
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Mother Tongue Interference on English Grammar: A Case Study of EFL Students at Technical College, Saudi Arabia

Mohammad Asad

Department of English Language, Nesma High Training Institute, Neom, Saudi Arabia

Corresponding Author: Mohammad Asad, **E-mail:** mdasad.jnu@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

The mother tongue influence plays a crucial role in the process of second or foreign language acquisition, serving as both a potential aid and an obstacle. When significant linguistic differences exist between a learner's first and second language, the influence of the mother tongue may hinder the acquisition of the target language. This case study investigates the negative impact of mother-tongue interference on English language acquisition among EFL learners. Specifically, it examines the most common grammatical errors in English paragraph writing made by technical students and explores the underlying causes of these errors. The research focuses on the analysis of paragraph writing from the final-term examination scripts of thirty students at the Technical College of Al-Hait in Saudi Arabia. Analysis of the data revealed that the most frequent grammatical errors involved the use of the copulas, adjective phrase, prepositions, articles, and apostrophes. The findings indicate that mother-tongue interference is the primary factor contributing to these grammatical inaccuracies. The results emphasize the need for contrastive awareness and explicit instruction targeting error-prone structures. The paper proposes pedagogical interventions such as focused grammar instruction, corrective feedback, and consistent writing practice to reduce the impact of L1 transfer. The study concludes that while mother-tongue influence poses a significant challenge in EFL contexts, especially in writing, its negative effects can be reduced or eliminated and mitigated through systematic and consistent writing practice. Based on these insights, the paper proposes pedagogical strategies and valuable insights for educators and learners aiming to minimize first-language interference and enhancing grammatical accuracy among Arabic-speaking EFL learners and contributes to the broader field of second language acquisition research.

| KEYWORDS

Mother tongue interference, grammatical errors, EFL technical students, EFL writing, Arabic-English transfer, Saudi learners.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 May 2025

PUBLISHED: 25 May 2025

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2025.8.5.22

1. Introduction

Writing is an integral part of professional, personal, and social life. Writing refers to a conventional system of signs or symbols that represent the spoken language in written communication. It is an orthographic system that visually demonstrates how spoken letters, words, and sentences are symbolized in written characters. Writing is one of the fundamental parts of human communication. People mostly communicate with others either through a verbal channel or written text. In spoken communication, it is simple to convey ideas or emotions through context-based dialogue and body language. Contrarily, in written communication, the dialogues are contextual, but body language is missing. In Penman's (1998) view, negotiating the meaning of the written text is impossible. It may be understood, misunderstood, or misinterpreted as mentioned in AbiSamra (2003).

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most challenging language skills to master. Its complexity stems from the cognitive and linguistic demands it places on the writer, making it a difficult skill for both native and non-native speakers alike. However,

the nature of these challenges often differs based on the writer's linguistic background. Native speakers, who think and process information in English, typically internalize grammatical structures, allowing them to write more intuitively. In contrast, non-native speakers, such as Arabic-speaking learners of English, often need to consciously apply grammatical rules during the writing process (AbiSamra, 2003). According to Nuruzzaman et al. (2018), writing is inherently demanding for all language users because it requires the simultaneous management of multiple components, including content development, organizational structure, grammar, vocabulary, purpose, audience awareness, and writing mechanics. Al-Samadani (2010) also underscores the difficulties associated with writing in a second or foreign language, highlighting that writers must produce texts that are not only grammatically correct but also semantically meaningful and culturally appropriate.

Moreover, the linguistic and orthographic differences between English and Arabic further complicate the writing process for Arab EFL learners. As a result of these challenges, learners often rely on their first language when constructing texts in English, which frequently leads to grammatical errors influenced by mother-tongue interference.

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language across all levels of education, including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Prior research (Al-Khreshah, 2010; Murad & Khalil, 2015; Asad, 2024) indicates that Arabic-speaking learners frequently exhibit grammatical, syntactic, and mechanical errors in their English writing, primarily due to negative transfer from their first language, Arabic. Although Arabic and English share some linguistic features, the structural and stylistic differences between them—such as variations in vocabulary, word order, and writing conventions—pose significant challenges for learners in developing proficiency in English writing. Corder (1971) argues that interlingual errors emerge when the structural patterns and habitual rules of a learner's first language interfere with the acquisition of the target language. This type of negative transfer is more likely to result in a higher frequency of errors when the learner's first language and the second language differ significantly in their linguistic structures (Ellis, 1995; Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

2. Distinction between Errors and Mistakes

In the field of second and foreign language acquisition, the terms *errors* and *mistakes* are often used interchangeably to describe deficiencies in learners' grammatical performance. However, these two concepts are fundamentally distinct in both nature and function. A *mistake* is typically an unintentional and temporary deviation from correct language use. It occurs when a learner, despite knowing the correct form, makes an incorrect utterance due to lapses such as slips of the tongue, momentary distraction, fatigue, psychological stress, or lack of attention. Mistakes are generally self-recognizable and self-correctable upon review, indicating that the learner possesses the underlying knowledge but failed to apply it accurately in a given instance. Conversely, an *error* represents a more systematic and consistent deviation that reflects a gap in the learner's linguistic competence. Errors arise when a learner does not yet fully understand the rules of the target language. Unlike mistakes, errors are not typically self-corrected because the learner is unaware of the inaccuracy. They are often persistent and are rooted in incomplete or incorrect internalization of language structures.

According to Brown (2000), 'mistakes' (in performance) refer to "a failure to use a known system correctly, whereas, 'errors' (in competence) refer to a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker". Similarly, Corder (1974) states that 'a mistake' is an unsystematic poor language performance, while 'an error' is a systematic and incomplete learning result and learners' linguistic incompetency.

Moreover, the sources of errors are varied. Interlingual errors occur due to interference from the learner's first language, while intralingual errors stem from complexities within the target language itself. Other contributing factors include sociolinguistic context, cognitive processing challenges, and affective variables such as anxiety or motivation (Brown, 2000). Therefore, understanding the distinction between errors and mistakes is crucial for language educators, as it informs appropriate corrective feedback and instructional strategies tailored to the learner's specific developmental needs.

3. Error Analysis Approaches

Error Analysis (EA) and Contrastive Analysis (CA) were applied to examine the learners' linguistic errors. These two approaches are closely related to each other and are often used together to investigate the influence of first language (L1) transfer on second language writing (L2).

Error Analysis is a method of linguistic analysis that focuses on identifying, describing, and explaining the errors learners make in the process of acquiring a second or foreign language. In contrast, Contrastive Analysis is a predictive and comparative approach, examining potential areas of difficulty by identifying structural differences between the learner's native language and the target language without looking at the learners output (Sajaavara 2000, p. 208). Hayati (1998) outlines two core assumptions underlying contrastive analysis: first, the level of difficulty is revealed by the degree of disparity between the two languages.

Second, similarity levels reflect simplicity levels. Thus, when there are significant discrepancies between L1 and L2, learners are more likely to struggle, whereas similarities can facilitate easier acquisition.

Historically, learner errors were viewed negatively—seen as flaws or obstacles to be corrected (Gass & Selinker, 2008). However, this perspective shifted significantly with Corder's (1974) ground-breaking view that errors are not merely signs of failure but crucial indicators of language development. Corder argued that learner errors should be seen as a valuable part of the learning process, offering insight into what has been acquired and what remains to be learned.

Moreover, in classroom settings, Error Analysis is widely recognized as a powerful diagnostic tool for teachers. It not only helps evaluate student performance but also guides instructional feedback and curriculum adjustments (Richards & Sampson, 1974). According to Corder (1974) and Brown (2000), analyzing learner errors provides three key benefits: (1) *it informs teachers of learners' current progress and learning gaps*; (2) *it offers insights into the nature of language acquisition and teaching methodologies*; and (3) *it provides learners with tangible evidence of their own development, helping them recognize patterns of improvement*.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that understanding learner errors plays a crucial role in enhancing grammatical accuracy in second language writing (Carroll & Swain, 1993). Among the most significant causes of errors is *negative L1 transfer*, commonly referred to as *interference*. Lado (1957) defined interference as the negative influence of a learner's native language on their performance in the target language. In addition, ineffective teaching methods—particularly those that overemphasize translation between the first and second language—can also contribute to the frequency and persistence of learner errors.

4. Literature Review

Numerous previous studies have investigated the negative transfer of Arabic (L1) to English, suggesting that first language interference is a major underlying cause of grammatical errors in English writing among Arabic-speaking EFL learners (Bhela, 1999; Khuwaileh, 2000; AbiSamra, 2003; Sabbah, 2015 etc.).

Younus and Fatima (2015) carried out a study at Tabuk University to examine the most common errors in English writing among 40 female students in the English and Translation Department. Their findings revealed that the most frequent errors were grammatical—specifically in verb tenses, prepositions, syntax, and articles, along with punctuation errors (omission, misuse, addition), and spelling errors, including word substitution, omission, addition, disordering, segmentation, and use of unknown words.

Similarly, Sawalmeh (2013) investigated 32 essays written by Saudi 32 EFL learners enrolled in the Preparatory Year Program at the University of Ha'il. The findings identified ten prevalent types of errors: (i) verb tense, (ii) word order, (iii) singular/plural form, (iv) subject-verb agreement, (v) double negative forms, (vi) spelling, (vii) capitalization, (viii) article, (ix) sentence fragments, and (x) prepositions.

Additionally, Al-Khreshah (2010) discovered that the distinctions between the subjects' L1 and L2 may have contributed to the errors in the acquisition of the English coordinator conjunction *and* made by L2 Jordanian EFL learners. Students who speak Arabic as their first language are puzzled by the disparity between the two languages and make interlingual errors. Furthermore, According to Farooq et.al. (2012), grammatical accuracy remains one of the most challenging aspects of writing for ESL learners. They found that students face difficulties constructing well-formed sentences and paragraphs, especially in areas such as sentence structure, the use of modifier, and subject-verb agreement.

Likewise, Al Fadda (2012) observed that ESL students frequently struggle to differentiate between spoken and written English, particularly in mastering essential grammatical components. Among the most observed difficulties are issues related to subject-verb agreement and sentence cohesion within paragraphs. These grammatical inconsistencies are often exacerbated by learners' tendency to rely on spoken English patterns when composing written texts, leading to a lack of formality and structural coherence. AbiSamra (2007) argued that Arabic-speaking learners frequently commit interlingual errors that occur due to the direct transfer of linguistic features from the first language (Arabic) into the second language (English).

Karim and Nassaji (2013) also highlighted the influence of L1 on L2 writing. They asserted that ESL/EFL learners often transfer linguistic features from their first language into their second language writing, which can lead to grammatical errors in areas such as verbs, tenses, articles, and prepositions due to structural differences between L1 and L2.

Ridha (2012) examined the linguistic errors present in English essays written by EFL students and concluded that mother-tongue interference is the primary source of those errors. The study emphasized that learners often rely heavily on their first language while speaking and writing in English, with grammatical errors being the most frequent and problematic.

Huwari and Al-Khasawneh (2013) emphasize a few factors that contribute to their English writing deficiencies, such as a lack of writing experience, poor understanding of grammatical rules, and a lack of proper school education. Likewise, Ansari (2012) states that school education is one of the leading reasons for the inadequacies of Saudi students in their English writing.

5. Main Objectives of the Study

As previously discussed, numerous studies have examined the influence of the mother tongue on English as a second or foreign language (EFL/ESL), with consistent findings indicating that Arab learners frequently commit grammatical errors in English writing. Most of these investigations, however, have been conducted at the university level. To date, there appears to be a lack of research focusing specifically on grammatical errors made by EFL learners at technical colleges.

Given this gap, it is both timely and valuable to undertake a study aimed at identifying the grammatical errors commonly found in the English writing of technical college students. Furthermore, the study seeks to explore the key contributing factors to these errors. The significance of this research lies in its potential to provide academic support for both instructors and learners by offering insights into the nature of grammatical difficulties and informing more effective teaching strategies in technical education contexts.

The primary objectives of the present study are:

- 1) To identify and analyse the grammatical errors made in the English essay writing by the EFL students at the Technical College.
- 2) To investigate the underlying factors contributing to the occurrence of these grammatical errors.
- 3) To calculate the frequency and percentage of distribution of various subtypes of grammatical errors identified in the students' writing.

6. Methodology

SI The methodology employed in the present study was informed by established research in the field of second language acquisition, particularly the works of Corder (1974), Brown (2000), and Ellis (1995). These foundational studies provided structured guidance on conducting linguistic fieldwork, including the stages of data collection, error identification, categorization, analysis, and interpretation. Each of these steps was systematically followed in this research to ensure rigor and consistency.

6.1. Participants

The study involved 30 male students from the Technical College of Al-Hait. These students were enrolled in vocational training programs in various technical disciplines such as computer technology, electrical systems, and pipefitting. In addition to their technical training, they received instruction in Business English and Technical English. All participants had received more than six years of English education at the school level. Their ages ranged from 20 to 26 years, with an average age of 23. None of the participants reported any physical, cognitive, or neurological impairments that might affect their language learning or writing performance.

6.2. Data Collection

Data for the study were collected from the participants' final-term English exam scripts. One of the exam tasks required the students to write a short essay of 60 to 80 words on the topic 'Myself.' This task was specifically selected for its potential to elicit spontaneous written language, which is useful for identifying naturally occurring grammatical errors. The collected scripts were used as the primary data source for error analysis.

6.3. Data Samples

Each student was instructed to compose a short essay containing approximately 10 sentences. With a total of thirty students contributing to the study, the resulting dataset comprised 300 individual sentences (30 students × 10 sentences). These 300 sentences collectively formed the corpus used for the identification, categorization, and examination of grammatical errors present in the learners' written English. This dataset provided a focused and manageable sample for investigating recurring patterns of linguistic inaccuracies and assessing the impact of mother-tongue interference on English grammar usage.

6.4. Data Analysis

The answer scripts were carefully examined to identify linguistic errors, with a primary focus on grammatical errors. While syntactic and mechanical errors (Asad, 2024) were also observed, the scope of this study was limited to grammatical inaccuracies. The analysis was conducted using Error Analysis (EA) as the primary framework, supplemented by Contrastive Analysis (CA).

EA was employed to identify and categorize the grammatical errors made by learners, whereas CA was used to explore whether these errors could be attributed to interference from the learners' first language (L1). The dual approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how the linguistic features of Arabic influenced the students' English writing, particularly in areas of grammar and structure.

Table 1. Grammatical Error Categories

Grammatical Error Type	Examples
Adjective phrase	*I have car white. Instead of: I have a white car.
Apostrophe	*Im student. Instead of: I'm a student.
Copula	*I good. Instead of: I am good.
Definite Article	*I learn the English. Instead of: I learn English.
Indefinite Article	*Im student. Instead of: I'm a student.
Preposition	*I get up in 6 am. Instead of: I get up at 6 am.

7. Results and Discussions

The primary objective of this study was to identify the most prevalent grammatical errors committed by EFL learners at a technical college and to explore the potential causes of these recurring issues. The analysis was conducted on 30 final examination answer scripts, focusing specifically on a short essay task written in English. A total of 350 grammatical errors were identified and categorized. The findings are summarized in Table 2, with a corresponding graphical representation shown in Figure 1 below.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Grammatical Errors in English Writing

Grammatical Error Type	Frequencies	Percentages
Copula	110	31%
Prepositions	70	20%
Indefinite articles	90	26%
Definite articles	20	6%
Adjectives	50	14%
Apostrophe	10	3%
Total	350	100%

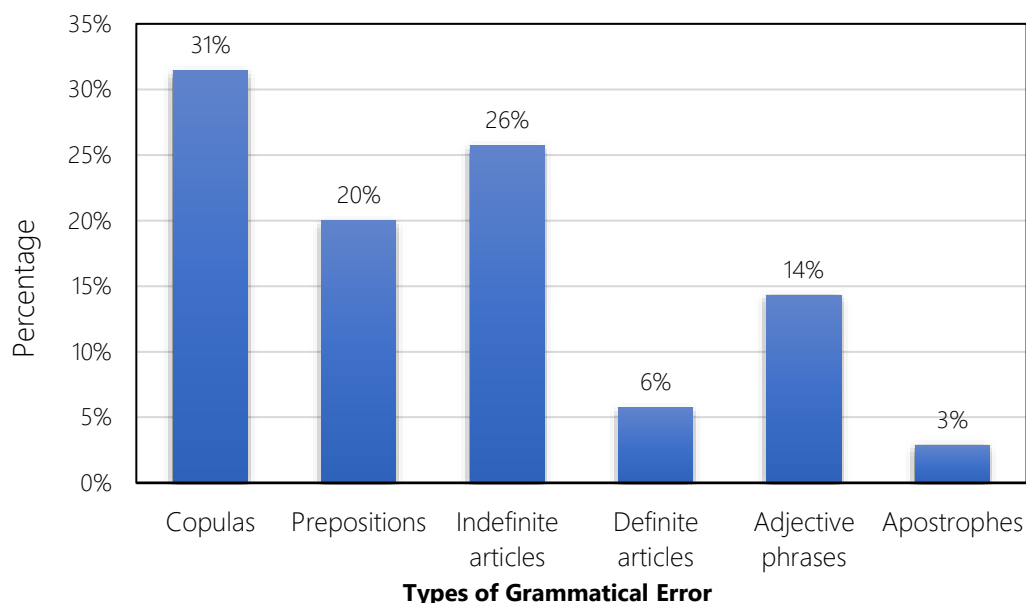


Figure 1. Percentage of Frequent Grammatical Errors in English Writing

The data in Table 2 indicate that the most frequent grammatical error type among the participants was the omission of the copula verb (*is, am, are*), which accounted for 31% of the total grammatical errors. This suggests a significant difficulty among learners in forming grammatically correct nominal sentences in English. Given that Arabic allows for nominal sentences without a linking verb, this pattern is indicative of L1 transfer—specifically, negative transfer from Arabic to English.

The second most frequent error involved indefinite articles (*a, an*), comprising 26% of the total errors. These errors typically included either omission or incorrect selection based on vowel or consonant sounds. The third most common error type was related to prepositions (20%), where learners frequently selected incorrect prepositions or omitted them altogether—another area influenced by structural differences between English and Arabic. Errors involving adjective usage (14%) were also common, especially in terms of incorrect placement or form. This aligns with known syntactic contrasts between English and Arabic, where adjectives typically follow the noun in Arabic but precede it in English. Less frequent but still notable were errors in the use of definite articles (*the*), which accounted for 6%, and apostrophe usage, which represented the smallest category with 3%. The difficulty with apostrophes likely stems from the fact that apostrophic constructions do not exist in Arabic, leading to either omission or overgeneralization in English.

7.1. Explanation of the Grammatical Errors

7.1.1. Copula (to be)

In English grammar, the copula verb '*to be*' (e.g., *am, is, are*) functions as a linking verb, connecting the subject to a complement, typically a noun or an adjective. Its use is obligatory in English present tense construction. However, in Arabic, the equivalent of the copula is omitted in present tense nominal sentences, as the language structure does not require a verb to link the subject and predicate in such cases.

The grammatical and structural difference between Arabic and English often leads to systematic omission of the copula verb by Arabic-speaking EFL learners, particularly in written English. As illustrated in the examples below, learners frequently omit *am, is, are*, resulting in ungrammatical constructions. This reflects a typical case of negative L1 transfer, where EFL students apply native language (Arabic) rules to the second language (English), resulting in persistent grammatical errors. The interference occurs because learners follow familiar structures from L1 that do not align with the grammatical requirements of L2.

Examples

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) *I good. | I am good. |
| 2) *my name Ahmad. | My name is Ahmad. |
| 3) *We two brothers. | We are two brothers. |
| 4) *He my brother. | He is my brother. |
| 5) *My fathers name sultan. | My father's name is Sultan. |

These examples clearly highlight a consistent pattern of 'to be' omission, especially in declarative sentences, which can severely affect the grammatical accuracy and comprehensibility of learners' written output. Addressing such errors through explicit instruction and contrastive analysis is crucial for improving learners' mastery of English sentence structure.

7.1.2. Preposition (At/In/On)

Prepositions in English grammar are function words that express relationships between elements within a sentence, typically indicating *time*, *place*, *direction* or *manner*. Their correct usage is governed by fixed syntactic and semantic rules and they often lack direct equivalents in other languages, including Arabic. Thus, this makes English prepositions one of the most challenging areas for EFL learners, especially those whose first language is Arabic. For the present study, only *preposition of time* is discussed because only these prepositions were observed in the data analysis.

In Arabic, many different English prepositions are translated as one single preposition, such as في (fee), which can mean *in*, *at*, or *on* depending on the context. Moreover, Arabic often omits prepositions altogether, especially before expressions of time (e.g., *at*) or days of the week (e.g., *on*), which are required in English obligatorily. This one-to-many mismatch between the two languages contributes to frequent errors among learners.

Examples

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 6) *I get up 6 am. | I get up at 6 am. |
| 7) *I sleep in night 10 pm. | I sleep at night at 10 pm. |
| 8) *I go home thursday. | I go home on Thursday. |
| 9) *I play games saturday. | I play games on Saturday. |
| 10) *My father will come in 2 march. | My father will come on 2 March. |

These examples demonstrate the negative transfer of L1 where learners apply Arabic prepositional patterns inappropriately to English contexts. These errors often are overlooked due to the learners' reliance on L1 grammar. As noted by Shakir and Yaseen (2015, p. 157), such misuse reflects the influence of Arabic's prepositional system on learners' English output. Sabbah (2015) highlighted that Arab learners frequently misuse prepositions, such as using 'on' instead of 'in' or 'at' due to direct translation from Arabic.

7.1.3. Article (A/An/The)

The English article system consists of definite (the) and indefinite (a, an) articles, each serving distinct grammatical functions. Articles help define whether a noun is specific or non-specific, known or unknown to the reader or listener. In contrast, Arabic has a definite article (ال/ al), but lacks an explicit equivalent for indefinite articles, which often leads to confusion among Arabic-speaking EFL learners. In Arabic, definiteness is conveyed morphologically by adding ال (al) to the beginning of the noun, for instance, الكتاب (al-kitaab—'the book'). However, there is no article used for indefinite nouns; the idea of indefiniteness is often implied rather than marked. This structural gap contributes to errors in article usage, such as omitting the indefinite article in English or overusing the definite article.

Furthermore, Arabic often uses the definite article where English does not, such as before proper nouns like countries or languages, resulting in overgeneralization in L2 writing. This pattern illustrates a clear instance of interlingual interference, where learner's assumptions based on L1 rules do not align with English grammar norms.

Examples

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 11) *My brother doctor. | My brother is a doctor. |
| 12) *Im student. | I'm a student. |
| 13) *I have car white. | I have a white car. |
| 14) *I learn the english. | I learn English. |
| 15) *I eat apple daily. | I eat an apple daily. |

These examples reveal the persistent challenges that Arabic-speaking EFL learners face in acquiring English grammatical rules, especially in the use of articles and adjective-noun order. These errors can be attributed to the influence of the learners' first language (L1), where direct equivalents for English articles do not exist. Consequently, learners often rely on L1 grammatical rules and patterns when constructing sentences in English, leading to negative transfer of L1 or interference.

7.1.4. Adjective Phrase

Adjectives are open-class lexical items used to modify nouns by describing qualities such as size, colour, quantity, and condition. While both English and Arabic employ adjectives for modification, the word order differs significantly between the two languages – leading to frequent syntactic/grammatical errors among Arabic-speaking EFL learners.

In English, adjectives typically precede the noun they modify (*a big house*), whereas in Arabic, the adjective follows the noun (منزل كبير / *manzil Kabeer*—literally 'big house'). This structural reversal often results in learners incorrectly placing adjectives after nouns when writing in English.

Examples

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 16) *I have car white. | I have a white car. |
| 17) *My brother has house big. | My brother has a big house. |
| 18) *You are teacher good. | You are a good teacher. |
| 19) *This is bus school. | This is a school bus. |

These examples reflect interlingual transfer, where learners unconsciously apply syntactic rules from their first language to the second language. Further, such errors reveal a persistent challenge in mastering modifier-noun order, especially in noun phrases.

7.1.5. Apostrophe

In English, apostrophes serve two primary grammatical functions: (1) to indicate contractions (e.g., *don't* for do not), and (2) to show possession (e.g., Ahmad's book). This punctuation mark, however, has no equivalent in Arabic grammar, which contributes significantly to learner difficulty.

Arabic neither uses contractions in written form nor has a punctuation-based system for showing possession. Instead, possessive relationships are expressed syntactically, often using phrase like *كتاب أحمد* (*kitaab Ahmed*—'Ahmed's book') without any punctuation mark. Consequently, Arabic-speaking EFL learners often omit apostrophes or use them incorrectly when writing in English. This reflects a classic case of negative L1 transfer, as learners attempt to transfer native grammatical structures into English, resulting in punctuation and syntactic errors.

Examples

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 20) *Im student. | I'm a student. |
| 21) *Hes my friend. | He's my friend. |
| 22) *My father name sultan. | My father's name is Sultan. |
| 23) *His brother car good. | His brother's car is good. |

8. Summary and Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the most frequent grammatical errors made by technical college EFL students in their English writing and to identify the primary factors contributing to these errors. The analysis of 30 final-term exam scripts revealed a total of 350 grammatical errors across six major categories: copula, indefinite articles, prepositions, adjectives, definite articles, and apostrophes.

The present study identified and examined five major categories of grammatical errors: copula omission, prepositional misuse, article confusion, adjective placement, and apostrophe errors—commonly found in the English writing of Saudi EFL learners at a technical college. They are as follows:

- **Copula omission:** Copula omission was the most frequent error (31%), directly linked to the absence of an equivalent structure in Arabic. Learners frequently omitted *am/is/are*, reflecting direct L1 transfer.
- **Prepositional errors:** These errors arose due to the complexity and context-specific use of English prepositions, compared to Arabic's more generalized use of *في* (*fee*).
- **Article misuse:** Article misuse, especially with indefinite articles (26%), stemmed from the lack of explicit indefinite markers in Arabic and the overuse of the definite articles (6%) where it is inappropriate in English.
- **Adjective errors:** Adjective errors (14%) were attributed to the reverse syntactic order between Arabic (noun + adjective) and English (adjective + noun), leading to common phrase-structure issues.
- **Apostrophe errors:** Apostrophe errors (3%) indicated learners' unfamiliarity with contractions and possessives in English, as Arabic lacks a comparable punctuation-based system.

These errors are predominantly the result of the negative language transfer, where the grammatical rules of Arabic are incorrectly applied to English. The findings of the present study align with previous research, confirming that first language (L1) transfer—particularly negative interference from Arabic—is a primary factor contributing to grammatical errors in the English writing of Saudi EFL learners (Bhela, 1999; Khuwaileh, 2000; AbiSamra, 2003; Al Fadda, 2012; Karim & Nassaji, 2013; Sawalmeh (2013); Sabbah, 2015).

Overall, this study confirms that negative transfer from the mother tongue plays a central role in the grammatical challenges faced by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. The persistence of these errors underscores the need for targeted pedagogical interventions that emphasize contrastive grammar instruction, raise learners' awareness of cross-linguistic differences, and provide consistent practice in written English. The study affirms that addressing these issues requires both awareness of

language differences and targeted teaching strategies. It offers a foundation for improving writing instruction in technical and vocational education settings, with a specific emphasis on grammatical accuracy.

9. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this case study hold valuable implications for both EFL instructors and learners. By identifying key grammatical challenges—particularly those influenced by first language (L1) interference—the study highlights areas where focused instructional support and learner effort are most needed. EFL learners must engage in regular and consistent writing practice to gradually eliminate recurring grammatical errors and minimize the negative transfer from Arabic to English.

To support this goal, educators are encouraged to integrate structured writing activities into the curriculum. These may include frequent in-class writing tasks, weekly assignments, and peer-reviewed writing workshops. Additionally, extracurricular activities, such as writing competitions, can be organized to foster motivation and promote writing proficiency in a more engaging environment.

Moreover, learners can benefit from using digital writing support tools, including *Grammarly*, *Ginger*, *QuillBot*, *Write & Improve*, and basic spell checkers, many of which are freely available or offer affordable subscriptions. These platforms provide real-time feedback on grammar, structure, and vocabulary, enabling learners to independently identify and correct errors.

Importantly, instructors play a central role in encouraging and guiding students toward improved writing competence. They should provide constructive feedback, reinforce correct grammatical structures, and foster a classroom environment that values language accuracy alongside fluency.

Finally, the insights from this study can be utilized as a reference for curriculum designers and syllabus developers, particularly in technical and vocational education contexts. A grammar-focused writing component that addresses common L1-related issues should be an integral part of English language programs to ensure learners' long-term development in written communication.

10. Study Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers meaningful insights into the nature and causes of grammatical errors among Saudi EFL learners in a technical college context, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size was limited to 30 students from a single technical institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The students' writing was assessed based solely on their final-term examination scripts, which may not accurately reflect their full range of language skills due to exam-related stress or time constraints. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on grammatical errors, thereby excluding other important dimensions of writing proficiency such as content development, coherence, organization, and vocabulary usage. It also did not take into account learners' varying levels of English proficiency, educational backgrounds, or their exposure to English outside the classroom, all of which are potential factors influencing the nature and frequency of grammatical errors.

In light of these limitations, future research should consider adopting a larger and more diverse sample from multiple institutions across different regions. A longitudinal approach could also provide insights into the progression of grammatical competence over time. In addition, employing a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative error analysis with qualitative techniques—such as learner interviews, tutor interviews, questionnaires, or think-aloud protocols—could yield a more comprehensive understanding of learners' grammatical challenges and the role of first language interference.

Moreover, comparative studies involving learners from different L1 backgrounds could further clarify the specific influence of Arabic on English grammar acquisition. Future research could also explore the impact of targeted instructional interventions, such as contrastive grammar teaching, focused error correction, or task-based writing activities, to evaluate their effectiveness in minimizing common grammatical errors. Such research would have significant pedagogical value and contribute to the development of more effective strategies for enhancing grammatical accuracy in EFL writing instruction.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2559-8646>

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors, and the reviewers.

References

- [1] AbiSamra, N. (2003). *An analysis of errors in Arabic speakers' English writings. Investigating writing problems among Palestinian students studying English as a foreign language*, The American University of Beirut. <https://abisamra03.tripod.com/nada/languageacq-erroranalysis.html>
- [2] Al Fadda, H. (2012). Difficulties in academic writing: From the perspective of King Saud university postgraduate students. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3), 123-130. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1078924.pdf>
- [3] Al-Khreshheh, M. H. (2011). An investigation of interlingual interference in the use of 'and' as a syntactic coordinating structure by Jordanian EFL learners. *European Journal of Social Science*, 18(3), 426-433. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/209784360_An_Investigation_of_Interlingual_Interference_in_the_use_of_'and'_as_a_Syntactic_Coordinating_Structure_by_Jordanian_EFL_Learners
- [4] Al-Khreshheh, M. H. (2010). Interlingual interference in the English language word order structure of Jordanian EFL learners. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(1), 106-113. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/206206253_Interlingual_Interference_in_the_English_Language_Word_Order_Structure_of_Jordanian_EFL_Learners
- [5] List the Al-Asfour, A. S. (2018). *Grammatical Errors by Arabic ESL Students: an Investigation of L1 Transfer through Error Analysis*, PhD Diss., Portland State University. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/4551/
- [6] Alsamadani, H. A. (2010). The relationship between Saudi EFL students' writing competence, L1 writing proficiency, and self-regulation. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(1), 53-63. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/acprod/odb_etd/ws/send_file/send?accession=ohiou1224685570&disposition=inline
- [7] Ansari, A. A. (2012). Teaching of English to Arab students: Problems and remedies. *Educational Research*, 3(6), 519-524. <https://www.interestjournals.org/articles/teaching-of-english-to-arab-students-problems-and-remedies.pdf>
- [8] Asad, M. (2024). Mechanics Errors in Students 'English Writing due to Mother Tongue Influence: A Case Study at Technical College of Al-Hait in Saudi Arabia. *FORTELL*, 48, 161-172. <https://www.fortell.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Fortell-January-2024-161-172.pdf>
- [9] Bhela, B. (1999). Native language interference in learning a second language: Exploratory case studies of native language interference with target language usage. *International Education Journal*, 1(1), 22-31. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=47c5ba5e9ca5274253c23ffea7d22102d08ace15>
- [10] Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (4th ed.). Longman.
- [11] Carroll, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback: An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 15(3), 357-386.
- [12] Corder, S. P. (1971). *Idiosyncratic dialects and error analysis*. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 9(2), 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1971.9.2.147>
- [13] Corder, S. P. (1974). The significance of students' errors. *Error Analysis: Perspective on Second Language Acquisition*. London: Longman.
- [14] Corder, S. P. (1974). Error Analysis. In J. P. B. Allen, & S. P. Corder (Eds.), *Techniques in Applied Linguistics (The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics)*: 3, pp. 122-154. London: Oxford University Press.
- [15] Ellis, R. (1995). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [16] Farooq, M. S., Uzair-Ul-Hassan, M., & Wahid, S. (2020). Opinion of second language learners about writing difficulties in English language. *South Asian Studies*, 27(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330170345_Opinion_of_Second_Language_Learners_about_Writing_Difficulties_in_English_Language
- [17] Gass, S. M., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. New York: Routledge.
- [18] Hayati, A. M. (1998). A contrastive analysis of English and Persian intonation. *Papers and studies in contrastive linguistics*, 34, 53-72. <https://ifa.amu.edu.pl/psicl/files/34/03Hayati.pdf>
- [19] Huwari, I. F., & Al-Khasawneh, F. M. (2013). The reasons behind the weaknesses of writing in English among Pre-year students' at Taibah University. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 14(38), 1-9. https://www.zu.edu.jo/MainFile/Profile_Dr_UploadFile/Researcher/Files/ResearchFile_3794_35_58.pdf
- [20] Karim, K., & Nassaji, H. (2013). First language in second language writing: An examination of current research. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 1(1), 117-134. Retrieved on May 20, 2024, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1127353.pdf>
- [21] Khuwaleh, A. A., & Shoumali, A. A. (2000). Writing errors: A study of the writing ability of Arab learners of academic English and Arabic at university. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2), 174-183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310008666597>
- [22] Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics and language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- [23] Nuruzzaman, M., Islam, A. B. M., & Shuchi, I. J. (2018). An Analysis of Errors Committed by Saudi Non-English Major Students in the English Paragraph Writing: A Study of Comparisons. *Advances in language and literary studies*, 9(1), 31-39. <https://journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/all/article/view/4078/3317>
- [24] Penman, R. (1998). Communication and the Law. *Communication Research Institute of Australia, CRIA* http://www.communication.org.au/html/paper_23.html
- [25] Richards, J.C., & Sampson, G. P. (1974). The study of learner English. In J.C. Richard (Eds.) *Error Analysis. Perspectives on second language acquisition* (pp. 3-18). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315836003>
- [26] Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2002). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (3rd ed.). Longman.
- [27] Ridha, N. S. A. (2012). The effect of EFL learners' mother tongue on their writings in English: An error analysis study. *Journal of the College of Arts*, 60, 22-45. <https://un.uobasrah.edu.iq/papers/2945.pdf>
- [28] Sabbah, S. (2015). Negative transfer: Arabic language interference to learning English. *Arab world English journal (AWEJ) Special issue on Translation*, (4). <https://awej.org/images/AllIssues/SpecialIssues/Translation4/17.pdf>
- [29] Sajaavara, K. (2000). Contrastive analysis. In Byram, M. (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 205-212). London: Routledge.

- [30] Sawalmeh, M. (2013). Error analysis of written English essays: The case of students of the preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia. *English for specific purpose world*. 14(40), 1-17.
https://www.academia.edu/5038778/Error_Analysis_of_Written_English_Essays_The_case_of_Students_of_the_Preparatory_Year_Program_in_Saudi_Arabia
- [31] Shakir, H., & Yaseen, B. H. (2015). Acquisition of English prepositions among Iraqi secondary school students in Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(5), 157-162.
https://www.academia.edu/14902106/Acquisition_of_English_Prepositions_among_Iraqi_Secondary_School_Students_in_Kuala_Lumpur_Malaysia
- [32] Younez, Z. B., & Albalawi, F. S. (2015). Exploring the most common types of writing problems among english language and translation major sophomore femal students at Tabuk university. *Asian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 3(2), 7-26.
<https://www.multidisciplinaryjournals.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/FULL-PAPER-EXPLORING-THE-MOST-COMMON-TYPES-OF-WRITING-PROBLEMS.pdf>