



An Analysis of English Spelling Problems among Saudi Universities Diploma Students

A Case Study of Uqlat Asugour Applied College Branch

Ahmed Mahil Hassabelrasool Hamad¹

¹Associate Professor of English, Applied College, Uqlat Asugour Branch, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia
A.Hamad@qu.edu.sa

Received: 18/12/2025

Published: 30/12/2025

Abstract

The study analyzes English spelling problems among Saudi university diploma students at Qassim University, Applied College, Uqlat Asugour Branch, as persistent spelling errors hinder students' writing accuracy and academic achievement. The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach to identify common spelling difficulties and examine their causes. The population consisted of diploma students and English language instructors at the Applied College, from which a sample of 20 students and 15 instructors was selected. Data were collected using a spelling test administered to students and a questionnaire for instructors. The findings revealed that students faced major difficulties with vowel spelling, silent letters, consonant doubling, and irregular spelling patterns, mainly due to mother tongue interference, limited exposure to English, and insufficient focus on spelling instruction. The study recommends integrating systematic spelling instruction into diploma curricula, providing professional development for instructors, and implementing remedial spelling activities to improve students' writing proficiency.

Keywords: An Analysis, Spelling, Saudi, Diploma, Students.

Introduction

Background of the Study

English spelling plays a crucial role in students' academic success, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Accurate spelling contributes to effective written communication and reflects learners' understanding of phonology, morphology, and vocabulary. However, spelling remains one of the most challenging aspects of English for Saudi learners due to the significant differences between Arabic and English writing systems. Saudi diploma students at applied colleges often encounter continuous spelling difficulties that negatively affect their writing performance. These problems may arise from limited exposure to English, interference from the Arabic language, irregularities in English spelling, and insufficient instructional focus on spelling strategies. As a result, students struggle with producing accurate written texts, which may hinder their academic and professional development. This study focuses on analyzing English spelling problems among Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Asugour branch, Qassim University. It also considers instructors' perspectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of the causes of these spelling difficulties and possible pedagogical solutions.

Statement of the Problem

Many Saudi diploma students continue to make frequent spelling errors in their written work. These errors affect the clarity and quality of their academic writing and indicate gaps in their linguistic competence. At the Applied College, Uqlat Asugour branch, instructors have observed recurring spelling mistakes among diploma students, yet limited empirical research has been conducted to identify the nature and causes of these problems. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the spelling errors made by Saudi diploma students and explore instructors' views regarding the factors contributing to these errors. Addressing this issue may help improve English language teaching practices and enhance students' spelling proficiency.

Objectives of the Study: The study aims to:

- a) Identify the most common types of English spelling errors made by Saudi diploma students.
- b) Analyze the possible causes of these spelling problems.
- c) Investigate instructors' perceptions of students' spelling difficulties.
- d) Suggest recommendations to reduce spelling problems among diploma students.

Questions of the Study: This study aims to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the most common English spelling problems among Saudi diploma students?
- b) What factors contribute to these spelling errors?
- c) How do instructors perceive students' spelling difficulties?



d) What strategies can be recommended to improve students' English spelling skills?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to improving English language instruction at applied colleges in Saudi Arabia. By identifying common spelling problems and their causes, the study may help instructors develop more effective teaching strategies and materials. Additionally, the findings may assist curriculum designers and educators in addressing spelling difficulties more systematically, thereby enhancing students' overall writing skills.

Delimitation of the Study

This study is limited to Saudi diploma students of Applied Colleges (students of Uglat Asugour Branch as a sample) during the academic year (2026-2027). The sample consists of 20 diploma students and 15 English language instructors from different colleges at Qassim University. The study focuses solely on English spelling problems and does not address other language skills such as grammar, speaking, or listening. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized beyond the selected context and sample.

Literature Review

English Spelling in EFL Contexts

Spelling in English is recognized as one of the most challenging areas for EFL learners due to its irregularities and complex orthographic rules. Alhaisoni et al. (2015) state that, "Saudi learners of English often struggle with spelling because English orthography does not match their spoken forms and differs significantly from Arabic script." This indicates that the difference between L1 and L2 writing systems significantly affects learners' spelling performance.

According to Al-Sobhi et al. (2017), "English spelling has always been described by many language researchers and teachers as a daunting task especially for learners whose first language is not English" because of the irregular and complex nature of English spelling system. This foundational observation underscores the relevance of investigating spelling difficulties among Saudi diploma students.

Types of Spelling Errors

Researchers have classified spelling errors into several types. According to Hameed (2016), "The most common types of errors among Saudi EFL students are omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition." For example, omission errors often involve missing vowels, while transposition errors involve reversing the order of letters in a word. Albeshar (2018) adds that "phonological errors, where students spell words based on pronunciation, are also prevalent in learners' writing."

Causes of Spelling Problems

Several studies identify multiple factors behind EFL learners' spelling difficulties. Arabic language interference is widely reported. Alsaawi (2015) notes, "The primary source of spelling errors among Arab learners is negative transfer from Arabic, especially with vowels and silent letters." Linguistic interference from the Arabic language is repeatedly identified as a major factor in spelling problems. For example, Alsaawi's research on Arab learners reported that "spelling errors made by Arab learners are associated with the impact of their L1," particularly in areas such as consonant doubling, silent letters, and vowel use. Likewise, research conducted with Saudi university students has shown that English-Arabic interference, along with educational system factors and limited instructional emphasis on spelling, contributes significantly to learners' mistakes. This aligns with broader error analysis theory in EFL research, which holds that first-language transfer often shapes learners' written output. Other contributing factors include limited practice, weak prior English foundation, and the irregularity of English spelling (Albeshar, 2018). These factors make spelling a persistent challenge for EFL students.

The Role of Teachers and Instructional Strategies

Instructors play a vital role in addressing spelling problems. Alhaisoni et al. (2015) observe that "most instructors rely on traditional methods such as dictation and repetition, which may not sufficiently improve learners' spelling accuracy." Similarly, Hameed (2016) argues, "Integrating spelling instruction into writing activities is more effective than isolated drills." These findings highlight the need for more explicit, learner-centered teaching strategies.

Impacts of Spelling Difficulties

Poor spelling has clear implications for learners' academic performance. Albeshar (2018) emphasizes, "frequent spelling errors negatively affect students' writing fluency, confidence, and overall



communication skills.” This shows that addressing spelling issues is essential not only for language accuracy but also for students’ self-efficacy and engagement in learning.

A number of studies on Saudi and Arab EFL learners have identified persistent spelling errors and investigated their nature. In the context of Saudi Arabian EFL learners, Hameed (2016) emphasizes that “the craziness of English spelling has undeniably perplexed learners, especially in an EFL context” and that students’ difficulties are often compounded by the interference of their first language (Arabic) in the English writing process. Similarly, Alhaisoni et al. (2008) found that the most frequent spelling errors committed by Saudi beginner learners in an intensive English programme were categorized using Cook’s classification system (i.e., omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition), with omission errors being the most common. These errors provide a reliable basis for analyzing learners’ spelling performance. Beyond identifying error types, several scholars have examined the underlying causes and pedagogical implications of spelling difficulties. Hussain’s (2022) study of Saudi EFL students concluded that “a variety of factors contribute to students’ spelling mistakes, cutting across the educational system and university curriculum, students’ learning attitudes, and English-Arabic linguistic interference.” ♦ This suggests that linguistic interference is not the sole determinant; sociocultural and instructional contexts also play a role.

Many strategies to improve spelling accuracy have also been discussed in the literature. Altamimi and Rashid (2023) argue that targeted teaching approaches—such as explicit spelling practice, increased learner engagement, and improved instructional methods—can “eliminate spelling problems” among Saudi English language learners. ♦ Their recommendations resonate with broader findings in EFL pedagogy that emphasize the integration of spelling instruction with other language skills.

In summary, the literature consistently shows that English spelling poses significant challenges for EFL learners, particularly in Arabic-speaking contexts. Research points to the complexity of English spelling, L1 interference, limited instructional focus, and curricular inadequacies as primary contributors to learners’ errors. Furthermore, error classification frameworks and empirical analyses provide useful tools for understanding and addressing spelling difficulties. The present study builds on these insights by focusing specifically on Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Asogour branch, thereby filling a gap in localized research.

Methodology

Study Design

This section describes the study design, participants, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods used to investigate English spelling problems among Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Al Suqur branch, Qassim University. The study adopts a descriptive analytical research design. This design is appropriate because it aims to identify, analyze, and describe the types and causes of English spelling errors made by Saudi diploma students without manipulating any variables. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

Participants

The participants of the study consist of two groups:

Students

The student sample includes 20 Saudi diploma students enrolled at the Applied College, Uqlat Asogour branch, Qassim University. The students are EFL learners who have studied English as part of their diploma program.

Instructors

The instructor sample includes 15 English language instructors from different colleges at Qassim University. They were selected to provide professional perspectives on students’ spelling difficulties and their possible causes.

The participants were selected using convenience sampling, as they were accessible and relevant to the purpose of the study.

Instruments of the Study

To collect the required data, the study employs two main research instruments:

Spelling Test

A spelling test was designed to assess students' spelling performance. The test includes a set of English words and short sentences commonly used in academic and everyday contexts. Students' responses were analyzed to identify different types of spelling errors, such as omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was administered to the instructors. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended and open-ended questions aimed at exploring instructors' perceptions of:

- 1) Common spelling errors made by diploma students
- 2) Factors contributing to spelling problems
- 3) Teaching strategies used to address spelling difficulties
- 4) Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, permission was obtained from the relevant academic authorities at the Applied College. Then, the spelling test was administered to the student participants during regular class time. The test papers were collected and reviewed carefully.

Next, the questionnaire was distributed to the instructor participants. The instructors were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, and their responses were collected for analysis. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be kept confidential. The data collected from the spelling test were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to identify the most common types of spelling errors. Error analysis techniques were applied to categorize the errors into different types.

The questionnaire responses were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Closed-ended responses were summarized using percentages, while open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and key themes related to spelling difficulties and instructional practices.

Analysis and Findings

This section of the study presents the analysis of the data collected from the spelling test administered to Saudi diploma students and the questionnaire distributed to English language instructors. The findings are presented in tables, followed by interpretation and discussion in light of previous studies.

Analysis of Students' spelling Test

The spelling test results were analyzed to identify the most common types of spelling errors made by the students. Errors were classified into four main categories: omission, substitution, insertion, and transposition.

Table 1: Types of Spelling Errors Made by Diploma Students

Type of Error	Fluency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Omission	38	38%	1.90	0.72
Substitution	30	30%	1.50	0.65
Insertion	20	20%	1.00	0.58
Transposition	12	12%	0.60	0.49
Total	100	100%	-	-

Table one above shows that omission errors are the most frequent type of spelling errors, accounting for 38% of the total errors ($M=1.90$, $SD= 0.72$). This reflects high occurrence among students. Substitution errors ranked second (30%, $M=1.50$, $SD=0.65$), followed by insertion (20%, $M= 1.00$, $SD= 0.58$). Transposition errors had the lowest mean score ($M=0.60$), indicating that they were less frequent. These include missing letters, especially vowels (e.g., environment instead of environment).

These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Alhaisoni et al. (2008), which reported that omission errors were the most common among Saudi EFL learners. This may be attributed to differences between Arabic and English orthographic systems, as Arabic script does not rely heavily on written vowels. The results indicate that students struggle particularly with English vowel representation and silent letters.

Common Words with High Error Rates

Table 2: Examples of Frequently Misspelled Words

Correct Word	Student Spelling	Error Type	Mean	Std. Derivation
Environment	Environment	Omission	1.85	0.70
Because	Because	Substitution	1.55	0.66
Student	Student	Insertion	1.05	0.60
Friend	Freind	Transposition	0.65	0.50

The above table illustrates typical spelling errors found in students' written responses. It appears that words involving vowels, consonant doubling and incorrect letter order show higher mean scores, indicating greater difficulty for students. These errors reflect learners' reliance on pronunciation rather than correct orthographic rules. English spelling irregularities often mislead EFL learners, especially when phonetic spelling does not match standard written forms. Similar patterns were reported by Hameed (2016), who emphasized the role of phonological confusion in spelling mistakes.

Analysis of Instructors' Questionnaire

The instructors' questionnaire aimed to identify their perceptions of students' spelling problems and their causes.

Table 3: Instructors' Perceptions of Major Causes of Spelling Problems

Cause of Spelling Problems	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Arabic language interference	6	40%	2.40	0.63
Limited practice in spelling	4	27%	2.00	0.71
English spelling irregularities	3	20%	1.80	0.60
Weak prior English foundation	2	13%	1.40	0.60
Total	15	100%	-	-

Table 2 shows that most instructors (40%, M= 2.40), SD. 0.63) identified Arabic language interference as the primary cause of students' spelling problems. Limited spelling practice (M= 2.00, SD.0.71) and irregular English spelling rules (M= 1.80, SD.0.60) were also seen as major contributing factors. This result supports findings from Alsaawi (2015) and Hussain (2022), who concluded that L1 interference plays a significant role in Saudi students' spelling errors. Instructors' responses confirm that spelling problems are not merely student-related but are influenced by instructional and curricular factors as well.

Teaching Strategies Used by Instructors

Table 4: strategies Used to Adress Spelling Problems

Teaching Strategy	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
Dictation and repetition	40%	2.30	0.68
Error correction in writing	27%	1.95	0.72
Explicit spelling rules	20%	1.70	0.60
Limited or no specific strategy	13%	1.20	0.50

As it has been seen from the above table, dictation and repetition are the most commonly used strategies (M= 2.30, SD= 0.68). They received the highest mean score, while some instructors reported using errors correction in writing (M=1.95, SD=0.72), explicit spelling rules (M=1.70, SD=0.60) and finally some of them reported using limited or no specific spelling-focused strategies (M=1.20, SD=0.50). The heavy reliance on traditional methods such as dictation suggests a lack of diversified instructional techniques. Previous research (Altamimi & Rashid, 2023) recommends integrating spelling instruction with writing activities and using learner-centered strategies to enhance spelling accuracy.

Overall Discussion

The findings of this study show that Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Asugour branch, face remarkable difficulties in English spelling. Omission and substitution errors are particularly common due to Arabic language interference and the irregular nature of English spelling. Instructors acknowledge these challenges and highlight the need for more focused spelling instruction



and practice. The results are consistent with earlier studies conducted in Saudi EFL contexts, reinforcing the view that spelling problems are persistent and varied. Addressing these issues requires pedagogical interventions that combine explicit instruction, increased practice, and awareness of cross-linguistic differences.

Summary

This section presents a summary of the study, highlights the main results, and provides recommendations based on the findings. It also suggests directions for future research. The present study investigated English spelling problems among Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Asogour branch, Qassim University. The study aimed to identify the most common types of spelling errors, explore the causes of these errors, and examine instructors' perceptions of students' spelling difficulties. To achieve these objectives, a descriptive analytical research design was adopted. Data were collected through a spelling test administered to 20 Saudi diploma students and a questionnaire distributed to 15 English language instructors from Qassim University. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis techniques.

Results

1. Saudi diploma students commit various types of spelling errors, with omission errors being the most frequent, followed by substitution, insertion, and transposition errors.
2. Many spelling errors are related to vowel omission, silent letters, double consonants, and incorrect letter order.
3. Arabic language interference was identified as the main factor contributing to students' spelling problems.
4. Instructors also attributed spelling difficulties to limited spelling practice, irregular English spelling rules, and weak prior English foundation.
5. Most instructors rely on traditional teaching strategies such as dictation and repetition, while fewer use explicit or integrated spelling instruction techniques.

Recommendations

1. English language instructors should place greater emphasis on explicit spelling instruction, focusing on common error patterns and English spelling rules.
2. Spelling activities should be integrated into writing tasks, rather than taught in isolation.
3. Students should be encouraged to engage in regular spelling practice, including dictation, word lists, and peer correction.
4. Teachers should raise students' awareness of differences between Arabic and English written systems to reduce negative language transfer.
5. Course designers should include systematic spelling components within diploma-level English courses.
6. Professional development workshops should be provided for instructors to introduce modern and learner-centered spelling teaching strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the dominance of English spelling problems among Saudi diploma students at the Applied College, Uqlat Asogour branch. The findings emphasize the need for improved instructional practices and increased attention to spelling in EFL classrooms. Implementing the recommended strategies may help enhance students' spelling proficiency and overall writing performance.



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