie and chatting with English friends. So, they use everyday English'.* Those who marked 'Formal English' said: *' help me learn more English'; because I study formal English and I use it all the time; 'becose I study the formal English'.* Those who marked 'Colloquial English' said: *'Because it's easy to use'; 'Because, I easy than one; 'gust in social media.'*

In reply to question ten, 50 % agreed and commented: *'When I write some errors in chatting correct'; 'becoues in sometime I use the language'; 'She can't error my mistakes'; 'help me in The learning writing';' becose it is help me to chang my writing';' Can improving my language and improve my write technec'; 'improve it by chatting with my friends'; 'It helps me to improve my writing by learning vocabulary and idioms, etc.'; 'I have english speaking friends and they talk in casual English'; 'to learn new words'.*

Conclusion

Teaching writing and encouraging students to write is quite challenging. Nevertheless, for most people writing is a process that requires motivation, training, and specific skills. Therefore, it requires employing teaching strategies which can assure competence in EFL writing. Students feel reluctant to write even in their L1, and they usually are not confident in their ability to write in L2.

Considering the errors caused by Arabic language interference, the errors occurred the most frequently were: prepositions, articles, word form, verb tense, pluralization, concord, and word choice, respectively. The sources of errors included the incomplete application of FL rules; ignorance of rule restrictions; lack of memorization of spelling of words; ignorance of grammatical and punctuation rules; and difficulty of English article and preposition systems. Also, writing problems arose due to the differences between Arabic and English in phonology, morphology, lexis, and grammatical structures. As a result of these problems, students' effective writing in English is hampered.

In the study context, teaching methods and strategies might have been inadequate. Writing examinations question types were inappropriate because they mostly included multiple-choice, short answer, and matching techniques besides providing learners with guiding topic sentences so as for them to elaborate. Unfortunately, learners were asked to write topics that have previously been tackled in class. Furthermore, learners are not intrinsically motivated to write even in their own language. Lexically, participants' lack of adequate stock of vocabulary could be one of the factors that contributed to the errors committed. Moreover, the lack of writing practice in and outside the classroom was one source of errors.

EFL learners experience difficulties in selecting proper vocabulary, producing and developing ideas about specific topics as well. Unfortunately, FL writing teachers are inclined to focus mainly on teaching students appropriate grammatical structures. Due to the gap between students' needs and teachers' conventional instructional methodology, students cannot express themselves freely and fluently in writing. In conclusion, learners' errors are essential because they can indicate how far a learner is progressing in FL learning and acquisition and how much more they still need to learn.

Recommendations and pedagogical implications

One of the issues that emerged from the study findings is that being able to write effectively in EFL is highly essential for proper FL learning and acquisition to occur. Writing is a complicated process which requires time and effort until we master it. The findings have important implications for integrating writing with other skills. Teachers should help students with several useful writing strategies and techniques which could help them improve their foreign writing skills. Teachers should help students increase their stock of vocabulary by providing them with extensive reading assignments on different topics. They should give immediate oral and written feedback to the students' writing performance. Learners should practice writing more essays on different genres. The number of hours allocated to the teaching of writing per week should be increased. Learner-centered curricula to cater to the specific learners' needs should be reconsidered. Most significantly, the examinations of writing should involve questions which focus on developing the writing sub/skills and foster critical and creative thinking.

A better grasp of FL error occurrence and source (s) will help teachers identify learners' difficulties in learning. Hence, there will be a clear picture of the most effective and efficient course books to be adopted. Thus, future studies on error analysis are recommended since exploring errors is believed to provide invaluable information that could be used to develop better FL learning and teaching.

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Appendix (A)

Table 1. *Error classifications and frequency*

No.	Error classifications	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Punctuation marks	607	29.69 %
2.	Spelling	522	25.53 %
3.	Prepositions	178	8.70 %
4.	Articles	163	7.97 %
5.	Verb Tense	119	5.82 %
6.	Word Form	104	5.08 %
7.	Pluralization	69	3.37 %
8.	Word Choice	63	3.08 %
9.	Concord	59	2.88 %
10.	Pronouns	38	1.85 %
11.	Interlingual errors	35	1.71 %
12.	Copular Be (Unnecessary)	28	1.36 %
13.	Copular Be (Missing)	26	1.27 %
14.	Word Order	18	0.88 %
15.	Conjunctions	11	0.53 %
16.	Infinitive and gerund	5	0.24 %

Appendix (B)
Table 2. *Results of the students' writing difficulties questionnaire*

Ser.	#	% of the participants	Item
1.	25	62.5 %	are motivated to improve their foreign language writing skills.
2.	16	40%	like the way in which they are taught writing in EFL.
3.	13	32.5%	feel confident in their ability to express their ideas in EFL writing.
4.	12	30. %	can easily write on any relevant topic.
5.	10	25%	are given enough time in the classroom to write.
6.	12	30%	use prewriting techniques.
7.	20	50%	think that internet networking and SMS chatting affect their English writing.
8.	6	15%	find difficulties in grammar.
9.	9	22.5%	find difficulties in vocabulary.
10.	15	37.5%	find difficulties in mechanics.
11.	10	25%	find difficulties in organization.
12.	10	25%	want the teacher to focus on sentence structure and style when correcting their written work.
13.	9	22.5%	want the teacher to focus on vocabulary and expressions.
14.	6	15%	want the teacher to focus on grammar and sentence pattern.
15.	15	37.5%	want the teacher to focus on content and ideas.
16.	13	32.5%	use formal English when using the Internet or SMS.
17.	18	45%	use colloquial English when using the Internet or SMS.
18.	9	22.5%	use both types.