# Editorial Board

# Editorial Preface

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the latest issue of the *Journal of Research in Language & Translation.* This edition features a diverse range of articles from esteemed scholars and experts in their respected fields. From *practising English as a lingua franca* to *the explicit teaching of metadiscourse* and from *Error analysis of L2 learners' essays* to *teachers' perspectives on students' communication problems*, this issue promises to offer evidence-based perspectives which can help bridge the theory-practice gap in language learning and teaching.

As always, *JRLT* strives to provide its readers with high-quality content that is both informative and engaging. We hope that this issue will inspire professionals and practitioners to engage in a critical discussion on English language theorizing and teaching.

We thank the contributors for their scholarly and insightful articles. We also thank readers for their continued support of the journal, and look forward to hearing their feedback on this latest edition.

*Editor*

Dr. Abdullah Alasmary
Associate Professor
Department of English Language & Translation
College of Language Sciences
King Saud University
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# Practicing English Lingua Franca Skills: A Glimpse of a Saudi Arabian Classroom

Haifa A. Al-Nofaie

*Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts, Taif Univeristy, Taif, 11099, Saudi Arabia*
*Email: haifa.a@tu.edu.sa*

*https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8240-5698*

## الملخص

تضيف هذه الدراسة تصنيفا جديدا لسياقات التفاعل الصفي والتي حددها (2019 ,1996) Seedhouse "مجتمع اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركه" كنوع آخر من السياق التفاعلي في الصف. لا يزال السؤال حول كيفية تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لإعداد المتعلمين للتواصل مع غير الناطقين بها في عصر العولمة مطروحا. واهتمت هذه الدراسة بمعرفة إلى أي مدى يمكن للمحادثات خارج التمارين الصفية بين معلمة باكستانية وطلابها السعوديين في إحدى الجامعات السعودية من دمج الطلاب في محادثات باللغة الانجليزية من نوع (الإنجليزية كلغة مشتركه) وتم استخدام نهج تحليل المحادثات. أظهرت النتائج أن الخروج عن موضوع الدرس يمكن أن يهيئ الطلاب للتعامل مع الحديث الغير المخطط له والذي يشبه التواصل في الحياة الواقعية. حددت الدراسة أيضا نوعين من الحديث خارج نطاق موضوع الدرس: حديث بناء العلاقات والحديث التعاوني.

## Abstract

This study extends the typology of interactional classroom contexts identified by Seedhouse (1996, 2019). It suggests the "English lingua franca community" context as another type of classroom context. The question of how English language teaching classrooms can prepare learners for communicating with non-native speakers in the era of globalization remains open. This study examined the extent to which off-task conversations between a Pakistani teacher and her Saudi students at a Saudi Arabian university might engage students in ELF conversations. Interaction analysis was informed by the conversation analysis approach. The findings showed that getting off-topic could prepare students to deal with unplanned talk that resembles real-life communication. Also, the study identified two types of off-task classroom talk: rapport-building talk and cooperative talk.

*Keywords: classroom contexts; classroom interactional competence; English as a lingua franc; off-task conversation; teaching English*

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**Introduction**

Educational researchers and linguists call for teaching the communicative skills of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms (Dewey, 2014; Lewandowska, 2019; Rabab'ah, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2001; Vettorel, 2018). The purpose of these calls is to prepare students for communicating with non-native English speakers in the time of globalization. There are some studies that have identified the common communicative strategies found in ELF talk in academic settings, such as code-switching, compensation, paraphrasing, humor and rapport-building, which can inform the practices of EFL teachers for adapting an ELF-aware approach (Björkman, 2014; Lewandowska, 2019; Rabab'ah, 2015). However, the number of studies that scrutinize the merits of ELF conversations in ELT classrooms from the conversation analysis perspective (CA) is scarce (Matsumoto, 2015).

With the purpose of this study being to draw the attention of ELT teachers toward exploring the possible merits of infusing an ELF-aware approach during off-task talk, the availability of such studies will expand the available literature on this topic and will guide ELT teachers in creating a communicative classroom context that resembles communication with non-native English speakers in real life and thus improve the students' linguistic skills in order to meet the requirements of the global marketplace. The study demonstrates the interlocutors' use of their communicative interactional competence (CIC) skills in order to achieve mutual intelligibility, such as clarifying misunderstanding and managing turns (Walsh, 2011). When students extend their CIC skills, they possibly engage in conversations that resemble real-life conversations in ELF contexts. To the best of my knowledge, studies that investigate exploiting ELT classrooms for creating opportunities for practicing ELF communicative skills that can be found among non-native speakers in real-life conversations are limited (Siqueira, 2020). Informed by the CA approach, this study answers the following question:

    To what extent can ELT classrooms provide students with opportunities for practicing ELF skills?

As revealed by this question, this study demonstrates how ELF and ELT integrate in one classroom.

There are a plethora of studies on classroom interaction. Seedhouse (1996, 2019) identifies different types of classroom interactional contexts: form and accuracy context, classroom as speech community context, task-oriented context, real-world target speech community context, text-based context and procedural context. These types explain how teachers create different classroom contexts guided by their pedagogical plans. Seedhouse urges educational researchers to identify more types of classroom contexts and does not limit the classification of classroom contexts to these types. The present study extends Seedhouse's classification and suggests the "English lingua franca community" context, a context that is characterized by spontaneously non-pedagogical interaction. The next section reviews the literature on teaching ELF.

**Literature Review**

ELF has received different conceptualizations. For instance, House's (1999, p. 74) definition of ELF interactions is "interactions between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue." Firth (1996, p. 240) extends the term ELF to refer to "a contact language between persons who share

neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language for communication." These two definitions agree that ELF is a tool for intercultural communication. In a new conceptualization of ELF as communication, speakers of different "linguacultures" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 164), including non-native English speakers and native speakers, choose English as the common language. Based on this new interpretation of ELF, switching to languages other than English in an ELF context is a natural phenomenon.

**English as a Multi-lingua Franca**

Some ELF scholars recognize that native speakers can also participate in ELF communication (see Seidlhofer, 2009). Jenkins (2015) has expanded the conceptualization of ELF to include English as a multi-lingua franca. This new conceptulization takes into consideration the presence of other languages in ELF communication (i.e., the speaker's mother tongue or languages other than English). The next paragraph explains how "culture" and "communication" are positioned within the field of ELF.

One of the theories that underpin ELF and explain the notion of intercultural communication is the communication accommodation theory (CAT; i.e., how speech is adjusted by speakers to interlocutors; Baker, 2015). CAT is a theoretical framework for interpreting intergroup and interpersonal communication. It explains why, when, and how people adjust their communicative behavior during social interaction. Entailing having the focus on cultural and linguistic features, Zhu (2011) emphasizes interaction and negotiation as the key terms of intercultural communication. Since the word "culture" is a broad term, Scollon et al. (2012) replace the term "intercultural communication" with the term "inter-discourse communication." By this replacement, the focus of analysis is on discourse communities and related social factors such as profession and gender (Scollon et al., 2012). The following section discusses how ELF is addressed in ELT classrooms.

**ELT in ELF Contexts**

The two main ELF fields that have received researchers' full attention are business in ELF (BELF) and ELF in academia (ELFA; Baker, 2015; Mauranen, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the review of literature will focus on ELFA. There are some studies that have investigated the interactional features of ELF communication in ELT contexts. For instance, a survey study by Luo (2018) explores the attitudes of Japanese university students toward ELF and finds that these students are aware of using ELF for communicating with non-native English speakers. Another corpus analysis study by Björkman (2014) identifies comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification requests as frequent ELF strategies among exchange students at a Swedish university. In a similar study conducted outside the classroom by Hanamoto (2014), the focus is on the types of communication strategies used when breakdown occurs (e.g., confirmation checks, clarification checks, comprehension checks and self-repetitions) during the interaction between Japanese students and international students studying at the same Japanese university. The CA approach was employed for the sequential analysis of turns. These studies in ELF or ELT classrooms pay attention to conversations between learners in group works or outside the classroom.

There are studies that investigate interaction in teacher-fronted classrooms. These studies examine the features of talk occurring between students and teachers in ELF contexts.

For instance, Matsumoto (2015) investigates the communicative strategies by non-native English speakers or ELF speakers in the context of ESL writing classrooms at a U.S. university. The study, concluding that miscommunication can be beneficial in achieving mutual understanding among ELF speakers via creating an interactional space for constructing negotiation, combines the sequential analysis of discussions (CA) and ethnographic information from interviews and observations. A few pedagogical studies have examined how training students for using ELF communicative strategies improved their linguistics performance according to post-tests scores (Dimoski, Yujobo & Imai, 2016; Rabab'ah, 2015). There are calls for teaching ELF communicative strategies in ELT classrooms (Lewandowska, 2019; Vettorel, 2018).

Due to the small number of published studies on training English language learners for using ELF communicative strategies, language teachers and educational researchers may benefit from ELF studies carried out in non-educational contexts. These studies highlight natural interactional features of ELF talk. For instance, some studies examine humor and rapport-building in natural settings, such as social media and workplace (Brunner & Diemer, 2018; Jenks, 2012a; Pullin, 2010, 2011). With some studies looking at multimodal communication strategies in business (e.g., gestures, gaze and objects; see for example Räisänen, 2020), other non-academic studies focus on cooperative strategies in ELF conversations, such as providing lexical help, lexical repetition and approximation (Ting & Pha, 2008).

An interesting study by Nurmi and Koroma (2020) highlights the importance of creating a psychologically safe language environment for non-native English speakers' employees in the workplace. The study suggests that non-native English speakers feel less anxious about their language use and they engage in supporting each other in order to cope collectively with the job demands. When these studies are taken into consideration by language teachers and material designers, one can widen the knowledge and practices of English language teachers on teaching ELF communication. The following paragraph explains why it is important to pay attention to ELF practices in ELT classrooms.

Many non-native English teachers seem to emphasize the teaching of standardized native speaker model (i.e., British or American English) in classroom practices, although the teaching practices of non-native English teachers are different from those practices by native English teachers (Maley, 2009). Learners cannot be aware of the uniqueness of English if teachers themselves are not aware of the world Englishes (Maley, 2009). Seidlhofer (2001) explains that it is essential to implement an ELF approach in classroom practices to develop learners' competency skills for managing miscommunication and achieving mutual intelligibility. Similarly, Dewey (2012) stresses out the need for establishing principles of professional ELT that enables learners to communicate with the world using ELF.

Dewey (2014) adds that ELT syllabus needs to be modified to meet ELF challenges. Jenkins (2012b) draws the attention of general exam boards (e.g., TOEFL and IELTS) to the importance of rethinking language assessment from an ELF perspective. In some ELT book materials, conversations are planned through designed scenarios where learners are given some time to plan them, using resources such as dictionaries. There is still a need for more research studies that examine interactional features in teacher-fronted classrooms for the purposes of guiding teaching practices, assessment and material design toward implementing

ELF approaches, with learners needing to know and experience how to communicate with others in unplanned situations via naturally occurring conversations. The following section discusses some features of ELT classroom interaction and the merits of off-task talk in relation to ELF.

**Classroom Interaction and Off-task Talk**

Cook (2010) explains the various concepts of language, one of which is language as action. The meaning of language as action refers to the individuals' competence in communicating with native or non-native communities, an interpretation that includes both language as a community practice and language as a set of sentences (Cook, 2010). Cook's view fits within the socio-cultural theory, originated with Vygotsky (1896–1934). This theory views learning as the creation of meaning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). ELT researchers have been engaged in examining the role of interaction in facilitating language learning. One of the terms that pay attention to the features of classroom interaction that can maximize learning is CIC (Walsh, 2011, 2012). The term CIC is defined as "teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (Walsh, 2011, p. 158). Also, Walsh (2012) explains CIC further "CIC focuses on the ways in which teachers' and learners' interactional decisions and subsequent actions enhance learning and learning opportunities" (p. 5).

Walsh (2012) identifies three features of CIC. The first feature is that the language used by the teacher should be in tune with his pedagogical aims and should match the linguistic levels of learners. Secondly, with the notion that interaction can be maximized by adapting different strategies, such as increasing wait-time and extending learners' turns, teachers need to provide learners with learning space through this interaction. Thirdly, teachers need to play a significant role in shaping learners' contributions. Shaping entails paraphrasing, scaffolding and repairing input. With off-task conversations being an encouraging opportunity for using their CIC, teachers need to create opportunities for their learners to maximize this CIC.

Research studies that examine off-task talk in ELT classroom and its role in facilitating language learning in teacher-fronted classrooms are scarce (Illés & Akcan, 2017). Available studies focus on off-task talk in collaborative peer interaction and its role in language learning (McDonough et al., 2016; Stone, 2019). There are still more merits to unveil concerning off-task talk that assists learning English. Off-task talk could take a different form from the interactional pattern of institutional talk in which teachers initiate a question, students respond, and teachers give feedback (IRF pattern; Long, 2018). In addition, it differs from communicative textbook activities in which students have time to think of their answers and then share them with others. As this study will show, off-task talk can resemble conversations occurring in ELF contexts (i.e., authentic interaction). The next section provides some background information on the context of this study.

**Background: ELT in Saudi Arabia**

Preparing Saudis to interact with people from different nationalities and cultures through English is one of the educational objectives of teaching English in schools (see Elyas & Badawood, 2016, p. 78, for the full objectives), with ELT in Saudi Arabia going back to the 1950s and English being taught in the country as a compulsory subject, starting from the primary school level. The number of Saudi universities is approximately 33. English is a compulsory module at all universities, and some majors are taught in English. Language

programs are usually designed and provided by the language centers at these abovementioned universities and there is no one unified guidance for language instructors at Saudi universities and colleges that discusses language teaching approaches and addresses common language learning obstacles. The textbooks used vary from one university to another. However, language centers are careful about using textbooks designed by well-known international publishers (e.g., Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press and Macmillan). Language teachers at these centers are Saudis, other Arab nationals and non-Arabs. There are no accurate statistics for the number of non-Saudi teachers teaching English in the Saudi higher education sectors. The following paragraphs predict how recent social and political changes in Saudi Arabia might shape ELF teaching.

The country witnesses economic and social changes. The date 27th September 2019 marks the country's move toward becoming a global destination for international tourists. Visitors to the country can come with a tourist visa for the first time in the history of the country. In the past, visas were limited to the purposes of performing religious duties (Hajj and Umrah) and to visiting a relative working in the country. This decision by the Saudi government will offer more jobs in tourism for young Saudis. The status of English might increase because Saudi nationals will find it the only language to use with non-Arabs in the meantime, where, further, the country has offered attractive incentives for international investors to increase its economic power in the region. Therefore, language centers at universities need to prepare Saudis for using English for communication with ELF speakers in authentic situations, and should utilize the presence of non-Arab instructors for creating authentic atmosphere that resembles life outside the classroom. Also, books designers need to focus on content that familiarize language learners with the notion of ELF and highlight ELF communicative strategies.

## Materials and Methods

The data for this study came from a large set of unused data collected by the researcher during her PhD project between 2010 and 2011 for a different research purpose, namely, implementing critical thinking skills to improve speaking skills (Alnofaie, 2013). The present study included detailed transcriptions of 300 minutes of audio recording of one class at a language center that belongs to a Saudi university. The class was observed for 12 weeks. Like other Saudi universities, this university teaches English skills as a compulsory module. English skills module was taught by a Pakistani lecturer whose second language was English. She was an experienced lecturer with a teaching background over 20 years in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. There were 18 Saudi students in this class, whose mother tongue is Arabic, and who majored in business and administration. All the participants have signed consent forms prior to the start of the data collection, and all ethical procedures have been followed by the researcher. The book contents focused on the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and included various topics. The data were audio-recorded and collected randomly over the 12 weeks. The total number of recorded sessions was six sessions, and the length of each session was 50 minutes.

The data analysis was informed by CA approach. The purpose of using CA is "to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk, with a central focus on how sequences of action are generated" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 14).

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Also, CA allows for scrutinizing the socio-cultural approaches for language learning (Seedhouse, 2007). The transcription was done manually, and the transcription conventions were adopted from Jefferson (2004). In the cases of off-task talk that were not recurrent cases, but were rich of ideas related to the merits of off-task talk, there was a close focus on these off-task conversations, taking into consideration how such talks were initiated, for what purposes, and how did off-task talk create learning opportunities. The following section presents the results of this study.

**Results**

This section presents extracts from the recorded lessons. Extract 1 is from a lesson entitled "philanthropy." The teacher talks to her students about the importance of giving and how it builds bonds in the society by giving examples (Extract 3).

*Extract 1*

| | 85 | T: | Ramadan Ramadan mostly all of us find some way of giving |
| | 86 | | food clothes money work- |
| | 87 | Son: | -Teacher |
| | 88 | T: | Yes |
| → | 89 | Son: | £Today is the book£ day we should er choose er something |
| | 90 | | About the books |
| → | 91 | T: | Okay you er <tell me which which book do you think you |
| → | 92 | | were> er er taught you something about giving |
| | 93 | Son: | Giving? |
| | 94 | T: | Yah an- any story okay tell me a story which help you to |
| | 95 | | Know that giving is very important |
| → | 96 | Luj: | Cinderella ((laughter)) |
| | 97 | T: | What do you think ((laughter)) er and how does Cinderella help |
| | 98 | Luj: | (Help) her sisters= |
| → | 99 | T: | =Stepsister |
| | 100 | Sn: | She was good to them |
| | 101 | T: | And what did they and how and how did how did how did ah |
| | 102 | | God help her (0.5) |
| → | 103 | Sal: | Ah she's married a prince |
| | 104 | T: | Okay she got you know a beautiful prince a handsome prince |
| → | 105 | | to marry her off so her life changed she's what about your |

| → | 106 | | Favourite books girls |
| | 107 | S?: | £Cooking£ a:nd sew the dress |
| | 108 | T: | ↑Really |
| | 109 | S?: | Yah |
| → | 110 | T: | £You will become a good housewife£ |
| | 111 | | ((class laughs)) |
| | 112 | S?: | [May be] |
| → | 113 | T: | [Alright] let's go to number er number three we can answer |
| | 114 | | number four I want somebody to read number four |

Son draws the teacher's attention to the World Book Day and she suggests talking about a topic related to this international event (line 89). The student here initiates off-task turn (pointing out an international event). The teacher tries to get the student back to track by relating the student's interest to the topic being discussed (lines 91–92). Son's response to this question is off-task because she mentions Cinderella followed by her laughs (line 96). Her turn marks a new sequence. The teacher laughs back and asks the student to elaborate more. While the student elaborates on her contribution, the teacher continues shaping the student's contribution by providing a more appropriate word "stepsisters" instead of "sisters" (line 99), which exemplifies a cooperative strategy of ELF communication (Ting & Phan, 2008). The off-task talk continues as the teacher shifts her focus from discussing the ways of giving to asking students about their favorite books (lines 105 and106). The teacher's comment on the student who likes cookbooks and sewing "you will become a good housewife" (line 110) creates laughs. The student extends her turn by saying "may be" (line 112).

What is notable here is that the talk is generally informal and spontaneous. The teacher does not correct the student's utterance for accuracy in line 107. The conversation here is not aligned with the standard English that characterizes ELT classrooms, and the teacher's let-it-go strategy helps to maintain the flow of talk. Humor found in this extract exemplifies real-life conversations among ELF users (Jenks, 2012a). The analysis of this extract reveals that, since opportunities for practicing real-life conversations can be created, teachers should not feel guilty when they are off-task. After these off-task interactional turns, the teacher ends this talk by using the marker "alright" to mark the transition to answering the book activity (line 113). Extract 1 demonstrates another type of off-task talk that resembles real-life ELF talk which is building rapport. Extract 2, from another lesson, shows that the teacher and her students discuss an activity in the book which requires students to rank places that they think they need support.

*Extract 2*

| | 118 | T: | ↑Alright y:es [Sw] |
| | 119 | Saw: | First one hospital and second one mosque third |
| | 120 | | one community |

| → | 121 | T: | Okay the third one is a community centre alright what is a |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| → | 122 | | community center does because I want to tell you something |
| | 123 | | community centers you can do a lot of work in a community |
| | 124 | | center what is a community centre (1.0) |
| | 125 | | ((students whisper)) |
| → | 126 | T: | Girls what do you mean by community center |
| → | 127 | Nuh: | (Helps the) problems of the people- |
| | 128 | T: | Community center is a place let's say Rawda(.) it's |
| | 129 | | district they have a hall a big hall there and this |
| | 130 | | place you can use it for teaching you can use it for |
| → | 131 | | weddings you can use it for helping the community |

In lines 121 and 122, the teacher asks the students about the meaning of community centers. In line 127, Nuh volunteers to explain the meaning of this word, followed by the teacher's elaboration for simplifying the question (lines 128–131). In the following extract (Extract 5), the teacher continues the explanation of community center and she starts sharing her personal experience with the community center in her area.

*Extract 3*

| | 138 | T: | where I was an active part in the (?) this community center |
|---|-----|-----|-----|
| | 139 | | was in the area just like you have what you call Rawda or Zahra |
| | 140 | | district or something like this and everybody who lived in that |
| | 141 | | community ha- and they knew something for instance I was good at |
| | 142 | | English or typing or shorthand I had to go for one hour to give |
| | 143 | | my time once a week or twice a week and all the girls from the |
| | 144 | | area would come (talk continues) |
| | 145 | | I used to teach typing and shorthand you know because I felt it |
| | 146 | | something something that can get them a job= |
| → | 147 | Luj: | =Miss typing and what? |
| | 148 | T: | Shorthand shorthand is a special language when you listen to the |
| | 149 | | radio you take down notes so it's a special language that you |
| | 150 | | have and if you know that you can get a very good job you know |
| | 151 | | especially a secretarial job so- |

| → | 152 | Luj: | Are they poor or- |
|---|-----|------|-------------------|
|   | 153 | T:   | No no no they're not poor sometimes they just do for fun |
|   | 154 |      | sometimes it's you know (.) they have vacation and all the girls |
|   | 155 |      | they want to go to sch- just like this (?) it's one hour you |
|   | 156 | T:   | know so they say let's go together sometimes it's how to teach |
|   | 157 |      | them dancing |

In this extract, while the teacher continues her story with giving, Luj initiates two turns (lines 147 and 152). Luj's turns show that she is engaged in her teacher's story. The teacher explains why she tells her students about her story with giving in extract 4.

*Extract 4*

|   | 160 | T:   | You nee::d to begin something like this girls and you need |
|---|-----|------|-------------------|
|   | 161 |      | to actually get ready in one week for it because most people |
|   | 162 |      | they uh- I'm talking about giving today because |
| → | 163 |      | <I want you to get this feeling> how can you give (.) |
|   | 164 |      | ((talk continues)) |
|   | 165 |      | so that is the idea of the community girls how many neighbors |
|   | 166 |      | know you don't know too many neighbors it is a very |
|   | 167 |      | good way of bringing people in the community together- |
|   | 168 | Son: | T::eacher we see our neighbors in Ramadan in mosque only |

It seems that when teachers share their stories with their students, they try to build rapport. In line (163), the teacher gives another example of how students can engage in giving (lines 165–167), and tries to inspire her students to build that sense of giving. The example she mentions here is giving to neighbors. By emphasizing the importance of being kind to neighbors, the teacher teaches morality and seems to adapt the role of a mother here. The teacher's kind words make Son feels comfortable to share her opinion about the relationship among neighbors and that people rarely meet these days (line 168).

These lines in extracts 3 and 4 shift from traditional teaching, where teachers focus on the teaching of the coursebook activities, and deviate from the traditional classroom interactional pattern (IRF). The teacher motherly talk, as the one in lines (160–163), is meant for building rapport which characterizes talk by non-native English speakers (Pullin, 2010). Also, the teacher talk here helps students to initiate turns in (lines 147–152–168). Providing students with opportunities for initiating turns and expressing their thoughts and feelings freely can create a psychologically safe language environment which is a requirement for ELF communication in real-life (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). Extract 5 shows another example of building rapport through humor. Extract 5 is taken from a lesson on emotional intelligence. Students are asked to name people whom they find intelligent.

*Extract 5*

| | 82 | Kal: | My cousin |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 83 | T: | Why |
| | 84 | Kal: | Because a:: she is a doctor who care about patients and |
| | 85 | | spend her life for them. |
| | 86 | T: | interesting who else |
| → | 87 | Jam: | Angelina Jolie |
| | 88 | T: | Angelina Jolie? why? |
| | 89 | Jam: | she help poor people in[the world] |
| → | 90 | Reh: | [I like her personality too] |
| | 91 | | ((overlaps)) |
| | 92 | T: | Be quiet |
| → | 93 | Hal: | Teacher who is your favorite actor? |
| | 95 | T: | God! Favourite actors↑… I don't watch movies (0.8) |
| → | 96 | | You know when you become a teacher you will not find |
| → | 97 | | time for watching movies (.) |
| | 98 | | Students laugh |
| → | 99 | Kal: | teaching is hard hehe |
| | 100 | Ran: | I ↑like watch sc::are |
| | 101 | T: | You must be brave |
| | | | (laughs) |
| | 102 | Hal: | Y::ah me too |
| → | 103 | T: | ↑Okay now girls lets this is very interesting I have a |
| | 104 | | little ai ee kew test for you that's why I want you to |
| | 105 | | do it quickly alright (.)we talk about this intelligence |
| | 106 | | testing background please open your … you have your |

Jam mentions Angelina Jolie as an example of intelligent people (line 87). Reh initiates a turn to comment on Jam's turn "she is a good actor" (line 90). Hal initiates an off-task talk when asking the teacher about her favorite actor (line 93). The teacher's reply is humorous "when you become a teacher you will not find time for watching movies" (lines 96–97). This turn by the teacher encourages Kal to comment "teaching is hard hehe" (line 99). Humor is a common ELF strategy among non-native English speakers (Jenks, 2012a; Pullin, 2010, 2011).

Ran extends Kal's turn to express her view (line 100). What is interesting is that Ran does not provide a well-structured utterance, however, the teacher does try to correct the utterance and let the conversation move on (line 101). The let-it-pass strategy by the teacher shows that the focus on competency is more than the focus on accuracy, a feature of ELF interaction, and this integration between ELT and ELF is highly encouraged in the language classroom (Siqueira, 2020). After this short off-task talk, the teacher switches to the book and asks students to answer an IQ test in the book (line 103).

## Discussion

This study demonstrates the integration between ELT and ELF in a higher education setting. Examining the features of ELF communication in ELT classrooms in the higher education sector has not been widely explored (Matsumoto, 2015; Siqueira, 2020). The fact that the teacher and her students did not share the same L1 did not hinder their use of CIC skills which implies meaningful interaction (see Walsh, 2011), with the particular focus of this study being thus to investigate the extent to which off-task conversations that occurred between the teacher and her students could provide a space for practicing ELF communicative strategies that resemble real-life conversations. The following paragraphs discuss the main findings of this study in detail.

The study suggested "English lingua franca community" classroom context as an additional classification to Seedhouse's (1996, 2019) classification of classroom contexts. This proposed classification is characterized by the natural and spontaneous turns between teachers and their students that resemble real-life conversations. Although Seedhouse (2004) proposes the "real-life target speech community" context, it refers to the teacher's pedagogical aim for replicating real-life conversations. The proposed "English lingua franca community" context results from a non-pedagogical aim, as it occurs naturally without replicating real conversations. It contributes to learners' competency for communicating in ELF contexts.

The study highlighted two types of off-task conversations that resemble real-life conversations in ELF contexts: cooperative talk (extract 2) and rapport-building via creating humor (extracts 1 and 5) and giving advice (extract 4). In these extracts and some lines-specific extracts presented in the Results section, and not to say that the IRF pattern is not effective in ELT classrooms, the type of interaction between the teacher and her students moved away from the institutional interaction patterns (IRF; see Long, 2018). What is meant here is that the interactions in these extracts, which were not related to answering the coursebook activities, occurred naturally and resembled interactions that occur among non-native English speakers in real life, beyond the classroom walls. Although the teacher did not plan for incorporating the teaching of ELF in her classes, the natural ELF communications that occurred can draw language teachers' attention toward considering the teaching of ELF skills, in response to calls by educational linguists. During ELF conversations, the interactants did their best to communicate effectively via employing their CIC skills, which indicates that implementing ELF in ELT classroom and language testing can lead to promising effects (Dewey, 2012, 2014; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2001). The following paragraph explains how these CIC skills were implemented by both the teacher and students in relation to relevant literature.

The extracts presented in this paper reveal aspects of ELF conversations identified by earlier studies in non-academic contexts. The teacher played a crucial role in dealing with off-task talk as a venue for practicing ELF communicative strategies and creating learning opportunities. Where cooperative strategies are common practices by non-native English speakers for overcoming communication breakdowns and moving forward with the conversation (Ting & Pha, 2008), we see in extract 1, for an example, the teacher's efforts to provide the students with the appropriate word and shape learners' responses during off-task talk were in tune with cooperative talk found in non-academic contexts.

Another aspect of ELF communication that was observable in this class was the rapport-building conversations. In extracts 3 and 4, the teacher initiated the off-task talk in order to share her personal experiences with learners and advise them for the purpose of building rapport with her students. As a result of the teacher's motherly talk, the students felt confident to build on her turns (e.g., line168). Humor was another example of rapport-building strategies (e.g., extract1). In real-life conversations, humor is a common feature in ELF socializing (Jenks, 2012a). In types of classroom contexts that should be encouraged in the higher education sector in order to prepare learners for ELF communication that they will encounter in the era of globalization, the conversations in these extracts reveal that EFL classroom can be a fertile venue for practicing ELF skills. To sum up the discussion, the findings of this study highlight the need for increasing the awareness of non-native English teachers for preparing their students for ELF communication. Off-task conversations, if managed effectively by teachers, could provide learners with opportunities for practicing their CIC skills for dealing with unplanned talk.

The significance of this study appears in extending the classifications of EFL classroom contexts identified by Seedhouse (1996, 2019) to include the "English lingua franca community" context. Another significance lies in extending the limited literature on the merits of off-task conversations in ELT classrooms for practicing ELF communicative strategies that can be found in real-life. The findings of this study contribute to literature by relating the practices of CIC to ELF contexts. As studies that explore ELF communications in Arab countries are scarce, a fourth significance point is the context of this study. The majority of available studies shed light on speaking ELF in ELT classrooms in European or East Asian contexts (Björkman, 2014; Hanamoto, 2014; Matsumoto, 2015). While these studies will help curriculum designers to rethink their designs in order to prepare language learners and teachers for dealing with global Englishes (Dewey, 2014), the availability of such studies will add in-depth understanding of the integration between ELF and ELT in the higher education sectors and will inform the practices of language teachers in order to prepare their students for communication with non-native English speakers (Dewey, 2012, 2014).

The recurrence of this type of natural ELF interaction is constrained by following the assigned textbook, a point that is apparent in the teacher's efforts to redirect her students' attention to completing the textbook activities, as seen in line 113 of extract 1 and line 103 of extract 5. This explains why the number of instances of teacher–student off-task conversations identified and reported in this study was not recurrent in this context. Out of the 300 minutes recorded, ELF talk accounts for 53 minutes (about 17% of the total data). Since this study does not fully explore the topic of infusing ELF-aware approaches in ELT classrooms, future studies

should identify the additional merits of such implementation. Factors that may hinder the adaptation of ELF-aware approaches also need to be examined.

## Conclusion

The present study represents a small step forward in revealing some of the merits of infusing ELF-aware approaches in ELT classrooms. Through examining ELF communicative strategies employed during off-task talk, the study identifies the "English lingua franca community" context as a type of interaction that can be added to Seedhouse's (1996, 2019) typology of ELT classroom contexts. It concludes that off-task conversations in ELT classrooms in ELF contexts encourage students to prepare for unplanned talk that resembles their real-life communication with non-native speakers. The study identifies two types of off-task talk that resemble real-life talk in ELF contexts: rapport-building talk and cooperative talk. Researchers need to conduct further studies to highlight additional features of ELF talk in the classroom. Consequently, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to ELT classroom practices in ELF contexts.

**Bio**
Dr Haifa Al-Nofaie holds a PHD in Applied Linguistics from Newcastle University, UK. She is an associate professor in the Department of Foreign Languages at Taif University, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include bilingualism, CALL and language pedagogies. She was a series cultural advisor to ELT Oxford University Press between 2014 and 2015. She has published some research studies in international journals. Her Orcid ID is: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8240-5698

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# The Effect of the Explicit Instruction of Interactive Metadiscourse Markers on L2 Writing Performance

Hmoud Alotaibi

*English Department, College of Sciences and Humanities, Shaqra University*

*Dawadmi, Saudi Arabia*

*halrwais@su.edu.sa*
*https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7191-5844*


Ahmed Masrai

*IRCS - Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz Uinversity*

*Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia*

*a.masraei@psau.edu.sa*

*http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6778-5952*

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الملخص

تعد نظرية ما وراء الخطاب ممارسة مستنيرة في مهارات الكتابة. ولكن نلحظ ندرة في الأبحاث التي تطرقت إلى تأثير التدريس الصريح لعلامات ما وراء الخطاب على أداء الكتابة لمتعلمي اللغة الثانية. وبالتالي، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص العناصر (أي العلامات) الموجودة في نظرية ما وراء الخطاب، والتي لها تأثير كبير على أداء الكتابة. ركزت الدراسة على العلامات التفاعلية في نموذج هايلاند (2005) لمعرفة مدى تأثير التدريس الواضح لكيفية استخدام هذه العناصر في تطوير مهارات الكتابة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وكذلك لمعرفة مدى مساعدة عناصر محددة من هذه العلامات في التنبؤ ببعض التباينات في الأداء الكتابي لهؤلاء المتعلمين. طلب من 77 طالبا كتابة مجموعتين من المقالات. المجموعة الأولى كتبت قبل تعريف الطلاب بعلامات ما وراء الخطاب بينما كتبت المجموعة الثانية بعد التعريف. أوضحت النتائج أن الطلاب استخدموا علامات ما وراء الخطاب التفاعلي بشكل ملحوظ بعد تعريفهم بها. وأظهرت النتائج أيضًا أن جميع أنواع العلامات التفاعلية تم استخدامها بشكل ملحوظ في المقالة الثانية مقارنة بالمقالة الأولى، باستثناء علامات الإطار. علاوة على ذلك، أشارت نتائج تحليل الانحدار إلى أن العلامات التعبيرية أوضحت التباين الأكبر في أداء الكتابة، تليها علامات الإثبات، وعلامات الانتقال، وعلامات الإطار. وبشكل عام، أشارت النتائج إلى أن الإلمام بعلامات ما وراء الخطاب ساهم بصورة كبيرة في تطور أداء الكتابة لدى الطلاب، مما يدعم أهمية تضمين هذه العلامات والعناصر في تدريس الكتابة للطلاب. واوصت الدراسة في الختام بضرورة تدريس علامات ما وراء الخطاب.

## Abstract

Metadiscourse theory has long informed practices on writing skills. Less research, however, has looked at the effect of the explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on L2 learners' writing performance. Thus, the aim of the present study was to specifically examine the elements (i.e., markers) in metadiscourse theory that have a greater influence on writing performance. The study focused on the interactive markers in Hyland's (2005) model to explore the extent to which the explicit instruction of these markers enhances L2 learners' writing performance, and also the extent to which certain markers predict variance in L2 learners' writing performance. Following a pre- and post-testing approach, 77 university students were asked to write two essays. The first essay was written before the intervention was applied, while the second essay was written after the intervention in which the students were introduced to metadiscourse markers. The results showed that the students used interactive metadiscourse markers significantly more after the intervention. The results also revealed that all types of interactive markers were used significantly more in the second essay compared to the first essay, except for frame markers. Furthermore, the results of regression analysis indicated that code glosses explained the largest variance in writing performance, followed by evidentials, transition markers, and frame markers. Overall, the findings suggested that knowledge of metadiscourse markers significantly contributed to the writing performance of the students, lending support to introducing these markers to learners in L2 writing courses. The study concludes with a recommendation in favor of the explicit teaching of metadiscourse markers.

*Keywords: essay; interactive marker; metadiscourse; teaching; writing performance*

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# Introduction

The writing performance of English as a foreign language (EFL) university students is of prime interest and concern to educators and teachers. Recently, research has shifted the focus from sentence-based grammar to the discourse level. In this regard, metadiscourse has proved to be a useful and influential theory in discourse studies as well as an effective tool for increasing readers' awareness of the text, as argued by Crismore (1985). Few studies, however, have investigated student writing in light of metadiscourse theory. Metadiscourse has been perceived as "the commentary on a text made by its producer in the course of speaking or writing" (Hyland, 2017, p. 16). The approach adopted by Hyland (2005) comprises two dimensions. The first dimension is labeled interactive metadiscourse (also known as textual) and serves to guide readers through the text. It consists of the following elements: transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses.

As pointed out by Hyland (2005) "these features are used to organize propositional information in ways that a projected target audience is likely to find coherent and convincing" (p. 50). The second dimension is known as interactional metadiscourse (also known as interpersonal) and functions to engage writers with their readers. It comprises the following elements: hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, and self-references. The present study focuses on the interactive category because of its evident connection with cohesion and coherence (Hyland, 2005). Cohesion and coherence are, in turn, considered significant attributes of writing performance. Furthermore, the rationale underpinning this study was the call for further research from previous investigations, such as El-Dakhs (2020), regarding the validity of teaching metadiscourse markers explicitly in the second language (L2) writing classroom.

Previous research that focused on metadiscourse to investigate student writing at the university level can be grouped into three categories. The first category examined metadiscourse in relation to language proficiency, the second examined the influence of academic discipline on the use of metadiscourse markers, and the third, which is relevant to the present study, examined the usefulness of teaching metadiscourse explicitly. The next subsection highlights the most salient findings in the three groups of studies.

## Using Metadiscourse in Student Essays

As indicated earlier, three groups of studies investigated metadiscourse in essay writing, mostly L2 scripts, written by university students. The first group examined the correlation between the use of metadiscourse and language proficiency. Bax et al. (2019) examined the use of metadiscourse markers at different levels of L2 writing proficiency in 900 scripts. They found a significant difference in the total use of metadiscourse markers across proficiency levels. Unexpectedly, they found that more advanced L2 writers used a significantly fewer number of metadiscourse markers than writers at lower levels. Furthermore, fewer interpersonal markers were used at higher proficiency levels, while textual markers did not display any particular variation across levels.

Lee and Deakin (2016) examined interactional metadiscourse in successful and less-successful (i.e., A- and B-graded) argumentative essays written by Chinese learners of English as a second language (ESL) at the university level. In particular, the study analyzed 25 successful ESL essays, 25 less-successful ESL essays, and 25 successful first language (L1)

English essays. Contrary to the findings of Bax et al. (2019), this study found that successful essays, both L1 and L2, included significantly more hedging devices than less-successful essays. Yet, the results showed no significant variations in terms of using boosters and attitude markers. Similarly, Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) investigated 12 good and poor essays written by ESL university students. They found that good-rated essays displayed more uses of metadiscourse markers.

Other studies found different distributions of metadiscourse markers across different levels of language proficiency. For example, Carri´o-Pastor (2021) explored the assessment of metadiscourse devices in L2 essays at different levels of language proficiency. She found that varied metadiscourse markers were associated with different levels of language proficiency. She also provided a list of devices pertinent to each proficiency level arguing that "metadiscourse devices should be learnt depending on proficiency levels" (Carri´o-Pastor, 2021, p. 11). Similarly, El-Dakhs (2020) investigated metadiscourse markers in the argumentative essays written by native speakers of English (NSE), EFL learners, and ESL learners, and how they vary across different language proficiency levels and the learning context. The findings detected a similar pattern in the use of metadiscourse markers in the three groups. The study also showed some specific findings regarding the distribution of markers in the interactive and interactional categories. EFL learners significantly used more frame markers than NSE and ESL learners in the interactive category. As for the interactional category, the results showed variation across the use of markers. In terms of the influence of language proficiency on the use of metadiscourse markers, the study showed that B1 level learners used considerably more transitions, frame markers, and interactive markers than their B2 level counterparts.

The second group of studies that investigated metadiscourse markers in student essays focused on the influence of academic discipline on the use of metadiscourse markers. Yoon and Römer (2020), for example, used Hyland's model of interactional metadiscourse to investigate disciplinary variation in the use of metadiscourse in advanced-level student writing. They examined 16 disciplines and found different patterns of variation in the use of interactional metadiscourse across specific disciplines. For instance, student essays from soft disciplines (i.e., humanities and social sciences) displayed more frequent use of hedges, boosters, and attitude markers than those from hard disciplines (e.g., biology and physics). Li and Wharton (2012) examined the use of metadiscourse in Literary Criticism and Translation Studies. To the contrary, they found limited disciplinary variations.

The final group, which is more relevant to the present study's objectives, investigated the effectiveness of metadiscourse instruction. Cheng and Steffensen (1996) used Crismore et al.'s (1993) typology of metadiscourse, which includes both interactive and interactional elements, to investigate the effect of using metadiscourse on improving learners' writing skills. They found that students in the experimental group benefited from instruction on metadiscourse, as they performed significantly better in their post-test essays than those in the control group. The researchers further analyzed the essays qualitatively and found that most of the improvement in the essays was attributed to using metadiscourse markers. Specifically, they analyzed two pairs of essays, and found that essays in the experimental group showed more attributors and certainty markers, while those in the control group exhibited more hedges and attitude markers. Overall, the experimental group used more textual features and less

interpersonal markers, while the opposite was the case with the control group which focused more on interpersonal features than on textual features. The results of the study are interesting because they show that textual metadiscourse (viz interactive in Hyland's model) leads to better writing performance. On the other hand, the considerable use of interpersonal metadiscourse (viz interactional in Hyland's model) did not clearly appear to influence writing performance. It is important to note that the taxonomies of textual metadiscourse used by Crismore et al. (1993) are very similar to those adopted by Hyland (2005). For example, logical connectives are labeled transitions in Hyland's model, sequences correspond to frame markers, and, finally, reminders function as endophoric markers.

Additionally, most of the analysis in Cheng and Steffensen (1996) focused on the use of hedges, certainty markers, attributors, and attitude markers, which are elements in the interactional category. Therefore, the picture is still unclear concerning the influence of textual and interactive elements on L2 learners' writing performance. The present study aims to fill this gap.

Pertinent to the present study, three research papers examined the explicit teaching of metadiscourse to L2 learners in the Iranian context. The results of these studies were in favor of explicit exposure to metadiscourse markers. Asadi (2018) explored whether teaching metadiscourse is beneficial in improving students' writing skills. Thirty-eight EFL intermediate-level students from an English institute took part in the study. They were divided into control and experimental groups, and both groups attended a formal writing course on academic writing for two months. Yet, only the experimental group was taught how to use metadiscoursive elements from both interactive and interactional categories. The study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test with considerably higher scores. Thus, the author concluded that the explicit teaching of metadiscourse markers had a positive effect on the improvement of the writing skills of EFL learners.

Likewise, Farahani and Pahlevansadegh (2019) detected a positive relationship between teaching metadiscourse markers and enhancing the writing performance of 40 Iranian EFL IELTS applicants. More specifically, they found that metadiscourse features from the interactional category had a more significant impact on the students' writing performance than those from the interactive category. Similarly, Dastjerdi and Shirzad (2010) examined the effect of teaching metadiscourse to EFL undergraduate students majoring in English literature at an Iranian university. The researchers divided the 94 subjects into three groups based on their level of English language proficiency into elementary, intermediate, and advanced. The findings showed that the intermediate learners had the highest improvement, while the advanced learners showed the least improvement.

The review above indicates the scarcity of studies examining the effect of teaching metadiscourse markers on L2 learners' writing performance. Therefore, there is a need for further research to address this matter, which is the aim of the present study.

**Analytical Framework**

Earlier investigations of metadiscourse features in writing were conducted by Williams (1981), Crismore (1983), and Kopple (1985). Recent studies, however, have adopted Hyland's (2005) taxonomy, which comprises five categories of interactive metadiscourse: transitions,

frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, and code glosses. These categories are outlined in Table 1 along with functions and examples of each category. Hyland (2010) argued that interactive features "allow the writer to manage the information flow to explicitly establish his or her preferred interpretations" (p. 129).

**Table 1**

*A Model of Metadiscourse in Academic Texts*

| Category | Function | Examples |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interactive** | Help to guide the reader through the text | Resources |
| **Transitions** | Expresses relations between main clauses | in addition; but; thus; and |
| **Frame markers** | Refer to discourse acts, sequences, or stages | finally; to conclude; my purpose is |
| **Endophoric markers** | Refer to information in other parts of the text | noted above; see Fig; in section 2 |
| **Evidentials** | Refer to information from other texts | according to X; Z states |
| **Code glosses** | Elaborate propositional meanings | namely; e.g.; such as; in other words |

*Note.* Table 1 is adapted from Hyland (2005).

**The Present Study**

Based on the review of the literature, previous studies provided some insights into the positive correlation between metadiscourse and the improvement of L2 students' writing performance. However, there are at least four reasons to conduct more research in this area. First, although previous studies (e.g., Asadi, 2018; Cheng & Steffensen, 1996; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Farahani & Pahlevansadegh, 2019) have investigated metadiscourse elements from both interactive and interactional categories, they do not necessarily measure what particularly attributes to enhancing writing performance. In other words, metadiscourse theory is a broad approach that encompasses many aspects that could influence writing performance, such as cohesion, coherence, stance, and engagement. It would be too general to investigate all the elements in the model.

Thus, the present study focuses on the elements in the interactive category because of their rapport with cohesion and coherence as outlined above. Furthermore, teaching students all the features of both categories at once might distract them; hence, focusing on one category of the model would yield useful results. Second, some studies (e.g., Asadi, 2018; Farahani & Pahlevansadegh, 2019) had small corpora, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings. Third, most studies were conducted in the Iranian context; thus, it is intriguing to examine other EFL contexts. Fourth, methodologically speaking, previous studies (e.g., Asadi, 2018; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Farahani & Pahlevansadegh, 2019) examined the effect of teaching metadiscourse generically without specifying which metadiscourse element (i.e., feature) had the most effect and which had the least effect on learners' writing performance. Based on this rationale, the present study investigated whether metadiscourse awareness influenced learners' writing abilities. Specifically, the study addressed the following three research questions:

RQ1. What are the differences (if any) between the use of interactive metadiscourse markers in L2 writing before and after the intervention?

RQ2. To what extent does the explicit teaching of interactive metadiscourse markers affect L2 writing performance?

RQ3. To what extent do different interactive devices explain variance in L2 writing performance?

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 77 undergraduate students randomly sampled from two classes in an English major course at a university in Saudi Arabia. They were at the eighth level of their study and have been studying English for about 11 years. The first class consisted of 18 male students, and the second consisted of 59 female students. All the participants were non-native English speakers, with Arabic as their L1. Both classes were taught by the first researcher in a summer semester. Participation was voluntary and the participants' consent was obtained prior to conducting the study.

### Instruments

Essay writing was used as a tool to collect data for the study. One essay was written before the teaching of metadiscourse markers, and another after the treatment. To address the issue of the effect of text length on the analysis of the data, the students were asked to write a second essay (after treatment) that was similar in word count to the first essay (before treatment). To examine this matter, descriptive analysis was performed. The analysis showed a mean score of 319.77 words (tokens) for the first essay and 337.49 words (tokens) for the second. The paired-samples t-test revealed a non-significant difference between the two mean scores ($t(76) = -1.25$, $p = .22$, $d = -.14$).

### Materials and Procedures

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pre- and post-test method to examine the students' writing performance, with the metadiscourse markers as the predictive variable. In the pre-treatment stage, students were asked to write an essay about their experience with Covid-19. Specifically, they were given the following prompt:

> *Covid-19 has impacted countries as well as individuals all over the world. Write a well-organized and coherent essay with a minimum of 250 words about your experience of Covid-19. Explain how the pandemic has affected your life in terms or studying, working, traveling, socializing, etc.*

After the pre-test essays were collected, a one-hour workshop on how to employ metadiscourse in writing was scheduled for the students. They were explicitly familiarized with metadiscourse categories and examples. Hyland's (2005) taxonomy was shown as a model. At the end of the workshop, the students were asked to write another essay on the previously given prompt, i.e., their experience with Covid-19, as a post-test measure. Two raters were asked to evaluate the performance of the participants by scoring the essays with a score ranging from 0-9, following the rubric of the IELTS Task 2-Writing band descriptor (public version).

The rubric included four criteria, yet the raters were asked to focus on the "coherence and cohesion" category. The raters were assistant professors of English in the English department at the same university. They did not have any information about the nature of the study, its procedures, or its aims. After obtaining the scores from the raters, data were prepared for quantitative analyses by the second researcher and crosschecked by the first researcher to maintain accuracy. Initial analysis of the data included inter-rater reliability of scoring the first and second essays. For this purpose, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was used. The results showed an acceptable level of reliability between the two raters for both pre-test ($\alpha$ = .77) and post-test ($\alpha$ = .74) (Taber, 2018). The level of agreement was at 96% and 97%, respectively.

## Results

Descriptive statistics of the scores produced by the two raters for the essays written before and after the teaching of metadiscourse markers are presented in Table 2. In this part of the results, we seek to explore the level of agreement between the two raters' scores on the pre-test and post-test. To examine the difference in scoring, the paired-samples t-test was performed. The results revealed no significant difference between raters 1 and 2 in both pre-test ($t(76)$ = -1.40, $p$ = .17, $d$ = -.16) and post-test ($t(76)$ = -1.09, $p$ = .28, $d$ = -.13). As the difference between the raters was statistically non-significant, the scores of one of the raters (i.e., Rater 1) were used to address the second and third research questions.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics of Essay Scores by the Two Raters (N = 77)*

|  | Min. | Max. | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rater 1 – Pre-test | 2.00 | 7.00 | 4.36 | 1.07 |
| Rater 2 – Pre-test | 2.00 | 7.00 | 4.53 | 1.34 |
| Rater 1 – Post-test | 3.00 | 8.00 | 5.04 | 1.20 |
| Rater 2 – Post-test | 3.00 | 7.50 | 5.18 | 1.32 |

### Research Question One

The first research question addressed the differences between the use of metadiscourse markers in L2 writing before and after the intervention. To answer this research question, descriptive and paired-samples t-test analyses were conducted. First, we examined the total number of interactive metadiscourse markers used in the first and second written essays. The results indicated that students, on average, used 10 markers in the first essay and 16 in the second. The paired-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the two (t(76) = -8.23, p < .001, d = .94), with a large effect size. Second, the use of each interactive metadiscourse marker was compared across the first and second essay. The results showed that the students, on average, used more markers in their second written essay than the first (see Table 3). The pairwise t-test comparisons indicated that the students used each type of marker

significantly more in their second essay compared to the first, except in the case of frame markers. The pairwise comparisons are reported in Table 4.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of Interactive Metadiscourse Markers in the Pre-Test and Post-Test Essays*

|  | **Min.** | **Max.** | **M** | **SD** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trans_Pre | 1 | 23 | 8.10 | 4.51 |
| Trans_Post | 1 | 37 | 11.56 | 6.05 |
| FM_Pre | 0 | 6 | 1.29 | 1.54 |
| FM_Post | 0 | 6 | 1.53 | 1.41 |
| EM_Pre | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| EM_Post | 0 | 2 | .32 | .57 |
| Evi_Pre | 0 | 1 | .05 | .22 |
| Evi_Post | 0 | 7 | .83 | 1.38 |
| CG_Pre | 0 | 10 | .91 | 1.62 |
| CG_Post | 0 | 11 | 1.94 | 2.20 |
| Pre_total | 1 | 25 | 10.35 | 4.90 |
| Post_total | 2 | 39 | 16.18 | 6.59 |

**Table 4**

*Paired-Samples T-Tests of the Differences Between Interactive Metadiscourse Marker use in the Pre-Test and Post-Test*

|  |  | *M* | *SD* | *SEM* | 95% CI Lower | 95% CI Upper | *t* | *df* | *p*-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair 1 | Trans Pre -Post | -3.45 | 5.70 | .65 | -4.75 | -2.16 | -5.32 | 76 | < .001 |
| Pair 2 | FM Pre -Post | -.25 | 1.20 | .14 | -.52 | .03 | -1.80 | 76 | .08 |
| Pair 3 | EM Pre -Post | -0.32 | .57 | .07 | -.45 | -.19 | -4.98 | 76 | < .001 |
| Pair 4 | Evi Pre -Post | -0.78 | 1.31 | 0.15 | -1.08 | -0.48 | -5.20 | 76 | < .001 |
| Pair 5 | CG Pre -Post | -1.03 | 2.26 | 0.26 | -1.54 | -0.51 | -3.98 | 76 | < .001 |

## Research Question Two

The second research question examined the extent to which explicit teaching of metadiscourse markers affects L2 writing performance. To answer this research question, we compared the students' scores on the first and second essays by employing the pre-test and post-test method. The results showed an improvement in the students' writing performance after explicitly introducing them to the interactive markers category of metadiscourse markers (pre-test, M = 4.36; post-test, M= 5.04). The paired-samples t-test indicated that the students' writing had significantly improved after the treatment (t(76) = -4.45, p < .001, d = .51), with a medium effect size, suggesting the efficacy of incorporating interactive metadiscourse markers in essay writing.

The following is an extract from a student's essay written after the intervention. It shows considerable employment of code glosses. Specifically, the student used code glosses as acronyms to explain the full names and meanings of the SARS virus.

> *COVID-19, or coronavirus disease 2019, is a disease caused by a new (or emerging) type of coronavirus that was first discovered when there was an outbreak in December 2019. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause illness ranging from mild illnesses, such as the common cold, to more severe diseases, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). And because the emerging corona virus is related to the SARS-CoV virus (SARS-CoV),*
> *It has been called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (2-SARS-CoV).*

## Research Question Three

The third research question examined the contribution of specific interactive devices to L2 writing performance. To address this question, hierarchical regression analysis was performed. The results suggest that code glosses explain the largest variance in L2 writing performance, about 10%, followed by evidentials, which added about 3% to the model, transition markers (about 2%), and frame markers (about 2%). The predictive value of these markers combined is about 16.4%. Endophoric markers, however, were not found to contribute to the writing model. A summary of the model is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis*

| Model | R | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | SEE | $R^2$ Change |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | .32a | 0.10 | .09 | 1.14 | .10 |
| 2 | .36b | .13 | .11 | 1.13 | .03 |
| 3 | .38c | .15 | .11 | 1.13 | .02 |
| 4 | .40d | .16 | .12 | 1.12 | .02 |
| 5 | .40e | .16 | .11 | 1.13 | .00 |

## Discussion and Conclusion

Using Hyland's (2005) model, the present study aimed at examining the relationship between the use of metadiscourse markers and writing performance, and the extent to which certain markers predict variance in L2 learners writing performance. The findings revealed that awareness of markers in the interactive category (i.e., transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidential markers, and code glosses) significantly increased after introducing them to the students through explicit teaching, except frame markers. This result suggests that metadiscourse markers may not be picked up incidentally in a writing skills course, but that intentional teaching might be required to develop learners' awareness of these important markers and their usefulness in enhancing their writing skills. This conclusion corroborates the conclusions of earlier studies (e.g., Asadi, 2018; Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; Farahani & Pahlevansadegh, 2019) that teaching metadiscourse markers is a valuable approach to support L2 learners writing skills.

The study further explored the use of each marker in the interactive category in the students' essays. The finding showed that transition markers were the most used markers. This is consistent with the results of some previous studies, but also contradicts others. For example, the results accord with those of Bax et al. (2019), Carri´o-Pastor (2021), and Li and Wharton (2012) who noticed an abundant use of transition markers in student essays. More importantly, Bax et al. (2019) found that students almost equally used transition markers, regardless of their proficiency levels. El-Dakhs (2020), however, found that learners of lower proficiency levels used significantly more transitions than those who are more proficient. In fact, the finding of using transitions abundantly in this study is not surprising because transitions mostly comprise connectives that "assist readers in recovering how the writer links the argument" (Hyland, 2010, p. 132). Hence, using transitions seems to be very crucial to writing in general.

The second most used marker was code glosses. When comparing this result with previous studies, El-Dakhs (2020) found a somewhat high use of code glosses, while on the contrary, Carri´o-Pastor (2021) observed very limited use of code glosses in student essays. Bax et al. (2019) did not find a significant difference across different levels of proficiency. However, Intaraprawat and Steffensen (1995) found that good essays included more types and varieties of code glosses than poor essays. Unlike transitions, code glosses are normally insignificant in academic writing because they are used to discern the ideational meaning, and this tendency may not be available to all learners, especially those with lower proficiency. The finding of the present study supports this argument because the results of regression analysis showed that code glosses explained the largest variance in writing performance.

As for frame markers, they ranked third in terms of use in this study. Previous studies revealed inconsistent findings about the use of frame markers in student essays. Carri´o-Pastor (2021) noticed extensive use of frame markers in student essays, while in El-Dakhs's (2020) study, less proficient learners used significantly more frame markers than their more proficient counterparts. However, the picture was different in Bax et al. (2019), as they found no significant difference across levels in terms of the two functions of frame markers: announcing goals and sequencing, whereas advanced levels scarcely used two functions: label stages and topic shifts. Frame markers are essential in academic writing because they refer to text boundaries and stages. Therefore, students should be exposed to these markers from the early

stages of learning writing. This might explain why the present study revealed no significant variations in the two groups of essays.

The analysis of endophoric markers did not reveal significant contributions to writing performance. This result is not in line with that of Bax et al. (2019) who found that endophoric markers were used more by advanced level learners than lower level learners. Finally, the investigation of evidentials revealed that these markers were the second largest variance in L2 writing performance. This result is similar to that of Bax et al. (2019) who found that evidentials were used more by advanced level learners than lower level learners. This finding is not surprising because evidentials are references to sources from other texts. Hence, using them requires a deep understanding of the topic being discussed as well as knowledge of other sources. This overtly requires higher language proficiency.

In conclusion, the overall result shows a significant effect of using metadiscourse markers on students' writing performance. This was evident in the students' essays after they were exposed to metadiscourse markers and explicitly taught how to use them. The students' tendency to employ interactive markers, particularly after the intervention, could be viewed as a good indication of development in textual cohesion and coherence as well as improvement of their overall writing performance.

The post-test result shows a reasonable number of interactive markers in the students' essays, including transitions, evidentials, and endophoric markers. This may indicate that the students' awareness of metadiscourse has improved after they were taught these features and the linguistic items pertinent to them. Prior to the intervention, the students appeared to use a limited number of interactive markers. The lack of knowledge of most metadiscourse markers before the intervention may indicate that students follow the strategy of avoidance, and this may be due to a number of factors. First, the students might be oblivious of the linguistic rules of using interactive markers in different textual contexts.

Second, as novice writers, they might be uncertain of the meanings of metadiscourse features or unaware of the importance and contribution of these features to the construction of written texts. Therefore, they are expected to be hesitant or inattentive of using the markers because they fear making mistakes. However, the results of the present study show considerable improvement in using interactive markers in the students' essays written after the intervention. In fact, interactive features are not enough to manage metadiscourse utilization in written texts, let alone, the overall writing process since they represent one category of the metadiscourse theory proposed by Hyland (2005). Interactional metadiscourse is another metadiscourse category which needs to be investigated in further research studies, besides other intra-and inter-textual factors prerequisite for the improvement of writing performance.

As far as the aim of this study, it could be concluded that exposing students to interactive markers may improve their insights into metadiscourse features. Familiarizing undergraduate EFL learners with the meanings and uses of these features certainly helps them manipulate the markers in relation to other textual elements, such as cohesion and coherence, hence improving their writing performance, particularly at textual level. Exploring the number of metadiscourse markers used by the students and their relation to cohesion and coherence may be considered a good indication of writing performance improvement and an important step to good writing performance. Yet, it may not be sufficient for overall writing performance

as the latter necessarily requires other factors. Therefore, further comprehensive studies are recommended where both quantitative and qualitative analyses can be adopted to examine writing performance.

The most important contribution of this paper is the exploration of the relationship between clear and detailed exposure to different metadiscourse markers, through teaching, and the degree of raising students' awareness and developing their performance in writing. This relationship could inevitably call for particular writing instructions where metadiscourse parameters are considered. The significance of this research study also lies in categorizing and analyzing metadiscourse features within the analytical framework proposed by Hyland (2005), which may help students understand linguistic markers and their meanings. In fact, it is the interplay and manipulation of these linguistic markers that hold different text patterns tightly together in a cohesive and coherent manner.

This study can hopefully offer some pedagogical implications for novice writers, EFL writers, writers of academic writing materials, and instructors. Focusing on metadiscourse markers provides novice writers with strategies to write more coherently and effectively. This may also help writing instructors extend their focus of teaching grammar rules in isolation to include other language aspects that are required to raise students' awareness of creating texture, thus developing their abilities in making use of the different linguistic markers available to them to bring parts of a text together. Teaching linguistic resources, bearing metadiscourse meanings and values, to novice writers may help them use different metadiscourse categories appropriately.

It should, however, be noted that the present investigation focused on essays written by students chosen from one academic field (English language) and one university. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other fields or other university students. The analysis was also based on one domain (i.e., textual) of the metadiscourse framework (Hyland, 2005). For more comprehensives results, further studies should include the other domain (i.e., interpersonal) and broaden the area of investigation to cover other universities and include samples of written essays by students of different academic fields.

**Bio**

Prof. Hmoud Alotaibi works as a head and full professor of linguistics at Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia. His research interests are genre analysis, academic wiring, and English for specific and academic purposes.

Ahmed Masrai is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. His research and teaching interest include second language acquisition, lexical studies, and vocabulary testing. This interest has led to publication in a number of prestigious journals and contribution to edited volumes.

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# Error Analysis of Written English Essays: The Case of Undergraduate Students in an English Program in Saudi Arabia

Yasamiyan Alolaywi

*Department of English Language and Translation, College of Science and Arts,*
*Methnab, Qassim University, Buraydah, Saudi Arabia*

*yalieoy@qu.edu.sa*
*https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2749-7558*

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## الملخص

هَدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد أخطاء الكتابة الأكثر شيوعًا التي يقع فيها متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية؛ مع الاهتمام بالأخطاء النحوية. شَارك في هذه الدراسة خمسون طالبة جامعية من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة القصيم في المملكة العربية السعودية. جُمعت البيانات لهذا البحث من النصوص المكتوبة للطالبات في مقرر الكتابة (نجل 144). استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الكمّي والنوعي في الدراسة. صُنفت الأخطاء الكتابية إلى الأصناف التالية: الأخطاء في زمن الفعل، الأخطاء في توافق الفاعل مع الفعل، الاستخدام الخاطئ لأدوات التعريف، الجمل غير المكتملة، أخطاء الهجاء، علامات الترقيم، أخطاء استخدام الأحرف الكبيرة. عُرضت النتائج من خلال تقرير عدد تكرر الأخطاء في المقالات والنسبة المئوية لكل صنف من هذه الأخطاء. أظهرت النتائج أن أكثر أنواع الأخطاء شيوعاً هي الأخطاء الإملائية. علّلت الباحثة أن هذه الأخطاء بمجملها تقع نتيجة لعدم المعرفة الصحيحة بقواعد الكتابة. وبناءً على ذلك، توصي هذه الدراسة على مضاعفة الجهود لتطوير قدرات الطلبة التحريريّة من خلال دمج تقنيات تدريس وتعليم أكثر نجاعة كأسلوب التغذية الراجعة التصحيحية. وفي الختام، قدّم البحث بعض المقترحات للباحثين المهتمين في مجال الدراسة كالبحث المعمق للأسباب الرئيسة لأخطاء الكتابة لدى المتعلمين.

**Abstract**

The current study aimed to identify the most common writing errors made by English as a foreign language learners' (EFL), with a special focus on their grammatical errors. The participants in this study were 50 undergraduate students from the Department of English at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The data for this research were collected from students' written scripts in a writing course. A mixed-method research approach was employed in the study, and data were analyzed both quantitively and qualitatively. Errors were classified into the following types: errors in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, wrong use of article, sentence fragment, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The frequencies of occurrence and percentages of each error type were reported. Results showed that the most frequent type of errors made by students was spelling errors. It was suggested that they were made out of lack of knowledge of rule restrictions. Therefore, extra endeavors are urged to expand the students' writing abilities through the integration of more efficient teaching and learning techniques such as corrective feedback. Finally, on the basis of these results, some suggestions were put forward for future researchers such as a careful investigation of the main causes of learners' writing errors.

*Keywords: analytical approach; EFL learners; error analysis; grammatical errors; second language writing*

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# Introduction

Writing is an important vehicle that helps pupils express their ideas and thoughts lucidly. It is also one of the major language skills that second language learners need to proficiently acquire and master. To produce very well-written paragraphs, students, particularly at the undergraduate level, are expected to develop adequate writing techniques that enable them to compose written essays free from errors of all types including grammatical errors. In the meantime, writing is a complex task that involves an overlap of a variety of aspects such as layout, structure, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, coherence, and cohesion, among other things. Hence, second language learners are encouraged to possess high levels of linguistic and cognitive competence that help them compose well-written paragraphs.

In fact, second language learners make different types of errors. These errors result from a variety of factors involving mother tongue transfer or intralingual influence. They are also committed due to the fact that SL learners are unaware of the rules or appropriate language use in a second or a foreign language learning context. In addition, lack of exposure to authentic language resources represents a contributing element to SL learners' low proficiency levels. However, within the scope of EFL, educators often remark weakness in their students' performance, their mastery of the language in general, and their writing skills in particular. This has been confirmed by some studies conducted in this field. For example, research conducted by Bacha (2012) in an EFL context revealed that teachers find students' academic writing weak.

In case of Saudi undergraduate learners, researchers contributed a set of indicative outcomes. AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) argued that "Although they have great expectations to write good English paragraphs, many Saudi university students have a lot of problems in writing" (p. 178). Moreover, Alkodimi and Al-Ahdal (2021) reported limited academic writing skills among Saudi university students characterized by a lack of lexis, regular sentences, and proper orthography. Similarly, Alqasham et al. (2021) explored the writing abilities of a group of Qassim University's tertiary-level students and indicated that the participants failed to achieve the desired academic level in their writing and assessed their essay writing achievements as being generally low.

These arguments pointed out the fact that the current status of students' writing demands further amendment. A fundamental step toward the process of improvement is to thoroughly assess students' ongoing language levels. This will help determine areas of weakness that require more advancement. In addition, the literature on EFL learners' literacy assessment shows numerous research studies conducted on this area. Yet, studies addressing Saudi EFL undergraduate learners' writing skills are still scarce.

Therefore, this paper sought to analyze samples of EFL undergraduate students' writings and to identify their common writing errors in order to take appropriate measures toward the process of development. The errors identified in this study were classified into the following categories: verb-tense errors, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragment, wrong use of article, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. In other words, the objectives of the present study can be summarized as follows:

1. To identify the most common writing errors committed by EFL undergraduate students in the Department of English Language and translation at Qassim University.

2. To classify the types of errors that the students commonly make in paragraph writing.

3. To appraise the prevalence and recurrence of these errors.

### Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What type of writing errors do EFL undergraduate students in the Department of English at Qassim University commonly make in paragraph writing?
2. Which errors occur more frequently in the participants' paragraph writing?

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Considerations

*Error Analysis (EA)*

Studying learners' errors falls into a category of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field of study known as Error Analysis (EA). EA involves a systematic description and classification of L2 errors detected in samples of learner's speech or writing. It is considered as the most appropriate tool for analyzing learners' errors.

Within SLA, EA was first introduced by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the late 1970s and became a very popular approach for describing L2 errors (James, 1998). In 1967, Corder argued that L2 errors are significant because they can reflect some of the underlying linguistic rules. The main focus of EA is the actual mistakes made by FL/L2 learners which lately became very popular in the field of applied linguistics. Brown (1994) argued that EA has a great value in classroom research. In fact, the systematic analysis of mistakes made by FL/L2 learners allows determining areas which require reinforcement in teaching. EA was defined by James (1998) as "the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language" (p. 111). In addition, Mahmoodzadeh (2012), defined EA as "a procedure used to identify, categorize, and explain the errors committed by FL/L2 learners" (p. 75).

According to EA, a great deal of errors made by FL learners are similar regardless of their native languages. Such errors are mainly caused by intralingual interference or transfer. James (1998) claimed that such a type of interference from the structures of the target language (TL) itself is the main cause of intralingual errors. Based on this assumption, EA serves two main purposes: first, it provides insights about the types of interferences found in second language learners' performances; second, it informs teachers and syllabus designers about the most problematic aspects of the TL that students face difficulty producing (Dulay et al., 1982).

According to Corder (1981), there are two main objectives of EA: one theoretical and the other is applied. The theoretical objective aims to check the validity of the theories such as the theory of transfer. In other words, this objective can help in understanding how and what a foreign language (FL) learner learns whilst studying a FL. On the other hand, the applied objective "concerns pedagogical purposes" (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012, p. 735). This objective enables learners of L2 to learn their TL more efficiently and effectively by using the previous knowledge of their linguistic knowledge for pedagogical purposes. In sum, the identification of FL/SL learners' errors and the problems they encounter help EFL/ESL teachers pinpoint

their students' weaknesses and then revise their teaching practices and learning materials accordingly.

## Empirical Considerations

The literature on EA displays a number of research papers that were conducted to probe the most frequent error types made by EFL learners. The objectives of past studies on the field of EA bear some resemblance to the current study's aims in terms of diagnosing the types of errors performed by EFL students. However, some of these studies focused on issues that were not covered by the current research such as searching the causes of such errors as being interlingual and intralingual in addition to coherence and cohesion as pertaining to students' essay writing. Moreover, the present study is restricted solely to analyzing samples of Saudi EFL learners' written essays. Similar studies in the field involve AlTameemy and Daradkeh's research work (2019) which investigated the type and frequency of errors made by EFL college students at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. Findings showed that students committed errors in grammar (42.15%), punctuation (16.14%), spelling (14.81%), and capitalization (10.19%). No significant differences were found in the performance between male and female student participants.

With the aim of exploring common writing errors made by Saudi students, Khan and Khan (2016) conducted a study with 60 students from Jazan University. All the errors were identified and the most common errors were found in the use of verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, auxiliaries, and spellings. Previous studies revealed that the Saudi students committed different types of errors, and most of these errors were due to intralingual than interlingual transfer. In addition, the results indicated that learners' English writing skills need more attention and improvement.

Another range of studies dealt with Arab learners such as that by Farsani et al. (2015) who scrutinized the essay writing errors of EFL university students studying English at Azad University. Results showed that the students in this study committed 10 common errors. These errors are: (1) verb tense, (2) word order, (3) singular/plural form, (4) subject-verb agreement, (5) double negatives, (6) spellings, (7) capitalization, (8) articles (9) sentence fragments, and (10) prepositions. On the basis of these results, some suggestions and teaching strategies that help reduce future problems regarding writing English essays among Arab learners were proposed. Similarly, Al-Khasawneh (2014) analyzed errors of written English paragraphs by Jordanian Undergraduate Students. The findings of the study revealed that the students of Ajloun National University committed several errors such as spelling, word order, and subject-verb agreement. Results also showed that the most frequent error committed by the students was the improper use of English articles.

In addition, Abbasi and Karimnia (2011) investigated grammatical writing errors among Iranian translation students. The analysis indicated significant weakness in the participants' English grammar. Findings also showed that 98% of the students struggled with grammar, and that most of their errors were interlingual, indicating the influence of the mother language on the target language. Finally, a study conducted by Phuket and Othman (2015) attempted to explore the major sources of errors that occurred in the writing of EFL students. Forty narrative essays composed by Thai university students were collected and scrutinized. Findings indicated that the most frequent types of errors were word choice, verb tense, use of

prepositions, and commas. The errors were mainly from two sources: interlingual and intralingual. According to Phuket and Othman (2015), interlingual or native language interference was found to be the dominant source of errors.

## Methods

### Sampling and Participants

The study sample consists of 50 Saudi EFL students from the Department of English and Translation at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. Those students were enrolled in a writing course as part of their study plan in the English Language Department. They spent roughly one year of English instruction in the program. The sampling procedure adopted to assign students into the study is cluster sampling, which involves selecting the whole class as participants in the study.

### Research Design

This study employed an analytical research design, wherein the researcher uses information already available and analyzes them to evaluate the material critically (Kothari, 2004). Data for this research were collected from the students' sample answers to the essay writing question in a writing course. A mixed-method approach was utilized as data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The students' writing errors were detected and reported according to frequency and percentage. The focus of the analysis was on grammar errors and mechanics (capitalization, spelling and punctuation errors). Grammatical errors were grouped into the following categories: verb tense, subject-verb agreement, wrong use of article, and sentence fragments.

### Material

The primary source of data used to answer the research questions is the answer scripts of 50 students during the final exam of a compulsory writing course at the Department of English Language and Translation at Qassim University. The students were asked to write an essay of no less than 50 words on one of the following topics: "Your Best Friend" or "Your Favorite Clothing Item".

### Research Procedures

All the 50 participants were administered a writing test involving an essay writing task. The participants were required to write a short essay about one of the following topics: "Your Best Friend" or "Your Favorite Clothing Item". These topics were general and not related to the topics covered in their writing class. The duration of the test was two hours, and the required paragraphs length is a minimum of 50 words. The data was collected during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. The corpus used in this study is collected from the written paragraphs of 50 students who are enrolled in one of the English compulsory courses (i.e., Writing (1) ENG 144).

### Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed in accordance with Chanquoy's (2001) paradigm of writing errors. These errors were classified into the following: (1) Spelling errors: this category tackles the errors which are related to orthography. (2) Grammatical errors: this category deals with the errors related to gender, number, verb-subject agreement. (3) Verb

tense: this category aims to identify mistakes related to wrong tense structure or false selection of tenses, and (3), Punctuation: this category addresses punctuation and capitalization errors.

**Validity and Reliability**

The researcher undertook certain measures to insure research validity. For instance, the topics chosen for the writing task were completely different from the topics covered in their course. They were also selected on the basis of familiarity and interest of students to ensure that the students were able to express their thoughts and generate ideas about them smoothly. In addition, the students were not informed that their writing samples will be analyzed for research purposes in order to control the Hawthorne effect. The Hawthorne effect refers to the increase in performance of individuals when they realize that they are noticed, watched, and paid attention to by researchers or supervisors (Dörnyei, 2007). However, to maintain research ethics, the participants' consent to take part in the study was sought after performing the test.

Further, reliability of the results was established by adopting the inter-rater method. The answer sheets of the students were assessed by two raters to eliminate subjectivity and provide fairer assessment. The results showed no discrepancy between the scores provided by the two assessors, which ultimately ensures the reliability of the results. Besides, Spearman Correlation Coefficient was calculated to estimate the correlation between the two sets of scores provided by the two assessors as can be seen in Table 1 below:

**Table 1**

*A Correlation between the Two Raters' Results*

| Correlations | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Rater_1** | **Rater_2** |
| Rater_1 | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .587** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | No | 50 | 50 |
| Rater_2 | Pearson Correlation | .587** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | No | 50 | 50 |

 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data above shows that *r* value is (.587) which indicates an acceptable correlation between the two raters' results. Moreover, the *p* value is (.000), and as it is below (.05), it is estimated that the significance is high which also indicates a strong association between the two sets of scores.

**Data Analysis and Discussion**

The data analysis revealed several interesting findings. Basically, the analysis was confined to definite classes of errors, including errors in verb tense, verb-subject agreement, article usage, sentence fragments, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of these errors as found in the corpus collected from the students'

written essay. They are organized on the table in a descending order from the highest rates to the lowest rates. Figure 1 shows a summary of the findings.

**Table 2**

*Frequency and Percentage of Errors According to Type*

| No. | Type of Error | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Spelling | 115 | 34.53% |
| 2 | Subject-Verb Agreement | 54 | 16.21% |
| 3 | Capitalization | 47 | 14.11% |
| 4 | Sentence Fragment | 37 | 11.11% |
| 5 | Verb tense | 34 | 10.21% |
| 6 | Wrong Use of Article | 25 | 7.50% |
| 7 | Punctuation | 21 | 6.30% |
|  | Total | 333 | 100% |

**Figure 1**

*The Percentage of Errors in EFL Learners' Writings*
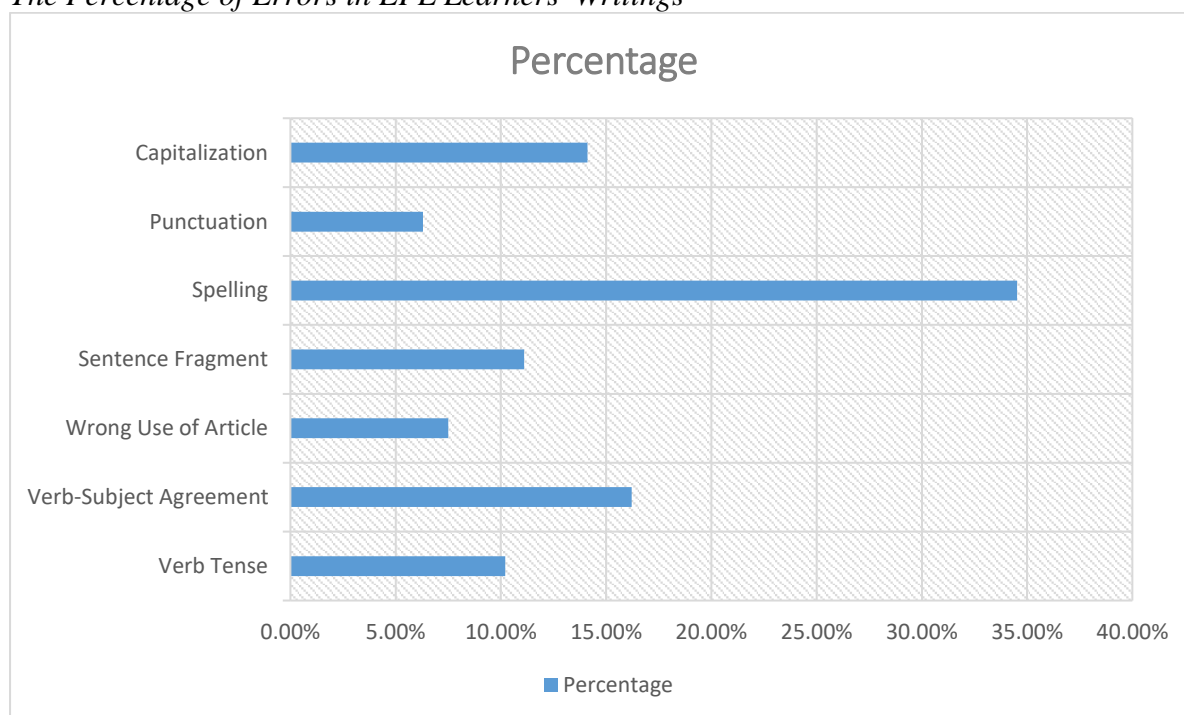


**Spelling**

Findings of the current study have shown that the most frequent errors the students made were spelling errors, with a frequency of 115 errors and a percentage of 34.53%. (see Appendix A). The following are examples of misspelled words: "clase" for "close," "frend" for "friend," "plye piano for play piano," "fainally" for "finally," "the shape is sircle instead of the shape is circle," "toller for taller," "beacase" for "because," "favioret for "favorite," "yong" for "young," and "live" for "life."

This study found that the most frequent type of error made by the students was spelling errors. This result is closely related to Ababneh's (2017) who demonstrated that the most types

of errors found in his study sample fell in the spelling category. He explained that these errors were probably due to the rare use of English vocabulary in everyday conversations and rare English reading as many students professed verbally that they conversed and read mainly in Arabic and not in English. However, some researchers suggested justifications for the prevalence of such errors. For instance, Haggan (1991) reported that EFL learners with a non-Roman writing system made fewer spelling errors than EFL learners with another Roman writing system. In addition, Khan (2011) demonstrated that the difference in sentence patterns between a student's mother tongue and L2 leads students to make many spelling errors such as omitting silent letters. Also, L1 phonology has been found to play a role in L2 learners' English spelling (Allaith & Joshi, 2011).

**Subject-Verb Agreement**

The participants also made errors in subject-verb agreement (Appendix A). The frequency of this error category was 54, with a percentage of 16.21%. Instances of the students' wrong usage of verb forms are quoted as follows: "She have a long hair," "Broog live in Onaizah," "He (her friend) 19 years old," "It is the cutest person I know (her friend)," "Sara are simple girl," "She see me," "I love him (her friend)," and "She save my secrets."

This finding is similar to those of Khan and Khan (2016), Farsani et al. (2015), and Al-Khasawneh (2014). The researchers scrutinized EFL learners' most common errors and found that subject-verb agreement was among the most common errors. This finding is also similar to Alahmadi's (2019) who investigated grammatical errors of subject verb agreement in writing made by Saudi learners. Alahmadi revealed that Saudi Arabian learners encounter some difficulties in applying the rules of subject-verb agreement in academic writing. He explained that these difficulties resulted from learners' failure to complete the right application of rules and failure to fully develop these rules, which eventually leads to unacceptable use of the target language. In the same vein, Hammad (2012) explained the errors pertaining to agreement committed by students when writing in English in light of their lack of exposure to English and insufficient language input. Nonetheless, Martin (2008) and Ferris (2009), as cited in Al-Khasawneh (2014), suggested that these errors can be attributed to Arabic interference and the negative transfer of mother tongue rules.

**Capitalization**

The participants committed several capitalization mistakes (Appendix A), with a frequency of 47 errors and a percentage of 14.11%. Most capitalization errors were found in writing proper names with a lowercased first letter. Examples of this category involve "razan," "sara," "manar," "dana," "dubai," and "rolex"; names of nationalities such as "spanish," "american," and "italian"; or starting a new sentence with a capital letter, such as "And." Moreover, many students wrote the first-person pronoun "I" with a small *i*.

These results concur with the findings of previous studies, including those of Abbasi and Karimnia (2011) and Khan and Khan (2016). It is also consistent with the finding of Ababneh (2017) who reported that his students made errors in capitalization (8.92%) by either wrongly capitalizing words or wrongly not capitalizing words. It was also noticed that the students made errors in mixing small and capital letter words or starting sentences with small letter words. However, Ababneh (2017) suggested that such errors in capitalization occur due to the fact that Arabic as a language does not distinguish between upper- and lower-case words.

**Sentence Fragment**

The students' writings contained some fragmented sentences at a frequency of 37, with a percentage of 11.11% (see Appendix A). Sentence fragments are sentences that tend to be short or incomplete owing to a missing independent clause. Also, some fragments are incomplete because they lack either a subject or a verb. Examples include the following: "Because we don't see them much," "When I visited her," "When I started college.", "born in Kuwait", and "she smart girl". This finding is also confirmed by previous studies such as those of AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019) and Al-Khasawneh (2014), who cited numerous instances of fragmented sentences in their study participants' samples. It is also consistent with Sawalmeh's (2013) finding who investigated the errors in a corpus of essays written by 32 Arabic-speaking Saudi learners of English. His results showed that the participants committed 11.7% errors in sentence fragment and justified such finding by the overt influence of Arabic on the students' writing of English. Likewise, Al-Khasawneh (2014) proposed that language interference and negative transfer of the mother language are causes of errors in EFL paragraph writing.

**Verb Tense**

Data analysis showed that the participants committed errors in verb tense (Appendix A). The frequency of the students' verb-tense errors was 34, with a percentage of 10.21%. Most errors were characterized by the wrong use of the present tense by placing a copula (is) prior to the verb, resulting in an invented verb form. This wrong usage was recurrent in many students' performances. The following examples were quoted from the students' answer sheets: "I am wish everybody," "She is study," "She is help me," and "My sister is want." The other errors were in dropping off the copula, as in "She athletic and healthy" and "He 19 years old." Other tense errors were represented by the use of the wrong tense form, such as using the simple past instead of the present past. For example, "I took to her every day" instead of "I talk to her every day." It was also found that the students made errors in the use of the present third-person singular, as in "My friend always help me," "My mom love it," and "She make me laugh."

This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies such as those of AlTameemy and Daradkeh (2019), Farsani et al. (2015), and Al-Khasawneh (2014). These studies investigated the most frequent errors committed by EFL learners and found that the wrong use of verb tenses was among the most recurrent errors. Although this research did not investigate the causes of these errors as results of interlingual transfer or intralingual sources, they suggested that these errors are intralingual, as the types of mistakes committed bear no similarities to the linguistic aspects of the participants' mother tongue.

**Article Usage**

The students' performances revealed misused, misplaced, or missing articles (Appendix A), as in the following examples: "She is wonderful girl," "She is living in the Onaizah," and "She is in same age with me." The frequency of the students' article misusage was 25 and the percentage was 7.50%. This observation is also confirmed by previous research studies that examined EFL learners' common writing errors (e.g., Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011; Farsani et al., 2015). Their data analysis revealed that, like the present study's participants, their research participants misplaced the articles or dropped them altogether.

## Punctuation

The students made relatively fewer errors in punctuation (6.30%) than other types of errors with a frequency of 21 (Appendix A). Most punctuation mistakes occurred by missing the comma after a dependent clause, as in the following example: "When I was 10 years old." This is also similar to the findings of Phuket and Othman (2015), who found that their research participants made several mistakes in punctuation and comma placement. According to Phuket and Othman (2015), interlingual or native language interference was the dominant source of the errors made by their participants. Moreover, this finding supports the findings of Ababneh (2017), Nuruzzaman et al. (2018), and Sawalmeh (2013) who cited errors in punctuation with their studies samples. They indicated that errors in punctuation were in missing to use a punctuation symbol when a symbol was needed. It was also observed that some students used punctuation symbols other than a period at the end of paragraphs and commas when listing things.

## Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations to this study. First, the corpus for this research was collected from 50 students' written essays which is relatively a small number. A bigger sample size will definitely yield more in-depth findings and allow the generalizations of the results to the larger population of EFL learners. Second, due to limitations of time and space, the causes of errors made by the participants were not investigated. Hence, subsequent research conducted on the subject might probe thoroughly into the principal sources of EFL learners' writing errors. Third, the study's sample comprises only female participants, nonetheless, findings will be more inclusive if both genders are involved in the study.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to identify EFL undergraduate learners' writing errors, with a special focus on their grammatical errors. The results showed that the students made many mistakes at both the word and the sentence level, including errors in verb-tense, subject-verb agreement, sentence fragment, use of articles, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. The frequencies and percentages of these errors were reported. It was also found that the highest rate of errors made by the participants was spelling errors. Moreover, the outputs of this study support the findings of previous studies in the same field in many aspects. For example, there are similarities in the types of grammatical mistakes committed by EFL students. Some previous studies evaluated the general level of university students in contexts where English is a foreign language as weak and below expectations. This low achievement is ascribed to several factors, including traditional and ineffective teaching methods, low motivation on the part of students in addition to lack of exposure to authentic language input in settings where English is considered a foreign language.

The classification of errors as being a cause of interlanguage transfer or intralingual is a controversial issue and was not addressed by the present study. Accordingly, a further study that tackles the issue of the sources of errors made by EFL learners is suggested. Furthermore, a duplication of the current study on similar contexts is also proposed to test the extent to which the outputs are comparable, which eventually, allow the generalizability of findings to the larger population of EFL learners. However, this research forecasts that the errors committed by the participants in the study were intralingual as the errors committed bear no resemblance

to the grammatical aspects of the target language. In light of these results, some recommendations were offered to improve the current learning and teaching conditions and to promote learners' literacy levels.

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the present study, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. It is suggested that instructors of grammar as well as other English-major modules provide finer instruction of grammatical rules as it is noticeable that most errors committed by the participants were made out of ignorance of proper language use.

2. The study attempted to answer some questions pertaining to learners' writing performance. Yet, there are still some gaps that need to be filled by further studies; such as exploring the motives of students' grammatical confusion as if whether they are a result of interlingual transfer or intralingual interference.

3. It is also recommended that teaching methods that emphasize language production are implemented and to increase tasks that involve communication and interaction among second language learners.

4. Finally, it is suggested that EFL learners are exposed to extensive language input and materials to facilitate their grasp of authentic language use. This is mainly because findings of research in the area of EFL writing indicate that lack of exposure to the target language is one of the justifications of learners' low proficiency levels.

**Bio**

Dr. Yasamiyan Saleh Alolaywi is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, College of Science and Arts, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include second language acquisition, pragmatics, and translation. Dr. Alolaywi has presented research at national and international conferences. She has also published research in highly ranked journals. In addition, she is a certified and licensed trainer both nationally and internationally. She also has two Certificate of Authority in Arabic Syntax from the Arabic Academy of Syntax. Twitter: @Yasmine_Alelawy

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# Appendix A

Lists of All Errors Made by the Students Ordered According to Frequency

*1. Spelling Errors*

| No. | Error | Correct Form | No. | Error | Correct Form | No. | Error | Correct Form |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | studen | student | 50 | confortable | comfortable | 99 | pepeol | people |
| 2 | know | now | 51 | collage | college | 100 | finly | finally |
| 3 | Dube | Dubai | 52 | tinas | tennis | 101 | kaindest | kindest |
| 4 | detels | details | 53 | faviret | favorite | 102 | defren | different |
| 5 | favourate | favorite | 54 | studants | students | 103 | callege | college |
| 6 | jewelary | jewelry | 55 | releshenship | relationship | 104 | wishe | wish |
| 7 | gif | gift | 56 | finlly | finally | 105 | coosin | cousin |
| 8 | fanny | funny | 57 | whit | white | 106 | mush | much |
| 9 | throue | through | 58 | sircle | circle | 107 | sive | save |
| 10 | porn | born | 59 | fainally | finally | 108 | bast | best |
| 11 | fenly | finally | 60 | blak | black | 109 | yoers | years |
| 12 | beacuse | because | 61 | well | will | 110 | famaly | family |
| 13 | rellay | really | 62 | wer | wear | 111 | clos | close |
| 14 | her | hair | 63 | frind | friend | 112 | kute | cute |
| 15 | eyas | eyes | 64 | hop | hope | 113 | deer | dear |
| 16 | tool | tall | 65 | lik | like | 114 | serch | search |
| 17 | becouse | because | 66 | fany | funny | 115 | engelish | English |
| 18 | match | much | 67 | live | life | | | |
| 19 | pourod | proud | 68 | bositive | positive | | | |
| 20 | beautal | beautiful | 69 | foefer | forever | | | |
| 21 | becuse | because | 70 | tool | tall | | | |
| 22 | alwes | always | 71 | hear | hair | | | |
| 23 | sweit | sweet | 72 | erea | area | | | |
| 24 | for ever | forever | 73 | clos | close | | | |
| 25 | chanse | chance | 74 | betwen | between | | | |
| 26 | parson | person | 75 | hous | house | | | |
| 27 | derast | dearest | 76 | lesen | listen | | | |
| 28 | clase | class | 77 | preduse | produce | | | |
| 29 | younge | young | 78 | friendlly | friendly | | | |
| 30 | beatiful | beautiful | 79 | gray | grey | | | |
| 31 | remembar | remember | 80 | trening | training | | | |
| 32 | danc | dance | 81 | togather | together | | | |
| 33 | faviorte | favorite | 82 | alwase | always | | | |
| 34 | litter | letter | 83 | choeas | choose | | | |
| 35 | peautilsh | beautiful | 84 | engilsh | English | | | |
| 36 | drows | draws | 85 | madicen | medicine | | | |
| 37 | took | talk | 86 | eich | each | | | |
| 38 | lave | love | 87 | chating | chatting | | | |
| 39 | har | her | 88 | cilling | calling | | | |
| 40 | me | my | 89 | yong | young | | | |
| 41 | samart | smart | 90 | miends | minds | | | |
| 42 | dessions | decisions | 91 | inter | enter | | | |
| 43 | amaizing | amazing | 92 | feather | future | | | |
| 44 | beacose | because | 93 | togthre | together | | | |
| 45 | appretiate | appreciate | 94 | reast | rest | | | |
| 46 | shart | shirt | 95 | becuse | because | | | |
| 47 | geft | gift | 96 | plye | play | | | |
| 48 | sistar | sister | 97 | pino | piano | | | |
| 49 | midal | middle | 98 | funy | funny | | | |

## 2. Subject-Verb Agreement

| No. | Error | Correct Form |
|-----|-------|--------------|
| 1 | The clothes is made | The clothes are made |
| 2 | Because it fit my body | Because it fits my body |
| 3 | She play basketball | She plays basketball |
| 4 | She save my secrets | She keeps my secrets |
| 5 | She feel of me | She feels of me |
| 6 | She and me plays online game | She and I play online games |
| 7 | My best friend its Sara | My best friend's name is Sara |
| 8 | Sara are simple girl | Sara is a simple girl |
| 9 | It is so cute | She is so cute |
| 10 | She see me | She sees me |
| 11 | She help me | She helps me |
| 12 | She make me happy | She makes me happy |
| 13 | She always make me smile | She always makes me smile |
| 14 | It is the cutest person I ever know | She is the cutest person I have ever known |
| 15 | I love he and she love me back | I love her and she loves me back |
| 16 | She have a good time | She has a good time |
| 17 | she always have a big smile on her face | She always has a big smile on her face |
| 18 | She always cheer people up | She always cheers people up |
| 19 | She make me laugh | She makes me laugh |
| 20 | He likes things I like | She likes the things I like |
| 21 | His love coffee | She loves coffee |
| 22 | My friend is old 20 | My friend is 20 years old |
| 23 | Renad like go shopping | Renad likes to go shopping |
| 24 | My friend love big malls | My friend loves big malls |
| 25 | Renad love swimming and playing tennis | Renad loves swimming and playing tennis |
| 26 | His like read a book | She likes reading books |
| 27 | His like red color | She likes the color red |
| 28 | Renad have job at school | Renad has a job at school |
| 29 | She like travel and reading books | She likes travel and reading books |
| 30 | In she free time watch TV | In her free time, she watches TV |
| 31 | She was a students | She was a student |
| 32 | Raghad love color black | Raghad loves the color black |
| 33 | It have a black in it too | It has a black in it too |
| 34 | My mom love and my sister too | My mom loves it and my sister, too |
| 35 | My best friend is a good person I love him | My best friend is a good person. I love her |
| 36 | She give me a positive energy | She gives me a positive energy |
| 37 | She don't bother me | She doesn't bother me |
| 38 | She hate cruel people | She hates cruel people |
| 39 | She love to dance and have fun | She loves to dance and have fun |
| 40 | She listen to music every day | She listens to music every day |
| 41 | I wish she good life and luck | I wish her good life and luck |
| 42 | I have my best friend your name Danah | I have my best friend … her name Danah |
| 43 | He 19 years old | She is 19 years old |
| 44 | He speak English | She speaks English |
| 45 | She have long hair and brown eyes | She has long hair and brown eyes |
| 46 | She have a big heart | She has a big heart |
| 47 | It is my favorite friend | She is my favorite friend |
| 48 | I wishes to see her soon | I wish to see her soon |
| 49 | Broog live in onaizah | Broog lives in Onaizah |
| 50 | She always smile and good to people | She always smiles and good to people |
| 51 | Any place she sit make all people funny | Any place she sits make all people funny |
| 52 | I have a lot of friend but he is my best | I have a lot of friends, but she is my best |
| 53 | She like food and shopping | She likes food and shopping |
| 54 | I hope the T-shirt … I will keep him | I hope the T-shirt … I will keep it |

*3. Capitalization*

| No. | Error | Correct Form |
|-----|-------|-------------|
| 1 | Your best friend "title", repeated 10 times | Your Best Friend |
| 2 | rawdah "proper noun" | Rawdah |
| 3 | this long friendship "beginning of the sentence" | This long friendship |
| 4 | it is really beautiful "beginning of the sentence" | It is really beautiful |
| 5 | i meet | I meet |
| 6 | i meet my first best friend | I meet my best friend |
| 7 | Online games | online games |
| 8 | department of English language and Translation | Department of English Language and Translation |
| 9 | i love that | I love that |
| 10 | i wish that | I wish that |
| 11 | My favorite necklace "title" | My Favorite Necklace |
| 12 | after two weeks, my brother "beginning of the sentence" | After two weeks, my brother |
| 13 | english | English |
| 14 | turkish | Turkish |
| 15 | french | French |
| 16 | spanish | Spanish |
| 17 | italian | Italian |
| 18 | american | American |
| 19 | we went shopping "beginning of the sentence" | We went shopping |
| 20 | shoPPing | shopping |
| 21 | raghad "proper noun" | Raghad |
| 22 | My favorite watch "title" | My favorite Watch |
| 23 | rolex | Rolex |
| 24 | my favorite clothing item "title" | My Favorite Clothing Item |
| 25 | I have A wonderful friend ever | I have a wonderful friend ever |
| 26 | She is beautiful Girl | She is a beautiful girl |
| 27 | sara "proper noun" | Sara |
| 28 | dana "proper noun" | Dana |
| 29 | my best friend "title" | My Best Friend |
| 30 | manar "proper noun" | Manar |
| 31 | in the same time "beginning of the sentence" | In the same time, |
| 32 | kuwait | Kuwait |
| 33 | god | God |
| 34 | broog "proper noun" | Broog |
| 35 | wajd "proper noun" | Wajd |
| 36 | unaizah | Unaizah |
| 37 | dubai | Dubai |

*4. Sentence Fragment*

| No. | Error |
|---|---|
| 1 | My best friend rawdah. |
| 2 | She is a student with me. |
| 3 | Because she is a doctor. |
| 4 | It's color is black. |
| 5 | It is important to me. |
| 6 | It is really beautiful. |
| 7 | Always I told her everything. |
| 8 | Until we die. |
| 9 | When I be with her. |
| 10 | I am grateful for that. |
| 11 | If she could. |
| 12 | In my first class. |
| 13 | When I was 10 years old. |
| 14 | Until know we are together. |
| 15 | I opened it. |
| 16 | She artists. |
| 17 | She interesting of coffee. |
| 18 | She athletic and healthy. |
| 19 | I miss too. |
| 20 | But last week. |
| 21 | I have best friend. |
| 22 | Was born in 2001. |
| 23 | 19 years old. |
| 24 | From Saudi Arabia. |
| 25 | Because she is funny. |
| 26 | She is beautiful Girl. |
| 27 | Thank you forever. |
| 28 | Aged 20. |
| 29 | Born in Kuwait. |
| 30 | I am waiting. |
| 31 | When I started college |
| 32 | She smart girl |
| 33 | Because of the birth day of my friend. |
| 34 | in the park. |
| 35 | If I wear this T-shirt. |
| 36 | When you make a good relationship and become friendly. |
| 37 | When I visited her |

*5. Verb Tense*

| No. | Error | Correct Form |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rawdah is hoppy drawing and singing | Rawdah's hobbies are drawing and singing |
| 2 | She is enjoy of the movie | She enjoys watching movies |
| 3 | My best friend her name Huda | My best friend's name is Huda |
| 4 | I am so trust her | I trust her so much |
| 5 | I feel greet when I wearing it | I feel great when I wear it |
| 6 | When I was ten years old I meet | When I was ten years old, I met |
| 7 | She was have a great sense of humor | She has a great sense of humor |
| 8 | We also getting older together | We are also getting older together |
| 9 | She my best human in the world | She is my best human in the world |
| 10 | She so close to me | She is so close to me |
| 11 | She married | She is married |
| 12 | She having a beautiful baby | She has a beautiful baby |
| 13 | My best friend is name | My best friend's name is |
| 14 | She is age | Her age is |
| 15 | She is living in the Unaizah | She lives in Unaizah |
| 16 | She is hoppy reading | Her hobby is reading |
| 17 | I am love my best friend | I love my best friend |
| 18 | She is get the feeling | She gets the feeling |
| 19 | I am wish everybody | I wish everybody |
| 20 | She is make me laugh | She makes me laugh |
| 21 | It 's been a long time to didn't see her | It's been a long time not to see her |
| 22 | My best friend 21 old | My best friend is 21 years old |
| 23 | I studying with her | I study with her |
| 24 | She good person | She is a good person |
| 25 | I hope it's work | I hope it works |
| 26 | She helps people when they in trouble | She helps people when they are in trouble |
| 27 | I was unexpected this | I unexpected this |
| 28 | In the future I will bought another | In the future, I will buy another |
| 29 | She is study in the university | She studies in the university |
| 30 | We stop see each other | We stopped seeing each other |
| 31 | We study the high school together | We studied high school together |
| 32 | I meet her in high school | I met her in high school |
| 33 | She stays with me when no one did | She stays with me one no one does |
| 34 | I meet her when I was young | I met her when I was young |

## 5. Wrong Use of Article

| No. | Error | Correct Form |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | For a elegant outfit | For an elegant outfit |
| 2 | There is gold strip | There is a gold strip |
| 3 | As it was first gift from my mother | As it was the first gift to me from my mother |
| 4 | She is living in the Onaizah | She lives in Onaizah |
| 5 | All the time in weekend | All the time in the weekend |
| 6 | She see me as good person | She sees me as a good person |
| 7 | She good person | She is a good person |
| 8 | She is a very kind and the cutest | She is very kind and the cutest .. |
| 9 | My mother gave me a dresses in my birthday | My mother gave me a dress in my birthday |
| 10 | She love a coffee | She loves coffee |
| 11 | It is a rolex | It is Rolex |
| 12 | In future I will bought another | In the future, I will buy another |
| 13 | She is honest and positive person | She is an honest and positive person |
| 14 | She help me in the my life | She helps me in my life |
| 15 | She is beautiful Girl | She is a beautiful girl |
| 16 | She is wonderful girl | She is a wonderful girl |
| 17 | It is a very beautiful and comfortable | It is very beautiful and comfortable |
| 18 | We study the high school together | We studied high school together |
| 19 | She is in same age of me | She is in the same age of mine |
| 20 | She likes color red | She likes the color red |
| 21 | I like color black | I like the color black |
| 22 | She is smart girl and talented | She is a smart girl and talented |
| 23 | She has beautiful voice | She has a beautiful voice |
| 24 | When we travelled to the Dubai | When we travelled to Dubai |
| 25 | She is student of english | She is a student of English |

## 6. Punctuation

| No. | Error | Correct Form |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | In the university I chose the English major | In the university, I chose the English major |
| 2 | In the same time she is my cousin | In the same time, she is my cousin |
| 3 | When I was ten years old I meet .. | When I was ten years old, I met .. |
| 4 | Then I will go with her | Then, I will go with her |
| 5 | In my free time I watch TV | In my free time, I watch TV |
| 6 | In the end I would tell | In the end, I would tell |
| 7 | In my first year I was | In my first year, I was |
| 8 | When I was 10 years old. | When I was 10 years old, |
| 9 | In the end I wish that | In the end, I wish that |
| 10 | I really love my friend, she is .. | I really love my friend. she is .. |
| 11 | We were in the same class we sat next to each other | When we were in the same class, we used to sit next to each other |
| 12 | In my opinion she has one of the best personalities | In my opinion, she has one of the best personalities |
| 13 | Eight years ago I went to a gift shop | Eight years ago, I went to a gift shop |
| 14 | When we were in Paris with my family | When we were in Paris with my family, |
| 15 | Sadly I did not find it | Sadly, I did not find it |
| 16 | Suddenly she handed me | Suddenly, she handed me |
| 17 | When I was walking with my mother | When I was walking with my mother, |
| 18 | At the moment I cant pay for it | At the moment, I can't pay for it |
| 19 | Fortunately my mother was with me | Fortunately, my mother was with me |
| 20 | In the birthday of my sister gave me a watch | In the birthday of my sister, she gave me a watch |
| 21 | In the end I can say | In the end, I can say |

# Influential Factors behind Learners' Weakness in English Language Communication: A Teacher's Perspective

Gareebullah H. Mudawi

*Associate Professor*

*Department of English Language and Translation, College of Language Sciences*

*King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia*

*gmudawi@KSU.EDU.SA*

*http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0145-0743*

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى التحقيق والإشارة إلى العوامل الرئيسية الكامنة وراء نقاط الضعف في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية لمتعلمي اللغة في المستويين المتوسط والثانوي في المدارس السعودية. تستخدم الدراسة منهجية استبيان استقصائية تضم مجموعة من 36 فقرة مصنفة إلى ثلاثة أجزاء، كل جزء يحتوي على 12 فقرة. تشير هذه المكونات الثلاثة بالتتابع إلى برنامج تدريب المعلمين، والكتب المدرسية التي يستخدمها المتعلمون، وطرق أساليب التدريس. وقد أجاب على الاستبيان 50 معلماً من المدارس المتوسطة والثانوية. تمت معالجة الاستجابات وتقييمها إحصائيًا وتحليلها حسب النسبة المئوية لتوزيع التردد للوصول إلى النتيجة. يعتقد غالبية المستجيبين، (ما يقرب من 95٪)، أن طرق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في مدارس المملكة العربية السعودية بحاجة إلى تحسين وأن منهجية وطريقة التواصل يجب أن تكون موجه نحو النتائج. وتوكد إجاباتهم أن هذه المكونات الثلاثة هي العوامل الرئيسية وراء ضعف المتعلمين في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية. وهذا يعني أن المعلمين ليسوا مستعدين حقًا لاعتماد تعليم اللغة التواصلي (CLT) ، ولا تتم مراجعة الكتب المدرسية سنويًا لتحديث محتواها لتحسين اللغة التواصلية للمتعلمين ، وعادة ما يتبنى المعلمون الأساليب التقليدية وأسلوب التدريس ، مع التركيز على تدريس القواعد صراحة من أجل الامتحانات.

**Abstract**

This paper aims to investigate and point out the main factors behind weaknesses in English language communication with reference to language learners at intermediate and secondary levels in Saudi schools. The study utilizes a questionnaire survey methodology comprising a collection of 36 items classified into three parts, each part carrying 12 items. These three components refer sequentially to the teacher training program, the textbooks learners use, and the methods and style of teaching. A total number of 50 teachers from intermediate and secondary schools responded to the questionnaire. The responses were processed and statistically evaluated and analyzed by frequency distribution percentage to arrive at the result A majority of respondents, almost 95%, believe that English language teaching methods in the schools in Saudi Arabia need to be improved and a communicative approach has to be introduced for result-oriented language teaching. Their responses ensure that these three components are the main factors behind the weaknesses of the learners in English language communication. That is to say, teachers are not really prepared to adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), textbooks are not revised annually to update its content to improve learners' communicative language, and teachers usually adopt traditional methods and style of teaching, focusing on teaching grammar explicitly for the sake of exams.

*Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching; teacher training; textbooks; methods; and style of teaching*

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## Introduction

The main influential factors behind learners' weaknesses in English language communication are considered to be the methods of teaching, styles and strategies used by teachers, teacher training programs, and the content of the textbooks as well as the lack of the real environment for practice (Al-Sohbani, 2015). Recent research in the field of education has focused more on the learner, his needs, interests, abilities, and so on. Evidence from teachers' experience as well as educational research has shown that this kind of insistence or emphasis on the learner makes the learning process easier and more effective (Larraz-Rábanos, 2021). As it is known, effective teaching includes a set of skills that should be acquired, improved and extended by teachers who teach effectively to meet learners' needs, abilities and interests.

It is also understood that language is a means of communication and relationships, so teachers should enrich their syllabus and understand that the textbook is just a means to an end during all language skills classes. For learners to be capable to express themselves in English in different situations, teachers must understand that what takes place inside the classroom should be related to what learners need outside the classroom. Unfortunately, some teachers, if not all of them, inform learners about the language instead of developing their ability to use the language for a variety of communicative purposes. There is a difference between having information about language and communicating with language. Hamdoun and Hussain (2010) held that some teachers believe that giving the pupils information about language will lead them to be able to use language for communication.

But, in fact, there is often a great ability gap between having the information and being able to use it spontaneously for communicative purposes. To be more specific, we know that many learners can:
- do exercises but cannot say in English that they don't have a pencil.
- answer questions about grammatical structures but cannot answer questions about themselves.
- form the present continuous and the passive, but cannot express that they were late for school because their father's car was getting repaired.
- know the question words but cannot ask questions.
- tell about the three types of conditional sentences but cannot talk about their three best friends.
- complete a multiple-choice grammar test correctly but cannot say how they feel about taking a test.
- tell the difference between the past perfect and the past simple but cannot say what they did yesterday.
- know the rules of future tense but they are not able to inform about their plans for the coming vacation.

There is a huge gap between acquisition of knowledge and ability to use that knowledge in order to communicate between what the pupils can do in terms of manipulation and what they cannot do in terms of communication. How to bridge this gap depends on what has been said earlier regarding teacher training, and the methods, strategies, techniques and style of teaching. Even after the implementation of a new curriculum based on Communicative Language Teaching in Saudi schools, the outcomes of English language teaching have still remained below those outlined in 2004. There are several studies, such as those of Abdulkader (2019),

Alharbi (2019), Wajid and Saleem (2016), and Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) that have explored the levels of language acquisition of the Saudi learners based on the English curriculum which has been in place for more than 10 years. The results of these studies show that the outcomes in English language learning are very weak. Also, these studies show that the learners experience challenges and difficulties in communicating in basic simple language (Bhuiyan, 2016). These studies provide different reasons why CLT does not work. One of these reasons is that the new emphasis does not match the assessment orientation, and the focus of both the learners and the teachers is still on passing exams rather than learning English as a life skill.

To this point, there are some problems which learners face in using English language in everyday activities and in being able to communicate spontaneously in different situations for different purposes. However, the main purpose behind communicative teaching is to prepare learners to be confident communicators in different real-life contexts. Language is a tool for real communication and interactions, so in order to overcome the communication problem, there should be a real revision of teacher training programs, teaching techniques, approaches, exams as well as learners' textbook content (Swain, 1995). All these fields need a radical change in order to work together appropriately on one track while focusing on learners' communicative competence.

CLT needs well trained teachers who are highly innovative, creative and open minded in order to bring the outside environment of the learners inside the classroom, and who are capable of introducing the learners to do all the activities as if they were behaving in real situations in their lives. Learners need to be tutored and trained in using different classroom language activities, such as discussions, acting, gaming, role play, debates and working in pairs and teams. Teachers should know that teaching a textbook is not for the sake of exams, but rather mainly for using language outside for real communication. CLT is an approach that considers language to be inseparable from individual identity and social behavior. Not only does language define a community; a community, too, defines the forms and uses of language. The norms and goals appropriate for learners in a given setting, and the means for attaining these goals, are the concerns of those who are directly involved in language teaching.

According to Al Nasser (2015), English language teachers in Saudi schools are not trained in linguistics. Their focus is primarily on helping learners pass exams. In addition, teachers do not incorporate updated teaching aids, techniques or pedagogies, like LCD projectors, videos, labs, etc. into their teaching regime.

Teachers and educators should adopt the CLT approach in their teaching for the following reasons:
- This approach concentrates on communication, and grammar is taught implicitly because teaching grammar explicitly might hinder the fluency in communication.
- CLT helps teachers to create an environment of learning inside the classroom congruent to the outside settings. Teachers will be capable to bridge the gap between what goes inside the classroom and what learners actually face outside the classroom in real situations in the community.
- Teachers will be able to enrich their subject matter to meet their learners' needs, abilities and interests.

- In addition, this approach paves the way for teachers to adopt useful and practical techniques, such as problem-solving practice, role play, dialogues and all exercises and practices which improve learners' communicative skills.
- Moreover, implementing CLT will reduce teacher time talking and raise learners time talking during the class. That is to say, the teacher is a monitor, facilitator, conductor, a friendly helper, while learners are the main players in the field.
- The CLT is concerned with improving learners' communicative competence through real contexts, and the sociocultural aspects of language to connect learning with sociocultural behavior for learners.
- The employment of CLT necessitates appropriate training for teachers; teachers should be exposed to a training program which integrates teacher education, teacher training and teacher professional development. Generally speaking, teachers teach the way they have been taught. Therefore, the training program will equip them with updated strategies and techniques to make them able to teach according to the demands of CLT to improve their communicative competence.

**The Objective of the Study**

As mentioned above, the study tries to address the seen and unseen factors which hinder learners from being able to communicate in English in real situations for different purposes. The study utilizes a questionnaire to collect data on teacher training, learners' textbook and methods and style of teaching adopted by teachers. The study investigates these three components in order to find out where the problem lies, and to seek an appropriate remedial process to overcome this problem. Moreover, the study focusses on adoption of CLT to overcome the problem that learners face in English language communication. In addition, the study suggests a remedial process for each component starting with teacher training followed by learners' textbook content and methods and style of teaching.

<div align="center">

**Literature Review**

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**Theoretical Considerations**

Speaking and writing are productive skills which are essential because they provide an opportunity for the learners to practice real-life activities in the classroom. All language skills, including speaking, writing, reading and listening are very important for learners to use them for a variety of purposes and to communicate in different situations outside the classrooms. These skills occur together, but in schools where teaching is practiced traditionally, they are completely separated (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

Language, in fact, is meant to be spoken, and speaking as a language skill includes different components such as grammar, selection of suitable words, and discourse. To achieve a required competence in speaking a language, it is very important for learners to improve their communication so that they are capable of expressing themselves. According to Chastain (1998), language learners consider speaking as the most important skill to learn and improve upon in order to become fluent speakers. Actually, spoken language is the means through which learners' proficiency is evaluated in any language. According to Martin (2011), learners' success is measured by their fluency and proficiency in the spoken language.

Learners who fail to improve their English-speaking competence are going to face difficulties in their future because they will be unable to communicate or express themselves

in English (Wilson, 1997). Moreover, ability to speak English also plays an important role in developing reading and writing skills in that language. As stated by Lindsay and Knight (2006), the concept behind CLT is that effective communication "in the world outside the classroom" (p. 20) is the main purpose and target for learning a language. To be precise, the focus is not on the language form or structure but on using language to communicate meaningfully by creating real life communication inside the classroom (Brown, 2000). Brown also believes that a new, innovative way of teaching English as a second or foreign language is paved by CLT, as it deals with the interactive nature of communication.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), in CLT, "almost everything is done with a communicative intent" (p.129). Nguyen (2010) also stated that the central notion of CLT is communication; and "communicative language teaching method advocates learning through communication." (p. 209). CLT focuses more on meaning rather than on structure, so learners' communication in the language comes from different activities, such as role-play, dialogues, games, problem-solving activities (Lindsay & Knight, 2006).

According to Richard and Rodgers (2001), the believers of natural approach to language learning argued that a foreign language could be taught without translation or using learners first language if meaning was conveyed to the learners directly through demonstration and action (p. 11). Generally, in second language acquisition there is the principle of "learning by doing" (Reese, 2011, p. 7), which strongly supports using language early and focusing on productive skills such as speaking and writing. Swain (1985) argues that learners need to actively produce language. Also, according to Hadley (2001), learners should be encouraged to be able to express their own meaning as early as possible after they have been introduced to the productive skills. Learners should be supported by different contexts to carry out different speech acts under real conditions of communication in order to develop their linguistic knowledge automatically (Ellis, 1997).

Communicative language teaching is a method which targets the development of learners' communicative competence. Doughty and Long (2003) presented some principles that are to be implemented in communicative language teaching, such as using tasks and promoting learning by doing. Also, the language input should be rich, meaningful, comprehensible and elaborated to encourage cooperative and collaborative work by teaming and grouping of learners to work together collaboratively on one task.

Wesche and Skehan (2002) observed that there are some degrees of consensus among language experts that communicative language teaching has qualities such as the using of activities which improve interaction among learners to make them able to exchange information, using authentic text and communication relevant to real-life contexts as well as using approaches that are learner centered which consider learners' language background and their roles in each activity.

Communicative language teaching is a method which targets the development of learners' communicative competence. Doughty and Long (2003) pointed out some principles that are to be implemented in communicative language teaching, such as using tasks and promoting learning by doing, connecting learning with real world events and activities. Also, the language input should be rich, meaningful, comprehensible and elaborated to encourage cooperative and

collaborative work by teaming and grouping of learners to work together collaboratively on one task.

The English language plays a major role in different fields in Saudi Arabia, but the outcomes of English language learning in Saudi schools were below than what the Saudi government had outlined in 2004 after the implementation of a new curriculum based on CLT. The new curriculum of communicative English teaching has been in place for more than 10 years. There are many studies, such as those of Wajid and Saleem (2016), Abdulkader (2019), Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019), and Alharbi (2019), which have explored the outcomes of Saudi students in this new curriculum. All these studies show that the outcomes of students are very weak.

The studies proved that students have experienced challenges and difficulties in writing and communicating simple sentences in basic English (Buhuyan, 2016). These studies also provide several reasons why CLT does not work. First, the new emphasis does not match the assessment orientation, and both learners and teachers focus on passing exams rather than learning English as a life skill for communication. Second, teachers use the textbooks differently and focus on grammatical rules explicitly at the expense of communication. In short, teachers do not follow the guide given to them and apply traditional methods of teaching such as grammar translation methods (Abahussain, 2016).

Saudi students have limited opportunities for oral practice in English in the Saudi community. Practically, learners need English to pass an exam, undertake higher education, apply for a job or deal with business documents, but it is not required for oral communication. There is a lack of suitable environment to practice oral communication in English Implementation of CLT may create a need and motivation for the learners to practice English in real situations for different purposes (Farooq, 2015).

**Empirical Considerations**

Since English does not meet learners' immediate needs, they usually do not pay serious attention to learning the language as a subject. Their efforts are devoted to acquiring what actually helps them to pass to the next grade level and pay no attention to other aspects of learning. As a result, learners tend to memorize grammatical rules and vocabulary (Al-Seghayer, 2014). In his experiments conducted on Saudi language learners, Al-Seghayer found that Saudi learners lack intrinsic motivation to learn and speak English because they have no environment outside the classrooms to practice oral English language communication. On the basis of his research, Al-Seghayer (2014) concluded that there was a great disparity between the present policymakers pertaining to teaching English to enable learners to communicate using English in different situations in the community and the learners who regarded learning English as a means to pass the final exams.

Al-Asmari (2015) focused in his study on the challenges that stopped teachers from implementing the CLT method, its tasks, and activities that was suggested in Saudi textbooks. He believed that not only did the CLT pose a challenge for the teachers, but also that the English language was regarded as a real challenge. He observed that teachers were not trained and well prepared for communicative language learning. Moreover, English as a foreign language was treated as a subject to study, but not as a set of skills to be acquired and used. The study conducted by Al-Garni and Al-Muhammadi (2019) to assess the impact of CLT on teachers

and students showed that CLT activities, such as role-playing, problem-solving and interviewing, had no positive impacts on students' learning because teachers had difficulty preparing materials for communicative activities. Moreover, there was the absence of the framework to be used for evaluation of the textbook activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned studies, there was a study carried out by Almalki (2014) which explored the English textbooks series in secondary schools considering teacher perceptions of these textbooks. The study found that most of the teachers believed that some parts of the CLT curriculum were too difficult, and they were beyond the learners' level. Also, Wajid and Saleem (2016) investigated how both teachers and learners viewed CLT in Saudi textbooks. The study showed that the quality of the prepared material was very low, which made the implementation of communicative activities difficult and challenging. They also discovered that there was a clear conflict between CLT teachers' role and traditional role of the Saudi teacher.

## Methodology

### Sampling and Participants

The study sample involved 50 Saudi school teachers who were teaching English in intermediate and higher secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. These teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire available for them on the Google Forms. A random sampling procedure was adopted to assign a questionnaire with 36 items in it to the teachers as participants in the study.

### Research Design

An analytical research design was adopted in this paper in which the researcher observed the responses received from the questionnaire distributed to the population of the study and analyzed them to assess the results diagnostically. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the responses were classified according to frequency and percentage. The focus of the analysis was on the main factors behind the difficulties that learners faced in English language communication at intermediate and secondary stages.

### Material

The primary source of data used to answer the research questions was the questionnaire which contained 36 items and which were divided into 3 components. The first 12 items investigated Teacher Training Programs. Items from 13 to 24 investigated the learners' textbook content. And items 25 to 36 were about the style, techniques and methods of teaching used by language teachers.

### Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were downloaded in Excel format from the google forms website. The responses were then codified on excel and the frequencies were calculated for the responses to each item in the questionnaire. A chi-square test of independence was conducted for responses to each of the items to assess if there was significant difference in the responses received for a sample size used, i.e., responses were significantly biased towards either agreement or disagreement.

**Validity and Reliability**

The researcher adopted some necessary steps to safeguard the legitimacy of the research. The topic, for instance, selected for the paper is not drawn from other works on the subject neither does it form a part of the teaching course. The teachers were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire. They were unknown to the researcher and belonged to different schools in different areas in Saudi Arabia.

In addition, the validity and reliability of the investigation are evident from findings which show that the research outcomes are stable, and they ensure that the study has delivered the anticipated results. For content validity, the questionnaire was checked and evaluated by three experts in the field of applied linguistics and syllabus design who grasped the topic, read through and ascertained that it effectively captured the topic under investigation.

## Results and Discussions

The data presented here has been derived from the observation and examination of the questionnaire survey distributed to 50 Saudi English language teachers teaching at various levels of some schools in Saudi Arabia. The questionnaire was analyzed with the objective of finding out the main factors that affected students' inability to acquire the required English language skills at the school level. Learners' knowledge of English rules, vocabulary and skills, the class environment, and the teachers' roles were the most crucial factors that were found to affect the learners' active acquisition of communicative English language skills in the class.

In order to provide experiential and palpable answers to the questions posed in the questionnaire and the concerns of the researcher, the means were computed and the differences in the percentiles of the study sample on each domain and the total degree of the reasons behind the weakness of English acquisition among the learners was calculated as is evident from the *Figures 1, 2,* and *3*. The Figures below demonstrate standard deviation in percentile written next to it in addition to the rank of each of the domains in which the questionnaire was distributed, namely, the English language program, the English language textbook contents, and the methods of teaching the English language. The questions were utilized as the research tool in this study so as to identify the possible factors that are responsible for the English learners' poor performance in proper language acquisition.

## Training Based Questions

### Table 1

*Responses to Questions Related to Teacher Training Programs and the Chi-square Test of Independence for Each Item*

| | Item | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Neutral % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Chi-Square Probability % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Training programs lack teacher's Professional development | 0 | 10 | 12 | 24 | 26 | 0.00 |
| **2** | Merging education, training and development | 0 | 12 | 12 | 20 | 28 | 0.00 |
| **3** | In-service teacher training programs put teachers in the shoes of the students | 0 | 10 | 6 | 30 | 26 | 0.00 |
| **4** | In-service teacher training programs provide teachers with latest changes and trends as well as new challenges in teaching English as FL and SL | 0 | 4 | 16 | 26 | 26 | 0.00 |
| **5** | There are no In-service teacher-training programs for teachers to adopt the upcoming new innovations in teaching | 0 | 10 | 10 | 30 | 22 | 0.00 |
| **6** | Most of the program contents focus on teachers and neglect the learners | 0 | 6 | 18 | 28 | 20 | 0.00 |
| **7** | Teachers during their study should practice daily in real situations inside schools affiliated to teachers' colleges | 0 | 8 | 8 | 28 | 28 | 0.00 |
| **8** | The training programs focus on the theoretical parts more than the practical parts with the learners | 0 | 6 | 12 | 24 | 30 | 0.00 |
| **9** | The training programs do not develop teachers' skills in order for them to be able to enrich the school syllabus | 0 | 8 | 12 | 24 | 26 | 0.00 |
| **10** | Moreover, the content of the training program is not designed to qualify teachers according to the learners' levels in which they are going to teach after graduation | 0 | 6 | 14 | 26 | 26 | 0.00 |
| **11** | There are no training sessions for teachers in order to follow updated techniques and methods | 0 | 4 | 12 | 28 | 28 | 0.00 |
| **12** | Most of the training programs focus on "know what" rather than "know how", therefore, teachers dominate inside the classrooms | 0 | 8 | 10 | 24 | 30 | 0.00 |

**Figure 1**

*Responses to Questions Regarding Teacher Training Programmes*



The chi-square test of independence showed that the responses to all the items related to teacher training programmes were significantly different from neutral, and a vast majority of the respondents agreed to the teacher training outcomes.
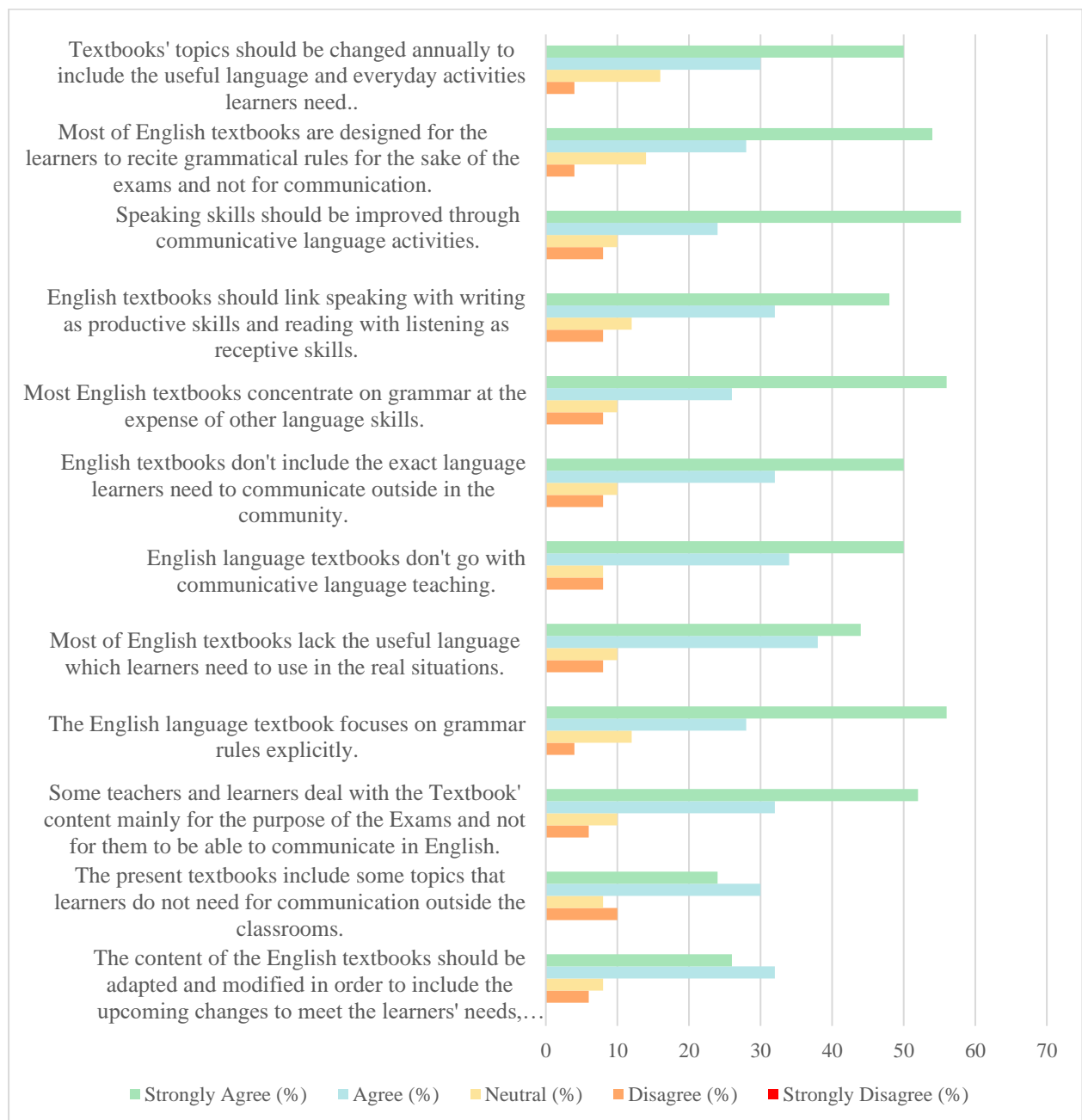
**Learners' Textbook content related questions**

**Table 2**

*Responses to Questions Related to Learners' Textbook Content*

| | Item | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Neutral % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Chi-Square Probability % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | The content of the English textbooks should be adapted and modified in order to include the upcoming changes to meet the learners' needs, abilities, and interest | 0 | 6 | 8 | 32 | 26 | 0.00 |
| 14 | The present textbooks include some topics that learners do not need for communication outside the classrooms | 0 | 10 | 8 | 30 | 24 | 0.00 |
| 15 | Some teachers and learners deal with the Textbook' content mainly for the purpose of the Exams and not for them to be able to communicate in English | 0 | 6 | 10 | 32 | 52 | 0.00 |
| 16 | The English language textbook focuses on grammar rules explicitly | 0 | 4 | 12 | 28 | 56 | 0.00 |
| 17 | Most of English textbooks lack the useful language which learners need to use in real situations | 0 | 8 | 10 | 38 | 44 | 0.00 |
| 18 | English language textbooks don't go with communicative language teaching | 0 | 8 | 8 | 34 | 50 | 0.00 |
| 19 | English textbooks don't include the exact language learners need to communicate outside in the community | 0 | 8 | 10 | 32 | 50 | 0.00 |
| 20 | Most English textbooks concentrate on grammar at the expense of other language skills | 0 | 8 | 10 | 26 | 56 | 0.00 |
| 21 | English textbooks should link speaking with writing as productive skills and reading with listening as receptive skills | 0 | 8 | 12 | 32 | 48 | 0.00 |
| 22 | Speaking skills should be improved through communicative language activities | 0 | 8 | 10 | 24 | 58 | 0.00 |
| 23 | Most of English textbooks are designed for the learners to recite grammatical rules for the sake of the exams and not for communication | 0 | 4 | 14 | 28 | 54 | 0.00 |
| 24 | Textbooks' topics should be changed annually to include the useful language and everyday activities learners need | 0 | 4 | 16 | 30 | 50 | 0.00 |

**Figure 1**

*Responses to Questions Related to Learners' Textbook Content*



Chi-square probability showed that the responses to each of the items related to the student's learning material were significantly different from the mean, and most of the respondents agreed to the problems faced regarding students' learning material used in classrooms.

**Classroom Teaching Related Questions**

**Table 3**

*Responses to Questions Related to Method/Style of Teaching*

| | Item | Strongly Disagree % | Disagree % | Neutral % | Agree % | Strongly Agree % | Chi-Square Probability % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **25** | Generally speaking, teachers teach the same way t have been taught regardless of the updated styles techniques that meet the learners' actual needs, int and abilities outside the classroom | 2 | 12 | 10 | 38 | 38 | 0.00 |
| **26** | The classroom environment doesn't help learners t be fluent in speaking and communicating compara the real environment they might find themselves in outside the classroom | 0 | 8 | 12 | 26 | 54 | 0.00 |
| **27** | During the lessons inside the classroom, teachers' time talking is dominated comparable to learners' talking | 0 | 8 | 10 | 30 | 52 | 0.00 |
| **28** | Most teachers are unable to utilize the content of English textbooks appropriately to bridge the gap between what learners can do in terms of manipulation and what they cannot do in terms of communication | 0 | 4 | 14 | 24 | 58 | 0.00 |
| **29** | Teachers confine themselves with the textbook content and use it as an end not as a means to help learners to use English for communication | 0 | 8 | 14 | 28 | 50 | 0.00 |
| **30** | Teachers are unable to connect the textbook conter with the learners' life and situations to encourage them to communicate in English | 0 | 10 | 8 | 28 | 52 | 0.00 |
| **31** | Most teachers teach grammar rules explicitly and that hinders fluency in speaking | 0 | 4 | 16 | 30 | 50 | 0.00 |
| **32** | Some teachers fail to bridge the gap between what takes place inside the classroom and the actual nee of the learners outside | 0 | 4 | 12 | 26 | 50 | 0.00 |
| **33** | Teachers should enrich the content of the textbook with communicative activities and create communicative learning environment inside the classroom | 0 | 10 | 14 | 22 | 54 | 0.00 |
| **34** | There is overuse of L1 during English classes fron both teachers and learners which weakens English communication | 0 | 12 | 4 | 32 | 48 | 0.00 |
| **35** | Teachers of English language should join In-Servi Teacher Training Programs to equip them with up styles, techniques and methods of teaching Englisl as FL or SL | 0 | 6 | 12 | 28 | 54 | 0.00 |
| **36** | There is a lack of communicative practices such as role play, presentation, reading aloud, problem solving, interviewing, apologizing, introducing yourself, and describing and debating; and there is lack of feedback from and to learners | 0 | 8 | 10 | 30 | 52 | 0.00 |

**Figure 3**

*Responses to Questions Related to Method and Style of Teaching*



The responses to items related to the method and style of teaching were found to be significantly different from the null hypothesis (neutral), as observed from the low p-value (>>0.05) of the chi-square test of independence. Most people agreed to facing problems relating to the method and style of teaching.

The results exposed many gray areas in the teaching of English as a communication tool in the schools in Saudi Arabia. Figure 1 presented ample evidence that the teachers involved in teaching language skills were not properly trained and they had not attended any blended program which includes teacher education, teacher training and teacher professional development. Their education only provided them with language knowledge without integrating it with teacher training for skills and teacher professional development for competence and performance. They had never undergone any in-service blending teacher training program which is crucial in the way of equipping teachers with updated strategies and techniques to teach English language for communication.

Figure 2 revealed the poor content of the textbooks which were not organized so as to connect speaking with writing and reading with listening. Reading and listening are skills

utilized mainly for the development and improvement of speaking and writing as productive skills. Table 2 and Figure 2 also show that most of the teachers teach the classroom textbook as an end and for examinations and they fail to use the content of the textbook as a means to help learners to use the language outside the classroom for communication in different situations. They do not link speaking skills with writing skills as productive skills in order to make learners write what they say and speak what they write from the starting with the learners as beginners in English language learning. It is pertinent that learners connect speaking with writing all the time to be able to express themselves in different topics in and out the classroom.

Figure 3 along with Table 3 reveal that teachers did not combine the reading and listening skills in the classroom. These are the receptive skills that support communication skills. It was found in the collected data that most of the teachers concentrated on teaching grammar explicitly as rules which hindered fluent communication and made learners start thinking on which tense or grammatical device to use. Teachers failed to create an active learning environment inside the classroom and did not connect what took place in the classroom with the actual needs of the learners outside the classroom in real-life situations. It is very important that what takes place inside the class should meet students' needs, interests and abilities. The responses to the questions in Table 1 show that teachers acted just like grammarians teaching grammar rules just as mathematical rules for the sake of examinations regardless of the negative effects of this technique on communication. They did not teach grammar implicitly which is inevitable to help students to think about ideas and expressions not on the rules and how to use them.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers of English need to be exposed to a comprehensive program to become capable of changing their way of teaching to meet the actual needs of the learner in using language for communication and not for only answering grammatical questions which has nothing to do in real situations that learners might face. Moreover, a lesson should include three stages inside the classroom. The teachers should start with warming up and exchanging feedback with the learners in the first stage. The second stage is the presentation of the new topic and the third stage is reflecting on how the topic corresponds to the real life of the learners. These stages will create a richer, everyday life-like learning environment inside the classroom and learners will come home to practice what they have learnt. In addition, teachers should use English while teaching as much as they possibly can, and they have to decrease teachers' talking time and increase learners' talking time inside the classroom. Moreover, teachers should encourage students team work or small group work which helps students to benefit from each other and create a competitive spirit between the groups. Also, teamwork or group work activate all the students to participate without stress or reserve.

Moreover, the sessions should be divided into two lessons; the whole lesson should be teaching and learning speaking and writing, and the other lesson should be reading and listening. Learners and teachers will prepare themselves to speak and write, and then in another period, they prepare themselves to read and listen. This method should be applied when the students start learning English as beginners. This method will make learners understand that speaking is always connected with writing while reading is connected with listening. This way of teaching will create a balance between the language skills and no skill is neglected.

Teachers' feedback to and from learners influences their relationships with their learners and their learners' outcomes as well. Moreover, positive feedback from teachers encourages learners to participate and become involved in the learning environment inside the classroom. Therefore, teachers should use more positive feedback for the sake of learners' engagement academically and for supportive positive relationships with their learners (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). In addition to that, teachers should be aware that teaching English mainly is to develop learners' communicative competence. As such, teachers should encourage learners to use language for a range of different purposes and functions and make them able to vary their choice of language according to the situations, topics and participants. Moreover, learners should be able to understand different types of texts and use different kinds of communication strategies.

Concerning the content of the textbooks, there should be a radical change of the topics and passages of these textbooks to include the language which learners need to use outside in the real-life situations. Students need useful topics to enable them to express themselves fluently in English – topics which include the everyday language for communication not grammatical rules for examination. Real-life language can be expressed in different texts such as how to: introduce yourself and friends, describe an object, greet, apologize, book for a trip, talk about family, react in a conversation, listen effectively, place order at a restaurant, be an interviewer or interviewee, talk about wishes and the future, be a volunteer, help others, plan for a vacation, talk about sports, and invite and congratulate.

The above-mentioned topics will attract learners because they would immediately relate to what they actually need in their everyday activities. These topics will encourage learners to be very active and participate inside the classroom and are likely to apply this knowledge outside with their families. Learners need to move away from reciting grammatical rules to thinking and giving different ideas about various topics without hesitation or hindering of these rules. They need to speak the language fluently focusing on the ideas to improve their competence and performance. Generally speaking, teachers neglect writing skills and speaking skills and focus on reading and grammar at the expense of speaking and writing. Some teachers say that writing is a hard skill to teach, therefore, they think of it only later when it's too late. This idea of writing as a difficult skill is due to separating the writing and speaking skills right from the beginning. Moreover, writing needs ideas and expressions which are completely absent because the teaching focuses mainly on teaching grammatical rules explicitly.

To this end, there are some problems which learners face in using English in everyday activities and being able to communicate spontaneously in different situations for different purposes. However, the main purpose behind communicative teaching is to prepare learners to be confident communicators for different real-life contexts. Language is a tool for real communication and interactions, so in order to overcome this communication problem, there should be a real revision for teacher training programs, teaching techniques, approaches, exams as well as learners' textbook content. All these fields need a radical change to complement each other to improve learners' communicative competence. To overcome all these communication problems, there should be an in-service teacher training program which integrates teacher education, teacher training and teacher development: Teacher education to improve teachers' knowledge competence, teacher training to improve teachers' skills, techniques and style of

teaching, and teachers' development to enable them to create real learning environments and enrich their syllabi.

**Bio**

Dr. Gareeballah Madawi is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and Translation at the Department of English Language, College of Language Sciences, King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He has published many papers in international refereed journals in the field of Applied Linguistics, translation, interpretation and ELT. He has participated in more than sixty international conferences and forums as a simultaneous interpreter. He has translated into Arabic two English books on education, and has written two course books on ELT.

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