

## Arab EFL Learners' Writing Errors: A Contrastive Error Analysis Study

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**ABSTRACT:** *The present study delved into the impact of students' L1 (Arabic) morphosyntactic system on their L2 writing skills; the influence of Arabic socio-cultural and educational context (where students learn L2) on students' writing; students' attitude towards L2 writing and EFL teachers' perceptions and interpretations of students' writing difficulties. The study was conducted in 8 public higher education institutions in Oman. The participants of the study were 598 Omani EFL students who studied at The General Foundation Program and 54 EFL teachers. The study was underpinned by two theories: transfer of learning theory (Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901) and interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972). The conceptual framework was arrived at by employing two models, contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA). A mixed-methods approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data employing a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and a writing test (essay writing). The findings revealed that students' intralingual (L2 rules) errors were larger than their interlingual (L1 interference) errors. It was also found that students had a positive attitude towards L2 learning. Further, the teachers' interviews confirmed that teachers were cognizant of students' writing errors but they could not identify and determine the sources of those errors.*

**Keywords:** Morphosyntactic system, contrastive analysis (CA), error analysis (EA), interlingual errors, intralingual errors

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## INTRODUCTION

English language in the Sultanate of Oman has not been adjudged a neutral language. It is a pivotal, all-important, and indispensable language that is deemed a means of globalizing, modernizing, and internationalizing its health, economy, and education system (Al-Jardani, 2017). Oman has striven to develop strategies for internationalizing its educational programs. Ergo Omani students learn English in schools both at basic and post-basic levels where the English curriculum is introduced to hone students' English language skills with an emphasis on writing (Al-Issa, 2014). This is because writing is adjudged the salient skill that learners need to master since it demands a more substantial in-depth knowledge of the grammar system and writing conventions than other receptive skills (Mourssi, 2013). Notwithstanding, the depth and breadth the schools address to the student's writing skills are scant and deficient and it does not, therefore, assist students to satisfy the requirements of higher education writing levels where English is employed as a medium of instruction for most of the degree programs (Burns, 2013). Hence, Oman has introduced the General Foundation Programs to help students meet the higher education requirements,

sharpen the student's English language skills for further studies and boost their cognitive skills and linguistic competency (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, 2017).

The General Foundation Program (GFP) is no exception. Writing is addressed as an extension of other language skills and sub-skills. The GFP implements pattern-model-based writing which aims at teaching students varied forms of writing including rhetorical modes such as cause/effect and comparison/contrast in both short paragraphs and long essays to help students master L2 writing skills. Furthermore, the writing components of the GFP address informal writing (general topics) and formal writing (writing for academic purposes). Although the GFP students are provided with numerous facilities to help improve their L2 writing skills, the students encounter an alarming number of problems in writing so errors are largely recurrent features in their writing productions. To this end, the present study aims to find out if Arabic morphosyntactic systems interference/transfer is the prime cause of students' writing errors; to investigate the effect of Arabic socio-cultural and educational context, where students learn L2, on students' English writing skills; to determine the behavior of GFP students towards writing and to examine EFL teachers' perceptions of students' English writing problems.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Second language writing has always been a strenuous and arduous task for ESL learners and a hot point of discussion amongst foreign language researchers. A lot of studies and research on SL acquisition (Mickan, McQueen & Lemhöfer, 2019; Mohamed & Zouaoui, 2014; Na Phuket & Binti Othman, 2015; Fareed, Ashraf & Bilal, 2016; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017) investigated learners' errors in L2 writing. Errors are inevitable and many of them occur because of learners' L1 interference (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Kesmez, 2015; Derakhshan & Karimi, 2015; Mustafa, 2017).

### **Language Transfer/Interference**

Language interference or linguistic interference (transfer) bears upon the impact of learners' L1 on their L2 writing production due to the resemblances and discrepancies between the target language and the language which was formerly acquired (Karim & Nassaji 2013). Namely, learners especially those who are in the early stages of L2 acquisition, transfer structures and linguistic items from their mother tongue to the target language (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Language interference deals with the transferability of speech acts from L1 to L2 and also the degree to which learners can employ the intuitive knowledge of their mother tongue in L2 (Azzouz, 2013). Omani learners, for example, tend to translate word-for-word from Arabic to English, and since many speech acts cannot be transferred without changing the form which extends beyond literal translation, Omani learners commit a lot of errors in the process of L2 writing (Al Alawi, 2016; Ali & Al- Rushaidi, 2016).

### **Error Analysis**

Errors are natural phenomena that are associated with learning a language. Lightbown & Spada (2006) contend that writing errors, especially those which are germane to grammar, are inescapable and can help teachers pinpoint the development of ESL learners' inter-language system. In the same vein, Ranganayaki (1983) claims that errors are not evils to be rooted out or problems to overcome, nonetheless, they are

inexorable in L2 learning. Ergo it is reasonable to infer that language cannot be acquired without committing errors.

### **Contrastive Analysis**

The efficacious contributions of contrastive analysis and error analysis to the process of L2 learning cannot be disregarded. Gass and Selinker (1983) claim that comparative investigations of L1 and L2 are pivotal preliminary steps to a better understanding of language transfer. This is echoed by Almaloul (2014) who states that contrastive analysis is concerned with the study of the similarities and dissimilarities between two languages and more. In my opinion, this substantiates the claim that learners incline to refer back and rely on their L1 when they deal with L2 units or items which are dissimilar to their native language.

### **Arabic and English Morphology**

Arabic and English are not cognate (genetically related). Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family, whereas English goes down from the Indo-European language family (Crystal, 2010; Viney, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Morphology is the subfield of grammar that deals with the alteration and formation of words. It studies how linguistic items such as words and their subpart morphemes (prefixes, affixes, suffixes, and infixes) integrate (Carstairs-McCarthy, 2002). Morphology can be also defined as the derivation and inflection of words (Blevins, 2008). Some of the most common morphological areas such as gender, articles, and number are elucidated below.

#### *Gender*

In the Arabic language, the grammatical ‘gender’ necessitates the inflection of adjectives and nouns to determine whether they are feminine, masculine or neuter ( Al-Sayed, 2006). Notwithstanding, there is no existence of such inflection in English because some lexical items are used instead of gender. Female and male pairs of words such as ‘woman/man and girl/boy’ are marked for sex instead of gender (Ryle, 2011). More specifically, the characteristics belonging to those common nouns are lexical characteristics indicating sex and not grammatical characteristics indicating gender (Haussamen, 2003).

#### *Articles*

There are two types of articles in English: the indefinite articles ‘a and an’ and the definite article ‘the’ (Murphy, 2012). Nonetheless, Arabic has the definite article (ال) /al/ where the indefinite article is marked by a pause form only

(نَكِيرَة التَّنْوِين) /nakirat al-tanwi:n/ ‘nunation’ (Faraj, 1982). Simply put, Arabic has no equivalent to the English indefinite articles ‘a and an’. ‘The girl’ in English is equivalent to (الْبِنْتُ) /al-bintu/ in Arabic, while ‘a girl’ is translated as (بِنْتٌ) /bintun/ (Al-Sayed, 2006). Similar to the English definite article ‘the’, the Arabic definite article (ال) /al/ can precede both uncountable and countable nouns.

#### *Number*

There are three features of the Arabic ‘number’ including the dual, plural, and singular forms (Abdeljawad, 2001). English ‘number’ has only the plural and singular forms and does not make any specific distinction for the dual form which is symbolized by the plural form instead. Arabic nouns, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns, whether relative or demonstrative, are signaled for number and indicate agreement in all cases (Ryding, 2005). That is to say that plural subjects take plural verbs, dual subjects take dual verbs and

singular subjects take singular verbs. Likewise, English verbs, demonstratives, nouns, and pronouns are marked for number, nevertheless, unlike in Arabic, the indefinite articles and adjectives are not (Yowell & Aziz, 1989).

### Arabic and English Syntax

Syntax is the grammar sub-field that deals with the study of rules and the way language various units, including words, are amalgamated to form phrases or sentences (Miller, 2002). Arabic and English syntax varies as expounded in the syntactic cases below.

#### *Noun Phrases as adjectives*

A noun phrase in Arabic may also incorporate a secondary noun that can operate as an adjective (modifier) for qualifying the principle noun which is known as ‘head noun’ as in (تِلْكَ الشَّرْطِيَّةُ الضَّابِطَةُ) /tilaka af-furtijatu ad<sup>s</sup>-d<sup>f</sup>a:bitatu/ ‘That is the police officer’. Arabic nouns, unlike English, precede adjectives (الْخَيْطُ الْأَحْمَرُ) /al-xajtu al-ahmaru/ ‘The read thread’ (Al-Sayed, 2006).

An English noun phrase is a phrase that starts with a noun or which performs the role of a noun. A noun phrase is very cross-linguistically common, and it may be the most habitually prevailing type of phrase (Radford, 2004). Example: ‘Milk is white’, Milk is a noun.

#### *Adverb Phrase*

Similar to English, an Arabic adverb phrase starts with an adverb or a prepositional phrase. Each of them operates as an adverb to describe another adverb, an adjective, a verb, a clause or a simple sentence to show degree, place, manner, and time (Hewings, 2005). Example: (ذَهَبُوا إِلَى مَطْعَمٍ لِيَحْتَفِلُوا بِيَوْمِ مَوْلِدِهِ) /dahabu: ila mat<sup>s</sup>amin lihtaflu: bjawmi mawliidihi:/ ‘They went to a restaurant to celebrate his birthday’.

#### *Adjective Phrase*

An Arabic adjective is a word that describes or modifies another thing or a person in the sentence. The Arabic adjective follows the noun it modifies so it has feminine and masculine forms. The rule is that if a noun is indefinite the adjective has to be indefinite and vice versa. Like in (الْوَلَدُ الْقَصِيرُ) /al-walad al-qasi:r/ ‘The short boy’ (’ال’/al/ is adjudged the Arabic indefinite article) (Ryding, 2005). An English adjective phrase consists of a group of words that describe a pronoun or a noun in a sentence. In an adjective phrase, the adjective can be found in the beginning, middle, or end of phrases. The adjective phrase is positioned before or after the pronoun or noun (Eastwood, 1994). Example. ‘Today is sunny’ or ‘What is a sunny day!’

#### *Prepositional Phrase*

A prepositional phrase is the sentence part that contains a preposition and the object it refers to. An object in English is usually a gerund, a pronoun, a noun, or a noun clause and is called a preposition object (Brinton, 2000). Arabic prepositional phrase is similar to English in terms of their function. An Arabic prepositional phrase can be used as an adverb or adjective (Abdul Sattar, 2002). Example:

(ذَٰكَ الْقَلَمُ فَوْقَ الْكِتَابِ خَاصَّتِي) /ða:ka al-qalamu fawqa al-kita:bi xa:s<sup>s</sup>ati:/ ‘That pen which is on the book is mine.

### **Learners' Common Syntactic and Morphological Writing Errors**

An Arabic sentence sometimes starts with a verb so it might confuse EFL students as English sentences start with nouns or subjects. The most recurrent L2 writing errors which are committed by Arab learners may occur due to the wrong usage of verbs and subjects which highlights their mother tongue 'Arabic' interference (Ababneh, 2017). According to Hadi (2016), Arab learners are very much affected by L1 so they often use the particle 'not' to start English sentences as it is identically formed in Arabic. Thus, it results in inadequacy in both placement and meaning of the particle. For example, 'Not go with her' and 'Not go to work now' represent both the incorrect positioning of 'not'. Also, the two sentences are marked by the absence of the auxiliary verb and the pronoun as well.

The great number of prepositions, along with their dissimilar meaning in both Arabic in English, can be an obstacle for EFL learners to learn this item of the language. For instance, learners tend to translate the Arabic preposition system into English which results in making errors in the use of the English prepositions (Mourssi & Al Hilali, 2015; Tahaine, 2014). In addition, English and Arabic possessive noun phrases are identically structured, however, Arab learners sometimes make errors in the use and position of 's' (Qasim, 2013).

It is evident that previous studies and research have attempted to investigate some of the students' problems in writing, however, the focus has been largely on grammatical errors committed by students. There is a dire need for a fastidious investigation into other types of writing errors and also other hindrances of L2 writing. Ergo the present research is going to meticulously uncover more types and sources of students' writing difficulties.

### **Social-cultural Context in ESL Writing**

Every language is characterized by its writing and speech norms and is shaped by its people's culture. Namely, every language has some cultural features which make it distinct from other languages (Rajend et al., 2000). According to Chambers (2003), the problems arise when learners attempt to acquire new behavior and habits of the target language while they are much affected by the habits of their L1 or native language. Debbie (2014) claims that the new target language makes the pre-requisite knowledge of learners subject to the reality of a new culture whose structure is wholly varied, and therefore it becomes problematic or sometimes beyond achievement. The development of learners' L2 writing is impacted by several socio-cultural elements including expressing social values in writing, students' rhetorical patterns, and the students' incognizance of the socio-cultural background of the target language. This is generally seen as errors that result from the distinctness between L1 and L2 cultures (Fernsten, 2008; Uysal 2008; Hinkel, 2009). Thus, some linguists such as Choudhury (2014) agree that learners should be stimulated to understand the culture of the target language via the teaching material which should represent the contemporary situations and attitudes of the target language. I strongly believe that the teaching material should mirror the native speakers' lives to help learners understand the foreign language culture.

### **Attitudes of Students Towards Writing**

Attitudes affect our perception of the world and govern how we react to various world entities (Gholaminejad et al., 2013). There are many definitions of attitudes but I believe Eagly & Chaiken (1993)

give a clear and holistic definition of attitude as a mental tendency that is indicated and highlighted via the evaluation of a certain entity with a level of acceptance or rejection.

In terms of ESL writing, Mohamed (2016) divides students into two types:

- a. The first type comprises students who have negative attitudes towards writing. This is because they are incognizant of the significance of writing skill as they believe that speaking skill is more important than writing skill.
- b. The second class of students is those who have positive attitudes towards writing. They believe that good writing skills can help them communicate with non-Arabic speakers and fulfill their study requirements.

### **Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Writing Errors**

The notion of perception in English language learning is not exhaustively novel. Teachers have pre-terminated viewpoints which result from their knowledge of various teaching approaches, post-experience, or successful practices with EFL learners (Al-Azani, 2015). Teachers' perceptions and attitudes are pivotal elements in teaching L2 writing (Williams, 2003). Research and studies have shown that error is deemed the salient facet in EFL writing evaluation (Homborg, 1984) and that learners' grades in essay writing increase substantially when errors of sentence level are corrected (Sweedler-Brown, 1993). Hence, teachers need to fastidiously create criteria to assure constant and clear correction to eschew inundating both learners and teachers with red ink (Hyland & Anan, 2006). Teachers' perceptions of learners' writing errors are influenced by some elements including learners' language competence (Janopoulos, 2002) and pigeonholed expectations of learners' ethnolinguistic identities (Rubin & Williams-James, 1997).

Although there are lengthy treatises that are germane to the impact of L1 on students' L2 writing skills, there is still a dire need for more investigation to fill the gap in the contemporary literature respecting particular issues or populations that have received little attention, rebut and discredit some assumptions and myths, invigorate and enhance existing theories, or provide more illuminations and evidence for L2 writing problems. One of the objectives of the present research is to discern and analyze the distinctness between Arabic and English morphosyntactic systems and their impact on the L2 writing skill of Omani foundation students. This underscores the novelty of the investigation area of the current study and also the approaches it adopts to deal with students' writing problems.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The present study is underpinned by two theories, that is to say, transfer of learning theory (Thorndike & Woodworth, 1901) and interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972). These theories are used by the current study because they are both germane to the impact of L1 on L2 learning. Transfer of learning theory refers to how individuals transfer learning from an old context to a new alike one. Simply put, Thorndike and Woodworth infer that past experiences have an impact on an individual's performance and learning in a new situation. According to the theory, there are two kinds of transfer, positive and negative transfer. The

conceptual framework of the current study is arrived by employing two methods, contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current study adopts a mixed-methods approach or multi-methodology. A mixed-methods approach is a methodology that incorporates collecting, analyzing, and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data in one single study or research (Creswell, 2003).

### **Participants**

#### **Student Participants**

The participants of the study are 598 Omani students who study English as a foreign language at 8 higher education institutions. The course aims to prepare students for their various disciplines which use English as a medium of instruction.

#### **Teacher Participants**

The current study target population is 54 EFL teachers working at 8 public higher education institutions.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The study data were collected utilizing three instruments: a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and a writing test.

### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire comprised 15 close-ended items (Appendix 1). The items were generated using a 5-point Likert scale anchored in “1” (Strongly Disagree) to “5” (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire aimed at gauging students’ perceptions and attitudes towards L2 writing.

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 54 teachers. Fourteen questions constituted the interviews (Appendix 2). The interviews provided microdata and answered the research question about EFL teachers’ interpretations and perceptions of learners’ errors in writing. The interviews were conducted face to face and over the phone.

### **Writing Test**

A writing test, which took the form of a writing essay, was given to 234 students. This number of students presented the students' sample size. The current study adopted a total population sampling technique to sample 598 students. To calculate the sample size, the researcher calculated the population size, the confidence interval (also called the margin of error), and the confidence level as follows:

*The confidence level = 95%,  
confidence interval = 5%.  
Population size = 598  
Students sample size = 234*

The students were asked to write an essay about “The importance of friendship”. The writing test aimed to investigate students’ developmental or intralingual errors and interference or interlingual errors that may influence students’ L2 writing performance. Semi-structured interview data was analyzed via thematic analysis. The researcher highlighted the most repeated and most important themes that emerged from the interview. The written test was analyzed at the level of morphosyntactic systems of both Arabic (L1) and English (L2). The purpose was to discern, recount, and deal with the phenomenon of writing errors, gain a better insight into the nature of those errors and collect sufficient data to answer the research questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study divulged that a plurality of students’ writing errors (73.58%) was made at the intralingual level. The writing test revealed that the total number of errors which were made by students was 1143. Students’ errors were classified based on Brown’s 2000 categorization of error sources. They were categorized into: developmental or intralingual errors (841) and interference or interlingual errors (302). Richards and Schmidt (2002) describe interlingual errors as those errors resulting from language negative transfer which is generated by the learners’ first language. On the other hand, intralingual errors are germane to communication strategies, learning context, and the target language (Brown, 2000).

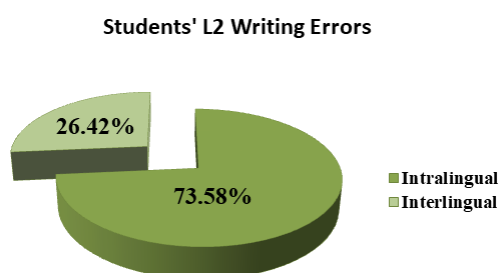


Figure 1

Intralingual errors incorporated morphological errors (165), lexical errors (143), semantic errors (173), and syntactic errors (245), whereas interlingual errors comprised semantic errors (136) and syntactic errors (166). Thus, students’ intralingual errors were larger than their interlingual errors. Hence, it can be inferred that students erred within the L2 structure. Most of the students’ errors (33.28%) occurred largely in word formation. This encompassed demonstratives, verb tense (Ababneh, 2017), plural and singular nouns, adjectives, possessive cases (Qasim, 2013), and articles. In addition, the percentage of students’ syntactical errors was 29.13% which was largely in the form of the wrong usage of word order (Al-Mekhlafi, 2013). As for lexical errors (17.30%), they were mostly presented in word selection, whereas about 20.56% were semantic errors which appertained to the meaninglessness of some of the students’ writing (Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn, 2017).

Apropos of the impact of the Arabic socio-cultural and educational context on students’ L2 writing skills, the data obtained from students’ questionnaires demonstrated that the Arabic socio-cultural and educational context, where students learned English, did not affect students’ writing skills. More specifically, although students admitted that whenever they carried out a writing task they brainstormed



the activity in Arabic, that practice did not affect their writing. Further, it was found that students had positive behavior toward English writing (Mohamed, 2016) for many reasons. First, more than half of the students had a high level of comfort and confidence when they were required to do any L2 writing activity. The students found the task somehow laborious. They could not easily find main ideas or supporting details to support their argument. Notwithstanding, they felt comfortable and confident when they were required to write a paragraph or essay in English. Another reason is that the majority of students did not translate their first draft of writing from Arabic to English. Though they brainstormed ideas in Arabic, still they wrote their main ideas, supporting details, and conclusions in English. Moreover, students rejected the idea of using a bilingual dictionary to help translate their writing from L1 to L2. Another reason is that the vast majority of students opposed the assumption that they wrote sentence structures in L1 and then translated them to English but they wrote sentences in L2 without the need for Arabic translation. Further, students tended to use a monolingual dictionary to look up words and find correct meanings. Although some of the students used a bilingual dictionary, it did not affect their positive attitude towards L2 writing. In short, most of the students' writing errors were at the intralingual level, yet they had a positive attitude towards L2 writing.

Semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with EFL teachers, illustrated that teachers in the present study were cognizant of various types of errors committed by students but they could not specifically determine the sources of those errors. Most of the teachers classified students' errors into grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors. According to teachers, students' writing errors were about wrong word formation and incorrect sentence structure which marked their poor writing skills. Further, teachers were aware of their students' most recurrent errors which occurred because of their incognizance of L2 grammar rules such as the use of articles, subject-verb-agreement, tenses, adjectives, and adjective and noun agreement. To put it in a nutshell, even though the findings of the current study affirmed the assumption that Arabic interference occurred because Arabic and English morphosyntactic systems are dissimilar, it was not proved that L1 interference was the prime cause of students' L2 writing errors.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are some significant implications that may arise from the findings of the current study as follows:

### **Implications of EA for L2 Writing**

Errors are adjudged pivotal methods that can be utilized by teachers and researchers to identify and understand learners' L2 learning process (Crystal, 1992). Error analysis can furnish L1 (Arabic) with objective data. EA furnishes meticulous recognition and description of students' errors and then divides them into categories. In addition, EA gives evidence of how language is acquired or learned and identifies techniques employed by students to discover the language. This can help teachers predict students' errors and then try to evade their recurrence.

As regards the significance of EA for L2 writing, researchers and teachers, who crave apt remedial instruction, need to carry out their research and studies based on the error analysis approach to employ efficacious teaching techniques and methods that can help hone students' L2 writing skills. The utilization of EA can apprise teachers of their students' writing process and what needs to be done to meet

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teaching/learning objectives. Hence, EA has been deemed an advantageous and practical means specifically if teachers manage to get feedback from students' varied writings.

### **Implications for Curriculum Designers**

The present study denoted that writing is adjudged a laborious task for students. This is primarily because, in second language learning situations, students lack the opportunity to practice writing in a communicative and authentic setting. Moreover, students do not practice their writing skills outside the EFL classroom. Hence, they make consecutive errors whenever they are asked to write in L2. Notwithstanding, those errors are natural, ineluctable, and immanent in L2 learning so they cannot be avoided. Error analysis can be employed as a felicitous means to trace and locate errors in general. It furnishes teachers with the results of their teaching strategies and apprises curriculum designers of the efficacy of teaching materials. Specifically, EA enables us to identify which parts of the curriculum can be learned by students and those which present difficulties for students to learn and thus need to be revised. Ergo EA can help curriculum designers develop teaching materials that can satisfy the needs of both teachers and students. This is to say that errors can apprise us of what to be included or exclude from the curriculum.

### **Implications for English Language Teachers**

The teacher is deemed one of the salient factors in foreign language learning. This is because a teacher's teaching caliber has tremendous effects on students' attainment. Students' progress depends on the amount of knowledge they acquire from teachers to evade as many experienced errors as possible. The more errors students rectify, the more cognizant of L2 they become. Thus, teachers should know what to rectify, how to rectify and the level of error to be rectified. In the Omani context, teaching has gained momentum over the last 20 years. Notwithstanding, students experience many errors in their writing which do not reflect the exerted efforts by teachers.

### *Holding Conferences and Seminars*

Searching for the most appropriate methods to hone students' writing skills should be a matter of concern to all professionals to deal with various issues of students' writing adversities. Hence, English language teachers are required to keep abreast of the latest techniques in teaching writing. These issues can be conferred in conferences and seminars which need to be regularly held to carry resolutions of students' various writing problems. Those meetings are of pronounced significance for the reason that teachers' collaborations can contribute to updating their teaching strategies which consequently leads to sharpening students' writing abilities. Further, by attending conferences and seminars, teachers can be actively involved in self-evaluation and reflection. They can improve their teaching of writing skills, expand their notions on various teaching concerns and boost conjoint relationships with other EFL teachers.

### *Integration between School and Higher Education*

Since university students' writing achievement banks on the knowledge students acquire from school, cooperation and integration between both school and tertiary education is vital. This cooperation can contribute to finding efficacious and practical solutions to the majority, if not all, of writing problems encountered by students. The key purpose here is EFL teachers in both systems can share and make use

of other teachers' expertise, viewpoints, and teaching techniques. This can consequently lend teachers a deeper understanding of how to attend to students' writing problems via adopting future standpoints.

### **Implications for ESL Students**

Students are deemed one of the most pivotal variables in the teaching/learning process. Errors committed by students are no longer judged prohibited or forbidden as they are immanent in L2 acquisition (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). Taking into account the Foundation Program students' errors spotted in the written essays, it is recommended that students should be motivated to keep writing despite the errors they may commit. This can help them manage any expected writing anxiety which may stand as a hindrance to their writing progress. Moreover, errors help teachers learn about students' language levels and the techniques they employ in writing. Therefore, errors should not be viewed as an instance or demonstration of students' poor linguistic proficiency which may lead them to be punished. Nonetheless, there is a need for a mutual understanding between the teacher, to put up with certain types of errors, and the students, to do their utmost to avoid the errors they have already made. Students need to be given authentic materials which can help them draw an analogy between L1 and L2 to minimize their unnecessary and unintentional writing interference errors.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The current study has some limitations as it entails the existing Foundation Program students so the results cannot be generalized to future foundation students. Furthermore, investigating students' L2 writing errors in a writing test or paragraph in a restricted time may not provide a complete image of all students' writing errors. Also, data collected from the current study was established on a 'one-off' investigation into students' writing errors which may not provide a thorough picture of the development process of Foundation Program students' L2 writing skills. That is because L2 writing experience is a perpetual process that starts when students join the nursing institutions and keeps on to be developed during the whole period of their study.

In the light of the discussion of the present study findings as well as the foregoing limitations which were pinpointed in the study design, some suggestions can be put forward for future research.

- Analogous research needs to be conducted on future Foundation Program students to obtain an inclusive and complete picture of various students' levels.
- Development of students' L2 writing skills is a lengthy process as students need time to obtain the required practices and literacy knowledge vital to write good texts that fulfill the requirements of higher education writing. Thus, there is a dire need for more longitudinal studies to elucidate the L2 writing skills of Foundation Program students during their whole study period.
- The proposed recommendations are hoped to help ameliorate the process of L2 writing. In addition, further research that is germane to errors and error analysis needs to be carried out to arrive at apt educational strategies pertinent to the teaching process and up-to-date teaching materials that can be beneficial, useful, and interesting.

## CONCLUSION

The present study delved into the impact of students' L1 (Arabic) morphosyntactic system on their L2 writing skills; the influence of Arabic socio-cultural and educational context (where students learn L2) on students' L2 writing; how students respond/react to English writing tasks and teachers' perceptions and interpretations of students' writing difficulties. The findings affirmed that students' intralingual errors were larger than their interlingual errors. It was also revealed that students had a positive attitude towards L2 learning. Further, the interviews confirmed that teachers were cognizant of students' writing errors but they could not identify and determine the sources of those errors.

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### Appendix 1 Students' Questionnaire

Please tick (✓) the response that represents your opinion.

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I feel confident and comfortable when I am asked to write a paragraph or an essay in English. (أشعر بالارتياح عندما يطلب مني ان اكتب فقرة او مقال باللغة الانجليزية)					
2. It is easier to write in Arabic than to write in English. (الكتابة باللغة العربية اسهل من الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية)					
3. Writing is the most difficult skill among English language skills such as reading, speaking & listening. (تعتبر مهارة الكتابة من اصعب مهارات اللغة الانجليزية)					
4. It is uneasy to find the main ideas and supporting details which can help me to write an essay in English. (من الصعب ان اجد الافكار او العناصر الرئيسية وكذلك التفاصيل المناسبة التي تساعدني علي كتابة مقال باللغة الانجليزية)					
5. When writing in English, my problem lies in making grammatical mistakes. (عندما اكتب باللغة الانجليزية ارتكب اخطاء في استخدام قواعد اللغة الانجليزية بطريقة صحيحة)					
6. When writing in English, I experience difficulty with word-formation. (اجد صعوبة في تركيب و تحويل الكلمات باللغة الانجليزية كتحويل الفعل الي اسم او صفة على سبيل المثال)					
7. When writing in English, I face the problem of combining words in sentences. (واجه صعوبة في دمج الكلمات مع بعضها البعض لتكوين جمل باللغة الانجليزية)					
8. When writing in English, I ignore the kind of errors I usually make. (لا اهتم بالأخطاء المتكررة التي عادةً ارتكبتها عندما اكتب باللغة الانجليزية)					

9. When I carry out a writing task in English, I first think about it in Arabic and then I start writing in English. (عندما اكتب اي موضوع باللغة الانجليزية، افكر به باللغة العربية اولاً ثم اكتبه بعد ذلك باللغة الانجليزية)					
10. Before I write any task in English, first I prepare it in Arabic and then I translate it into English. (عندما اكتب اي موضوع باللغة الانجليزية، اكتبه باللغة العربية اولاً ثم اترجمه الى الانجليزية)					
11. When writing in English, I first write the structures of sentences in Arabic and then I translate them into English. (عندما اكتب اي موضوع باللغة الانجليزية، اقوم بكتابة الجمل باللغة العربية و من ثم اترجمها الى اللغة الانجليزية)					
12. I consult an Arabic/English, English/Arabic dictionary when I write an essay in English. (استعين بقاموس عربي/انجليزي او انجليزي/عربي عند كتابة مقال باللغة الانجليزية)					
13. I use an English/English dictionary when I write a paragraph in English. (استعين بقاموس انجليزي/انجليزي عند كتابة فقرة باللغة الانجليزية)					
14. When I have doubts, I ask the English language teacher for a clarification in Arabic. (عندما يكون لدي استفسار اطلب من معلم اللغة الإنجليزية ان يعطيني التوضيح باللغة العربية)					
15. When I have doubts, I ask the English language teacher for a clarification in English. (عندما يكون لدي استفسار اطلب من معلم اللغة الإنجليزية ان يعطيني التوضيح باللغة الإنجليزية)					



## **Appendix 2**

### **Semi-structured interview**

1. What is your qualification?
2. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
3. How long have you been teaching in institution?
4. Do foundation students make a lot of errors in writing?
5. What type of writing errors do they make?
6. What are the most recurrent writing errors?
7. What are the least recurrent writing errors?
8. In your viewpoint, what is / are the cause(s) of these writing errors?
9. Do you think that students make writing errors due to their L1 ( Arabic) interference? Why/Why not?
10. Do you believe that knowing the reasons behind these errors can make the process of teaching easier for you? Why/Why not?
11. To what extent do you give much importance to error correction?
12. a. Do you ask your foundation students to correct their writing errors themselves?  
b-If the answer is “yes”, how often do you do that?
13. In your opinion, how can these writing errors influence foundation students’ writing skills?
14. What are the solutions or strategies you recommend to help students avoid or minimize their errors in writing?