Arab EFL Students' and Instructors' Perceptions of Errors in Mechanics in Second Language Paragraph Writing

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English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face various challenges when writing, including mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. If the mechanics are incorrect, understanding a text can be difficult, and the meaning can be distorted. Moreover, understanding how EFL students and instructors perceive these errors is vital for enhancing language instruction and providing targeted feedback. This study explored the perceptions of EFL students and instructors regarding mechanical errors in paragraph writing employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative surveys. According to the findings, instructors and students had different opinions about mechanical errors. Male and female EFL learners also differed in their perceptions. Their perspectives on spelling and punctuation diverged. Students thought their spelling issues were the most severe, but their instructors believed that punctuation was the biggest problem, including commas and full stops. Furthermore, EFL instructors provided potential reasons and suggested strategies to address these issues. The results offer practical implications for curriculum development, instructional design, and instructor training in EFL contexts .

Keywords: errors of mechanics, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, perceptions, EFL students and instructors

Bacon (1597) famously said, 'Writing makes an exact man,' highlighting the significance of meticulousness and precision in written communication. This quote emphasizes the importance of correctness, accuracy, and completeness in thought and communication. In line with this, Kessler (2021) suggests that effective communication of ideas in writing requires adhering to the rules of grammar, coherence, vocabulary, and mechanics. Moreover, writing in a second language presents additional challenges, necessitating proficiency in vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Hinkel, 2015; Ahmed, 2018). By paying attention to micro-level details in writing, writers can ensure that their ideas are conveyed with clarity and accuracy, enabling readers to fully understand the intended message. Therefore, writing should not only be grammatically correct but also meaningful and capable of expressing ideas unambiguously.

The mechanics of writing (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) play an essential role in academic and professional settings, facilitating effective communication and conveying ideas with precision. Crossley et al. (2014) found a strong correlation between writing quality and mechanics. Harmer (2023) similarly posits that using mechanics correctly and in the right places can improve a text and give a good impression of the author. On the other hand, Husna and Multazim (2019) asserted that the erroneous use of mechanics can lead to confusion regarding the intended meaning. Similarly, Yuliawati (2021) remarked that while these mechanics errors may not wholly affect the overall comprehension of paragraphs, they influence the quality of write-ups. An

improper use of mechanics can result in misunderstandings, create a negative impression, and undermine the author's credibility and effectiveness as a communicator (Abbas & Asy'ari, 2019). It is, therefore, essential to pay close attention to mechanics and ensure that they are used appropriately to achieve the desired outcome.

Previous studies have shown that EFL learners face many difficulties and constantly make errors in mechanics (Shanorra et al., 2021) due to a lack of understanding of mechanics (Abbas & Herdi, 2018). Arabic-speaking students, in particular, tend to make more mistakes in mechanics than non-Arabic-speaking students (Alhaisoni et al., 2015; Al-Sobhi et al., 2017; Nisa et al., 2023). These errors often manifest in spelling, capitalization, and comma usage. Although some scholars, researchers, and research associations (Norman et al., 2014; Salamin et al., 2016; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Nazim & Mohammad, 2022) attempted to illustrate the significance along with other aspects of writing, an exclusive study in relation to Arab EFL learners is still required.

Recent educational research claims that understanding student and instructor perceptions of course content is essential for effective teaching and learning (Chavan et al., 2021). Aligning students' and instructors' perceptions of learning leads to optimal learning and teaching processes, resulting in maximized learning outcomes (Könings et al., 2014). Correspondingly, Ahmad et al. (2021), Başar (2020), Borg (2018), and Setoodeh et al., (2020) affirm that language instructors' pedagogical belief systems affect classroom practices. In the same vein, Williams and Burden (2015) also emphasize the significance of learners' perceptions and interpretations in influencing their achievement in language learning. Therefore, understanding student-instructor perspectives on errors in mechanics in paragraphs written by Arab EFL learners can provide valuable insights into effective strategies for classroom practices.

It is worth noting that no previous study has explored the gender-based perception of mechanical errors among Arab EFL learners, triangulating their instructors' beliefs and possible solutions. There is a need to acknowledge the existence of these two distinct categories and worldviews, namely Arab male EFL learners and Arab female EFL learners. Thus, this research investigates the perceptions of EFL students and instructors about errors in mechanics. The findings can improve instructional practices, promote effective communication, and enhance language learning experiences. This study sets out to investigate these research objectives:

Research Objectives
RO1: To identify and analyze the common mechanical errors that students perceive they struggle with in their writing.
RO2: To investigate any gender differences in the types of mechanical errors students make.
RO3: To understand how instructors perceive and prioritize mechanical errors in students' writing.
RO4: To explore the potential causes or reasons behind mechanical errors in students' writing.
RO5: To analyze the strategies writing instructors use to address and correct mechanical errors in the classroom.
Based on the objectives, this study will answer the following research questions:
Research Questions
RQ1: What are the common mechanical errors that students perceive they struggle with in their writing?
RQ2: Are there gender differences in the types of mechanical errors students make?
RQ3: How do instructors perceive and prioritize mechanical errors in students' writing?
RQ4: What are the potential causes or reasons behind mechanical errors in students' writing?
RQ5: What strategies do writing instructors use to address and correct mechanical errors in the classroom?

Hypotheses
In the light of RO 2 and RQ 2, the researchers postulated hypotheses as follows:
  H0: There are no significant gender differences in the types of mechanical errors students make.
  Ha: There are significant gender differences in the types of mechanical errors students make.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Why study the perceptions of students and instructors?

In an educational setting, four key themes—the learner, the instructor, the task, and the learning context—are interrelated and impact the teaching-learning process. By understanding how these variables interact with each other, educators can gain a better understanding of the educational process and design effective instructional practices.

One perspective is to explore and compare the perceptions of both instructors and students regarding what engages learners in the context of errors. Conscious perception, according to Schmidt (1990), is a crucial factor in the process of turning language input into intake. He argues that being consciously aware of language input is necessary and sufficient for language learners to internalize and incorporate it into their linguistic systems. By incorporating learners' perspectives into instructional practices, instructors can create an effective and engaging learning environment that caters to learners' individual needs and promotes better achievement outcomes. Correspondingly, knowledge derived from research on student thinking is valuable for instructors when designing and executing instructional plans (Hill & Chin, 2018). Therefore, educators should actively explore and address learners' beliefs, perceptions, and interpretations, as Williams and Burden (2015) suggested. By doing so, instructors can design personalized and effective instructional practices and promote better language acquisition outcomes.

In addition to learners, instructors are crucial stakeholders whose 'opinions and views are critical contributors to educational progress' (Ramazani, 2013; Khan et al., 2020). Their perspectives and insights, shaped by individual qualities, experiences, social factors, and professional growth that influence decision-making and instructional practices (Borg, 2013), play a central role in various classroom activities and interactions. Understanding instructors' views provides vital insights into their decision-making processes and helps identify areas for improvement in classroom teaching (Srakang, 2013). They serve as an invaluable source of information for reflection, discussion, and advancement in the field of teaching and learning (Zeichner & Liston, 2014; Ramazani, 2013), including understanding and addressing their learners' errors. Similarly, Nasim et al., (2024) stated that instructors' perspectives affect learning, development, and implementation. Therefore, considering instructors' perspectives and incorporating their input is essential for enhancing the overall teaching and learning experience.

Könings et al., (2014) highlighted the potential for disparities between the views of learners and instructors, which can negatively impact classroom dynamics, instruction, and students' learning and thinking skills, implying incongruent behaviors and goals negatively impacting. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate further the intersection of instructors' and students' perceptions. By gaining a deeper understanding of these perceptions, valuable insights can be obtained to inform and improve classroom practices. Addressing these mismatches and disparities can lead to a more productive and harmonious classroom environment and, ultimately, better language acquisition outcomes.

Previous Studies on Errors in Mechanics in L2 Writing

According to Nasim et al., (2023), English language teachers have consistently prioritized the improvement of their students' linguistic skills. Nonetheless, errors in a language class are inevitable (Raja et al., 2016). However, they are now seen as 'symptoms of recovery' in the learning process instead of the traditional perspective as negative and undesirable indications of a

lack of knowledge or incompetence (Kelechi Nzerem & Bob, 2021). Researchers approached the mechanics of errors from different perspectives. For example, Khudhair (2020) described various difficulties L2 learners encounter in their academic writing, including writing mechanics, while AlYousef (2019) focused on finding the impact of applying dynamic written corrective feedback (DWCF) on Arab EFL learners' writing accuracy, especially organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. Khudhair (2020) did not delve deeper into mechanics, whereas AlYousef (2019) did not investigate the teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes toward mechanics.

Mechanical conventions are often considered low-level skills (Mamad & Vigh, 2023) and, at the most, writing sub-skills (Norman et al., 2014; Tamer et al., 2021). These could be the potential reasons for the comparatively lower research output in mechanics compared to other main language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing, within the context of EFL instruction. However, there is a growing recognition of exploring various aspects of mechanics, such as identifying, evaluating, and classifying errors, understanding why they occur, proposing possible solutions, or analyzing their frequency and impact. For example, Saad (2020), Shanorra et al., (2021), and Ahmed (2021) investigated different components of EFL writing skills, such as organization, vocabulary, content, word choice, language use, and mechanics. Saad (2020) found 13.2% errors in mechanics in students' writing pre-tests, where mistakes of commas were the most serious and full stops were the least serious. Shanorra et al., (2021) found that only 4.3% of difficulties were with their students. Ahmed (2021) noticed 33% of mechanical errors in the pilot test of the study.

Yuliawati (2021) and Darmawan (2023) exclusively studied mechanical errors in detail in their studies. Yuliawati (2021) reported that after analyzing 65 writing assignments from three non-writing courses, participants' mistakes were the most in punctuation and the least in numbering. Likewise, Darmawan (2023) reported that in the abstracts of academic writing, 16 mechanical errors were found. Among them, punctuation was the most misused.

While previous studies have provided valuable insights into mechanics errors in EFL writing, further research is still needed to fully understand these errors' complexity and develop effective strategies for addressing them, particularly in the context of Arab EFL learners. A study specifically exploring the perceptions of EFL students and instructors regarding mechanics errors in Arab EFL learners' writing will help fill this gap in the literature and provide practical insights for instructional approaches.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform instructional practices and contribute to the overall improvement of language learning experiences. By understanding the common mechanical errors students and instructors perceive, educators can design targeted interventions to address these specific areas of difficulty. Additionally, exploring gender differences in mechanics errors can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges male and female students face in writing. Instructors' perceptions and prioritization of mechanical errors can inform classroom practices and help instructors allocate instructional time effectively. Understanding the causes and reasons behind mechanical errors can guide the development of more tailored and effective instructional strategies. Lastly, identifying instructors' strategies to address and correct mechanics errors can offer practical insights for other educators in similar contexts.

Method

Research design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the perspectives of Arab EFL learners and their instructors regarding errors of mechanics in paragraph writing. The data collection tools were a closed-ended questionnaire survey for students collected through convenience sampling. These responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent sample t-test. Instructors' responses were collected using a rating scale and an open-ended questionnaire via a purposive sampling technique to ensure a cross-section of instructors. Data from the open-ended questionnaire was subjected to thematic analysis, and rating scale responses were coded. The mixed-methods research design let the researchers combine data from several sources (Creswell & Poth, 2023) to get a full picture of the mechanics mistakes that Arab EFL students make when they write.

Data Collection Tools

The closed-ended questionnaire to gather students' opinions consisted of 7 items on a 3-point Likert scale, with a demographic section asking for information about participants' age and gender. The tool was translated into Arabic to ensure students had a better understanding. A group of bilingual English language professionals and researchers validated and localized the tool, providing feedback that helped the researchers revise and finalize it. This survey aimed to explore not only the attitudes of participants but also the frequency of errors in mechanics and its components while writing paragraphs in their second language. The survey had three options on a Likert scale of 0 to 2: (0=never, 1=sometimes, and 2=always). Participants were asked to indicate how often they made errors in mechanics and its components. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which was 0.70.

The rating scale (1 being the least severe and 5 being the most severe) consisted of six questions for EFL instructors to record their opinions for their students on the severity of mechanics and its components. At the same time, the open-ended questionnaire had two questions asking about the difficulties, causes, and suggestions to overcome those mistakes. This was a self-prepared data collection tool based on the researchers' experience teaching English to Arab EFL students for more than ten years. However, it underwent a validation check by two experienced EFL instructor-researchers who had extensive experience teaching and researching EFL learners in different settings in Saudi Arabia and other countries. A few changes were made based on their suggestions.

Participants and Procedure

The participants of this study were first-year EFL students between the ages of 17 and 26 studying writing. They were in their first semester studying Q: Skills for Success, Special Edition, Level 2 Reading and Writing. They were selected through a convenience sampling technique and were all native speakers of Arabic, making them representative of their population. The closed-ended questionnaire asking about EFL learners' difficulties using mechanics was administered among the EFL students studying at the college through their instructors. A sample of 33 students (18 males and 15 females) recorded their responses to seven items regarding their use of mechanics and its components while writing a short essay in English. A test of normality was performed on the sample. The Shapiro-Wilk value (as the n≤50) for the male participants was 0.618; for the female participants, it was 0.167; and the total was 0.201, indicating that the data was normally distributed.

For instructors to record their views on the errors of mechanics in the writings of EFL Arab learners, a rating scale and an open-ended questionnaire were distributed using the purposive sampling technique. The sample of EFL instructors was selected to include both native and non-native speakers of English. Fifteen male and 15 female instructors teaching Saudi EFL students at

the Deanship were part of the sample. By selecting a cross-section of participants from different backgrounds and experiences, the study aimed to generate more comprehensive and diverse findings. However, only 23 EFL instructors (3 native and 20 non-native) and 10 male and 13 female instructors responded. Their responses were coded and analyzed to obtain the themes.

Based on descriptive and inferential statistics, i.e., frequency distribution, percentage, and t-test for the survey findings, data analysis was made. Two items, 6 and 7, were re-coded to align with the other items as they suggest positive meanings. A mean closer to 2 will mean that students face more problems with that item. The mean and SDs will be interpreted on three levels of difficulty: low (0 to 0.67), moderate (0.68 to 1.33), and high (1.34 to 2). This classification will help understand the levels of challenges Arab EFL learners face in English writing mechanics and its components. The findings were used to compare the other data in the study.

Results

The findings of the study are presented below:

RQ1: What are the common types of mechanical errors that students perceive they struggle with in their writing?

Table 1 displays that Arab EFL learners reported that they faced many problems with mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) when writing, with a high difficulty score of 1.42. They held the view that more mistakes were in spelling (M = 1.18), punctuation (M = 1.12), and capitalization (M = 1.06), which belong to the moderate levels.

Table 1 also shows the average number of learners' mistakes in punctuation and its components. They made more mistakes with commas (M = 1.03) and full stops (M = 0.55) in comparison to question marks. They reported that they knew the use of question marks better than other punctuation marks (M = 0.21). Except for the mistakes of commas, full stops, and question marks, they belong to the low-level difficulties.

Table 1
Errors in Mechanics as Perceived by Arab EFL Learners

Items	Mean	SD	Difficulty level
1. I face problems using mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) when I write a paragraph in English.	1.42	.90	high
2. I face problems using punctuation when I write a paragraph in English.	1.12	0.96	moderate
3. I face problems using a comma (,) when I write a paragraph in English.	1.03	0.92	moderate
4. I have problems using a question mark (?) when I write a paragraph in English.	0.21	0.60	low
5. I have problems using a full stop (.) when I write a paragraph in English.	0.55	0.87	low
6. I know the rules of capitalization in English (such as starting a sentence with a capital letter).	1.06	0.66	moderate
7. I know the rules of spelling in English (such as "two" is correct, but "tow" is incorrect for 2; "table" is correct, but "tabl" is incorrect).	1.18	0.46	moderate

RQ2: Are there any gender differences in the types of mechanical errors made by students?

A comparison of the participants' perceptions on a gender basis was also made in the study. The results of the mean differences between male and female participants in the types of mechanical errors are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Tables 2
Gender-wise Mean Scores of Errors in Mechanics as Perceived by Arab EFL Learners

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Q1	Male	18	1.83	0.51	0.12
	Female	15	0.93	1.03	0.27
Q2	Male	18	1.56	0.78	0.18
	Female	15	0.6	0.91	0.24
Q3	Male	18	1.28	0.83	0.19
	Female	15	0.73	0.96	0.25
Q4	Male	18	0.39	0.78	0.18
	Female	15	0	0	0
Q5	Male	18	0.72	0.96	0.23
	Female	15	0.33	0.72	0.19
Q6	Male	18	0.78	0.55	0.13
	Female	15	1.4	0.63	0.16
Q7	Male	18	1.17	0.51	0.12
	Female	15	1.2	0.41	0.11

The Levene's test scores for items 1 (I face problems using mechanics: punctuation, capitalization, and spelling when I write a paragraph in English) and 4 (I have problems using a question mark (?) when I write a paragraph in English) were $\alpha = 0.000 \leq 0.05$ each, which means equal variances were not assumed. The results, $t = 3.072$, df $=19.696$, $\alpha= 0.05$, $p = 0.006 \leq 0.05$ for item 1 and $t = 2.122$, df $=17$, $\alpha= 0.05$, $p = 0.049 \leq 0.05$ for item 4, showed a statistically significant difference between male and female participants facing problems in mechanics in general and using the question mark (?) when they write a paragraph in English. However, for items 2 (I face problems using punctuation when I write a paragraph in English) and 6 (I know the rules of capitalization in English (such as starting a sentence with a capital letter), Levene's test scores were $\alpha = 0.270 \geq 0.05$ and $\alpha = 0.220 \geq 0.05$, signaling equal variances assumed. The results of the independent samples, $t = 3.241$, df $= 31$, $\alpha= 0.05$, $p = 0.003 \leq 0.05$ for the item, and $t = -3.028$, df $= 31$, $\alpha= 0.05$, $p = 0.005 \leq 0.05$ for item 6, showed a statistically significant difference between female and male participants facing the problems of punctuation and capitalization. Therefore, for items 1, 2, 4, and 6, H0 will be rejected, and H1 will be accepted.

Table 3
Independent Sample Test Scores of Errors in Mechanics as Perceived by Arab EFL Learners

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Conf Interval of the Difference	
		f	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	S.D	Lower	Upper
Q1	Equal variances assumed	41.532	0.000	3.251	31.000	0.003	0.900	0.277	0.335	1.465
	Equal variances not assumed			3.072	19.696	0.006	0.900	0.293	0.288	1.512
Q2	Equal variances assumed	1.260	0.270	3.241	31.000	0.003	0.956	0.295	0.354	1.557
	Equal variances not assumed			3.196	27.880	0.003	0.956	0.299	0.343	1.568
Q3	Equal variances assumed	1.784	0.191	1.750	31.000	0.090	0.544	0.311	-0.090	1.179
	Equal variances not assumed			1.726	27.857	0.095	0.544	0.315	-0.102	1.191
Q4	Equal variances assumed	25.149	0.000	1.932	31.000	0.063	0.389	0.201	-0.022	0.799
	Equal variances not assumed			2.122	17.000	0.049	0.389	0.183	0.002	0.776
Q5	Equal variances assumed	6.655	0.015	1.293	31.000	0.206	0.389	0.301	-0.225	1.002
	Equal variances not assumed			1.327	30.746	0.194	0.389	0.293	-0.209	0.987
Q6	Equal variances assumed	1.568	0.220	-3.028	31.000	0.005	-0.622	0.206	-1.041	-0.203
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.988	27.988	0.006	-0.622	0.208	-1.049	-0.196
Q7	Equal variances assumed	0.222	0.641	-0.202	31.000	0.841	-0.033	0.165	-0.370	0.303
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.206	30.974	0.838	-0.033	0.162	-0.363	0.296

For item 5 (I have problems using full stops when I write a paragraph in English.), Levene's test score is $\alpha = 0.015 \leq 0.05$, meaning equal variances were not assumed, and the results t

= 1.327, df =30746, α= 0.05, p = 0.194≥ 0.05 showed no statistically significant difference between male and female participants using full stops. Moreover, for item no. 3 (I face problems using a comma (,) when I write a paragraph in English.), Leven's test value is α = 0.191≥0.05, indicating equal variances. The results were t = 1.750, df = 31, α= 0.05, p = 0.090≥0.05, showing no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female participants using a comma. Furthermore, Leven's test value is α = 0.641≥0.05, indicating equal variances, and the results were t = -0.202, df = 31, α= 0.05, p = 0.841≥0.05 for item 7 (I know the rules of spelling in English (such as "two" is correct, but "tow" is incorrect for 2; "table" is correct, but "tabl" is incorrect), but no statistically significant difference between male and female participants facing problems of spelling was found. Thus, for items 5, 3, and 7, H0 will be retained, and H1 will be rejected.

RQ3: How do instructors perceive the severity of mechanical errors in students' writing?
When the instructors were asked about the severity of mechanics and its components on a scale of 1–5 (1 being the least severe and 5 being the most severe), 23 instructors expressed their opinions. They recorded that punctuation mistakes were the most severe, with 74% of participants choosing them as the most serious mistake, followed by spelling mistakes with 57%, and the least serious were capitalization mistakes, with 21% of instructors choosing them on the rating scale with points 4 and 5 combined. In other words, capitalization was not as severe as punctuation and spelling mistakes. Twenty-two percent of instructors rated it less severe and rated it 1 and 2. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4
Instructors' Beliefs about the Severity of Mistakes in Mechanics on a Rating Scale of 5

Mistake (Type)	1	2	3	4	5	Total Frequency
Punctuation	1 (4%)	3 (13%)	2 (9%)	14 (61%)	3 (13%)	23
Spelling	1 (4%)	6 (26%)	3 (13%)	5 (22%)	8 (35%)	23
Capitalization	5 (22%)	4 (17%)	9 (39%)	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	23

As far as instructors' opinions on the seriousness of other constituents are concerned, commas were found to be the most serious, as 78% of instructors rated them 4 or 5. Mistakes of full stops and question marks were reported to be less serious among the EFL learners, as only 22% and 17% of instructors rated them with 4 and 5, respectively, on the rating scale of 5. However, a good number of instructors (39% for full stops and 70% for question marks) agreed that their students' mistakes in full stops and question marks were moderate and rated them as 3. Therefore, these two types of mistakes should also be taken seriously. This is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5
Instructors' Beliefs about the Severity of Mistakes in Punctuation on a Rating Scale of 5

Mistake (Type)	1	2	3	4	5	Total Frequency
Commas	0 (0%)	3 (13%)	2 (9%)	11 (48%)	7 (30%)	23
Full Stops	1 (4%)	8 (35%)	9 (39%)	3 (13%)	2 (9%)	23
Question Marks	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	16 (70%)	3 (13%)	1 (4%)	23

RQ4: What are the potential causes or reasons behind mechanical errors in student writing?

An analysis of the responses to open-ended questions received from 13 instructors highlighted some reasons why Arab EL learners commit mistakes in mechanics and its components while writing essays in the English language. In addition, they suggested some solutions to minimize these errors.

According to these instructors, Arab EFL learners made these mistakes in mechanics and its components for many reasons. The instructors provided the following explanation for the incorrect use of mechanics:

Errors in full stops are due to the following reasons:

"…it could be their native language influencing their sentence length and lack of full stops in English. Many of the students are very active on social media as well, so that informal style of communication may also be affecting how they view sentence length."

A reason for errors in capitalization is put forward as follows:

"For capitalization, Arabic does not have lowercase and uppercase forms, so it's an unfamiliar language feature for many of them, and it can be challenging to acquire the skill to differentiate proper nouns from common nouns."

One instructor gave the reason for the wrong spellings as follows:

"For spelling, English, of course, does not have a very strong connection between its written representation and the actual sound of the language, so spelling is going to be difficult for any student, especially students who come from a language background that is more phonetically and graphically linked."

All other reasons mainly include L1 interference, washback of informal style on social media, less practice of mechanics, lack of knowledge of the rules of mechanics, being less attentive towards mechanics and its components, the difficulty of writing as a skill, and less importance attached to it in the classroom in comparison to other skills.

Figure 1
Instructors' Reasons for Errors Committed by the Learners
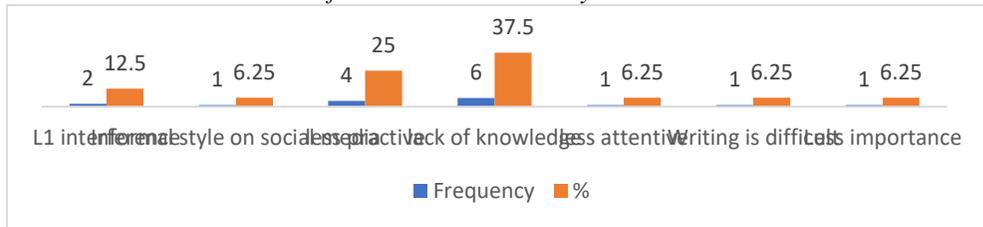
The lack of knowledge of mechanics rules was the most frequently cited reason by the instructors (37.5%), and the washback of informal social media style and being less attentive to mechanics and its components (6.25% each) had the least impact on students' EFL writings.

RQ5: What strategies do instructors use to address and correct mechanical errors in the classroom?

These instructors also suggested some solutions as to how their mistakes may be reduced. One instructor suggested:

"Allocate more time for proofreading in class (example: proofreading drills: students are shown a paragraph with many mistakes, and they need to add the proofreading marks to identify each mistake, and then they should rewrite the paragraph while correcting the identified mistakes)."

Similarly, another instructor recommended the following:

"Perhaps the addition of writing labs outside of classes where the focus is on students' mechanics would be beneficial. They could bring their paragraphs and sit with an instructor to identify errors and be guided step-by-step through the revision process."

To reduce spelling mistakes, one instructor suggested:

> "Expose students to more reading material and encourage them to read while listening to audiobooks so they can connect the sound of the words with the graphical representation of the words."

Giving students more exercises to practice was the most common (35.29%) and effective solution, according to these instructors. Revising the drafts was also a common suggestion (17.65%). Among other suggestions were providing feedback to students on their mistakes (11.76%), early teaching about the rules of mechanics (11.76%), and asking them to self-assess their write-ups (11.76%). A few instructors suggested assigning more HW to the students (5.88%) as well as giving them examples or models of good mechanics (5.88%).

Figure 2
Instructors' Solutions for Reducing the Errors Committed by the Learners
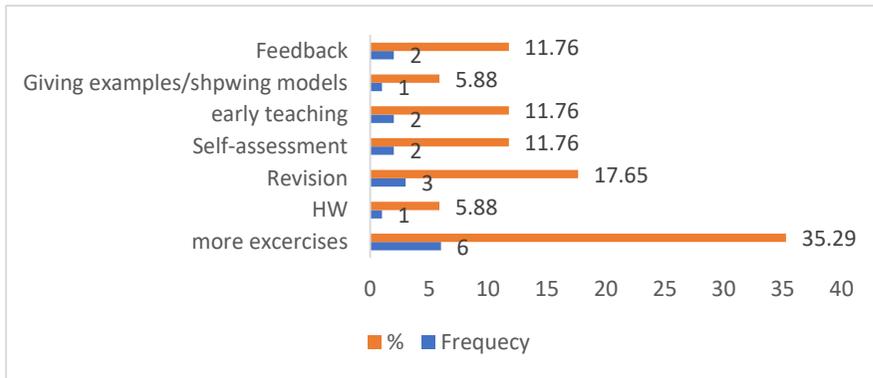
Discussion

Indeed, one of the most disheartening aspects of being a second language (L2) instructor is the task of correcting errors, particularly when they persistently recur in students' language production (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005; Hyland & Anan, 2006). However, errors are important in their own right and serve as a tool for learners to acquire language (Corder, 1967). They offer insights into learners' knowledge of a second language (Selinker, 1972) and allow instructors to tailor their instruction to address these specific areas of difficulty and provide targeted feedback and remediation. At the same time, understanding students' perspectives on their errors can be as influential in guiding instructional decision-making as understanding their thinking in specific content areas (Lannin et al., 2007). For effective error management and language learning, understanding learners' perceptions and interpretations is crucial.

This study explored the perceptions of EFL learners and instructors regarding the difficulty of using mechanics. Both parties disagreed on their views on using punctuation and spelling. Students believed that they had more problems with spelling. This is supported by Almukhaizeem (2013), who identified spelling as the most common type of error among students, as evidenced in the present study. However, instructors ranked spelling mistakes second and punctuation errors first. According to them, their students lacked punctuation skills the most. Errors in capitalization had the fewest occurrences and were ranked at number three by students as well as instructors. This corresponds to the research by Sandrawati and Jurianto (2021), Nurwahyuni (2017), and Manzolim and Gumpal (2015).

This mismatch between students' and instructors' perceptions needs attention, as this difference creates two focal points for mechanics. Instructors might continue to believe that learners need more practice with other components of mechanics, not spelling. However, the case is otherwise; their learners need more focus on spelling, as suggested by previous studies by Alharbi (2019) and Alzamil (2020). Alshraah et al., (2023) also established that spelling errors and EFL learners' low achievement were correlated.

The perceptions of EFL instructors and students were found to be the same when asked about their problems using other components of mechanics. In other words, both instructors and students agreed that there were problems with punctuation and its constituents. They also ranked them the same in terms of difficulty. Students mentioned using commas was the most difficult, followed by full stops and question marks. Their instructors also agreed with these beliefs. Nazim and Mohammad (2022), Sandrawati and Jurianto (2021), and Yuliawati (2021) also discovered that the highest number of punctuation mistakes made by EFL learners were related to the use of commas and the absence of periods in their writings.

An agreement of beliefs creates a cohesive learning environment, enhances communication and feedback, and empowers students to take ownership of their writing development. This ultimately leads to improved learning outcomes and increased proficiency in writing skills.

Apart from the instructor-student standpoint, the difference in perception between genders is also noteworthy, which was almost negligible in previous studies on the same topic. The perceptions of male and female learners were found to be significantly different in using punctuation, capitalization, question marks, and overall mechanics, indicating that males need more attention than females, except for capitalization, where females were found to make more mistakes than males. Tesfaye's (2004) findings support the result that male students made more errors in punctuation. In contrast to the results of this study, Abdullah (2020) and Tesfaye (2004) mentioned that female learners were better than male learners at capitalization. In addition, Muhammad and Nair (2017) found that female students made more errors in mechanics. Nonetheless, this study showed that female students were better at using punctuation and its components.

However, the difference between male and female perceptions of errors in using commas, full stops, and spellings is statistically non-significant, which means that male and female learners are equally proficient in using them. However, this does not mean they do not have difficulties using question marks and spelling. It only indicates their similar but insignificant level of mistakes. Therefore, attention should still be paid to these aspects, but the severity of making mistakes is not as serious as with other components of mechanics. Moreover, Alhaisoni et al. (2015) suggested that female learners should pay more attention to spelling errors than male learners.

EFL/ESL students' errors can be traced to two general sources: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Alenazi et al., (2021) and Al-Sobhi et al., (2017) discovered that the highest percentage of spelling errors among Arab students was due to the anomalous nature of the English spelling system, a lack of awareness of English spelling rules, and L1 interference. Interlingual and intralingual factors are the primary causes of these errors. Altamimi and Rashid (2019) attributed spelling errors to the negative impacts of the education system and syllabus, which do not prioritize teaching spelling rules and techniques, and the interference between the English and Arabic languages. Moreover, Alsaawi (2015) identified consonant doubling, silent letters, the final [e], and vowels as the most common spelling errors.

Overall, it is crucial for instructors to understand and address students' perceptions of errors, as well as consider any differences based on gender. This knowledge can inform instructional practices, provide targeted feedback, and foster a supportive learning environment, ultimately enhancing students' language learning outcomes.

Implications and Recommendations

All stakeholders should emphasize the causes that lead learners to commit those errors and work out solutions provided by the instructors, as they can tailor their instruction and provide targeted feedback that addresses specific areas of difficulty for students. According to Harmoush (2000), the English spelling system has caused many difficulties for Arab students, so it is important to address the differences between their first language and English as well as intralingual errors to solve the spelling problems. Arabic sentences tend to be longer and may lack proper punctuation, which can transfer to their English writing. The absence of rules for uppercase and lowercase forms, as well as for proper nouns and common nouns, might have led students to make mistakes in capitalization.

Koch (1983) claims that Arabic does not use the same punctuation rules as English. Students are sometimes confused by the differences between the Arabic and English systems of punctuation. When they fail to select the proper punctuation, they will have difficulty communicating their ideas. Before students write sentences, instructors should address these issues (Almukhaizeem, 2013). Spelling errors may be improved after giving students feedback (Nair & Hui, 2018). Nisa et al. (2023) and Alzamil (2020) recommended adding more exercises focused on spelling and punctuation to the course outline.

Just as instructors gain insights into students' understanding through their thinking processes, understanding how students view their errors provides valuable information for guiding instruction. By analyzing students' perceptions of errors, instructors can identify misconceptions, tailor feedback, differentiate instruction, and promote metacognition. This knowledge helps instructors provide targeted support, personalized feedback, and growth opportunities, ultimately fostering a positive learning environment and deepening students' understanding of the subject matter. Understanding learners' perceptions and interpretations aligns with the learner-centered approach, which focuses on the individual learner's needs, beliefs, and motivations. Recognizing errors will foster diagnostic competence in students and instructors, as suggested by Heinrichs and Kaiser (2018).

The findings from this study have important implications for teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Firstly, instructors should be aware of any specific types of mechanical errors that learners tend to make and provide targeted instruction to help learners improve in these areas. Secondly, instructors should also address learners' misconceptions and beliefs about the types of errors they make to help them better understand their areas of weakness. Finally, instructors should consider the severity of errors and prioritize teaching and correcting the most serious ones to ensure learners can communicate effectively in written English.

Limitations

The study's focus solely on Saudi EFL learners may limit the generalizability of the findings, as socio-cultural and educational variations could influence the results. To enhance the study's validity and applicability, it is recommended to include participants from different universities and regions to capture a more diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, expanding the sample size, particularly in terms of the number of instructors involved,

can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. A larger sample size allows for more robust data analysis and strengthens the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Regarding the instruments used in the study, it is important to pilot-test them before implementing them in the research. Piloting the instruments helps identify potential issues or limitations, allows for refinement and adjustment, and ultimately enhances the reliability and validity of the collected data. Additionally, using standardized and validated data collection tools in future studies can further improve the reliability and comparability of the findings across different research contexts.

Furthermore, the study only focused on mechanical errors in writing, neglecting other aspects of writing such as organization, coherence, and cohesion. Future research could explore these aspects to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Arab EFL learners' writing skills. By addressing these limitations, future studies can provide more comprehensive and reliable insights into the perceptions of EFL learners and instructors regarding mechanics errors, thereby advancing knowledge in the field.

Conclusion

Using correct mechanics in writing is crucial for effective communication, as it can increase comprehension and leave a positive impression on the reader. This study confirms the challenges Arab EFL learners face when using proper mechanics in their writing. The results also revealed a discrepancy between students' and instructors' perceptions of errors in mechanics made by Arab EFL learners. While the instructors believed that punctuation errors were the most frequent, followed by spelling and capitalization errors, the students opined that spelling errors were the most common. This was followed by punctuation and capitalization errors. This discrepancy highlights the importance of instructors' awareness of their students' actual writing skills and the need for them to provide appropriate feedback and instruction to improve their writing performance (Rostami et al., 2021).

Overall, this study suggests that Arab EFL learners need more support in developing their writing mechanics skills. This is mainly in the areas of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Instructors can help by providing focused instruction on these areas and giving feedback that highlights the severity of mistakes and provides guidance on correcting them. Educators and researchers need to adopt a constructive approach to errors by providing meaningful feedback and creating a supportive learning environment. By recognizing errors as part of the learning process, learners can feel more comfortable taking risks and experimenting with the language. This leads to greater linguistic development over time.

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