

Grammar Instruction in the Saudi EFL Context: Beliefs, Practices, and the Bridge to Professional Writing

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Abstract—Grammar instruction remains contentious in second language acquisition, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. Although explicit grammar instruction has been widely implemented in EFL classrooms, its effectiveness in real-world language use remains debatable. This study examines explicit grammar instruction in Saudi EFL classrooms to explore its perceived benefits and limitations. This qualitative study draws upon personal learning experiences as a source of knowledge. Specifically, three data collection methods were used to address the research questions: faculty interviews, alumni interviews, and curriculum analysis. The findings reveal a disconnect between classroom instruction and practical language application, as alumni reported minimal reliance on explicit grammar knowledge in workplace and non-academic settings. However, faculty members continued to emphasize its importance for developing linguistic accuracy. The findings underscore the need to re-evaluate the grammar teaching approaches in the EFL curricula to ensure better transferability beyond academic settings. This study thus provides insights for educators and policymakers regarding balancing grammar instruction with communicative competence in language learning.

Index Terms—L1, L2, EFL, grammar, learning transfer

I. INTRODUCTION

Grammar instruction's role in second language (L2) learning has long been subject to scholarly debate. While there is broad consensus regarding its importance, the question of how grammar should be taught and assessed remains contentious. This debate has been ongoing among second language acquisition scholars. Krashen (1982) argued that teaching grammar explicitly does not contribute to L2 acquisition but merely provides learners with limited knowledge in writing and editing practices. Some researchers believe that neglecting grammar teaching can lead to fossilization, classroom pidgins, and lower accuracy among learners (Skehan, 1998). Endorsing Skehan's argument, Schmidt (1990) asserted the importance of language form and structure.

The debate continues to evolve; while more recent foundational studies (Brown, 2001; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004) argue that teaching grammar to L2 students is necessary, later work such as Liviero (2014) suggests that explicit grammar instruction can compensate for specific limitations in EFL contexts. On the contrary, Bauducco (2017; as cited in Kaivanpanah et al., 2019) asserted that traditional grammar instruction using a fixed set of rules governing language is not appropriate. Bauducco (2017) explained that grammar rule introduction, rather than increasing function in a language, can further complicate L2 development by making learners overthink accuracy, thereby hindering their written and spoken fluency. Braine (2014) and Cruz Corzo (2013) indicated that the appropriate teaching of grammar and its purpose remain debatable among L2 researchers.

Given this ongoing debate, considering the perspectives of EFL instructors and learners is imperative. This study explores participants' perspectives on grammar instruction within the EFL context. It explores the role of instructors and curriculum developers in teaching and assessing grammar alongside the strategies employed to impart this knowledge to students. Furthermore, it examines these strategies' efficacy from the perspectives of former students.

This study stems from my personal experience as an English learner and educator—from learning English in Saudi Arabia to studying and teaching in English-speaking contexts. I noticed a significant gap between L1 and L2 writing instruction during the transition—the manner in which grammar and writing were taught in Saudi Arabia differed significantly from that in English-speaking countries and from the expectations in my Ph.D. studies. While the former strongly emphasized grammar accuracy and correctness, the latter focused on meaning construction and persuasion strategies. Although rigid grammar-focused instruction was part of what equipped me for academic and professional writing demands, this field requires a combination of grammar correctness and idea development.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore teaching practices' evolution in Saudi Arabia and their alignment with students' needs. Specifically, the study examines how English is taught in Saudi Arabian universities and whether current practices and faculty perceptions align with students' writing practices in the workplace. Additionally, the sub-research questions are:

What is the understanding of native-speakerism and standard English in Saudi English classrooms, and what is their influence on grammar teaching and assessment?

Is there a correlation between grammar teaching and assessment and students' needs in other contexts?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of English grammar teaching stems from the manner in which English was originally taught. As Nassaji and Fotos (2011) stated, L2 English learning in the 1970s included grammar and descriptions of structures. Language teaching methods primarily included grammar translation, audio-lingual, and direct methods, relying heavily on grammar instruction and sentence structure. However, "while students learning a language through these approaches generally require good comprehension skills and fluency in using the L2 for communication, it was gradually noticed that many such learners did not acquire accurate use of L2 morphology and syntax as an automatic by-product" (Swain, 1998; as cited in Celce-Murcia, 2015, p. 7).

Given this study's scope and the ongoing debate in L2 scholarship, examining the history of grammar teaching in the Saudi context is essential. According to Sofi (2015), grammar is taught in Saudi Arabia through "teacher-centered classrooms by the grammar-translation method" (p. 79). Students memorize rules and words translated from English to Arabic (Sofi, 2015). Al-Seghayer (2011) and Grami (2010) said these "outdated pedagogical approaches" lead to low foreign language proficiency. Alshakhi (2019) affirmed Saudi teachers' focus on grammar and spelling, explaining that "instead of connecting themselves with their writing, students focus on the topical issues of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This is very apparent in Saudi EFL classrooms today" (p. 177).

To better understand Saudi instructors' focus on grammar, examining the perceptions and beliefs influencing assessment strategies and classroom practices is important. Borg (2009) defined teachers' beliefs as the thorough knowledge of their personal experiences and understanding of various approaches in classroom teaching influencing instructional choices. He said teachers' beliefs and classroom practice not only act as a filter through which teachers realize new information and experiences but also have long-term effects on their instructional practices. Therefore, Saudi researchers are increasingly examining instructors' beliefs and understanding of grammar instruction and assessment. Almuhammadi (2020) and AlAmir (2025) determined that Saudi instructors perceived grammar instruction as a foundational framework for English instruction. A survey and interviews of Saudi university instructors revealed that grammar is considered essential for the appropriate use of English in EFL. In line with these findings, Un Nisa (2025) concluded that greater emphasis should be placed on explicitly teaching grammar to Saudi English learners.

Similarly, Alghanmi and Shukri (2016), Abduh and Algouzi (2020), and Fathi et al. (2025) determined that teachers value grammar instruction in the EFL context, reflecting it in their classroom practices. Although the survey revealed that participant-instructors valued implicit grammar teaching, their classroom practices indicated that they adopted direct grammar instruction.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section highlights this study's design, participants, and methods.

A. Design

This qualitative study draws upon personal learning experiences as a source of knowledge and explores a novel topic within the Saudi context, aligning with the study's reflective and exploratory nature. Three data collection methods were used: faculty interviews, alumni interviews, and curriculum analysis. Course materials including syllabi, textbooks, and grading rubrics offered insights into classroom practices, presenting a stable data source with minimal risk of bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured faculty and alumni interviews were used for understanding how writing is taught, perceived, and applied beyond the classroom. Semi-structured interviews offered insights into participants' lived experiences and ensured consistency across responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). The questions were mostly open-ended, allowing participants to reflect on their practices. Interviews were conducted in-person or via Zoom and recorded with participants' approval.

Using multiple sources facilitated triangulation¹, adding depth and credibility to the findings. This also aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) approach, drawing from various data types to strengthen qualitative interpretations. Maxwell (2013) emphasized the importance of collecting data from diverse sources to address potential bias and support validity. Collectively, these methods provide a broader picture of grammar instruction and its alignment with out-of-school contexts.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a phenomenological theoretical framework that aims to explore individuals' lived experiences and the meanings assigned to these experiences (Larsen & Adu, 2021; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2023). Drawing on interpretivist epistemology, the study acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity and background as valid and valuable

¹ Triangulation—as described by Maxwell (2013)—involves "collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods" (p. 128).

sources of insight (Maxwell, 2013). This perspective informs the study's design and methodology, emphasizing reflective inquiry and participants' perspectives on English writing instruction and grammar transfer across academic and professional settings.

C. Participants

Four faculty members from a Saudi university's English department were interviewed; a recruitment email was sent and appointments were scheduled with those who agreed to participate. The participants—two Saudi instructors and two native English speakers from international backgrounds holding degrees from institutions in the UK and Australia—represented diverse linguistic, educational, and disciplinary backgrounds, with specializations in applied linguistics, teaching English to speakers of other languages, and creative writing. For anonymity, they are referred to as Mr. Joseph, Mr. Muath, Mr. Mohammed, and Mr. Mustapha. Four alumni participants were also interviewed, recruited via email and WhatsApp. Eligible participants had graduated within the past five years and had worked in their field for at least a year. Nine alumni expressed interest, and four met the criteria—two radiology specialists, one human resources professional, and one medical student. The Zoom interviews were primarily conducted in Arabic, with occasional English, and were recorded and translated into English for analysis.

D. Data Preparation

Before the coding process, course materials including textbooks, grading rubrics, assignments, and transcripts of interviews with faculty and alumni were collected and compiled; they were first transcribed and translated as some were originally in Arabic. After “cleaning up” the transcripts by deleting repetitive words, fixing incorrect terms, and omitting identifying information about schools or participants (Geisler & Swarts, 2019), the data were segmented into t-units², clauses, noun phrases, and so on. Subsequently, the transcripts were imported into Delve³ software for initial coding.

E. Data Analysis

Data analysis involved two phases. Phase 1 focused on quantitative aspects such as code frequencies and distributions, while Phase 2 was based on overarching themes and research questions. The numerical findings were comprehensively explored to identify significance and underlying reasons. Supporting these interpretations, illustrative excerpts from the interviews and course materials were selected, analyzed, and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

IV. RESULTS

A. Faculty Interviews

The interviews with English instructors included the following questions: “What is your perception of native-speakerism and how does it affect your assessment of students? Do you consider native speakers' manner of writing ideal? Who are the native speakers in your mind?” and “In your opinion, what determines a good essay? What are your perceptions of students' ideas, voices, and grammar in an essay? Do you consider correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation important? Do you oppose the ideas presented in students' essays or only consider its overall structure?” The responses are discussed below.

(a). Mr. Joseph

Mr. Joseph is an English language instructor with bachelor's and master's degrees from international universities. He said students are not assessed based on native speakers' standards. However:

I expect certain things from my students—whether or not they are native speakers—[For example], subject-verb agreement. I don't expect them to know many phrasal verbs, but if they ask, I'll explain; if they use it in their writing and get it wrong, I'll correct it. Although I do not interfere, certain base language rules must be followed. (Mr. Joseph)

He asserted that he does not correct every grammatical error yet expects students to follow the grammar rules they learned. He added “when it comes to marking their work, I expect to see what I have taught in the assignment”. He concluded by saying “for me it's not from a native speaker's perspective that I mark their work, but purely from the English point of view that is in the book”.

Regarding what determines a good essay, Mr. Joseph replied “the writing style, grammar, fluency, smoothness of the argument, followed by the type of argument or ideas presented. Are they common things or extraordinary minds waggling? Did the person take time to delve deeper? I always tell my students, ‘don't be superficial, go deeper,’ and ‘don't be lazy, use your brain.’ For me, it's the combination of these two”. He elaborated, “don't tell me Saudi Arabia is a hot country. We already know that; explain, and provide some examples. Tell me why it is hot here but not in Syria or Jordan”.

Mr. Joseph said the one takeaway for students is “getting the fundamentals right.” He noted, “Many come to the university after about 12 years at school, right? They don't know that the first word in a sentence starts with a capital

² T-units are “the smallest group of words which can make a move in language.” See Geisler and Swarts (2019, p. 73).

³ Delve is a Qualitative Coding Software allowing users to manually categorize data segments into specific codes and themes. For more information, visit <https://delvetool.com>.

letter. That's a sin! If I can get them to remember that and that proper nouns are capitalized, I have achieved my goal". He added, "in English, there are certain rules to follow, and this is what I teach".

(b). *Mr. Muath*

Mr. Muath, an English-language instructor who completed higher education in North America, was asked about his perception of native-speakerism and whether it affects his grading style. He replied that he does not expect students' writing to be similar to native speakers; instead, he considers the ideas they express important. He accepts students' work as long as ideas are clearly conveyed in their writing. He reiterated that "students' identity is important, and I ensure they have a place in their writing where they can situate themselves freely". He encouraged students to express their beliefs and introduce their cultural identity into their writing.

Mr. Muath elucidated how his experience of studying abroad influenced his teaching: "Free writing and peer revision are new concepts, which I implement in class".

Therefore, he often encourages writing assignments in three drafts (rough, second, and final). After evaluating the rough drafts, he expects students to revise their second and final drafts, "which not many instructors do".

Regarding his assessment strategies, he said "when a student repeats a mistake in the rough or second, I deduct points". He also implements peer-review activities in class. Students are asked to review others' writing and provide feedback based on a list of questions provided by the instructor. However, he said students typically do not acknowledge peer feedback. "They request my feedback", because students are accustomed to "the instructor playing the main role in class". He said the absence of writing centers in Saudi universities also contributed to students not acknowledging peer feedback.

Mr. Muath focuses on certain types of errors while ignoring others, as "they can be corrected gradually." He emphasized the importance of "unity and coherence" and "flow of ideas", reflecting the view that effective writing does not concern mere grammatical accuracy but also communicating ideas clearly and logically. He stated, "occasionally, I overlook the mechanical errors if the argument or idea is strong". Conversely, he claimed that he focuses less on certain issues—"spelling and some grammar mistakes are fixed by computers nowadays". Nevertheless, "I won't accept an advanced level student misspelling simple words like 'textbook'". Mr. Muath also supports students drawing on their native language, such as using Arabic proverbs or Quranic verses, so long as it makes sense in context and there are no English equivalents.

(c). *Mr. Mohammed*

Mr. Mohammed is a writing instructor who teaches grammar to English and non-English majors at the university. He provided examples of Arabic scholars such as *Sibawayh* who are not native-Arabic speakers. He believes that, as long as an idea is communicated clearly, it is acceptable. "There are overall rules"; that "cannot be overlooked such as basic grammar and spellings, but regarding general format and writing style, everyone is an English language owner regardless of linguistic background".

Regarding assessment, Mr. Muhammed said "I tell my students that if I read their article without pausing, it means the essay is well-written".

Interviewer: What makes you read the article without pausing?

Mr. Mohammed: Creativity, cohesion, and sentence coherence and connection between ideas. I don't care much about grammar and spelling but emphasize the flow of ideas.

Interviewer: Does that mean students with no grammatical or spelling mistakes receive the same grades as those making errors?

Mr. Mohammed: No, I assign only 20% of total grade for these types of errors...I explain that during "peer review." I ask them to concentrate on concepts and meanings, instead of grammar and spelling.

Regarding voices and ideas, he indicated that he valued students' ideas and encouraged them to convey them clearly in their writing: "I tell my students that it is completely acceptable to share ideas and argue in favor of one over the other. The first assignment in my advanced class is a short article titled 'Who are you?' where students write about themselves, situate themselves, and remain confident of their achievements". He argued that the cultural context influences how writing is taught in Saudi. Mr. Mohammed commented "we always underestimate ourselves and students are always discouraged from expressing their ideas in their writing. This reflects our cultural values. We should overcome this, and writing is the best tool to do so".

(d). *Mr. Mustapha*

Mr. Mustapha is an English instructor whose dominant language is English; Arabic is his second language. He too received his degree from an international institution. Responding to the first question, he indicated that the standard English format is important to him and viewed native speakers' writing as a model. He added, "but I would back it up with data; I wouldn't say 'native English speakers' as such, but how proficient speakers would write".

Regarding assessment strategies, Mr. Mustapha said "we have a rubric to grade students' writing", adding, "it would be unfair for students to judge their writing based on my preference". Responding to whether he focused more on grammar or ideas when grading students' papers, he said "a little bit of both. There is no good writing without good thinking, and vice versa". While he believes that ideas and arguments in the paper are important, "the mechanics matter too".

B. *Alumni Interviews*

To further validate the data and assess whether instructors' teaching strategies align with students' experiences in the classroom, four alumni from the same school were interviewed about the feedback they received in college and how they correlated it with their writing at work. They were also asked about the assessment strategies their instructors used and whether they found them helpful. The following is a brief introduction to each participant along with selected quotes.

(a). *Mansour*

Mansour graduated with a bachelor of science in radiology; he works as an assistant radiologist at a local private hospital. Mansour was asked about the types of writing he learned in school and how they were assessed. He explained that prior to joining the workforce, he was expected to have at least two years of experience or complete the Saudi Career Development Program (SCDP) certificate, designed for newly-graduated Saudi medical students. It is a year-long program where students take additional courses focusing on their specialty. To obtain the certificate, a series of tasks must be completed to improve English communication skills, including the ability to write reports in English across medical fields. He said that initially, the SCDP trainer cited "major grammar issues" and failed to clear his test. He enrolled in courses to improve his grammar and written English skills and then retook the test.

Mansour explained that the program primarily focuses on discipline-specific knowledge and practical skills. For example, in the initial three months, students are assessed on their understanding of upper-body anatomy (e.g., chest, skull, shoulders) and learn how to properly take and evaluate X-rays. As the program progresses, they practice X-rays of other body parts, with a minimum passing score of 70%. While grammar is not explicitly included in the curriculum or grading criteria, Mansour noted that one instructor strongly emphasized grammar in report writing, viewing it as essential for professional communication.

(b). *Ahmed*

Ahmed is also a radiologist working in another private hospital. He graduated with a bachelor of science in radiology and has been working there for nearly two years. Ahmed said his program emphasized grammar. He believes that grammar is important and the essence of English language. "We were mainly taught grammar as a standalone subject, not as something we could use intuitively", Ahmed added.

When asked what he meant by "learning grammar out of context," Ahmed said "we typically learn grammar rules as equations. For example, if a singular noun comes before a simple present verb, we add an 's.' If it is a plural, we do not add it. We would think of every single grammar rule this way, and that would make us think multiple times before writing any sentence because our professor was particular about grammar rules".

(c). *Mohsen*

Mohsen is a human resource assistant at a petroleum company. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration and management. He facilitates communication between his employer and other businesses regarding billing-related concerns. He also assists with recruiting, hiring, and performance evaluation. Regarding the type of writing he does for work, Mohsen said he sends emails, writes letters, and reports.

Mohsen was asked about the association between his writing responsibilities at work and what he learned in college. Mohsen felt that his college English classes, which focused mainly on grammar, spelling, and reading comprehension, were not directly relevant to his work. In contrast, a summer course he took abroad was more practical, integrating grammar into broader lessons and providing opportunities to apply what he learned.

(d). *Saud*

Saud is a medical school graduate working as a researcher while pursuing postgraduate studies at a Western medical institution. He has worked in multiple hospitals and educational institutions in various positions—resident doctor, intern, and teaching assistant in a Saudi university medical program. He has academic and professional experience, both in Saudi Arabia and internationally, where he is pursuing graduate studies. He wants to obtain a Ph.D. and teach at the College of Medicine once he returns to Saudi Arabia.

Saud explained that his current job writing focuses on reports and emails, while his graduate program requires research papers. In college, grammar and basic English skills were emphasized in the preparatory year, with a required passing score of 80%. While Saud found this instruction somewhat effective, his prior experience studying English abroad gave him additional practice. As he advanced, grammar became less of a focus, with no grade deductions for errors. To avoid mistakes, he used tools like Grammarly and relied on his graduate program's writing center, which also offered support for international students—a resource he wished were available in Saudi Arabia.

C. *Course and Curriculum Analysis*

The selected university offers various English courses to prepare students for academic programs. Given that English is the primary medium of instruction in most academic programs at Saudi universities, students must complete several English courses in the "preparatory year," focusing on four core language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The program aims to enhance students' exposure to English and familiarize them with its use in academic settings, as it is not their native language.

Although the preparatory year program encompasses an array of English courses and skills, this study specifically focuses on how grammar is introduced and assessed in English courses. Given that grammar instruction is primarily delivered through writing courses, the study examined four relevant courses: “English Communication Skills,” “English Academic Writing I,” “English Academic Writing II,” and “English Academic Writing III.” This section briefly reviews each course, emphasizing the grading criteria and textbooks used.

(a). *English Communication Skills*

The class is divided into writing and speaking components. Students are expected to write an introductory paragraph and deliver a presentation. The course also emphasizes the importance of grammar and spelling; the course objectives state that students are expected to “1. proofread and edit own work to reduce grammatical errors,” “2. use knowledge of sentence structure to avoid sentence fragments, run-on sentences etc.,” and “3. utilize teachers’ feedback to correct grammatical and spelling errors.” The focus on mechanical aspects is also evident in class activities. For instance, for the peer review activity, students are asked to “edit their own and their peers’ writing to ensure there are no grammatical or structural errors” (Course syllabus, n.d.). Additionally, they are expected to proofread and edit an authentic piece of writing to identify grammatical errors (Course syllabus, n.d.).

Paragraph writing, which considers various grading criteria (including grammar and spelling), contributes to 40% of the total grade; students also complete quizzes, midterms, and finals. These tests comprise multiple-choice (where students select the right tense or verb in a sentence), cloze exercises (texts with omitted vocabulary or content information), fill-in-the-blank (sentences with a specific, predetermined word or structure missing) and error-identification (identifying structural or grammatical errors in paragraph or sentence). These quizzes and exams emphasize students’ comprehension of grammar rules and vocabulary learned in class. Students are expected to analyze texts with grammatical errors, spell correctly, and write grammatically correct sentences, as communicated in the grading rubric of the course.

The textbooks used include *Longman Academic Writing Series (3): Paragraphs to Essays* (Oshima & Hogue, 2013) and *First Steps in Academic Writing, Level 2* (Hogue, 2007). The first book emphasizes style, sentence structure, and mechanics. For instance, the first chapter, titled “Academic Paragraphs,” introduces students to page formatting for academic paragraphs, a simple sentence structure, subject–verb agreement, and letter capitalization; explicit instructions are provided. In the section labeled “mechanics,” students learn the “rules for using capital letters” (Oshima & Hogue, 2013, p. 10). This section provides a table of capitalization rules with examples. Similarly, in the three comma rules, students learn the use of comma after “the first sentence in a compound sentence” or between items in a three-or-more-item series (Oshima & Hogue, 2013, p. 44). It includes an example and a brief explanation (see Figure 1).

THREE COMMA RULES

Let’s review two comma rules that you have learned and learn one new one.

RULES	EXAMPLES
1. Put a comma after a time-order signal that comes before the subject at the beginning of a sentence. <i>Then, soon, and now</i> are usually not followed by a comma.	Yesterday, I did homework for three hours. Finally, I was too tired to think. At 8:00 in the evening, I fell asleep on the sofa. BUT Soon I started dreaming.
2. Put a comma after the first sentence in a compound sentence. Put the comma before the coordinating conjunction. (Don’t use a comma between two parts of a simple sentence.)	I was too tired to think, so I decided to take a short break. BUT I woke up and finished my homework.
3. Put a comma between the items in a series of three or more items. The items may be words, phrases, or clauses. (Don’t use a comma between only two items.)	I got up, took a shower, drank a cup of coffee, grabbed my books, and ran out the door. Red, white, and blue are the colors of the United States flag. BUT Red and gold are the school colors.

Figure 1. Three Comma Rules (Oshima & Hogue, 2013, p. 44)

Students are also introduced to grammatical aspects such as comma splices, fragmented sentences, and subject–verb agreement. Typically, the question concerns the presented topic. For instance, students learning about subject–verb agreement are asked, “How many subject–verb combinations are there in Sentence 2?” (Oshima & Hogue, 2013, p. 40). The textbook then explains how a subject should agree with the verb and offers practice sentences.

In the second book, students are introduced to “Grammar and Mechanics” and “Sentence Structure” in Unit 1. Part 2 (Grammar and Mechanics) elucidates subject–verb agreement, punctuation, and capitalization, while Part 3 (sentence structure) deals with sentence structure (simple, compound, complex), conjunctions (and, or, but), and issues such as comma splices and fragments. As in previous textbooks, grammar and mechanics are explicitly presented in this textbook.

(b). *English Academic Writing I*

This class introduces students to a multi-paragraph essay structure. Students learn how to write the body and concluding paragraphs and compose a full essay comprising three paragraphs (introduction, supporting points, and conclusion

paragraphs) at the end of the course. The curriculum of English Academic Writing I prioritizes grammatical accuracy, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. The objectives of writing assignments (two-body paragraph assignments and a full three-paragraph essay) include specific grading criteria emphasizing grammar. The assignment goals include “producing sentences with a minimal number of lower-level grammatical errors (e.g., articles, subject–verb agreement),” “producing various simple, compound, and complex sentences with minimal structural errors,” and “using capitalization and punctuation accurately” (Course syllabus, n.d.). Assuming that students have learned basic English grammar rules in a previous introductory class, they are expected to demonstrate knowledge of grammar rules, verb tenses, and various sentence structures, including simple, compound, and complex in this class. Compared with the previous course, expectations of grammar accuracy and correctness are greater in this course.

The textbooks used for this course are *Great Writing 3: From Great Paragraphs to Great Essays, Fifth Edition* (Folse et al., 2019) and *Fundamentals of English Grammar SB/App International Edition, 5th Edition* (Azar & Hagen, 2019). Although the former primarily focuses on writing, each unit includes only one or two grammar lessons, covering topics like “fragmented sentences,” “pronoun reference,” “subject–verb agreement,” and “the different types of clauses (noun, adjective, adverbial).” The second textbook covers grammar lessons and provides grammar activities. Similar to the textbooks used in the English Communication Skills course, grammar is explicitly presented to students in these textbooks.

(c). *English Academic Writing II*

In this course, students are expected to produce two full four-paragraph essays (450–500 words each)—opinion- and cause-and-effect essays—with reference to at least three scholarly sources to support their arguments. Unlike previous English courses, in English Academic Writing II, the quality of written production is expected to be higher. Rather than basic mechanical errors, the focus is on paragraph structure, academic English use, genre knowledge, and appropriate references. That is, students’ writing is assessed based on the grammatical structures used, academic language, lexical chunks, discourse markers, contextual devices appropriate to the genre, and specific citation and referencing style. The assessment of writing quality based on previously mentioned criteria accounts for 50% of the total grade.

In addition to writing assessments, students are required to complete quizzes and exams addressing genre, academic essay structure, referencing, and grammar. Similar to test formats in previous courses, students complete multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, and error-identification questions to assess their understanding of the content covered in the class; however, the focus of the tests in this class include aspects such as genre awareness and citation.

The textbook used for this course is *Longman Academic Writing Series (4): Essays* (Oshima & Hogue, 2013). Although it places less emphasis on grammar, the textbook offers lessons on comma rules. In the lesson titled “Transition Phrase and Conjunctive Adverbs,” Oshima and Hogue (2013) explain the appropriate place of commas after dependent clauses. It also offers practice on how to correctly structure topic, supporting, and conclusion sentences and distinguish them from each other.

(d). *English Academic Writing III*

The final English class in the preparatory year program is English Academic Writing III, comprising advanced grammar and scientific writing. The former introduces students to advanced grammatical structures and different types of clauses. For instance, they learn about nouns, adjectives, and adverbial clauses and how to incorporate them appropriately into their writing. In the latter, students are introduced to scientific writing; they are expected to produce a five-paragraph scientific essay (750–1,000 words) as their final project. Students’ progress is assessed in this class via their final scientific essays and assignments, quizzes, and exams. The instructor assesses their writing based on their ability to “identify discourse markers; use transition signals effectively; demonstrate flexible grammar usage to convey ideas; revise and edit texts for vocabulary, word choice, and grammatical accuracy; use a range of reporting verbs; and construct multi-clause structures” (Coursebook, n.d.). Additionally, the instructor assesses students’ understanding of course content via quizzes and exams primarily focusing on grammar and organization.

As there are two components—grammar and writing—students are required to take *Understanding and Using English Grammar, 5th edition* (Azar & Hagen, 2016), for the grammar component, and *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students, 5th edition* (Bailey, 2017) for the writing component. Azar and Hagen (2016) focus on grammar lessons designed for L2 learners, with explicit grammar instruction and practice for learners. Figure 2 illustrates how future progressive tense usage is introduced.

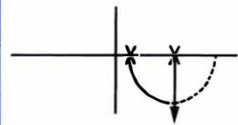
3-5 Future Progressive		
	(a) I will begin to study at seven. You will come at eight. I <i>will be studying</i> when you come.	The FUTURE PROGRESSIVE expresses an activity that <i>will be in progress at a time in the future</i> .
	(b) Don't call me at nine because I won't be home. I <i>am going to be studying</i> at the library.	The progressive form of <i>be going to</i> : be going to + be + -ing , as in (b)
	(c) I'll <i>be picking</i> Susie up early for a dentist appointment.	Will + the progressive can be used with an activity that is not in progress at a time in the future. It is common in spoken English when the speaker wants to sound more polite or softer. It is an alternative to: 1) the non-progressive form of will (<i>I'll pick Susie up early for a dentist appointment.</i>) OR 2) be going to (<i>I'm going to pick Susie up early for a dentist appointment.</i>)
	(d) We'll <i>be contacting</i> you shortly about your inquiry.	

Figure 2. Future Progressive Explanation (Azar & Hagen, 2016, p. 63)

Bailey (2017) provided various writing lessons beneficial for L2 students, including methods to structure an academic essay, analyze visuals, and cite references. The chapter titled “Language Issues” focuses on mechanical aspects, which “deal[s] with language issues that international students find most challenging when writing in English. For example, the appropriate use of definite articles, correct use of punctuation, and effective use of a suitable academic style can be problematic for any student” (Bailey, 2017). Each section contains a thorough explanation of language issues and techniques for avoiding them in their writing.

V. DISCUSSION

Drawing on interviews with Mr. Joseph, Mr. Muath, Mr. Mohammed, and Mr. Mustapha, this section discusses the relationships between instructors’ beliefs, institutional rubrics, and classroom practices regarding grammar instruction.

A. Faculty Interviews

(a). Perceptions of Native-Speakerism and Standard English

Faculty participants’ views on native-speakerism and standard English revealed varying degrees of awareness and endorsement. While all instructors verbally rejected grading based solely on native-speaker norms, their practices suggest otherwise. For instance, Mr. Joseph and Mr. Mustapha indicated that they follow institutional rubrics that reflect native-speaker standards, particularly regarding grammar. This adherence is reinforced by course textbooks and materials that prioritize standard English and include explicit grammar instruction in every unit. Interestingly, using standard English appeared to be influenced by participants’ linguistic backgrounds. Both the instructors said maintaining a standard form simplifies instruction and ensures consistency, reflecting the diglossic nature of Arabic, where standard Arabic (*fusha*) that is used in the Quran serves as a unifying written and formal spoken form, in contrast to the regionally-varied colloquial dialects (*amiyyah*) in everyday spoken language. This background likely influenced their positive stance toward English standardization.

However, Mr. Mohammed downplayed the significance of explicit grammar instruction, suggesting that English is a *lingua franca* and that all English learners can be considered “native speakers.” He acknowledged the necessity of familiarizing students with general grammar rules but argued that strict adherence to standard English grammar could alienate learners, suppressing their linguistic identities. This aligns with arguments warning against the rigid enforcement of standard English, which may discourage learners from utilizing their first language (L1) as a resource (Canagarajah, 2006; Cummins, 1991). While some believe L1 reliance could lead to negative language transfer (Karim & Nassaji, 2013), others—such as Mr. Mohammed—endorse its role in enhancing second language (L2) proficiency. Although this study’s participants did not express overt support for multilingual approaches, Mr. Mohammed hinted at a more inclusive understanding of English.

(b). Grammar Instruction and Assessment

Participants’ responses to grammar instruction revealed a subtle tension between stated beliefs and actual practices. While most of them claimed that grammar was not their primary focus, their teaching methods and grading policies suggest otherwise. Mr. Joseph and Mr. Mustapha explicitly emphasized the importance of grammar, aligning their grading with what was taught in class; for example, if subject–verb agreement was the lesson focus, related errors would be penalized. Their approach closely mirrored the institution’s rubrics, underscoring grammatical accuracy. Conversely, Mr. Muath and Mr. Mohammed adopted a more meaning-oriented approach, focusing on idea construction and coherence over grammatical correctness. However, the grading rubrics and textbooks they used emphasized grammatical correctness and other mechanical aspects. Both said that although they value content more, ignoring grammar completely could risk

being seen as incompetent by colleagues who assume that students have already mastered those skills. This affirms Al-Seghayer's (2011) argument that many Saudi instructors fail to amend their curricula because of curriculum constraints and institutional expectations.

This discrepancy between belief and practice has been supported by previous research; Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) and Abduh and Algouzi (2020) determined that Saudi instructors often claim to de-emphasize grammar but nevertheless implement grammar-focused practices amid institutional constraints. The embedded nature of grammar instruction in textbooks and rubrics is critical for maintaining this focus.

B. Alumni Interviews

The alumni interviews offered important insights into the teaching and application of grammar in professional contexts. The findings emphasize the varying levels of grammar instruction, its perceived relevance, and different impacts based on job type and academic background.

(a). Perception and Practice of Grammar

Mansour's experience underscores a critical issue in how grammar instruction is perceived and implemented in professional settings. While SCDP did not formally list grammar assessment as part of its grading rubric, the program instructor emphasized grammatical accuracy. Mansour's inability to pass the SCDP exam the first time due to "major grammar issues," despite the absence of explicit grading criteria for grammar, underscores the significance of correct grammar for professional competency, in line with Van Vooren et al. (2012), who argued that language instructors model their teaching based on their educational experiences. The instructor's educational experiences influenced Mansour's approach to teaching and assessing grammar, prioritizing grammatical precision over content and comprehension. This resonates with Alshakhi's (2019) case, where he was "told to focus more on the structure of writing and grammatical rules," affirming the scenario in Saudi EFL contexts.

Meanwhile, both Ahmed and Mohsen underscored the detrimental effects of presenting grammar instruction in isolation from real-world application. Ahmed's reflection on the abstract, rule-based nature of grammar instruction in his program revealed the negative impact of decontextualized grammar teaching. According to him, learning grammar as a set of rigid rules (e.g., "add an 's' for singular nouns") led to an overly analytical writing process, echoing Bauducco's (2017; as cited in Kaivanpanah et al., 2019) critique that explicit grammar instruction lacks contextualization. As Celce-Murcia (2015) indicated, grammar should be integrated into meaningful communication, not taught as an isolated, mechanical skill. When grammar is taught abstractly, it risks overburdening students with mechanical concerns at the expense of fluency and authentic writing practices.

Mohsen's account of the grammar instruction he received highlights how the emphasis on isolated rules hindered his ability to apply grammar effectively in real-world settings. His comparison of the grammar instruction received in college and the more practical, contextualized approach in a summer language program abroad illustrates the advantages of learning grammar within meaningful contexts, as Shen (2012) recommends for non-English majors. This reinforces the importance of presenting grammar instruction within a relevant context, particularly for non-language majors.

(b). Workplace Relevance

Although grammar instruction in academic programs may seem disconnected from workplace demands, the experiences of Saud and Mansour emphasize its continued importance in certain professional settings. Mansour's SCDP experience revealed that despite grammar not being included in official grading criteria, it influenced his chances of obtaining certification. This highlights how workplace expectations regarding grammar may not always align with formal educational objectives but nevertheless impact professional advancement. This aligns with the perspectives of Mr. Muath and Mr. Mohammed, who argued that although direct grammar instruction may not benefit students, they feel compelled to use it because of institutional and employer expectations.

Saud's experience—both in Saudi Arabia and abroad—highlights the importance of grammatical accuracy in academic and professional settings, particularly in the medical field, suggesting that, when grammar is taught within a clear context and its purpose is made explicit, learners are more likely to benefit—unlike Ahmed and Mohsen, who introduced grammar as abstract knowledge. This supports Shen's (2012) argument that direct grammar instruction, especially for non-English majors, is often ineffective when taught without a context or purpose. Instead, grammar should be taught indirectly and embedded in contexts relevant to students' careers. Although grammar remains a crucial element of academic and professional communication, it should be taught in a purpose-driven manner.

(C). Curriculum Analysis

The importance of grammar instruction and assessment is clearly stated in the objectives and textbooks of the four courses. According to course assignment rubrics, 30–40% of writing assignment grades are often allocated to grammar. Additionally, class activities such as peer review and quizzes heavily focus on grammatical accuracy. The activity description shows that the emphasis is often on grammatical correctness, spelling, and sentence structure. In peer review activities, students are instructed to "edit" and "proofread" their peers' papers, yet the underlying ideas are not discussed. Similarly, quizzes and midterms are designed to assess students' grammatical knowledge.

Accordingly, these class activities aligned with the textbook lessons. Each textbook provides explicit grammar instruction to students, including details such as comma use or ‘be’ verbs. Formulas are also provided for structuring simple and compound sentences as well as nouns or adverbial clauses to ensure accuracy and correctness. This curriculum preview highlights comprehensive instruction and significant classroom time dedicated to teaching grammar, sentence structure, and other technical aspects, as indicated by Almuhammadi (2020) and Fathi et al. (2025). It also corroborates the previously discussed learning experience of Alshakhi (2019), who criticized the extensive focus on grammar and topical issues of writing, preventing the exploration of “the variety of topics and genres of essays...and exploration of the world through writing” (p. 177).

Accordingly, course developers’ emphasis on exposing L2 students to grammatical and mechanical features is understandable and supported by seminal scholars (Liviero, 2014; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; Brown, 2000; Schmidt, 1990; Skehan, 1998). However, an overly detailed focus may hinder students from engaging with the critical aspects of writing such as idea development, rhetorical purpose, and audience awareness. As Alshakhi (2019) stated, “instead of connecting themselves with their writing, students focus on the topical issues of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling. This is very apparent in Saudi EFL classrooms today” (p. 77). Focusing on grammar and sentence structure not only leads students to overemphasize writing’s surface features, as is evident from Ahmed and Mohsen, at the expense of its fundamental goals: persuasion and communication. Overall, while grammar remains a key component of writing instruction, its decontextualized and prescriptive delivery in textbooks undermines students’ ability to develop meaningful, contextually-relevant writing skills beyond the classroom.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study explores the manner in which grammar is taught and assessed in Saudi universities from the perspectives of Saudi faculty and alumni. The triangulated findings based on faculty and alumni interviews and curriculum analysis collectively reveal a consistent emphasis on grammar instruction and assessment by instructors and course materials. Aligning with Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) and Abduh and Algouzi (2020), the findings reveal that, while some instructors expressed an interest in communicative competence and meaning-focused grammar teaching, their classroom practices reflected in the course rubrics, textbooks, and alumni reflections indicated otherwise. Faculty interviewees indicated that the focus on grammar can be attributed to institutional constraints and future job expectations that prioritize mechanical accuracy and rule-based instruction. Alumni interviewees indicated that the way they were taught grammar did not sufficiently benefit them in their current jobs.

The data suggest a disconnect between what is taught at school and what students need at work, leading to isolation not only from the English-language curriculum that alumni need at work but also from everyday English communication needs. To address this issue, purpose-driven grammar lessons could benefit students. Depending on their proficiency level and major, grammar lessons should be designed to suit their needs to enhance the link between what students learn in class and what they need in non-academic contexts; a combination of grammatical knowledge and practices is crucial. Similar to Mohsen, Ahmed, and Saud, who pointed out that grammar lessons were not useful because of the lack of a practical component, increasing in-class peer activities and providing out-of-class support—such as tutoring and writing center sessions—could prove beneficial. Saud’s case underscored the effectiveness of combining grammar instruction with regular visits to a writing center. However, as Mr. Muath mentioned, such centers are often lacking in Saudi universities, leaving students with limited opportunities to apply their grammatical knowledge, underscoring the need for writing centers at universities, particularly in EFL settings.

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