

# Factors Influencing Secondary School Students' EFL Writing in Saudi Arabia

Khaled Aldossary<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Language Department, College of Arts, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Khaled Aldossary, English Language Department, College of Arts, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: kaldossary@kfu.edu.sa

Received: March 1, 2024      Accepted: April 28, 2024      Online Published: May 17, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n5p87

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n5p87>

## Abstract

English language proficiency is highly important in today's globalized world, and Saudi Arabia recognizes the need for its students to acquire strong English writing skills. However, Saudi secondary school students often face numerous challenges relating to the development of English writing abilities. This research paper analyses the multifaceted factors (i.e. linguistic, sociocultural, and educational) influencing Saudi secondary school students' English writing proficiency. Utilizing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 278 Saudi secondary school students by means of an online questionnaire. The results showed that linguistic factors had a positive effect on students' English writing in Saudi Arabia, that sociocultural factors had a significant influence, and that educational factors also had some effect. By addressing these factors and implementing the recommended strategies, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can work towards enhancing English writing instruction and, thus, improve students' English writing proficiency.

**Keywords:** Secondary school, students' English writing, linguistic factors, sociocultural factors, educational factors

## 1. Background to the Study

According to Ullah (2017), English has long been the most commonly used language globally. One in five people on the planet speak English, comprising an estimated 1.75 billion speakers (Al-Rojaie, 2023). According to a poll conducted in 2022 by the Economist Intelligence Unit, around 70% of company executives reported that to fulfill corporate growth goals, their personnel must be proficient in English (Ahmed, 2023). Employers must hire English-speaking workers to remain competitive and job seekers must know the language to be considered for top positions. As pointed out by Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014), when outsourcing employment, North American and British businesses are most concerned with educational attainment and English language competency. English proficiency is also necessary for success in the sciences and academia. For science students and instructors, being fluent in English is a prerequisite for entering the global academic community (Khan Pathan, 2021). According to Alnasser (2022), almost 70% of scientific and linguistic publications published globally are in English. English is also the primary language used for international conferences and debate panels. Successful academics are required to be able to communicate in English as it serves as a bridge between local, national, and worldwide research groups (Alrasheedi, 2020).

Most English as a foreign language (EFL) learners face several challenges when it comes to writing in the second language (L2) (Elyas & Picard, 2018). Based on anecdotal data, it seems that Arab EFL student writers are seen from Western perspectives as knowledge tellers, reporting facts, as opposed to knowledge converters, synthesizing information into ideas that are personally and critically relevant. Traditional writers view writing as following a set of rules and a predetermined framework and tend not to employ other rhetorical strategies. The formal educational system for Arabic-speaking English language learners is based on traditional drills and planned writing exercises (Hendal, 2021), and instead of writing freely, students are required to follow essay models. Moreover, Arab students find it challenging to compose in English due to the need to think while writing (Abu Rass, 2015). Contextual knowledge and adequate writing training could help all students become better writers. Arabs' perceptions of learning in general, and learning to write in an L2 in particular, are influenced by contextual factors, such as religious adherence, a cultural aversion to self-expression, and educational background. This raises doubts about the unfavorable stereotype that Arab students are inherently poor writers (Alrasheedi, 2020).

Saudi Arabia was placed 68<sup>th</sup> out of 70 countries in recent research that indexed the competences of non-native English-speaking nations (Education First, 2015). This analysis indicates that English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia and other nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is much lower than the worldwide average. Saudi Arabian participants scored among the lowest in the 2015 International English Language Testing System (IELTS) writing examination, with an average score of 4.6 on a 9-band scale (Al-Zubeiry, 2012). The intrinsic challenges of EFL instruction in the Saudi Arabian context may be blamed for some, but not all, these deficiencies. Many native speakers also find it difficult to learn to write (Alqahtani, 2019). However, learning to write is much harder and more challenging for non-native speakers, especially in an EFL context where English is not widely used. Writing in English is a must for success. Many English language learners believe that writing is the most challenging language skill to master (Alawfi, 2022; Al-Rojaie, 2023) and when the target language is written using a different alphabet than the original tongue, as is the case for Arabic speakers studying English, the difficulties are exacerbated. These EFL students are typically only familiar with writing in Arabic, so before they

can even accurately record sounds on paper, let alone articulate ideas coherently, they must master the radically different Roman alphabet (Al-Zubeiry, 2012). It is also not possible to ascribe their lack of English proficiency to a lack of education as Saudi students study English for a minimum of nine years. To gain a better understanding of the challenges high school students face in learning to write in English and how teachers may support them in enhancing their writing abilities for both academic and professional contexts, more research is required. This study therefore focused on examining the factors affecting secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Sociocultural Factors Impacting EFL Instruction

Social and cultural norms within a specific setting shape the conventions that instructors and students follow throughout the educational process, and such conventions govern information exchange and comprise a set of rules in any given situation. The social environment is critical as the belief systems and behavioral norms of the society are likely to influence how L2 are taught in classrooms (Shukri, 2014). Classrooms tend to have their own set of complicated social and behavioral rules. Social norms, for example, shape the attitudes and expectations of parents, institutional managers, and policymakers, as well as the relationships among students in the classroom. These factors contribute to the complexity and diversity of the classroom environment (Elyas & Picard, 2018; Liton, 2016; Shukri, 2014). Due to the impact of the sociocultural context on teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and student advancement, it plays a crucial role in the development of L2 acquisition.

The sociocultural setting of the language classroom is inextricably linked to the activities that take place there (AlMously et al., 2013). According to Shukri (2014), language instruction is embedded in the social environment, meaning that instruction and learning cannot occur in a setting isolated from students' every-day experiences and interpersonal interactions. What happens in exchanges between students and professors, as well as among students, is greatly influenced by the wider environment (Ullah, 2017). Moreover, it is thought that most students do not acquire languages through coursework. Indeed, in the Saudi environment, people tend to develop language skills—to varying degrees—at work, in the neighborhood, and on the streets (Alfaifi & Saleem, 2022). It follows that educators must design lessons that include Saudi cultural characteristics while maintaining a genuine linguistic feel. According to Aljahdali and Alshakhi (2021), this is essential in the Saudi context since EFL curricula do not adequately reflect the sociocultural spirit of the target language and do not include some aspects of local culture. Attaining the intended instructional outcomes therefore requires bridging such gaps and strengthening the cultural bonds between the learners' L1 and L2 (Hendal, 2021).

### 2.2 Culture and Writing in English

According to Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014), all educational processes are founded on the social and cultural norms of the teachers and students in a well-defined setting. English should not be taught apart from its culture, just as other languages, since language learning and teaching are morally and ethically influenced by a society's culture (Alrasheedi, 2020; Alshafi & Shin, 2017). The social setting in which learners are immersed in an L2 influences not only their desire to acquire the language but also their attitudes and ideas about it. The belief systems of students from various cultural origins often vary from one to another (Elyas & Picard, 2018). Because it was not subject to colonial authority, Saudi Arabia has not been impacted by any other culture, European or British (AlMously et al., 2013), which potentially makes learning English difficult. Learning English in Saudi Arabia is affected by several influences, among them cultural aspects. Due to their lack of exposure to the language, English language learners in Saudi Arabia would rather study from native English speakers. Saudi English language learners believe native speaker instructors to be more reliable and effective in their work (Alshammari, 2018).

Khan Pathan (2021) argues that writing variations may be attributed to cultural variables and meanings can be formed in a variety of ways. There is a risk of ethnocentrism among individuals who lack experience and knowledge of various cultures when it comes to learning to write or seeing certain authors as inferior (Khan Pathan, 2021). It is important, therefore, to recognize that there are distinctions in writing styles that might help us see that writing challenges are not personal issues with students (Alqahtani, 2019; Alzouebi et al., 2020). Teachers may make lessons and genres relevant to their context by candidly discussing students' first language (L1) writing experiences and rhetorical techniques and comparing them with the standards of target writing communities. Having this information will likely aid Arab students' understanding in the classroom (Ullah, 2017).

Since Kaplan's (1966) analysis of 600 students' essays written in their L2, writing instructors have been interested in the concept of cultural variations in rhetoric. Students from diverse backgrounds methodically develop and articulate their ideas differently from native English speakers (Hendal, 2021). In contrast to the primarily linear structure of English paragraphs, Arabic speakers tend to create written work through an indirect technique comprising a succession of parallel-coordinate "Oriental" sentences, and only address the main idea at the end (Gawi, 2012). Arab rhetoric is characterized by stylistic exaggeration, elaboration, repetition, and overemphasis (Alawfi, 2022). Arabic typically features repetition, which is a fundamental aspect of Arabic reasoning, while the Western form of argumentation relies on the syllogistic model of evidence (Alrasheedi, 2020). Moreover, according to Nouraldeen and Elyas (2014), syntactic discourse components in the L1 and past schooling have a considerable impact on writing in an L2.

### 2.3 Factors Involving Teachers and the Classroom Environment

EFL instructors face various difficulties in addition to the social and cultural aspects of language instruction, which directly affect

instruction and learning in the classroom (Ullah, 2017). Large class sizes, mixed-ability classrooms, different developmental needs, high parental and student expectations, inadequate resources, inappropriate textbook content, low proficiency among students, irregular contact hours, and a dearth of useful and efficient assessment tools are some of these issues (Al-Zubeiry, 2012). Furthermore, Mukattash (2003) lists the difficulties Arab instructors face, such as lacking a genuine setting, using outdated curricula, and receiving little professional development. Because of these difficulties, educators may not be able to provide an environment conducive to learning or accomplish curricular goals by following the suggested syllabus (Aljahdali & Alshakhi, 2021).

Restrictions imposed by institutional authorities have an impact on the teaching methods in EFL courses (Alnasser, 2022). Instructors are not free to choose any instructional strategy. Rather, they are constrained by societal norms, students' expectations, and educational institutions' and ministries' rules regarding pedagogy and methodology (Khan Pathan, 2021). Because of these factors, they attempt to satisfy the learners' social and educational demands by alternating between behaviors that are directed toward education and society. Consequently, selecting the optimal teaching strategy that suits the requirements and learning preferences of their students may be difficult for EFL instructors teaching a variety of skills (Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014). EFL environments such as Saudi Arabia require instructors to use a communicative approach. But older methods are still widely used by EFL instructors in the Arab region (Alnasser, 2022; Shukri, 2014).

Teachers in Saudi Arabia tend to favor conventional approaches and find it challenging to use communicative strategies because of a variety of institutional and sociocultural limitations (Hendal, 2021). In Asian contexts, it has been found that the encouragement given to EFL instructors to include communicative components in their lessons presents unique difficulties for them due to the disparities between Eastern and Western cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Shukri, 2014). Most instructional resources are imported from English-speaking nations, and as a result, they are challenging to apply and have little relevance to the local circumstances. Al-Rojaie (2023) states that to align communicative practices with the objectives of instruction and the needs of the setting, it is necessary to choose materials and analyze assignments with care.

#### *2.4 Factors Affecting EFL Learners' Motivation*

Effectively managing students is one of the main aspects that tests the talents and skills of EFL instructors. Students who do not participate in class activities often perform below expectations. These students commonly lack enthusiasm and struggle to participate in class. There is a claim that EFL teachers—especially those from the West—tend to attribute students' successes or setbacks to motivation levels (Ullah, 2017). According to Shabbir and Bughio (2009), this is one of the most difficult problems facing language instructors. Less driven students avoid participating in class, cheat more inventively than they learn, demand answers from their professors, and challenge their lecturers through go-betweens (Aljahdali & Alshakhi, 2021). According to Altukruni (2019), there is a severe lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in Saudi EFL classrooms. In a similar vein, Mukattash (2003) claims that instructors in Arab nations deal with significant problems related to students' ability, initial readiness, and motivation. They often lament their pupils' poor performance and assert that they have no interest in teaching the language (Shukri, 2014).

Some experts, however, contend that underachievement among students results from a mismatch between teaching and learning styles, or from a discrepancy between the pedagogical design and the learning process (Elyas & Picard, 2018; Shakoori, 2022). Lack of exposure to the L2 in the Arab culture may also be a contributing factor. Learners may reject active engagement and their language competence may suffer from lack of exposure. All things considered, instructors who want to foster their students' interest in language learning, facilitate dynamic courses, and accomplish the goals of their lessons face a significant obstacle due to the low motivation of EFL students (Elyas & Picard, 2018). Uncooperative and uncommunicative students hinder instructors from achieving their objectives in the classroom, whereas self-motivated students take ownership of their education (Zainab, 2016). Furthermore, variety in the language classroom is enhanced by students' autonomy. However, autonomy is a Western term with cultural specificities in interpretation that do not belong in non-Western context. Because of this, instructors may find it difficult to delegate decision-making and pedagogical responsibility to students, which may be at odds with their professional development, pedagogical convictions, and long-standing classroom practices (AlMously et al., 2013; Alnasser, 2022).

#### *2.5 The Arab Learner and Writing*

Language in the Arab World is diglossic, taking two forms: classical and colloquial. Major Arabic-speaking nations have several vernaculars, including colloquial Arabic (Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014). Classical Arabic is the traditional written form, reflecting the language used in the Quran. Islam and the Arabic language are strongly related. Arabic serves as the channel of communication for the Arab world's official governance, religion, and educational institutions (Ferdoes, 2016). English, in contrast, has emerged as the standard worldwide language for communication in both business and education. Despite English being the first foreign language taught in all government schools and a required subject, instruction in Saudi Arabia mostly relies on memorization and the dissemination of information (Al-Zubeiry, 2012). In the Arab culture, examinations mostly involve copying notes acquired by rote; assignments that call for creative thinking or the presentation of personal viewpoints may be seen as unfair. Students often rely on their teachers to supply them with portions of modelled text. This prevents them from writing in an adventurous, imaginative, or experimental manner (Aljahdali & Alshakhi, 2021).

Rote memorization of foundational texts, which dates back to the Kuttab school, is still a fundamental component of Saudi Arabia's educational system. The Kuttab school focuses on memorization of the Quran and other religious books to teach Islamic religious

principles (Khan Pathan, 2021). The government-regulated curriculum, the strong emphasis on religious studies, and rote memorization are three clear features of the Saudi educational system. As a result of this, extrinsic restrictions are imposed on learning processes (Smith, 2001). Learner autonomy may thus be seriously compromised, if not entirely lacking. Saudi students in the foundation year of higher education are required as part of the international curriculum to write about themselves, their families, and a range of subjects related to travel, cuisine, everyday life, and so on (Alqahtani, 2019). The students' educational backgrounds differ in terms of whether they have attended public or private school. Graduates from private schools are often more imaginative and self-reliant than those from public schools, who are typically more reliant on their teachers as the source of information. The textbook-heavy nature of the curriculum in public schools does not give instructors sufficient time to include creative writing exercises (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009).

According to Altukruni (2019), based on classroom observations, Arab students tend to favor prescriptive learning settings in which they are given specific instructions. As a result, active learning and the role of the teacher as a facilitator—which is now practiced in the United Arab Emirates—often make them anxious. Pupils' reluctance to assume greater responsibility for their education is a result of their prior experiences in elementary and secondary education, when memorization and passive learning were the norm (Alawfi, 2022). Alqahtani (2019) points out that these methods make it harder for students to adopt effective learning styles while they are in college. This claim is relevant in the setting of this study, because the majority of students are dependent learners rather than independent (Al, 2017; Alzouebi et al., 2020; Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014).

### 3. Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions

The major aim of the study was to analyze the factors affecting secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. It sought to explore the different linguistic factors and their effect on Saudi secondary school students' English writing. In addition, the study attempted to explore the influence of different sociocultural factors on Saudi secondary school students' English writing. Moreover, the present study aimed to examine the effect of educational factors on Saudi secondary school students' English writing. To fulfill the study's aim and objectives, the following research questions were delineated:

1. What are the different linguistic factors that influence Saudi secondary school students' English writing?
2. What are the different sociocultural factors that affect Saudi secondary school students' English writing?
3. What effect do educational factors have on Saudi secondary school students' English writing?

This study makes several potentially significant contributions. First, understanding the factors affecting writing could aid the design of interventions to foster English language acquisition at an earlier age, potentially improving overall language proficiency. Second, the study contributes to the existing body of literature on language education and writing development, providing a context-specific perspective that can be compared with similar studies in other regions. Furthermore, the research can pave the way for collaboration between Saudi educational institutions and international partners to share best practices and resources for improving English writing skills. Hence, the findings from this study can help develop more effective English language curricula tailored to the needs of Saudi students. This might involve revising teaching materials, methodologies, and assessment strategies.

### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1 Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design based on quantitative research methodology. The focus was primarily on collecting and analyzing numerical data to answer the research questions concerning the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. The cross-sectional survey design was used in this study due to its efficiency in gathering data from a large and diverse sample within a relatively short timescale. This design allows researchers to collect information from a wide range of participants simultaneously on a range of variables, attitudes, or behaviors. As a result, it is particularly useful for generating a snapshot of the current state of a population or exploring the prevalence of specific phenomena. Cross-sectional surveys are also often more cost-effective than longitudinal studies, which require tracking the same individuals over an extended period. Hence, surveys are appropriate for use by researchers with limited resources or time constraints.

#### 4.2 Sample

The study focused on students in secondary schools in Riyadh, comprising a representative sample of the target population for the whole of Saudi Arabia. This community constituted the most appropriate sample for identifying and examining the factors affecting Saudi secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. The optimal sample size was determined using the instrument developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for calculating the sample size for a certain population (see Table 1). Based on the target population of 1,000 participants, a corresponding sample size of 278 Saudi secondary school students was established for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select the representative sample for the study.

Table 1. Table for determining sample size from a given or known population

N	n	N	n	N	n
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2800	338
60	52	340	181	3000	341
65	56	360	186	3500	346
70	59	380	191	4000	351
75	63	400	196	4500	354
80	66	420	201	5000	357
85	70	440	205	6000	361
90	73	460	210	7000	364
95	76	480	214	8000	367
100	80	500	217	9000	368
110	86	550	226	10000	370
120	92	600	234	15000	375
130	97	650	242	20000	377
140	103	700	248	30000	379
150	108	750	254	40000	380
160	113	800	260	50000	381
170	118	850	265	75000	382
180	123	900	269	100000	384

Source: Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

4.3 Data Collection

To gather data from the targeted sample of Saudi secondary school students in Riyadh, we employed a detailed online questionnaire. This questionnaire was meticulously designed to encompass a broad range of factors influencing English writing proficiency among these students. The survey consisted of approximately 30 items, covering various dimensions such as linguistic challenges, sociocultural influences, and educational factors impacting their English writing skills. Each item on the questionnaire was rated using a five-point Likert-type scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree." This scale allowed for a nuanced capture of the students' perceptions and experiences regarding their English writing.

The questionnaire items were derived from a comprehensive review of relevant literature in the field of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing challenges and pedagogical practices. This ensured that the questionnaire was grounded in theoretical and empirical research, enhancing its validity and relevance to the research questions. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire underwent a pilot testing phase involving a small group of secondary school students to refine the questions for clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness.

The data collection process commenced after securing informed consent from all participants, ensuring their willingness and understanding of the study's purpose. Participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses to encourage honest and accurate feedback. The collected data from this questionnaire provided a rich dataset for analyzing correlations between various factors and their impact on the English writing proficiency of Saudi secondary school students, thereby addressing the study's research questions.

4.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the tabulated results. Regression analysis was conducted to determine cumulative predictive capacity of the many independent variables on the dependent variable under investigation. This required a multiple regression model to determine the various predicted values, estimated as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

where Y denotes students' English writing,  $\beta_0$  is the constant (coefficient of intercept),  $X_1$  are linguistic factors,  $X_2$  are sociocultural factors,  $X_3$  are educational factors, and  $\varepsilon$  represents the error term in the multiple regression model.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The participants all gave informed consent, confirming their willingness to participate in the study. Confidentiality and privacy were assured throughout while managing the respondents' data. The participants had the freedom to respond to the questions with ease and in their own opinion.

**5. Results**

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted in SPSS.

*5.1 Demographic Characteristics*

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 2, most of the respondents (64.4%) were male (vs. 25.6% female). Most participants (48.2%) had more than 10 years' experience of learning English, followed by 33.1% who had spent 5–10 years studying English, while only 18.7% had spent fewer than 5 years as English learners.

Table 2. Demographic data of study respondents

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender		
Male	179	64.4
Female	99	25.6
Years spent learning English		
< 5 years	52	18.7
5–10 years	92	33.1
> 10 years	134	48.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100</b>

*5.2 Factors Influencing Writing in English*

The study explored the different linguistic factors that affect Saudi students' English writing, presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Linguistic factors influencing Saudi secondary students' English writing

<b>Linguistic factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Idiomatic expressions	19	6.8
Phonology and pronunciation	27	9.7
Proficiency in English	112	40.3
Grammar and syntax	44	15.8
Vocabulary knowledge	71	25.5
Other	5	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100</b>

The results in Table 3 show that the factor most influencing Saudi students' writing is proficiency in English (40.3%), followed by vocabulary knowledge (25.5%), then grammar and syntax (15.8%), phonology and pronunciation (9.7%) and idiomatic expressions (6.8%). A few participants (1.9%) gave examples of other linguistic factors, such as reading habits, namely that the amount and type of English reading materials students are exposed to can greatly impact their writing.

The study also established the different sociocultural factors affecting Saudi secondary school students' English writing, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Sociocultural factors influencing Saudi secondary students' English writing

<b>Sociocultural factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Level of exposure to western culture	58	20.9
Religious and cultural values	43	15.5
Family expectations	17	6.1
Motivation and personal goals	67	24.1
Peer influence	82	29.5
Other	11	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 4, it can be seen that most of the respondents (29.5%) identified peer influence as a key sociocultural factor influencing their English writing. It should be noted that peer groups and social networks can greatly influence writing preferences and styles. Students may be influenced by their peers' writing practices and may seek to emulate or conform to certain norms. A sizeable portion of the respondents (24.1%) also identified motivation and personal goals as influencing their English writing, followed by level of exposure to Western culture (20.9%), religious and cultural values (15.5%), and other (3.9%).

The study also examined the different educational factors influencing Saudi secondary school students' English writing, which are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Educational factors influencing Saudi secondary students' English writing

<b>Educational factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Level of access to writing resources	42	15.1
Curriculum design	21	7.6
Teacher qualifications	78	28.1
Teaching methods	118	42.4
Assessment methods	15	5.4
Other	4	1.4

<b>Total</b>	278	100
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The results in Table 5 show that most of the respondents (42.4%) identified teaching methods as the major educational factor influencing their English writing, followed by teacher qualifications (28.1%), then level of access to writing resources (15.1%), and curriculum design (7.6%). Some respondents (5.4%) also identified class-based assessment methods as an important educational factor. Moreover, a few respondents (1.4%) mentioned other educational factors, such as student motivation. Students’ motivation to learn and improve their writing skills can be influenced by various drivers, including their interest in the subject matter and their belief in the importance of writing in English.

Students were also asked about the different aspects of effective EFL Writing in Saudi Arabia and the results obtained after analysis are presented in Figure 1.

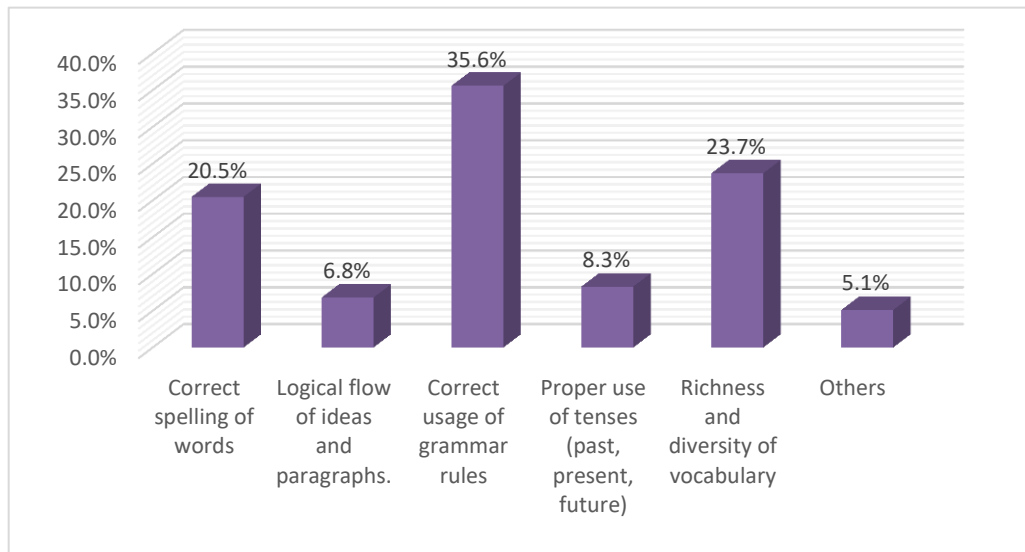


Figure 1. Aspects of students’ English writing considered to represent effective writing

Most of the participants (35.6%) considered that effective English writing is associated with the correct usage of grammar rules, followed by the richness and diversity of vocabulary (23.7%), then correct spelling of words (20.5%), and the proper use of tenses (past, present, future) (8.3%). Some participants (5.1%) mentioned other aspects of effective English writing, such as avoidance of overly generic or clichéd writing, effective use of cohesive devices (pronouns, references), proper formatting (e.g., headings, indentation, font size), and adherence to specific style guides (e.g., MLA, APA), if required.

5.3 Results of Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was applied to determine the extent to which the factors influencing Saudi students’ English writing predicted its effectiveness. The value of 0.754 obtained for the multiple correlation coefficient (R) demonstrated a positive association between the three independent variables and students’ English writing in Saudi Arabia. Also, the value of R<sup>2</sup> confirms that different factors influencing EFL Writing in this study (linguistic factors, sociocultural factors and educational factors) account for a 77.1% shift in students’ English writing in Saudi Arabia, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Model summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
	0.754	0.771	0.808	0.23051

Predictors: (Constant): Linguistic factors, Sociocultural factors, Educational factors

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine whether the independent variables in this study (linguistic factors, sociocultural factors, educational factors) were major predictors of the dependent variable and whether the linear regression model provided a good fit with the data. As shown in Table 7, the result of the ANOVA, F(3, 275) = 41.062, p < 0.05, indicates that the model and data are sufficiently matched.

Table 7. ANOVA analysis

Model	R	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression		42.117	3	17.102	41.062	0.003
Residual		3.102	375	0.046		
Total		45.219	278			

Dependent variable: Students’ English writing in Saudi Arabia. Predictors: (Constant), linguistic factors, sociocultural factors, educational factors

In addition, the different unstandardized coefficients of the model were examined to establish the independent effect of linguistic factors, sociocultural factors, and educational factors on students' English writing in Saudi Arabia (see Table 8).

Table 8. Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Effect Size
	$\beta$	Std. Error	Beta			
Constant	0.736	0.196		0.026	0.026	
Linguistic factors	0.251	0.103	0.397	0.002	0.002	0.67
Sociocultural factors	0.234	0.042	0.213	0.004	0.004	0.45
Educational factors	0.261	0.051	0.282	0.013	0.013	0.55

Dependent variable: Students' English writing in Saudi Arabia

Effect sizes were calculated to estimate the magnitude of the relationships between the independent variables and students' English writing proficiency. Effect size estimates help in understanding the practical significance of relationships beyond statistical significance. Moreover, various unstandardized model coefficients were examined to establish the independent effects of linguistic, sociocultural, and educational factors on students' English writing. Linguistic factors were found to have a p-value of 0.002, which was below the threshold of significance ( $< 0.05$ ), indicating that they had a significant positive effect on students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, these factors yielded a moderate effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.67$ ), suggesting a meaningful impact on students' writing proficiency. In terms of sociocultural factors, the beta coefficient was 0.23 ( $p = 0.004$ ), indicating a significant positive influence on Saudi secondary students' English writing. Sociocultural factors also yielded a moderate effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.45$ ), indicating a meaningful effect on students' writing proficiency. Moreover, educational factors (e.g. teaching methods, the curriculum, teacher qualifications, and training) were found to have a significant effect ( $p = 0.013$ ) on Saudi students' English writing. They yielded a moderate effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.55$ ), suggesting a meaningful impact on students' writing proficiency. These effect size estimates highlight the practical importance of linguistic, sociocultural, and educational factors in understanding and improving Saudi students' English writing proficiency.

## 6. Discussion

The study aimed to explore the multifaceted factors affecting secondary school students' English writing proficiency in Saudi Arabia. It specifically investigated the impact of linguistic, sociocultural, and educational factors on students' ability to write in English. The findings corroborate and extend the existing body of literature on language acquisition and educational challenges in the context of Saudi Arabia and similar EFL (English as a Foreign Language) environments. The significant positive effect of linguistic factors on students' English writing proficiency, as indicated by the study, aligns with previous research emphasizing the critical role of language proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, grammar, syntax, and familiarity with idiomatic expressions in writing (Khan Pathan, 2021; Al-Zubeiry, 2012). Proficiency in English emerged as the most influential factor, underscoring the importance of a solid linguistic foundation for effective writing. This finding supports the argument that enhancing students' English proficiency is crucial for improving their writing skills (Alawfi, 2022; Al-Rojaie, 2023), and highlights the need for curricula that prioritize comprehensive language skill development. The study's identification of sociocultural factors, such as peer influence, motivation, personal goals, and exposure to Western culture, as significant influences on students' English writing, resonates with previous findings on the impact of sociocultural contexts on language learning (Elyas & Picard, 2018; Aljhdali & Alshakhi, 2021). The prominence of peer influence suggests that social networks and peer groups play a crucial role in shaping students' writing styles and preferences, further emphasizing the need for educational strategies that encourage positive peer interactions and the creation of supportive learning environments. Moreover, the significance of motivation and personal goals highlights the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and aligning educational objectives with students' personal aspirations (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009; Altukruni, 2019). The impact of educational factors, particularly teaching methods and teacher qualifications, on students' English writing proficiency, aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of effective instructional strategies and the qualifications of educators in enhancing language learning outcomes (Alnasser, 2022; Shukri, 2014). The finding that teaching methods are the most significant educational factor suggests that adopting innovative and communicative approaches, as opposed to traditional rote learning methods, could significantly improve students' writing skills. This supports the argument for ongoing professional development for teachers and the need for curricular reforms that embrace more interactive and student-centered teaching methodologies (Hendal, 2021; Khan Pathan, 2021).

The impact of the local language and culture on Saudi students' English writing is an important factor. Arabic, the official language of Saudi Arabia, has a different writing system, vocabulary, and syntax from English. Saudi students thus often have difficulties converting from Arabic to English when writing. Their writing style may also be influenced by cultural customs and conventions (Ferdoes, 2016). In contrast to the clear-cut and uncomplicated approach favored in English writing, Arabic rhetoric values an ornate and flowery style. Thus, Saudi students may use very elaborate words and phrases in their English essays, which tends to obfuscate and complicate their writing (Khan Pathan, 2021). Grammar and vocabulary are important components of English writing, and for pupils from Saudi Arabia, as with other non-native speakers, grammatical principles such as subject-verb agreement and tense consistency can be difficult to understand (Hakami, 2019). Sentence construction, article use, and improper verb tenses are examples of common mistakes. Another obstacle in vocabulary development is that children may have trouble with word choice and colloquial idioms. Their writing may become shallow and less sophisticated as a result of their reliance on basic, repetitious words to express their views (Al-Rojaie, 2023; Khan Pathan, 2021).



The findings revealed that secondary school students' writing skills are greatly influenced by the level of English instruction provided in Saudi Arabia. In the last few years, Saudi colleges and universities have worked hard to enhance their English language curricula. Notwithstanding, discrepancies may persist in the caliber of guidance and materials supplied to pupils. The development of students' writing abilities may be influenced by factors such as class numbers, instructor credentials, and instructional approaches (Alrasheedi, 2020). Students often have more opportunity for personalized feedback and growth when they are taught by more experienced teachers in smaller class sizes. A crucial component of students' English writing is the writing process itself. Some Saudi students may have difficulty with the prewriting exercises that are essential for arranging ideas logically, including brainstorming and outlining. Furthermore, it is possible that they're not used to editing and proofreading their work, resulting in mistakes that may have been prevented with diligent editing. Two intangible but crucial components of writing are motivation and confidence. The difficulties Saudi students have might cause them to lose motivation or lose faith in their ability to write in English. Their desire to practice and become better may be impacted by this. Encouraging students to take chances and learn from their failures while creating a supportive learning environment is one way of addressing this issue (Ullah, 2017).

Several approaches may be used to improve the factors affecting Saudi students' English writing. Better teacher preparation and resources, together with ongoing improvements to the quality of English language education in schools and colleges, may have a major impact (Al-Rojaie, 2023; Shakoori, 2022). Educators must possess cultural sensitivity and be aware of the difficulties arising from the impact of Arabic language and culture. They may assist students in navigating these distinct features by offering focused advice (Alzouebi et al., 2020). Students might be encouraged to participate more actively in the writing process through the inclusion of writing workshops and peer feedback sessions in the curriculum. They may develop new insights into their work by receiving comments from their peers. By praising their accomplishments and fostering a happy, encouraging learning environment, teachers may help children develop a growth mindset and increase their self-confidence (Abdulhameed, 2020; Elyas & Picard, 2018). The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on EFL writing challenges and instructional strategies. By corroborating the significance of linguistic proficiency, sociocultural influences, and educational practices, this research adds a context-specific perspective to the global understanding of English writing development in secondary education. It underscores the complexity of language learning, which is influenced by a confluence of factors beyond mere exposure to language instruction (Alrasheedi, 2020; Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014).

## 7. Conclusion

### 7.1 Study Implications

This study examined the factors affecting secondary school students' English writing in Saudi Arabia. The study shows that Saudi students' English writing can be influenced by various linguistic factors as they navigate the challenges of writing in their L2. These factors can impact their writing skills and style. Sociocultural factors, including language policy, cultural values, and exposure to global influences, can also significantly influence English writing among Saudi students. Understanding these factors is essential for educators and policymakers to design effective language programs and support systems for students in their English writing endeavors. The quality of English writing among Saudi secondary school students can also be influenced by a variety of educational factors. It is important to note that these factors can vary from one school to another, and individual student characteristics also play a role in writing development. Effective collaboration among educational stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and policymakers, can help improve the educational environment and ultimately enhance Saudi secondary school students' English writing skills. Learners may overcome the challenges of writing if they have the proper guidance, supervision, and awareness of their areas of weakness. One additional issue arising from the students' educational history is that they have been instructed to adhere to a rigidly ordered writing style, which has similarities to the audio-lingual approach. Furthermore, Saudi students have limited access to materials, such as books, limiting their thinking and preventing them from becoming internationally minded. This research contributes to a broader understanding of Arab learners, their common writing challenges, and the ways in which culture shapes writing. As previously noted, language and culture are entwined. Being aware of the writing styles of Arab learners can help understand their learning styles. However, it is not possible to make generalizations about writers based on their culture, as each writer has a unique background, education, and experiences. Some Arab students may find it difficult to write on specific subjects and instead choose to write about well-known and universal subjects, such as nature and their country, because of the rich religious heritage and collectivist society in Arab nations.

### 7.2 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations can be made for EFL teachers, administrators, lawmakers, course designers, and teacher-trainers working in the contemporary research and educational environment:

1. Teachers should identify how to help students understand writing in their L2 and should do so gradually. Teachers may also be able to scaffold students until they can write on their own.
2. Revisions are needed to the methods used to evaluate teachers, removing the threat component from classroom observations. Moreover, the professional development unit should be supervised by skilled, experienced, neutral, and well-trained observers with the goal of raising English language instruction teaching standards.
3. EFL students have the right to receive instruction from certified and trained instructors and language teaching is a vocation that requires specialized training. For this reason, to improve student success and teaching quality, a more stringent hiring process for educators should be implemented.

- To address the linguistic factors, educators need to provide targeted instruction and practice, offer constructive feedback, and create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to develop their English writing skills.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge all the people who facilitated this project including administrators, teachers and the research participants for their cooperation in this project.

### **Authors contributions**

Not applicable

### **Funding**

This work was funded and supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [Grant No. A080]

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

### **Open access**

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