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IMPACT OF GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY AND GENDER ON WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG SAUDI EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between grammatical accuracy and writing proficiency among Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, focusing on three recurrent error categories: subject-verb agreement (SVA), prepositions, and articles. Argumentative essays written by undergraduate students enrolled in a writing course were assessed by human raters using a grammatical error-based rubric, and Grammarly's automated scoring system. Errors were further analyzed for type (omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends) and source (interlingual vs. intralingual). The findings revealed statistically significant negative correlations between all three error categories and writing proficiency when scored by human raters, with SVA errors exerting the strongest influence, followed by article and preposition errors. In contrast, Grammarly's automated scores showed no significant correlation with error frequencies, suggesting discrepancies between human and machine evaluations of accuracy. Gender-based comparisons using independent sample t-tests showed no significant differences in writing proficiency across either scoring system, indicating that male and female learners demonstrated comparable performance. Analysis of error patterns highlighted misformation as the dominant error in SVA, misselection in prepositions, and addition in articles, whereas intralingual factors emerged as the primary source of errors across all categories, with interlingual influence particularly evident in prepositions and articles. These results underscore the central role of grammatical competence in shaping writing proficiency, reveal the limitations of relying solely on automated assessment tools, and demonstrate that gender is not a determining factor in grammatical accuracy within the Saudi EFL context. Overall, this study provides critical insights into language pedagogy in Arabic-speaking environments, emphasizing the need for targeted grammar instruction prioritizing SVA, preposition use, and article mastery in developing writing proficiency.

KEYWORDS: EFL Writing, Grammatical Errors, Subject-Verb Agreement, Prepositions, Articles, Saudi Learners, Intralingual and Interlingual Errors, Human Vs. Automated Scoring.

1. INTRODUCTION

To master English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learners must acquire four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While listening and reading are receptive skills, speaking and writing are productive, requiring learners to generate language (Ramadan, 2019). Among these, writing is particularly complex, demanding both linguistic and cognitive abilities, including vocabulary, grammar, organization, and syntax (Bassot, 2015; Faller, 2018; Maharani, 2018; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Unsurprisingly, many EFL learners struggle with writing, often because of their limited lexical and grammatical knowledge (Hakiki, 2021).

Although grammatical competence plays a crucial role in conveying ideas clearly and accurately (Perdana & Farida, 2019), grammatical errors remain pervasive in EFL writing (Jayasundara & Premarathna, 2011; Sawalmeh, 2013). Common challenges include punctuation, spelling, capitalization, organization, and sentence-level errors (Habibi et al., 2017). To address these difficulties, error analysis (EA) has been widely employed to identify and explain learner mistakes. Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined EA as “the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners,” while James (2001) emphasized its role in investigating what learners do not know, and how they attempt to compensate. Corder’s (1974) outline of the five stages of EA—sampling, identifying, classifying, explaining, and evaluating errors—provides insights into both learners’ difficulties and the required pedagogical interventions.

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most demanding skills for EFL learners, particularly in achieving linguistic accuracy (Xie, 2019). Students frequently produce unintended errors stemming from their limited knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018; Pratiwi, 2016). Specifically, Abushihab et al. (2011) found that prepositions and morphological forms were among the most frequent errors made by learners, while Brown (1994) distinguished between “mistakes” (slips in performance) and “errors” (systematic gaps in interlanguage competence). These difficulties are further compounded by limited practice (Berry, 2021), interference from the learners’ first language (Hinkel, 2024), and traditional teaching methods that emphasize memorization over authentic language use (Xavier & Chia, 2024).

In the Saudi context, research has shown that students often struggle with grammatical features

such as subject-verb agreement (SVA), prepositions, and sentence structure (Alkhatib, 2020; Al-Towity, 2021). Sawalmeh (2013), for instance, found Saudi learners to produce frequent errors in SVA, prepositions, articles, and other grammatical areas, with issues such as double negatives and sentence fragments recurring across essays.

In recent years, feedback technologies have become integral to EFL writing instruction, with Grammarly gaining prominence as one of the most reliable automated writing evaluation tools (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016; Perdana & Farida, 2019), supporting both teachers and learners by rapidly detecting and correcting grammatical errors (Fahmi & Rachmijati, 2021; Mammadova, 2019; Nova, 2018). Beyond identifying spelling and grammar issues, it also provides feedback on style, sentence structure, punctuation, and vocabulary (O’Neill & Russell, 2019). Studies have highlighted its potential to reduce errors and enhance writing confidence (Ambarwati, 2021; Nova, 2018; Perdana et al., 2021; Yulianti, 2018). Although such tools cannot completely replace teacher feedback, they represent a significant pedagogical advancement in fostering learner autonomy. However, while Grammarly’s role in improving writing accuracy is well-established, little is known about how its evaluations compare with those of human raters when applied to specific grammatical categories.

Another factor that could influence EFL writing outcomes is gender, although research presents mixed evidence. Some studies suggest that male students outperform females in English tests, often attributing this to differences in motivation and societal expectations (Hasan & Khan, 2015), whereas others argue that females show higher motivation and achieve better results (Furtina et al., 2016; Rudd, 2018). Simultaneously, various studies have also reported no significant gender-based differences in grammar or writing performance (Alharthi, 2025; Obeidat & Alomari, 2020). This inconsistency highlights the need for further research. Moreover, few studies have examined gender differences in grammatical performance (Alharthi, 2024; Javid et al., 2013), and none have used a dual assessment system (human scoring and Grammarly).

Although numerous studies have addressed SVA (Mali & Yulia, 2012; Mayasari & Sari, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023; Solehah et al., 2023), prepositions (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Saravanan & Lakshmikantham, 2019), and articles (Alhaysony, 2012; Smith, 2001) on their own, all three have not been simultaneously investigated in relation to writing proficiency. More importantly, no study has

explored whether the correlation with writing scores differs by gender when evaluated by either human raters or Grammarly.

In light of these gaps, the present study aims to examine the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between EFL students' proficiency in the use of SVA, prepositions, and articles, and their writing proficiency scores?
2. Which of these three elements shows the strongest correlation with EFL writing proficiency scores?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in the writing proficiency scores of male and female EFL students?
4. What are the patterns of errors (omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends) and their sources (interlingual and intralingual) in SVA, prepositions, and articles among male and female EFL students?

The significance of this study can be highlighted in three key areas. First, it contributes to applied linguistics research by providing empirical evidence of how grammatical competence influences EFL writing proficiency in the Saudi context. Such findings not only enrich the literature on second language acquisition but also invite comparative investigations across different linguistic and cultural settings. Second, the study advances existing scholarship by examining three grammatical categories—SVA, prepositions, and articles—together, rather than in isolation. This integrated approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of their relative impact on writing proficiency, an area that has not been adequately addressed in prior research. Finally, the study extends the discussion of gender in EFL writing by analyzing whether male and female students differ in error frequency and types across these categories. As such, it addresses a gap in Arabic-speaking educational contexts and provides a foundation for future studies on gender and grammar in foreign language learning.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts James' (1998) error taxonomy, which classifies errors into six types: omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends. Omission refers to the absence of an obligatory item, whereas addition denotes the presence of an unnecessary element. Misformation involves the use of an incorrect form, while misselection refers to the choice of an inappropriate item, misordering reflects an incorrect arrangement

of elements, and blends occur when two linguistic forms are combined erroneously.

All errors in the selected grammatical categories—SVA, prepositions, and articles—were identified and categorized according to this taxonomy to determine their frequency. Moreover, error sources were analyzed following Richards' (1971) distinction between interlingual errors resulting from first-language interference and intralingual errors stemming from incomplete knowledge of the target language. This dual framework allows for a systematic examination of both types and sources of errors, thereby providing insights into learners' grammatical development.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Corder introduced EA in the 1960s as a reaction to contrastive analysis. Unlike earlier views that treated errors as undesirable, EA highlighted them as evidence of the learning process (Ellis, 1986). Corder (1967, 1974) emphasized that errors provide insight into learners' interlanguage development and offer feedback for teachers. Richards (1971) further distinguished between interlingual errors caused by L1 interference and intralingual errors resulting from incomplete mastery of L2 rules.

Much of the EA research on grammar has focused on SVA. Studies have consistently reported omissions and misinformation to be the most frequent errors. For instance, Mayasari and Sari (2024) identified misinformation as the most common, while Solehah et al. (2023) and Ramzan et al. (2023) highlighted omission as the dominant error type. Meanwhile, Mali and Yulia (2012) found errors were largely caused by ignorance of rules and incomplete applications, and more recent studies add further nuances: analyzing BA students' academic writing, Ayaz et al. (2024) reported omission, addition, and misinformation errors, classifying them as interlingual or intralingual. Wahyuni (2022) also traced SVA errors in business letters to both interlingual and intralingual sources, whereas Tampubolon (2020) observed that misinformation errors were dominant in essay writing. Even as these studies collectively confirm the persistence of SVA errors, they remain largely descriptive, seldom connecting error patterns to overall writing proficiency.

Research on prepositions has similarly underscored the role of L1 interference. Saravanan and Lakshmikantham (2019) found addition errors to be the most common among Indian learners, while Yousefi et al. (2014) showed that Persian learners' errors were primarily due to transfer from their first

language. Ferdian (2022) also reported omission as the most frequent error type, highlighting the combined influence of interlingual and intralingual factors. Although these studies demonstrate the difficulty of preposition acquisition, they are often limited by small samples or reliance on test-based instruments.

Article errors are particularly frequent among Saudi learners. Alhaysony (2012) and Al-Mohanna (2014) reported the recurrent omission of the indefinite article 'a' and misuse of the definite article the, reflecting negative transfer from Arabic. Bakri (2023) further confirmed that most article errors were interlingual, with misuse of 'the' as the most common. While highlighting persistent challenges with articles, these studies rarely address how such errors affect broader writing outcomes.

Beyond grammar, two strands of research provide additional context. Findings on gender differences in EFL grammar remain inconsistent: some report female advantages linked to engagement and strategy use (Alharbi, 2022), others suggest male strengths (Koç, 2022), while several find no significant differences (Alharthi, 2024; Faruk & Saha, 2016). Importantly, Almusharraf and Alotaibi (2021) compared graduate students' writing using both automated and human evaluations and found no gender disparities. While this highlights the value of combining assessment methods, the study did not focus on specific grammatical categories, thereby limiting its contribution to grammar-focused research.

The second line of research concerns automated feedback tools. Grammarly has emerged as one of the most widely used tools, with studies showing that it reduces surface-level errors and improves learner confidence (Ghufron & Rosyida, 2018). However, the drawbacks include overcorrection and misleading feedback (Aidil, 2021). Most importantly, while Grammarly's pedagogical value is clear, prior research has tended to evaluate it as a standalone tool rather than comparing its performance with that of human raters in targeted grammar categories.

In summary, while previous studies provide insights into errors in SVA, prepositions, and articles, they are largely descriptive, context-specific, and rarely link error types to overall writing proficiency. To date, no research has systematically compared human and automated evaluations of these grammatical categories, while also considering gender differences. This study aims to address this gap.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative design to investigate writing errors in three grammatical categories—SVA, prepositions, and articles—and their relationship to writing proficiency. Errors were analyzed according to type (omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends) and source (interlingual or intralingual). Writing proficiency was assessed using two complementary measures: human raters, based on error counts in the selected categories, and the overall score of Grammarly (premium version).

4.2. Participants

This study was conducted during the first semester of the 2025 academic year at the College of Languages and Translation in a Saudi university. The participants were third-year English majors (Level 5), aged 19–20, whose native language was Arabic. All participants had completed three prior writing courses (approximately nine credit hours). Of the 70 students initially invited, 42 completed the essay assignment: 21 males and 21 females, enrolled in the same writing course (Eng 3). Due to the gender-segregated nature of Saudi higher education, male and female groups were taught separately: males by a male professor and females by a female. Male and female instructors have an extended teaching experience. Both groups studied from the same textbook, *Effective Academic Writing* (Liss & Davis, 2006), and received two weekly lessons (150 minutes each). All participants performed the same essay task simultaneously.

4.3. Data Collection

In Week 5 of the semester, one week before the midterm exam, participants were asked to write a 300–350-word argumentative essay within 45 minutes on the topic: *Living in big cities: Do you agree or disagree, and why?* This topic was intended to be familiar to students, ensuring that all students had sufficient background knowledge. All students received a brief lecture outlining the experiment's goal and the importance of their participation in this study; no student received prior feedback on the writing task or data collection before the writing session. The essays were handwritten and subsequently transcribed into Microsoft Word to facilitate data analysis.

4.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed according to Corder's (1967) method of collecting the sample, identifying the errors, and describing these errors. The

researcher identified three main areas of errors: SVA, prepositions, and articles. The researcher then employed two scoring systems to allow for a clear comparison. First, a human assessment was conducted based on selected grammatical error categories, with each error resulting in a deduction of one point from the overall score of 100. Second, an automated assessment was performed using Grammarly. The numerical data obtained were used for statistical analysis.

4.5. Interrater Reliability

The researcher used two scoring systems: First, human raters examined the relationship between male and female writing using a predefined set of grammatical error categories (SVA, prepositions, and articles). Second, Grammarly Premium was used to analyze whole essays, producing an overall score. Regarding the human rater score, all essays were graded twice for interrater reliability. After rechecking, the results were considered acceptable, and the rating was reliable as there were no differences between the first and second checks.

Moreover, each investigated error was analyzed to determine its type according to James' (1998) classification: omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends. Each of these errors was then classified by source as either interlingual or intralingual (Richard, 1971). To analyze the relationship between students' proficiency in the use of SVA, prepositions, and articles (measured by the number of errors in each

area) and their writing scores, as evaluated by both human raters and an automated tool, the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was employed. This statistic was used to determine the direction (positive or negative) and strength of the correlation.

To compare these three grammatical categories and examine which had the strongest correlation with overall EFL writing proficiency, we compared the absolute values of the correlation coefficients, disregarding negative signs. A value closer to one indicated a stronger relationship. An independent t -test was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the two groups (male and female) in their overall writing proficiency. A p -value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze error patterns or types (omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends) and their sources (interlingual and intralingual) within the three grammatical categories. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the frequencies and percentages of both error types and sources.

5. RESULTS

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between EFL students' grammatical accuracy in SVA, prepositions, and articles, and their writing proficiency. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficients Between Grammatical Errors and Writing Proficiency (Human Raters and Grammarly Scores).

Grammatical Areas	Writing Proficiency					
	Human Raters Based on Selected Grammatical Categories			Grammarly Overall Writing Score		
	Pearson Correlation	p-value	Statistical Decision	Pearson Correlation	p-value	Statistical Decision
Subject-Verb Agreement	-0.80**	0.01	Significant negative correlation.	-0.12	0.44	No correlation
Prepositions Errors	-0.41**	0.01	Significant negative correlation.	-0.06	0.72	No correlation
Articles Errors	-0.46**	0.01	Significant negative correlation.	0.17	0.26	No correlation

Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients between students' grammatical errors and their overall writing proficiency as assessed by both human raters and Grammarly. For **SVA**, a strong and statistically significant negative correlation was found with human scores ($r = -0.80$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher numbers of SVA errors were associated with lower writing proficiency. However, the correlation with Grammarly scores was not significant ($r = -0.12$, $p = .44$).

For **prepositions**, the results revealed a moderate but significant negative correlation with human scores ($r = -0.41$, $p < .01$), suggesting that prepositional errors also contributed to lower writing performance. No significant relationship was observed between Grammarly scores and the dependent variable ($r = -0.06$, $p = .72$).

For **articles**, a significant negative correlation was again observed with human scores ($r = -0.46$, $p < .01$), indicating that more article errors were linked to

reduced writing quality. The correlation with Grammarly scores was negative, but not statistically significant ($r = 0.17$, $p = .26$).

Overall, the results indicated that all three grammatical categories negatively affected writing proficiency when assessed by human raters, with SVA showing the strongest effect. In contrast, Grammarly did not show significant sensitivity to errors in any of the three categories.

To address the second research question, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the

three grammatical error types (SVA, prepositions, and articles) and students' writing performance, based solely on human raters' evaluations. This was because only human ratings showed statistically significant negative correlations with grammatical errors (see Table 1), whereas Grammarly scores did not. Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients and their significance, highlighting the grammatical categories with the strongest impact on writing proficiency.

Table 2: Strength Of Correlations Between Grammatical Error Types and Writing Proficiency Based on Human Raters

Grammatical Areas	Writing Proficiency		
	Human Raters Based on Selected Grammatical Categories		
	Pearson Correlation	p-value	Strength of Correlation
Subject-Verb Agreement	-0.80**	0.01	Strong negative
Preposition Errors	-0.41**	0.01	Moderate negative
Article Errors	-0.46**	0.01	Moderate negative

As shown in Table 2, SVA errors exhibited the strongest and most significant negative correlation with writing scores ($r = -0.80$, $p < .01$), indicating that frequent errors in this category substantially reduced students' performance. Article errors also demonstrated a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.46$, $p < .01$), followed by preposition errors ($r = -0.41$, $p < .01$). Although both article and preposition errors negatively affected writing quality, their impact was moderate compared to the strong influence of SVA errors. These results underscore the central importance of SVA in determining overall writing proficiency, while also highlighting that

errors in articles and prepositions contribute to reduced performance, albeit to a lesser degree.

To address the third research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether there were statistically significant differences between male and female students' mean writing proficiency scores. Writing performance was assessed in two ways: (a) human raters' scores based on selected grammatical categories, and (b) Grammarly's overall automated scores. The results of the human rater evaluations are presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Independent-Samples T-Test Comparing Male and Female Students' Mean Scores in EFL Writing Proficiency Based on Human Rating.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value	Statistical Decision
Male	21.00	93.48	2.64	1.28	0.21	No differences between males and females
Female	21.00	94.57	2.91			

The results in Table 3 show that the writing proficiency of male ($M = 93.48$, $SD = 2.64$) and female students ($M = 94.57$, $SD = 2.91$) did not differ significantly. The independent-samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference

between the two groups ($t = 1.28$, $p = .21$), as the p-value exceeded the threshold of .05. In other words, based on human raters' evaluations, male and female students performed comparably in EFL writing proficiency.

Table: Independent-Samples T-Test Comparing Male and Female Students' Mean Scores in Overall EFL Writing Proficiency Based on Automated Scoring (Grammarly).

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value	Statistical Decision
Male	21	43.95	10.50	0.28	0.78	No differences between males and females
Female	21	43.10	9.65			

As seen in Table 4, the mean Grammarly score for male students ($M = 43.95$, $SD = 10.50$) did not differ significantly from that of females ($M = 43.10$, $SD = 9.65$). The independent samples t-test confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t = 0.28$, $p = .78$), as the p-value was well above the 0.05 threshold. These findings suggest that gender is not a determining factor in students' writing proficiency according to automated measures. Both male and female students demonstrated comparable levels of performance, reflecting a general homogeneity in their writing

ability in EFL.

To address the fourth research question, descriptive analysis was conducted using frequencies and percentages. The analysis examined error types (omission, addition, misformation, misordering, misselection, and blends) and error sources (interlingual and intralingual) across three grammatical categories (SVA, prepositions, and articles) for both male and female students.

Error Types

Table 5: Distribution Of Error Types by Grammatical Area and Gender.

Grammatical Areas	Gender	Error types												Total	
		Omission		Addition		Mis-formation		Mis-ordering		Mis-selection		Blends			
		NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%
Subject-Verb Agreement	Male	10	16.1	0	0.0	30	48.4	0	0	22	35.5	0	0	62	100.0
	Female	1	1.8	1	1.8	30	53.6	0	0	24	42.9	0	0	56	100.0
Preposition Errors	Male	8	22.9	6	17.1	3	8.6	0	0	18	51.4	0	0	35	100.0
	Female	5	15.6	9	28.1	0	0.0	0	0	18	56.3	0	0	32	100.0
Article Errors (Word Order)	Male	15	38.5	23	59.0	0	0.0	0	0	1	2.6	0	0	39	100.0
	Female	4	16.0	17	68.0	0	0.0	0	0	4	16.0	0	0	25	100.0

Note: Percentages Are Calculated Within Gender Groups For Each Grammatical Area.

The distribution in Table 5 highlights several clear trends across grammatical areas. For SVA, both male and female students struggled most with misformation (48.4% and 53.6%, respectively), indicating persistent difficulties in verb conjugation. Misselection was the second most frequent error, particularly among females (42.9%), while omission was more common among males (16.1%). Prepositions followed a similar pattern, with misselection being the dominant error type for both groups (males 51.4%, females 56.3%), confirming widespread challenges in choosing appropriate forms. Gender-based tendencies were also evident; males often omitted prepositions (22.9%), whereas females were more likely to add unnecessary prepositions (28.1%). For articles, addition errors were the most prevalent in both groups (males 59.0%, females 68.0%), reflecting a general tendency to overuse definite and indefinite articles. However,

males showed higher omission rates (38.5%), whereas females demonstrated relatively more misselection (16.0%). To sum up, the most frequent error types across all categories were **misformation, addition, and misselection**. Both genders struggled with **SVA**, particularly in verb conjugation and verb-form selection. With regard to **prepositions**, the main issue was correct selection, although males leaned toward omission, and females toward addition. In **articles**, the dominant difficulty was overuse (addition), especially among females, whereas omission was more pronounced among males.

Despite minor gender differences, the findings indicate shared difficulties in mastering these grammatical features, underscoring the need for targeted pedagogical interventions.

Error Sources

Tables 6: Distribution of Interlingual and Intralingual Error Sources Across Grammatical Areas and Gender.

Grammatical Areas	Gender	Error Sources				Total	
		Interlingual		Intralingual			
		NO	%	NO	%	NO	%
Subject-Verb Agreement	Male	2	3.2	60	96.8	62	100.0
	Female	4	7.1	52	92.9	56	100.0
Prepositions Errors	Male	9	25.7	26	74.3	35	100.0
	Female	11	34.4	21	65.6	32	100.0
Article Errors (Word Order)	Male	14	35.9	25	64.1	39	100.0
	Female	8	32.0	17	68.0	25	100.0

Table 6 presents the distribution of grammatical error sources (interlingual vs. intralingual) across

SVA, prepositions, and articles, classified by gender. For SVA, the vast majority of errors stemmed from

intralingual sources (males: 96.8%; females: 92.9%), while interlingual errors were minimal (3.2% and 7.1%, respectively). This suggests that challenges in this area are primarily due to the complexity of English agreement rules rather than mother-tongue interference. In the case of prepositions, intralingual errors still dominated (74.3% for males and 65.6% for females), but interlingual influence increased substantially (25.7% and 34.4% for males and females, respectively). This reflects the structural differences between Arabic and English, indicating that students often rely on native language transfer when using prepositions. For articles, the distribution was more balanced: intralingual errors remained higher (64.1% for males and 68% for females), but interlingual errors also accounted for a notable proportion (35.9% and 32%). These results highlight that the difficulties with articles arise both from the absence of a comparable system in Arabic and from incomplete mastery of English rules.

Overall, intralingual errors were the most frequent across all grammatical categories, reflecting the learners' incomplete internalization of English rules. Nonetheless, interlingual interference remained evident, particularly in the use of prepositions and articles, underscoring the dual impact of L1 transfer and L2 developmental challenges on EFL learners' writing.

6. DISCUSSION

To analyze the study findings, this section examines the results for each research question. The findings for the first research question demonstrated three significant correlations. SVA errors showed the strongest negative relationship with writing proficiency ($r = -0.80$, $p = 0.01$). Students who produced more agreement errors consistently received lower scores, confirming that mastery of this feature was a central indicator of grammatical competence and overall writing quality. This result supports Shafira (2021), who found that SVA mastery directly improves descriptive writing ability, as well as Betoni and Ulfaika (2020), who linked grammatical knowledge with higher writing achievement.

Prepositional errors were also negatively correlated with writing proficiency ($r = -0.41$, $p = 0.01$). The misuse or omission of prepositions disrupts cohesion and reduces the clarity of written texts. This aligns with Erarslan and Hol (2014), who reported that lower-level learners made more prepositional errors, and with Al-Bawaleez and Abdullah (2023), who confirmed that frequent prepositional errors predict weaker writing performance.

Similarly, article errors were moderately but significantly related to lower writing proficiency ($r = -0.46$, $p = 0.01$); incorrect article use leads to ambiguity and weakens the precision of communication. This finding resonated with Elyildirim (2019), who observed that article errors persist across proficiency levels, although accuracy improves with greater mastery.

In summary, writing proficiency was most strongly affected by SVA, followed by articles and prepositions. These results highlight grammar as a decisive factor in EFL writing, and underscore the need for focused instruction in these areas to enhance accuracy and overall proficiency.

The results for the second research question confirm that SVA errors revealed the strongest negative influence on writing proficiency, with a large, statistically significant correlation ($r = -0.80$, $p = 0.01$). Students who struggled with agreement consistently scored lower, highlighting its central role in grammatical accuracy. While preposition errors ($r = -0.41$, $p = 0.01$) and article errors ($r = -0.46$, $p = 0.01$) also negatively affected writing proficiency, their impact was comparatively moderate. Together, these findings posit SVA as the most decisive grammatical factor, shaping overall writing quality.

Given its instrumentality in English sentence construction, SVA errors reduce clarity and precision by obscuring who performs an action or what action is performed. The difficulty is partly structural, as English often separates the subject from its verb, making it more difficult to maintain agreement. Collective nouns, such as *team*, *family*, or *government*, further complicate the process, as learners may be misled about their grammatical numbers. These challenges are intensified for Arabic-speaking learners, as agreement systems differ substantially across the two languages. While Arabic requires verbs to agree with the subject in person, number, and gender, English primarily enforces number-based agreement. This mismatch can easily result in errors, as noted by Febriyanti (2019).

This study's results are consistent with those of Putri et al. (2023), who reported that Indonesian learners found agreement particularly challenging when linking subjects with modals, auxiliaries, or full verbs. Similarly, Nurjanah (2017) showed that students frequently misapplied agreement patterns in the present tense, confirming the persistence of this difficulty. Both studies highlight the combined role of intra-lingual and inter-lingual sources in shaping learners' errors: incomplete mastery of English rules interacts with interference from the first language, compounding the problem.

In sum, the findings show that among the three grammatical categories investigated, SVA stands out as the most powerful predictor of writing proficiency, with errors in prepositions and articles having a less intense contribution. This suggests that effective instruction in agreement rules, along with support for article and preposition usage, is crucial for strengthening EFL learners' overall writing ability.

Regarding the third research question, the results revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female students' writing proficiency, whether assessed by human raters or automated scoring. In other words, gender did not play a decisive role in shaping student writing performance, suggesting that proficiency in this context is more closely tied to grammatical competence and individual learning factors. This resonates with the broader debate in applied linguistics, where evidence of gender differences remains inconclusive. Ellis (1994) noted that results across second language acquisition studies vary considerably, while Du et al. (2025) observed that linguistic differences between males and females are often shaped by broader cultural and pragmatic patterns, rather than inherent ability. For example, research on spoken interaction highlights contrasts in politeness strategies, conversational control, and directness (Tran, 2021); however, such differences do not necessarily translate into disparities in writing proficiency.

The absence of gender differences in this study may be attributed to the relative homogeneity of participants in terms of educational and cultural background. When learners share comparable instructional contexts and exposure to English, their performance is expected to converge regardless of gender. Similar conclusions were drawn by Almahammed (2016), who found parity between male and female learners' use of English prepositions. Examining Iranian learners' written productions, Abusaeedi et al. (2015) also found that errors largely stemmed from intralingual interference rather than gender.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while gender-based differences may surface in spoken pragmatics, they are less influential in written contexts. Instead, EFL learners' writing proficiency appears to be shaped primarily by linguistic competence, instructional practices, and exposure to English, rather than gender identity.

The results for the fourth research question provide insights into both the patterns and sources of errors made by male and female EFL learners.

Regarding error patterns, misinformation emerged as the most frequent type of SVA for both groups (males 48.4%, females 53.6%), reflecting limited mastery of grammatical rules rather than influence from the first language. This aligns with Gunawan et al. (2018), who similarly reported misinformation as the dominant error type among Indonesian learners. Misselection was the most common (males 51.4%, females 56.3%), indicating that learners often substituted one preposition for another. Such errors are unsurprising, given the substantial structural differences between English and Arabic prepositional systems, as emphasized by Almahammed (2016). In the case of articles, addition errors predominated (males 59.0%, females 68.0%), with students frequently inserting unnecessary articles. This overgeneralization likely stems from attempts to clarify meaning or apply rules too broadly, a finding consistent with that of Puspita and Suswanto (2023), who attributed similar tendencies to first language influence. Overall, misinformation, addition, and misselection were the most persistent patterns, with only minor gender-based variations.

Regarding error sources, the analysis revealed that intralingual factors were predominant across all three grammatical areas. Regarding SVA, 96.8% of male errors and 92.9% of female errors were intralingual, suggesting that difficulties arose mainly from the complexity of English agreement rules rather than Arabic interference. These findings echo those of Ayaz et al. (2024) and Al Dubib (2013), who also identified intralingual as the primary source of learners' writing errors. Prepositional errors, while still mainly intralingual, played a greater role in interlingual influence than SVA, with 25.7% of male errors and 34.4% of female errors stemming from Arabic transfer. This is consistent with Almahammed's (2016) conclusion that the intricacy of the English prepositional system itself is a major barrier to accurate usage. For articles, both intralingual and interlingual errors were observed, with intralingual errors being slightly more common (males 64.1%, females 68.0%) than interlingual (males 35.9%, females 32.0%). Although learners struggled due to overgeneralization and incomplete rule acquisition, Arabic-English differences also played a role. Similarly, Abdulla (2024) found that learners' difficulties with definite and indefinite articles stemmed from the combined effects of linguistic complexity and native language transfer.

In sum, the analysis shows that error patterns were dominated by misinformation, addition, and misselection, while error sources were overwhelmingly intralingual, particularly in SVA.

Nevertheless, interlingual influence remained significant in prepositions and articles, underscoring the dual challenges learners face: mastering the complexity of English grammar while managing interference from their first language.

6.1. Limitations And Suggestions For Future Research

Although this study offers valuable insights into the link between grammatical errors and writing proficiency among Saudi EFL learners, it has several limitations. For instance, its relatively small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research would thus benefit from larger and more diverse samples drawn from multiple institutions. Additionally, the study focused only on three grammatical categories—SVA, prepositions, and articles—without considering areas such as tense or pronoun usage, which may also significantly influence writing outcomes. Moreover, data collection relied on a single argumentative essay, which may not fully reflect learners' grammatical competence across different writing contexts or genres. Finally, the study adopted a purely quantitative approach, which, while effective for statistical analysis, did not provide deeper insights into learners' reasoning behind their errors. Future studies should therefore broaden their scope by including additional grammatical features, examining performance across multiple genres, and employing mixed-method designs. Such approaches would allow researchers to capture a more comprehensive view of learners' challenges and better explain the cognitive or linguistic factors underlying error production. This study used Grammarly, specifically the Review Suggestion feature, to generate overall scores. Future research could use Grammarly's Write and Generative AI features, which go beyond grammatical error detection to generate and rephrase text. Merging teacher feedback on grammar with AI feedback can enhance the efficacy and accuracy of grammar learning.

7. CONCLUSION

By exploring the relationship between grammatical accuracy and writing proficiency among Saudi EFL students, while also analyzing error types, error sources, and gender differences, this study found that SVA errors had the strongest negative correlation with writing proficiency as

judged by human raters, whereas preposition and article errors had moderate effects. However, automated scoring using Grammarly did not detect any significant correlations, underscoring the mismatch between machine feedback and human evaluation.

Error pattern analysis showed that misinformation, addition, and misselection were the most frequent types of errors, indicating persistent learner difficulties in applying grammatical rules and selecting appropriate forms. Intralingual errors were dominant overall, particularly in SVA, whereas interlingual interference was more pronounced in prepositions and articles, reflecting the combined impact of incomplete target language knowledge and first-language transfer.

No statistically significant differences emerged between male and female students in terms of overall proficiency scores, whether rated by human raters or Grammarly. Nonetheless, some gendered tendencies were observed, with males more prone to omission and females to addition or misselection.

Taken together, these results contribute to a clearer understanding of the persistent grammatical challenges faced by EFL learners in academic writing and provide a foundation for addressing them through more targeted instruction and assessment practices.

7.1. Implications

As such, these findings have important pedagogical implications for EFL instruction. The strong link between SVA and writing proficiency highlights the need for sustained and systematic attention to this area in classroom practice. Learners should be provided with targeted tasks that reinforce accurate agreement patterns, given that mastery of this feature contributes directly to overall writing quality.

Concurrently, the persistence of errors in prepositions and articles underscores the importance of addressing these elements explicitly, especially given the structural differences between English and Arabic. Therefore, instructional materials and teaching strategies should integrate contrastive analysis to help learners anticipate areas where interference from the native language may occur.

Finally, the absence of gender-based differences in performance suggests that instructional approaches can be uniformly applied to both male and female learners.

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