

Spelling Problems and Causes among Saudi English Language Undergraduates

Dheifallah Altamimi

English Language Department, University College of Haqel
Tabuk University, Tabuk, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Radzuwan Ab Rashid (Corresponding Author)

English Language Department, Faculty of Languages and Communication
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

Abstract

Arab students who learn English as a foreign language, especially Saudi students, face different challenges during the process of learning of the four English language skills, especially writing and its component (spelling). This paper aims to investigate the preceded causes of students' spelling errors. The main research question sought to be answered is: What are the causes of spelling errors made by the Saudi university students? The research participants were 15 students in the English Language Department at Tabuk University and 15 English language lecturers from the same department. Group structured interviews were designed for the lecturers and students. The findings reveal that there are different causes of students' spelling errors such as the education system and university syllabus, students' learning attitude, and the interference between English and Arabic language. This paper concludes that the spelling errors which Saudi university students commit were caused by the negative impacts of their education system and syllabus, where the syllabus ignores the importance of spelling rules and techniques, and the interference between English and Arabic language when the learners refer to their mother tongue while writing in the English language. It is hoped that the findings revealed in this study will help the policymakers in taking necessary actions in improving the learning experience of Arab learners of English. This paper calls for a reform in the English language teaching in Saudi education system so that spelling is given the required emphasis as it is the foundation of English proficiency.

Keywords: English language teaching, Saudi learner, spelling error, foreign language learner, vocabulary

Cite as: Altamimi, D., & Rashid, R. A. (2019). Spelling Problems and Causes among Saudi English Language Undergraduates. *Arab World English Journal*, 10 (3) 178- 191.
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no3.12>

Introduction

Learning a second language is often challenging for learners as their native language has language rules according to which they pronounce and spell words. A second language has patterns different from their native language, which creates problems for learners as the patterns of their mother tongue become part of their linguistic instinct, which they attempt to, apply to the second language (Nor & Rashid, 2018). In order to learn any other language, the learner's linguistic instinct has to undergo various modifications to accommodate the understanding of the second language and thus developmental stages and encounters with the language many times (Kocatepe, 2017; Zuriyani & Mohamed Ismail, 2019). During the process of learning, the speaker hears sounds different to those she/he instinctively knows and has to form hypotheses about their use. Learners of a second language can have implicit knowledge about the orthographic structure of the target language insofar as they may be able to pronounce or spell a word in their second language without having explicit knowledge of the particular rule they are using.

Spelling is considered an essential component of written language. The potential mistakes in written spellings may change the meaning and understanding of written material and would make it unclear. Hence, it is essential to use the correct spelling of words in order to convey the exact intended meaning of the content. In this context, Babayiğit and Stainthorp (2010) state that grammatical and phonological skills make a significant contribution to spelling performance. Therefore, it can be asserted that spellings play a pivotal role in being a primary and essential skill required by students. Accurate spelling enables writers to express their ideas and thoughts within a standard framework, which is easily understandable by their readers. For effective writing, spelling must also be effective.

Among various difficulties faced by Arab learners of English, the most common error relates to the spelling of words in documents (Al-Bereiki & Al-Mekhlafi, 2015;). Students, due to ineffective learning, continue to repeat the same spelling errors, even after they have completed high school or university or have started in their field of work, which can create obstacles to their progress and development. Consequently, spelling errors can handicap students in various ways. According to Rosenthal and Ehri (2010), spelling out loud practice increases the pace of learning the pronunciation of new words. The present study suggests that a good command of spellings enables an individual to communicate his/her thoughts more clearly and openly in their writing. Poor spelling not only makes a bad impression; it also inhibits communication as the reader has to puzzle over the writer's message.

Literature Review

The concept of spelling has been defined differently by various researchers over the years. Puspandari (2017) defines spelling as a process of representing the spoken language in a written form that consists of a sequence of letters composed to form words in their generally accepted usage. On the other hand, Mpiti (2012) defines spelling as a process that encompasses a number of skills: phonological, morphological, syntax and semantic knowledge, as well as the ability to formulate words based on visual memory along with applying the orthographic rules. Moreover, Perveen and Akram (2014) define spelling as the method for writing words in their correct and acceptable forms. In other words, it is a process of assembling the letters of a given language in

accordance with their correct sequence according to the official orthographical rules of that language otherwise; it would be viewed as a spelling error.

In addition, Ahmed (2017) views spelling as a linguistic method that deals with phonemic orthography. In other words, spelling is the process of word formation by representing the oral language by using the conventional, accepted individual letters according to the rules of that particular language. According to Johnson (2008), spelling is the act of recognizing or mimicking oral or spoken words by the equivalent correct sequence of letters taking into consideration phonological and alphabetical skills and knowledge.

The Case for Good Spelling

Researchers and educators are concerned with mistakes and errors made by students in the process of learning a second or a foreign language (Dweikat & Aqel, 2017). One of the requirements for students, especially at higher levels of academic education, is to be able to communicate, to represent oneself through writing or speaking. Students should master the correct spelling to avoid the misunderstandings or miscommunications that can occur as a result of poor spelling. Hence, the proper spelling is one of the qualities that most students should acquire during the development stages of their education.

Alhaysony (2012) claims that people can turn their thoughts into clear and unambiguous written messages with the help of proper spelling. There could be a situation where there was a valid justification for figuring out how to spell which the traditional instructor never tried to make explicit. The reality of the situation may prove that there is something to be said for exercises of a formal sort to cope with different levels of ability. Clearly, if there was no point in spelling correctly, the subject of spelling would not be given so much consideration, still less an appropriate topic in language teaching.

Peters (2013) lists some of the reasons for teaching and learning spelling. First, there are reasons related to communication and concern for others. Poor and careless spelling may hinder communication. The reader may be constantly held up through having to puzzle out what a word is meant to be, or else he may be misinformed. Thus, the degree of precision necessary in spelling relates to the ease and smoothness of communication. Second is the issue related to the question of courtesy. Failure to speak clearly, to write legibly and to spell correctly are signs of discourtesy.

Thirdly, there is an issue of habit-formation. Right spelling as a skill means being precise; the habit of being correct is one of the essential virtues to be acquired by educated persons. Precision is important for communication, especially for the person who is receiving the information, while it is highly significant for the person who wishes to construct the communication (Banfi et al., 2017). Spelling precision can be viewed from two different dimensions: accuracy and stability. Spelling accuracy refers to the correct spelling of a word or the attempts made by a person to spell a word. They may always spell as word accurately (always right), inaccurately (always wrong), or inconsistently (sometimes right) (Rossi, Martin-Changa, & Ouellette, 2018). Inconsistent spelling can sometimes be attributed to a transition period when the learner is in the process of acquiring the correct spelling, but it is not yet stable.

Based on this presumption, the process of learning could include the transfer of training and that what is transferred is a skill such as spelling. The transfer, however, in this context, is not a technique but the basis for the construction of a habit of care. There is a causal relationship between the habits, skills, and ability involved in, handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and sentence construction and paragraphs formation. All these aspects require careful attention by learners who want to acquire a good command of a language (Ouellette, Martin-Chang, & Rossi, 2017). On the other hand, good spellers must also possess some orthographic knowledge which established on a word-by-word basis (Perfetti, 2007).

Fourthly, an important case for good spelling is that it contributes very effectively to learners' self-concept development. It allows the learners to communicate precisely and acceptably in writing and receive high esteem for their spelling accuracy. The fifth reason for learning to spell is that nearly all spelling systems have been conventionalized years ago by linguists. It is difficult to change or reform spelling systems because they become internalized effectively by the speakers of the language. People will resist any attempt to change a spelling system as it is deeply 'petrified'.

The sixth good reason for learning to spell is the educational importance attached to it, which is connected to the freedom to write. The freedom to write or creative writing does not mean that people are free to create new spellings (though they can generate new words) but they must develop the spelling skills that allow them to write freely, without making orthographical errors. It is only when people have attained machine-like spelling that is automatic, predictable, and infallible, that we can say they are free to write with confidence, with no backward glances to see if a word 'looks right'.

The Causes of Poor English Spelling

Different causes of English spelling errors have been mentioned and examined in various studies. In this sub-section, the four most common kinds of spelling mistakes and errors in the written work of students of English are discussed. Overall, spelling errors can be a result of omission, or substitution or insertion, or the misplacement of a letter when writing a particular word.

Omission errors are where the student does not complete a word something is left out. Derivation errors occur when the student does not apply a basic rule or follow the basic instructions for spelling a particular word; for instance, they write *snobish* for *snobbish*. Inflection errors occur when the student ignores or does not make the necessary changes when adding the inflection. For instance, students forget to drop or remove "e" when adding "ing" to some words, producing *timeing* for *timing* or *reduceing* for *reducing*. Residue error is when students forget to drop letters in a particular context like *bite* when the past form *bit* is required. Phonetic errors are produced when students spell words as they are spoken, like *yot* for *yacht* or *wacht* for *watched*.

Omission Errors

Omission is concerned when the inflectional or derivational morpheme in English words is left out, when the speller did not attempt the morpheme at all, e.g., *bill* as an error attempt of *billed*, or **behin* as an error attempt of *behind*. Omission errors also refer to the omission of one of the double letters in a word with the same two adjacent letters; for example, **hapy* (happy) and **speling* (spelling). In other words, this kind of error occurs when the speller leaves out one or two

letters from the standard spelling of a word. Moreover, this sort of spelling error may be caused by the inconsistency of the sound and the letter system in the English language (Critten, Connelly, Dockrell, & Walter, 2014).

Substitution Errors

The second kind of error is a substitution, which occurs when the speller substitutes one of the letters of the standard spelling of a word with another. The main cause of substitution and omission errors of English spelling is silent letters (Sénéchal, Gingras, & L'Heureux, 2016). Sénéchal et al. (2016) further explain that there is some statistical evidence that children used their prior orthographic context knowledge when making substitution errors. This can also be because some English letters have inconsistent pronunciation, depending on the context. For instance, the sound /f/ can be represented by letter f, ff or gh as in *life*, *different* and *laugh*. The letter C can be pronounced as /k/ in *car*, *microphone* and it is pronounced as /s/ in another context in words like *city*, *nice*, and *mice*. In addition, another sort of substitution error in English spelling occur as result of the inconsistent pronunciation of English vowels; for example, **hangry* (hungry), **thes* for (this), **fascenating* (fascinating), and so forth. Al-zuoud and Kabilan (2013) posit that vowels are another major reason why Arabic students struggle to write error-free English.

Insertion Errors

Another sort of English spelling errors most commonly committed by learners are insertion errors where the spellers add an additional letter when writing a word. A study conducted by Alhaisoni, Al-Zuoud, and Gaudel (2015) shows that insertion errors of spelling are very common among Saudi EFL learners, which may be a result of different sound systems. Examples of insertion errors may be different from person to person. For example, a speller may wrongly write words like, **famouse* (famous), **prouduce* (produce), or by doubling a letter in a word as in: **assisstant* (assistant), and **inclusion* (inclusion) (Gail, Hantler, Laker, Lenchner, & Milch, 2016).

Ambiguous Errors

These are mistakes that can be seen as either inter-lingual or developmental, as for the most part, they mirror the learner's mother tongue structure while resembling the expressions of very young mother-tongue learners (Al-Buainain, 2012). Al-Harrasi (2012) refers to a concern in the matter of categorisation, because these categories do not account for why a student may have more than one kind of spelling mistake in a single word (e.g., **discription* = depiction) or why two students may make different sorts of blunder spelling the same word, (e.g., **permission*, **permision*, **permmission* = authorization), so the categorisation of errors may be of limited help in the understanding of spelling errors. Allaith and Joshi's (2011) analysis suggested that Arabic students make mistakes using phonemes that doesn't exist in their own language; for instance, (/p/and/v/) so they substitute similar ones that do exist in Arabic for example, (/b/→/ب/and/f/→/ف/). They also examined students' ability to distinguish between/b/and/p/and between/f/and/v/. A few incorrect spelling events thus occur because of phonological issues.

Methodology

This research paper employs case study approach. Data were gathered through structured group interviews with the students who are in the final year of their degree in English language at university college of Haqel and their instructors. 3 group interviews are used in this study for the

students (A, B, C) in each group five students. In addition, three group interviews were also used in this study for the lecturers, whereas in each group consist of five lecturers. All the interviews were recorded, analyze, and codes manually. For example, (S1/GA) means student number 1 from group A and (L2/GB) means lecturer number 2 from group B.

Findings

Students' Views

Different students from different groups shared different comments toward the causes of their spelling errors. For example; the education system and university syllabus, students' learning attitude and the interference between English and Arabic language.

The participants felt that spelling problems are due to the poor education system in Saudi Arabia. For example, a participant mentioned that *students in Saudi Arabia have been learning Arabic since childhood and the education system only focuses on Arabic so becoming competent in English is very difficult (S1/GA)*. The responses revealed that as English is a foreign language, they face many challenges and there is lack of focus of the educational system to train students at beginner level at school so that they can learn to overcome language issues. Sawalmeh's (2013) study found that the Saudi government and Ministry of Education focuses only on Arabic and Arabic communication skills. There are many challenges for EFL students because they fail to understand even basic English instructions.

A participant from Group A pointed out that *[they] lack proofreading as a strategy or any reading skills in [their] syllabus or to check [their] writing, which is the real reason for the spelling mistakes in writing (S2/GA)*. The student claimed that lack of reading skills and proofreading strategies taught by lecturers, means most students fail to identify their spelling mistakes. However, with the help of proofreading, many of their writing issues can be improved. O'Brien's (2015) study used qualitative methods and found that proofreading helped students to identify their spelling mistakes, which is one of the most effective ways of preparing error-free scripts.

In the same vein, a participant from Group A stated that *[their] syllabus during [their] studies in the university lacks the four English language skills and the spelling rules or any kind of writing techniques (S3/GA)*. Some spelling problems occur due to lack of knowledge of writing rules, listening rules, reading rules, and speaking rules. The participant above pointed out they don't study any English language skills in their studies at University as these skills are not part of the students' syllabus. According to Murphy, Macaro, Alba, and Cipolla's (2015) qualitative study based on observation techniques, the findings revealed that understanding writing rules allows students to identify key ideas, which helps them avoid spelling errors. Alhasiany's (2014) findings suggested that those students who learn writing and speaking rules from the beginning of their studies can avoid many kinds of spelling mistakes.

A participant from Group B mentioned that *students face many challenges about how to deal with language writing issues because there is poor concept building at primary level (S2/GB)*. This participant sees language issues are mostly due to the education system failing to develop clear concepts for students in their early ages of education. This finding is supported by those of Al-Jarf

(2008) that educational institutions need to focus on the concept of educational development at basic levels.

A participant from Group C commented on *the syllabus that is taught to [them] during [their] academic studies is limited and it does not help [them] to overcome the basic level language challenges [S1/GC]*. Similar findings were obtained by Al-Nofaie (2010) that the education system and institutions need to plan beyond the structural ways of teaching the English language so that spelling can also be improved.

A student from Group A stated that:

The English syllabuses do not include spelling rules and patterns which can be applied to a large number of words, with few exceptions (e. g. the effect of (e) on the vowel in some words, e. g. rat /ræt/ vs. rate /reIt/; tub vs. | tube|.)

(S3/GC)

The limited rules and guidelines offered in the syllabus fail to fulfill the students' needs and queries regarding writing techniques and spelling rules which could allow Saudi students to potentially produce error-free scripts. Alharbi's (2015) analysis also proposed that at tertiary level, students are not provided with basic instruction, which means there is a lack of clarity concerning writing skills.

Students' lack of interest in learning Basic English language skills results in their not being able to improve their spelling. For example, a participant stated that *students do not practice or memorize English on a daily basis, so they often make spelling mistakes (S6/GA)*. This has encouraged them *to stop writing and memorizing the spelling of difficult words (S7/GA)*. Chou's (2014) observations revealed that learning English requires memorization and similar practices on a daily basis so that students can quickly correct their mistakes. It is clear that, when the students found themselves far removed from writing skills and if their university as well their lecturers pay no any attention to this skill, the students will stop practicing this skill even if they know the benefits of it.

There is a wide range of studies concealing the reasons for spelling mistakes. Alhasiany (2014) showed that students make a spelling mistake because of their own careless attitude. Yen, Hou, and Chang's (2015) mixed method research found that students do not practice or memorize English on a daily basis, which inhibits their learning and often creates problems like multiple spelling mistakes. The findings show that the poor writing practice results in extensive spelling mistakes and the text books available to the learners are limited and this reduces their opportunities to learn spelling and limits the texts they write and knowledge of writing methodologies.

A participant from Group B mentioned that *students don't care about the rules and the structure of English language; the students do not pay any attention to English spelling rules (S8/GB)*. It seems that most of the students do not even bother to learn the correct spelling even after noticing their mistakes. Basoglu and Akdemir (2010) found that it is the students' attitude that is the problem, as many students do not have much interest in correcting their common spelling errors.

This problematic attitude is associated with the nature of English language which makes students reluctant to show interest in learning basic forms (S10/GB). It seems that students are not interested in finding their common mistakes; there is lack of self-evaluation by students, which reflects their unwillingness to learn English. Figueredo's (2006) study revealed the same results that EFL students' attitude is highly influential for increasing (or reducing) their interest in learning and writing in the English language.

A student from Group C stated that *Saudi students come and sit in the classroom and expect the lecturers to do all the work. The students just listen to their lecturers and do not contribute in class (S8/GC).* The attitude of students in not participating in class, but expecting their teachers to do everything, ignore the fact that spelling rules have to be learned and remembered by the students themselves.

Regarding the interference between English and Arabic, the lecturers from the different Groups shared different ideas for example; *Saudi university students make spelling errors due to inter-lingual or intra-lingual errors. The inter-lingual errors start when students make spelling errors due to their native Arabic transfer. On other hand, their intra-lingual errors are because of poor learning of the second language (S3/GA).* The respondent suggests that inter-lingua and intra-lingual errors cause the students in Tabuk University to misinterpret English words and sentences. The students believe that because Arabic is their mother language and proficiency in it is most important, other languages are difficult for them. In this way, another language like English is not conceived as a means of communication, so the students of Tabuk University do not try to master any foreign language.

Another comment regarding the interference between English and Arabic language shared by the lecturers, *the nature of English language is also a cause of spelling errors. English is a difficult language, which is not easy to understand or learn. The main cause of students spelling errors is due to the number of silent letters or the grouping of letters makes it hard to understand for Saudi students to spell words when the students compare it with Arabic (S3/GC).* The response suggests that the nature of English language in terms of the silent letters or group of letters makes it hard for the students to understand how to spell words especially when the students compare it with Arabic. Silent letters also affect the pronunciation of the preceding vowel (like the difference between hop/hɒp/ and hope /hoʊp/) although they themselves are not pronounced. Hence, members of the teaching staff find English is often difficult for Saudi students because the relationship between the spoken and written form is not straightforward as it is in Arabic; the function of the silent letter cannot be understood easily because there are none in Arabic and most of the students refer to their mother language rules while writing in English.

Lecturers' Views

Different lectures shared different comments or ideas toward the preceded causes of students' spelling errors. For example; poor syllabus and education system, students lack knowledge of spelling rules and techniques and administrative constraints.

A participant from group A reported *in the Saudi context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Students are supposed to master the four language skills within English. Teaching*

the skill of writing, especially mastering the spelling component, is one of the major areas challenging language instruction and learning in Saudi EFL (L1/GA). The response points out that because English is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, it is difficult for students to gain expertise in all four skills, including spelling as the main component of the writing skill. The major challenges that are faced by learners are due to the teaching system, especially teaching the skill of writing is one of the challenges that face Saudi students and lecturers. Another participant reported that, *in some contexts, Saudi students are not able to master the four English language skills, especially in Tabuk University, because the students do not study writing as a compulsory subject, so this may be one of the reasons why Saudi students in Tabuk University face a problem with spelling (L2/GA).* As pointed out by the lecturer, students could make spelling errors because of their University (Tabuk University) ignores the writing skill in the students' syllabus.

Another participant from Group B commented that *the Saudi government focuses on Islamic studies rather than on English. This is because Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country and they must keep the focus on Arabic rather than any other language. Again, this corresponds to one of the major root causes of spelling issues among Saudi students, as the government makes schools prioritize Islamic studies and Arabic rather than focusing on English language (L2/GB).* The response of the lecturer suggests that because Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, where the government and other agencies focus on their religious values, they believe that Arabic is the only language which needs to be spoken as a means of communication throughout the country, therefore learning English has very little value.

The five participants from group C shared the same views regarding this reason. For example, *the major problem is due to the fact that the students do not know the spelling rules. They are unaware of English sound recognition, and they are not familiar with the correct pronunciation of words (L5/GC).* This participant believes that Saudi students currently enrolled in Tabuk University are unaware of the interconnectedness of writing, listening, and reading and speaking and how they affect each other. Another participant from Group B shared a similar comment, *this major problem is due to the fact that the students make spelling errors because they have no idea how the word is spelt or the different spellings of words that are homophones (L8/GB).* The response suggests that neither in Tabuk University nor during their previous school experience have students been provided with adequate spelling rules for writing in English, consequently, they seem unaware of them or how they operate.

The participants from Groups A, B and C agreed that administrative constraints contribute to the reasons for the students' spelling errors, for example, *Saudi students make spelling errors because of their universities' administrative constraints the amount of class time, for instance or when the lecturers are more focused on earning money and doing the minimum, rather than helping their students to learn or master English language skills. While the universities do not have certain clear guidelines to follow so that their students have learning goals, improved learning outcomes are difficult. If all the universities shared formal requirements such as a common test for all the students in all English departments, this would help general planning to improve students' performance (L5/GA).* This response suggests that Tabuk University lecturers need to support themselves and their families financially, and that is their main focus, or they feel unsupported by the administration in their teaching. Pieretti and Roseberry-McKibbin (2016)

approached 110 teachers of English in Saudi schools. Their findings revealed that these teachers were mainly novice teachers, more concerned with earning money than effective teaching. Hence, the findings of their study are similar to the comment above, about teachers being more likely to be concerned about making money, than helping students learn, especially if the administration and organization of teaching are not supportive.

A participant from Group B reported about the administrative constraints as a cause of students' spelling errors, *Saudi students make spelling errors because in many Saudi universities, there are no clear or specific rules for selecting lecturers, which means that sometimes, you can find a lecturer who has majored in science but is teaching English, especially if he is a native English speaker lecturer (L7/GB)*. The response suggests that Saudi learners may be taught by untrained teachers of English, especially if they are native speakers, and do not think in terms of second or foreign language learners' need for explicit teaching, so students misspell words because they are not provided with the proper rules and guidance because their lecturers are not EFL teachers. The University prefers lecturers who are native speakers of English to teach English regardless of where they come from, and their specialization can be Science or Computer background. If their only advantage is that they are native speakers of English, this may not be enough for them to teach English if it is outside their own field and they are untrained or are not fluent in another language beside English. Liu's (2017) sample of teachers in Nigeria and demonstrated that teachers' selection criteria are often neglected when appointing staff who are not qualified to teach specific courses and so are unable to improve the performance of students.

Discussion

Learning English can be particularly challenging for native Arabic speakers due to pronunciation and orthographic differences. Previous studies agree that the causes of spelling errors tend to be related to interference from the native language in areas where it differs from the second or foreign language (e.g., Ahmed, 2017; Al-Sobhi, Rashid, Abdullah, & Darmi, 2017). This study confirms the findings of the existing studies and at the same time, puts forth another factor, which is the nature of classroom instruction and teachers education. As highlighted in the findings part, students' lack knowledge of spelling rules and techniques and administrative constraints can be considered as perceived causes of spelling errors in addition to the nature and influence of the learners' mother tongue.

It is often more difficult for someone to learn something entirely new or very different from what they already know. Since English writing system is very different from Arabic, this could help explain why English spelling poses such a problem for Arabic speakers. In the interviews, the participants claimed that the majority of students made spelling errors related to prefixes, apostrophe usage, reduplication of letters, and omission of letters and addition of letters. The participants felt that the mistakes are due to influence from their mother tongue, which supports the finding of Al-Khairi (2013), as well as a result from irregularities in the English spelling system, which is in agreement with (Babu & Gibreel, 2018). The participants in Al-Khairi's (2013) and Babu and Gibreel's (2018) are different from the participants in this study, yet all of them agreed that their mother tongue contributes to the spelling errors made. This reflects that mother-tongue interference has a strong influence in Arab students' learning of English.

Tackling the mother-tongue influence is challenging. It is impossible for Arab learners to abandon their mother tongue as they grow up with this language. Thus, the challenge facing policymakers in Saudi Arabia is to find ways to lessen the effects of this mother-tongue interference. One possible way is perhaps to introduce English as early as possible, which can be done by including English as a core subject in early childhood education.

The present paper is also in line with Rass (2015) regarding the lack of administrative support for teachers. The findings show that the EFL lecturers believed they did not receive any training that could improve their performance in class. This suggests that novice lecturers are provided with inadequate resources, making it harder for them to develop useful activities for spelling or listening tasks. As a result, they often just teach directly from the textbooks provided to them, a finding supported by Witzel (2015). However, these textbooks do not contain writing activities that teach students about English spelling rules. Consequently, the Saudi EFL classes frequently ignore this important area. A contributing factor to instructor efficiency is the hiring practices at Saudi universities. When hiring lecturers from other countries, universities often only care whether individuals are native speakers of English regardless of their academic background or professional experience. This practice leads to teachers who do not learn effective methods of delivering information about language skills, a finding shared by Hervey, Dickins, and Higgins (2016) and Olson (2017). This practice results in fewer teachers and trainers qualified to teach English spelling rules. This situation would appear to negatively affect classroom performance because teachers appeared unable to deal with learner errors.

Perceived causes of Saudi EFL student spelling errors tend to include the major linguistic differences between English and Arabic, which affect their reading, writing, and listening abilities. Learning a language is a multi-sensory process that should include visual, auditory, morphemic, and etymological strategies to reduce spelling errors. Unfortunately, low quality of instruction is provided in the classroom, as perceived by the students and the teachers interviewed in this study. The teachers have limited experience, lower-quality training, and inadequate resources hence hampering them from being an efficient instructor to further develop their learners.

Conclusion

There were many perceived causes of spelling errors either reported by the respondents or observed in this study, in particular, according to the respondents, the interference between English and Arabic language, poor syllabus and education system, students lack knowledge of spelling rules and techniques, administrative constraints and students' learning attitude can be considered as the main causes of Saudi university students spelling errors.

About the Authors:

Dheifallah Altamimi is a PhD researcher at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. His research interests include Applied Linguistics and Qualitative Methodology. He has several years of teaching experience at university level in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2514-9456>

Radzuwan Ab Rashid is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and TESL at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Nusantara

Studies (Jonus), a social science journal indexed in Web of Science (ESCI), published by UniSZA Press. He is the recipient of UniSZA's Best Researcher Award 2019. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1334-6268>

References

- Ahmed, D. (2017). Investigating English spelling difficulties in basic level pupils: A case study of some basic level schools in Omdurman locality. (*Unpublished doctoral dissertation*). Sudan University of Science and Technology, Khartoum, Sudan.
- Al-Bereiki, S. & Al-Mekhlafi, A. (2015). Spelling Errors of Omani EFL Students. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, 9, (4), 660-676.
- Al-Buainain, H. (2012). Students' Writing Errors in ESL: A Case Study. *QNRS Repository*, 1, (1), 1-37.
- Alhaisoni, E.M., Al-Zuoud, K.M., & Gaudel, D.R. (2015). Analysis of Spelling Errors of Beginner Learners of English in the English Foreign Language Context in Saudi Arabia. *English Language Teaching*, 8, (3), 185-192.
- Alharbi, H.A. (2015). Improving Students' English Speaking Proficiency in Saudi Public Schools. *International Journal of Instruction*, 8, (1), 105-116.
- Al-Harrasi, T.S. (2012). Using Stories in English Omani Curriculum. *English Language Teaching Archives*, 5, (11), 51-58.
- Alhasiany, F. (2014). English Language Learners. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 5, (8), 38-43.
- Alhaysony, M. (2012). An Analysis of Article Errors Among Saudi Female EFL Students: A Case Study. *Asian Social Science*, 8, (12), 55-66.
- Al-Jarf, R. (2008). The Impact of English as an International Language (EIL) upon Arabic in Saudi Arabia. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10, (4), 193-210.
- Al-Khairy, M.A. (2013). Saudi English-Major Undergraduates' Academic Writing Problems: A Taif University Perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 6, (6), 1-12.
- Allaith, Z.A. & Joshi, R.M. (2011). Spelling Performance of English Consonants Among Students whose First Language is Arabic. *Reading and Writing*, 24, (9), 1089-1110.
- Al-Nofaie, H. (2010). The Attitudes of Teachers and Students Towards Using Arabic in EFL Classrooms in Saudi Public Schools: A Case Study. *Novitas-Royal: Research on Youth and Language*, 4, (1), 64-95.
- Al-Sobhi, B.M.S., Rashid, S.M., Abdullah, A.N., & Darmi, R. (2017). Arab ESL Secondary School Students' Spelling Errors. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 5, (3), 16-23.
- Al-Zuoud, K.M. & Kabilan, M.K. (2013). Investigating Jordanian EFL Students' Spelling Errors at Tertiary Level. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5, (3), 164-176.
- Babayigit, S. & Stainthorp, R. (2010). Component Processes of Early Reading, Spelling, and Narrative Writing Skills in Turkish: A Longitudinal Study. *Reading and Writing*, 23, (5), 539-568.
- Babu, S. & Gibreel, M.O.M. (2018). An Investigation in Learning English Language by Students of Sudanese University: A Case study of Tertiary Level Khartoum Locality. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research & Development*, 9, (6), 490-500.

- Banfi, C., Kemény, F., Gangl, M., Schulte-Körne, G., Moll, K., & Landerl, K. (2017). Visuo-Spatial Cueing in Children with Differential Reading and Spelling Profiles. *PLoS ONE*, 12, (7), 1-20.
- Basoglu, E.B. & Akdemir, O. (2010). A Comparison of Undergraduate Students' English Vocabulary Learning: Using Mobile Phones and Flash Cards. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 9, (3), 1-7.
- Chou, M.H. (2014). Assessing English Vocabulary and Enhancing Young English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners' Motivation Through Games, Songs, and Stories. *Education 3-13*, 42, (3), 284-297.
- Critten, S., Connelly, V., Dockrell, J.E., & Walter, K. (2014). Inflectional and Derivational Morphological Spelling Abilities of Children with Specific Language Impairment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, (948), 1-10.
- Dweikat, K.A.J. & Aqel, F.M. (2017). A Longitudinal Analysis Study of Writing Errors Made by EFL Students at Al-Quds Open University (QOU) the Case of Language Use Course. *British Journal of Education*, 5, (13), 127-145.
- Figueredo, L. (2006). Using the Known to Chart the Unknown: A Review of First-Language Influence on the Development of English-as-a-Second-Language Spelling Skill. *Reading and Writing*, 19, (8), 873-905.
- Gail, H.R., Hantler, S.L., Laker, M.M., Lenchner, J., & Milch, D. (2016). *U.S. Patent No. 9,465,791*. Washington, DC: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
- Hervey, S., Dickins, J., & Higgins, I. (2016). *Thinking Arabic Translation: A Course in Translation Method: Arabic to English*. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, K. (2008). *An Introduction to Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kocatepe, M. (2017). Female Arab EFL Students Learning Autonomously Beyond the Language Classroom. *English Language Teaching*, 10, (5), 104-126.
- Liu, W. (2017). The Changing Role of Non-English Papers in Scholarly Communication: Evidence from Web of Science's Three Journal Citation Indexes. *Learned Publishing*, 30, (2), 115-123.
- Mpiti, T. (2012). The nature of spelling errors of grade three isiXhosa background students in English first additional language. (Unpublished master thesis). University of Fort Hare, South Africa.
- Murphy, V.A., Macaro, E., Alba, S., & Cipolla, C. (2015). The Influence of Learning a Second Language in Primary School on Developing First Language Literacy Skills. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 36, (5), 1133-1153.
- Nor, N.M & Rashid, R.A. (2018). [A Review of Theoretical Perspectives on Language Learning and Acquisition](#). *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 39(1), 161-167.
- O'Brien, J. (2015). Consciousness-Raising, Error Correction and Proofreading. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15, (3), 85-103.
- Olson, E. (2017). Voice Onset Time in Arabic and English Stop Consonants. (Unpublished bachelor thesis). Faculty of The University of Utah, USA.
- Ouellette, G., Martin-Chang, S., & Rossi, M. (2017). Learning from Our Mistakes: Improvements in Spelling Lead to Gains in Reading Speed. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 21, (4), 350-357.

- Perfetti, C. (2007). Reading Ability: Lexical Quality to Comprehension. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 11*, (4), 357-383.
- Perveen, U. & Akram, F. (2014). A Comparative Study to Know the Causes of Spelling Errors Committed by Learners of English at Elementary Level in Distract Kasur and Lahore in Pakistan. *European Academic Research, 2*, (2), 2601-2622.
- Peters, M.L. (2013). *Spelling Caught or Taught: A New Look*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc.
- Pieretti, R.A. & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (2016). Assessment and Intervention for English Language Learners with Primary Language Impairment: Research-Based Best Practices. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, 37*, (2), 117-128.
- Puspandari, K. (2017). An Analysis on Spelling of Inflectional Nouns Made by the Seventh Grade Students of SMPN 1 Loa Kulu. *Jurnal Intelegensia, 2*, (2), 19-31.
- Rass, R.A. (2015). Challenges Face Arab Students in Writing Well-Developed Paragraphs in English. *English Language Teaching, 8*, (10), 49-59.
- Rosenthal, J. & Ehri, L.C. (2010). Pronouncing New Words Aloud during the Silent Reading of Text Enhances Fifth Graders' Memory for Vocabulary Words and Their Spellings. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 24*, (1), 921-950.
- Rossi, M., Martin-Chang, S., & Ouellette, G. (2018). Exploring the Space Between Good and Poor Spelling: Orthographic Quality and Reading Speed. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 23*, (2), 192-201.
- Sawalmeh, M.H.M. (2013). Error Analysis of Written English Essays: The Case of Students of the Preparatory Year Program in Saudi Arabia. *English for Specific Purposes World, 14*, (40), 1-17.
- Sénéchal, M., Gingras, M., & L'Heureux, L. (2016). Modeling Spelling Acquisition: The Effect of Orthographic Regularities on Silent-Letter Representations. *Scientific Studies of Reading, 20*, (2), 155-162.
- Witzel, C. (2015). Commentary: An Experimental Study of Gender and Cultural Differences in Hue Preference. *Frontiers in psychology, 6*, (1840), 1-3.
- Yen, Y.C., Hou, H.T., & Chang, K.E. (2015). Applying Role-Playing Strategy to Enhance Learners' Writing and Speaking Skills in EFL Courses Using Facebook and Skype as Learning Tools: A Case Study in Taiwan. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 28*, (5), 383-406.
- Zuriyani, M. Y. & Mohamed Ismail, A. S. (2019). The Interactive Roles of Lexical Knowledge and Reading Strategies on Reading Comprehension Performance. *Journal of Nusantara Studies, 4*(1), 273-299.