Saudi EFL Adult Learners' Spelling Errors: Reasons and Remedial Strategies to Raise Their Writing Proficiency Level

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the most common spelling errors committed by the Saudi EFL learners, their plausible reasons and the successful remedial strategies. The study may help the EFL teachers in their task of enabling their learners to complete their writing essays and assignments without any spelling mistakes and errors. This is a purely qualitative study. Thirty male EFL teachers and fourteen female EFL teachers have participated in this research study by sharing their teaching observations and experiences and helping in categorization of learners' errors and in finding reasons and remedies for the learners' spelling errors. Moreover, in the light of the feedback provided by the teacher participants, the researcher analyzed 50 writing drafts of Level-4 male Saudi EFL learners and 50 Level-4 female Saudi EFL learners at Preparatory Year Programme at Qassim University. The study concludes that the Saudi EFL learners usually use interlingual and intralingual transfer strategies due to problems in phonemic differences, loan words; phonemic, orthographic, homophonous, morphological and compounding confusions; ignorance or overgeneralization of spelling rules, and the impact of social media. The study recommends a number of teaching techniques for their rectification.

Key words: EFL Adult Learners, Spelling Errors, Categorization, Reasons, Remedies Qualitative

INTRODUCTION

Background

Spelling is important for all EFL learners in Saudi Arabia like all EFL learners around the world. It is as important and critical as any other skill such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. El-Helou (2001) has mentioned that many jobs are missed and employees are often let go because of spelling deficiencies. This is absolutely true if the job requires the employee to be skillful and knowledgeable in English in jobs such as teaching English as a second or foreign language, or translation from Arabic into English or vice versa. Moreover, doctors and pharmacists who work in hospitals need to be able to spell words correctly because misspelling can lead to serious consequences such as giving incorrect prescriptions. In addition, correct spelling is generally viewed as an indication of language competence. If students show good spelling, this means that their English skills are satisfactory. Even though the communicative approach does not support teaching spelling, EFL learners need to demonstrate correct spelling in many aspects of the language such as written activities, grammar drills, dictation, writing stories and many other classroom activities (El-Helou, 2001).

Bundq (2003) has pointed out that spelling is necessary and important for the language learners for several reasons.

Firstly, it is a way to express ideas and views in written form where words need to be spelled correctly in order to avoid any misunderstanding or ambiguity of the written texts. Secondly, misspelling may lead the readers and the audience to disregard and disrespect the writers. Thirdly, spelling is considered a real critique of the level of the students. After correcting their spelling mistakes, the teacher will know their level, which is clear evidence of their language competence. Thus the competence and command in the area of spelling becomes a mirror reflection of the effective or ineffective EFL teaching practices.

Statement of Problem

Adult learners in EFL contexts like that of Saudi Arabia are not able to complete their writing essays/assignments without spelling mistakes and errors mainly because they are probably not aware of various spelling strategies and techniques. Therefore, there is a strong research need to investigate the problems that EFL adult learners face in Saudi Arabia in producing correctly spelled words while attempting to write drafts/assignments/essays. Learning to spell is a complex process and difficult to learn. Using appropriate strategies in classroom activities will take away the fear of spelling and make adult EFL adult learners good at writing flawless

English. Appropriate strategies can bear fruit only when there is clear categorization of the learners' errors, focused research on the reasons for their errors and reflective remedial strategies to address the spelling errors committed by the learners.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The present study aims at finding the possible reasons behind the errors committed by Saudi adult EFL learners because the remedial work/strategies become more effective if the teachers are clear headed about the reasons behind the errors. What needs to be determined is whether it is because of inadequate education or carelessness on the part of the learners. In case of inadequate education, training and coaching, it will be spelling errors and in case of carelessness on the part of learners, it will be spelling mistakes. Majority of the teachers dealing with Saudi adult learners mostly give the feedback that most of their time and energy goes in correcting their spelling mistakes. The difficulty with spelling for most EFL learners is that they do not adopt various strategies and techniques that help them to improve their spelling. The study also tries to find out whether EFL teachers are mindful about the distinction between the error and the mistake and that how they deal with them differently. The study is significant and has positive implications for both the teachers and the taught. Teachers will come to know how to bring reforms in their teaching practices to improve spellings of the learners and the learners will get the guidance and direction to raise their proficiency level in English by knowing how to learn spellings quickly and accurately. Thus the study tends to find out the answers to the following research questions:

A. How can Saudi EFL adult learners' spelling errors be categorized?
B. What are the inter-language and intra-language reasons for Saudi EFL adult learners' spelling errors?
C. What remedial strategies are used by EFL teachers to treat Saudi EFL adult learners' spelling errors?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative approach to address the issues surrounding the spelling errors committed by EFL adult learners in Saudi Arabia. The research was carried out in two steps. In the first step, the researcher collected the common spelling errors committed by Saudi EFL students in PYP in Qassim University by using two important tools: a) 100 students' (50 male and 50 female) writing samples were marked by the researcher. In order to avoid the chance of considering a mistake an error, only those spelling errors that had been made by more than five students were recorded. The participants in this study were 100 Saudi students in Preparatory year Program, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, the education system only allows for separate classes for males and females. Therefore, in order to give equal representation to all students, 50 male and 50 female students included. The study took place while they were studying all English skills (a two hours class of Reading and Writing Skills, and a two hours class of Listening and Speaking Skills, thrice a week each) in the level 2 of the term.

b) 44 EFL teachers, 30 male and 14 female, (who had had at least three years of experience of teaching English to Saudi students in PYP) were requested to give a list of 30 most common spelling errors they had witnessed in the writings of their Saudi students. The researcher, then, studied all errors, and was able to categorize them into seven categories. In the second step, the 44 EFL teachers (30 male and 14 female) were interviewed to assess the common reasons for the Saudi students' spelling errors in English writing and to find out the successful remedial strategies that helped them overcome these problems. In this regard, only those remedial strategies have been included in the research for which there has been some proof of success in the earlier researches carried out in the field of teaching spellings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The English spelling system is about 1500 years old. The history of English language reveals that teaching/learning of spelling became significant mainly at the end of the Middle English Period (1100-1500 AD) when several changes took place that influenced the spelling system. These changes included the Great Vowel Shift, the dropping of the pronunciation of diacritic "e", and the invention of printing press (Culpeper, 2015). Since then, the teaching/learning of spellings has become an essential part in the EFL setup.

The teaching/learning of spelling is essential when it comes to the practical life as well. A needs-assessment survey of adults with low literacy skills found that 65% considered spelling as a significant problem in their lives (Hoffman et al., 1987). The results of this survey suggest that spelling instruction should be a specific component of the curriculum in English classes. In fact, the ability to spell correctly increases job opportunities and helps in making life better.

The earliest and the simplest technique for learning spellings has always been rote memorization. It was in the 20th century that the language was viewed as a highly regular and rule-governed system (Chomsky, 1968; Chomsky & Halle, 1968). It was mainly due to the convergence of work in linguistics and cognitive science that the learner was defined as an active participant in developing an understanding of his environment and in interacting within it. This led to the development of two theories describing the mental process involved in the learning of spellings: a) *duel-route theory for proficient spellings* is based on the assumption that there are two independent routes for storing and retrieving spellings: phonological route (letter-sound correspondence) and orthographical route (direct storage of lexical units) (Coltheart, 1978). Kamhi and Hinton (2000) reviewed a host of studies on spelling development and concluded that the poor spellings resulted when the learners focused on visual representation only and disregarded the sound-spelling relation. b) *Connectionist theory* describes the interaction between the two routes- phonology and orthography. It is assumed that limitations in the phonological processing system affect one's ability to establish associations with the orthography. Accurate spelling requires that one should generate letter sequences out of phonologic and semantic data. The technique of analogy is the outcome of connectionist theory. This involves spelling unfamiliar words based on a part

shared with a known word. For example, if one can pronounce and spell *cat,* one can use that knowledge to spell *mat, fat,* and even *apple.* Dietrich and Brady (2001), in a study, found that adult poor spellers more often misspelled words that they mispronounced. This suggests that poor phonological representations in memory, resulting from mispronunciations in normal speech, may contribute to poor letter–sound knowledge, which then results in misspellings. On the basis of these theories, following key approaches to learn/teach spellings effectively come on the surface:

Traditional Approach

The traditional method in the field of teaching spelling concentrates on memorization of the spelling of words, so the student is responsible for memorizing weekly any new words which appear on the board. Spelling games are played and workbook pages are also assigned for reinforcement. At the end of the week, tests are corrected by teachers with red marks which indicate the students' deficiencies and the following week the process is started all the over again (Gill, 1997).

Invented Spelling

This method stresses mainly the development stages in the spelling ability and the attempts of the students to correct the spelling. After assessing their individual level of understanding and utilizing word types and other whole language based strategies, the teacher in this approach acts as a facilitator and guide (Gill, 1997).This means that the teacher should let the students write whatever sound they hear without stopping them. So, the strategy of the teacher in this approach is as Shanahan has said (cited in Gill,1997, p.15) " to discover spelling principles as they attempt to make their spellings look and sound more like the words they read".

The invented spelling approach encourages the students to develop their writing. Uhry and Shepard (cited in Gill, 1997, p.18) have mentioned that "children are encouraged to write and then read their own work. Invented spelling can encourage children to listen carefully to spoken words, to segment and then spell, representing these phonemes with letters" so, the learner should write as much as possible in order to be a better speller.

Whole-language Approach

The whole–language approach to spelling acquisition is mainly an illustration of the Constructivist model. The Constructivist model is based on main assumptions: a) the individual/learner constructs knowledge out of the full range of prior experiences in his or her environment; b) the process of constructing knowledge is more efficient when the individual/learners is acting in the authentic or real-world than the artificial or contrived one. The whole-language approach towards teaching spelling requires learning experience to be more meaningful and authentic. Learning takes place when people engage in meaningful and purposeful social interactions. It also means as stated by Stahi and Miller, (cited in Gill, 1997, p.10) that "a philosophy of teaching reading us-

ing meaningful, natural language from literature and from children's own stories and skills are not taught directly" The spelling should be taught as a whole with other skills such as reading and writing. So, the students can learn spelling using their reading and writing contexts.

However, not much of the research supports solely whole-language approach to be effective in teaching spellings to adult English learners (Tompkins, 2002; Graham, 2000; Scott, 2000). Strickland (1998) proposed to bring together aspects of skills instruction including letter–sound knowledge, visual memory (how a word looks), and knowledge of word parts such as common suffixes and spelling patterns that might support spelling by analogy (p. 2l). Strickland recommended providing opportunities to learners to acquire these skills through formal and incidental (spontaneous, context-based) instruction.

Another kind of division among the educationists about the best way to develop spellings in the learners has been "bottom-up approach" and "top-down approach". Bottom-up approach emphasizes on learning from print and focuses on sound and meaning e.g; phonic rules (letter-sound approach) and word-families (analogy method). Top-down approach focuses on the learning of spellings by relating the language to the learners' world. The learners are encouraged to use invented spellings. However, they are gradually made aware of the new patterns or rules of spellings by using various other strategies.

In a genuine English language teaching/learning setup, it is important to anticipate what kinds of errors students in a specific context may make and understand the reasons or the background of these errors in order to help students write error free drafts in future. There are many irregularities in the English language spelling system (Jayousi, 2011). English spelling have been found to pose great difficulty to the EFL learners mainly due to two main reasons (Mehmoud, 2013; Al-Harrasi, 2012). Firstly, there is the lack of sound-letter correspondence in the English sound system. The foreign learners, who are used to following the sound-letter correspondence in their mother tongue, tend to commit errors when they apply the same in their EFL setting. Secondly, the English language does not have many spelling rules to cover most of the English words since most of English words are the loan words that entered the language and were adapted in different ways. The inconsistency in spellings of the English language makes it more difficult for the foreign language learners to be proficient in spelling ((Bancha, 2013). Another important cause of spellings errors is the first language interference. These errors occur mainly due to the differences in the linguistics systems of the learners' first language and the target language (Saville-Troike, 2012; Mehmoud, 2013; Bataineh, 2005).

The classification of spelling errors is an essential step for the realistic pedagogical recommendations. A great number of researchers in this area have mainly based their classification on the surface level differences/similarities among the errors i.e. addition, subtraction, omission and mis-ordering (Al-Harrasi, 2012; Cook, 1999). However, this classification does not take into account the cognitive strategies the learners employ while spelling English words and the rationale for their using specific strategy.

The research in spelling errors committed by Arab-speaking learners suggests that Arabic-speaking learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) face many spelling problems (Mehmoud, 2013). Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) attribute the spelling problems of Arab learners of EFL to the irregularity of English spelling whereas Tavosanis (2007) attributes them to the differences between the spelling systems of the two languages. There are other researchers (e.g. Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Harrasi, 2012; Mehmoud, 2013) who have classified the spelling errors committed by the EFL learners into interlingual and intralingual errors.

Al-Zuoud and Kabilan (2013) in their research study analyzed the spelling errors of Jordanian EFL learners according to Cook's classification (1999) viz a) omission, b) substitution, c) insertion, and d) transposition and found out that the most frequent spelling errors committed by them were substitution and omission errors. There is a lot of research in the interlingual errors committed by the Arab-speaking EFL learners which suggest that the possible reasons of Arab EFL learners' inaccurate spellings are because Arabic and English are typologically different from one another (Thomson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic, 1983); the process of writing each word in Arabic begins from right to left, while the reverse happens in English, and short vowels are not spelled in Arabic but pronounced in oral speech (Thomson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Ryan and Meara, 1991), whereas the same does not happen in English. However, Mehmoud (2013, 10) concluded in his research on the spelling errors made by the Omani Arab EFL students that the Arab students committed errors as a result of the interlanguage, intralanguage and communication spelling strategies used by them, and found out that most of the spelling errors committed by the Arab EFL learners in Oman are intralingual and very few (26%) interlingual.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, some researches find and categorize the spelling errors of Saudi EFL learners. Reima Al-Jarf's (2008) study aimed at investigating the phonological and orthographic problems that Saudi EFL freshmen students have in spelling English, their second language. With this aim in mind, the researcher asked 36 EFL freshmen students at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to complete a listening spelling test which required them to fill out 100 blanks in a dialogue. The results showed that the participants exhibited serious spelling difficulty, especially at the phonological level that constituted 63% of the errors. Poor spellers had difficulty hearing and discriminating all or most of the phonemes in a word, hearing and discriminating vowel phonemes and hearing the final syllable or suffix. As for orthographic problems, they included vowel diagraphs, double consonants, silent vowels, consonants and homophones. Al-Jarf (2008) concluded that most of the participants' weaknesses in spelling English could be attributed to the interference of the mother tongue. Al-Sobhi, et.al (2017) in their research tried to determine the types as well as the causes of spelling errors made by Arab ESL secondary school students by categorizing the errors according to Cook's (1999) classification of errors namely substitution, omission, insertion and transposition and found that errors of substitution constituted the highest percentage of the students' type of errors and

the main reasons found were the anomalous nature of the English spelling system, the Arab students' lack of awareness of English spelling rules as well as L1 interference. Despite being conducted in an ESL context, the study was almost consistent with the findings indicated by other studies which were carried out in many Arabic EFL context. The findings suggest that spelling instruction should be emphasised while teaching English and should also be integrated with the skills and subskills of reading, writing, pronunciation and vocabulary in order to develop the students' spelling accuracy. Unlike these earlier researches, the present research starts with the collection of errors from the students' sample essays and the most general spelling errors the Saudi EFL learners commit in their writing as witnessed by the teachers who have been into teaching EFL to Saudi students for at least 5 years. The researcher, then, categorized these errors on the basis of the most plausible reasons they could find by analyzing the similarities among them.

The present study intends to present an in-depth analysis of the main sources of error (interlingual and intralingual transfer) and to propose some effective learner-centered teaching techniques in light of the direct consultation with the experienced EFL teachers engaged in teaching in Saudi Arabia.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by bringing together almost all kinds of possible spelling errors committed by the Saudi EFL learners in order to bring awareness among the EFL teachers teaching in Saudi Arabia. It also throws light on the possible reasons for the commitment of such errors by the EFL learners. It also attempts to present plausible solutions or remedies in the light of the suggestions given by the experienced practicing EFL teachers to enable the EFL learners to prevent from the spelling errors.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: CATAGORIZATION, REASONS AND REMEDIES FOR SPELLING ERRORS

INTERLINGUAL ERRORS

Impact of Absence of L2 Consonants in L1

English phonemes (/p/, /v/, /t ʃ/, /ʒ/) do not exist in modern standard Arabic (MSA). The Arab learners tend to replace them by /b/, /f/, /ʃ/and /dʒ/ in pronunciation respectively. This sometimes leads to pronunciation-based substitution errors even in their spelling (Table 1).

Impact of Absence of L2 Vowels in L1

In Arabic, there are mainly three consonants which may be lengthened or shortened: /a:/, /i:/, and /u:/. The language does not have the English vowel /e/ or /ɑ:/. Therefore, the Arab EFL learners tend to use other vowels when they pronounce the words with these vowels in them. This leads them to misspell some words accordingly in their writing too (Table 2).

Impact of Lack of Consonant Clusters in L1

Arabic is a CVCV language and the consonant clusters are not very common. Therefore, Arab students learning EFL tend to insert extra vowels in spelling the English words with consonant clusters and commit errors (Table 3).

Impact of Loan Words

There has been a great deal of transfer of vocabulary from English to Arabic and vice versa. This transfer has rarely been complete and the words are adapted by the receiving language. As a result many words that had their roots in Arabic but were absorbed in English with slight difference in pronunciation are spelled and pronounced by the Arab students in their original way (Table 4).

INTRALINGUAL ERRORS

Like any other EFL learner, Saudi EFL learners also find English spelling challenging. The English language, striving to be the 'world's language', has borrowed many words from other languages and has expanded and changed over time due to its expansion. All this has led to making English spellings challenging for EFL learners all over the world.

In present research, there were found many spelling errors committed by the Saudi EFL learners that account for the intralingual complications/confusions. These errors have been categorized into seven following groups:

Impact of Pronunciation on Spelling Proficiency of the Learners

The Arabic language is largely a phonemic–orthographic corresponding language. However, English language lacks the sound-letter correspondence. Therefore, the Saudi EFL learners tend to commit errors by bringing a forced sound-letter correspondence in their spellings. In this regard, they tend to use the redundancy reduction strategies and sound-based substitution strategy. In the redundancy reduction strategy, the silent letters are not included (e.g. *now for Know, *sychology for Psychology, *famos for famous), and the repeated letters are used only once (e.g.*gramar for grammar, *stoped for stopped, *writen for written). The sound-based spelling strategy leads the students to substitute the actual letters by the ones closer to the sound used in pronunciation (e.g., *langwij for language, *temprachure for temperature, *elefant for elephant) (Table 5).

Table 1. Impact of absence of L2 consonants in L1

i. *barking (parking)	ii. *jop (job)	iii. *banda (panda)	iv. *blaza (plaza)
v. *blay (play)	vi. *bain (pain)	vii. *sandwish (sandwich)	viii. *meajer (measure)
ix. *brobably (probably)	x. *bray (pray)	xi. *sheep (cheap)	xii. *wan (van)

Table 2. Impact of absence of L2 vowels in L1 on Saudi EFL learners' spellings

i. *will (well)	ii. *hilthy (healthy)	iii. *beast (best)	iv. *miss (mess)
v. *sleeped (slept)	vi. *bed (bad)	vii. * injoy (enjoy)	viii. *friend (friend)

Table 3. Impact of lack of consonant clusters in L1 on Saudi EFL learners' spellings

i. *formerely (formally)	ii. *childeren (children)	iii. *moderen (modern)	iv. *faculity (faculty)
v. *foregin (foreign)	vi. *seconed (second)	vii. *pirocessed (processed)	viii. firest (first)

Table 4. Impact of loan words on Saudi EFL learners' spellings

i. *doktoor (doctor)	ii. *electroni (electronic)	iii. *coffe (coffee)	iv. *combuter (computer)
v. labtob	vi. telefision	vii. burjer (burger)	viii. budjut (budgut)

Table 5. Impact of Pronunciation on spelling proficiency of the learners

i. *nolege (knowledge)	ii. *enginier (engineer)	iii. *klimate (climate)	iv. *riligion (religion)
v. *sycholojy (psychology)	vi. *vejetable (vegetable)	vii. *beutiful (beautiful)	viii. *envirment (environment)
ix. *tempracher (temperature)	x. *famos (famous)	xi. *langwij (language)	xii. *diffrent (different)
xiii. *sience (science)	xiv. *necesary (necessary)	xv. *elegently (elegantly)	xvi. *freedum (freedom)
xvii. *definitely (definitely)	xviii. *grammer (grammar)	xix. *defination (definition)	xx. *sentense (sentence)
xxi. *writ (write)	xxii. *speek (speak)	xxiii. *restorant (restaurant)	xxiv. *now (know)
xxv. *elefant (elephant)	xxvi. *karpet (carpet)	xxvii. *nauty (naughty)	xxviii. *gramar (grammar)
xxix. *genatic (genetic)	xxx. *marrige (marriage)	xxxi. *reduse (reduce)	xxxii. *realy (really)
xxxiii. *milion (million)	xxxiv. *wensday (wednesday)	xxxv. *prosecced (processed)	xxxvi. *choises (choices)

Mispronunciation Leading to Misspelling

At times, the Saudi EFL learners, especially at the beginning stage, apply their initial spoken proficiency in attempting the writing task. In the process, the make errors in spellings while trying to write the way they pronounce these words: (Table 6).

Vowels Combination Confusion Leading to Misspelling

In most of the cases, the Saudi students tend to apply redundancy reduction strategy and use single letters where a vowel-vowel combination is to be used. As a result, we witness such spelling errors as *rason (reason), *for (four) and *fel (feel). Sometimes, the Saudi EFL learners find a vowel-vowel combination confusing and change the places of the vowels and result in spelling errors; like *chaep (cheap), *wired (weird) *pepol (people), *recieve (receive), *beleive (believe). In an attempt to write the combination, some students add extra unnecessary vowels such as *touition (tution) (Table 7).

Homophones Leading to Misspelling

The spelling errors resulting from the confusion caused by homophones are very common in the writings of almost all EFL learners. Saudi EFL learners are also found to confuse the homophones in their writing (Table 8).

Homophonous Endings Leading to Misspelling

Another confusing area in the English spelling for the Saudi EFL learners is the homophonous word-endings; for example, the spellings at the endings of the words "pollution" and "conclusion" are same –"-tion" and "-sion" – but they sound the same. In the same way, word-endings of the words "sentence" and "tense" sound similar but are spelled differently. Such confusions lead to the occurrence of spelling errors (Table 9).

Overgeneralization/Ignorance of Morphological Spelling Rules

Though there are many exceptions in the English language, there are many spelling rules to follow. The Saudi EFL learners, like any other EFL learners, commit spelling errors in writing. Most of these errors occur in the usage of past tense of some verbs: in case of the verbs that have an additional letter in their past forms like "stopped, trapped", the EFL learner do not add the letter and make errors:*stoped, *traped. In case of the verbs ending in "y", the rule for the past tense states that "y" must be replaced by "i" before the addition of "-ed". However, some Saudi EFL learners ignore the rule and the result is errors like "*applyed (applied), * carryed (carried). It is obvious that the EFL learners commit spelling errors in the case of exceptions: *eated (ate), *goed (went), *gos (goes). Moreover, another area of spelling where the Saudi EFL learners are found to commit errors is plurals: unaware of the rules, the students come up with errors like *gooses (geese), *familyes (families), *wifes (wives), *flys (flies), *mans (men). There are other morphological changes in the words when they change their group from one part of speech to other that the EFL learners are found to be unaware: *takeing (taking), *studing (studying),etc (Table 10).

Breaking the Compounding/Incomplete Compounding

Another area of the English language in which the Saudi EFL learners are found to commit spelling errors is the compounding. They sometimes break the compound words and at other times, they apply forced compounding where it is not to be done.

Table 6. Mispronunciation leading to misspelling by Saudi EFL learners

i. *gorment (government)	ii. *polotion (pollution)	iii. *tow (two)	iv. *naer (near)
v. *chaep (cheap)	vi. *forcebly (forcibly)	vii. *impect (impact)	viii. *treaditional (traditional)
ix. *theis (there is)	x. *conclution (conclusion)	xi. *frest (first)	xii. *toogether (together)

Table 7. Vowels combination confusion leading to misspelling by Saudi EFL learners

i. *fel (feel)	ii. *rason (reason)	iii. *for (four)	iv. *naer (near)
v. *chaep (cheap)	vi. *belive (believe)	vii. *wired (weird)	viii. *spek (speak)
ix. *discunt (discount)	x. *touition (tuition)	xi. *wether (weather)	xii. *pepol (people)
xiii. *concieve/receive (conceive/receive)	xiv. *foriegn (foreign)	xv. *restarant (restaurant)	xvi. *varias (various)

Table 8. Homophones leading to misspelling by Saudi EFL learners

i. *There (their)	ii. *loose (lose)	iii. *brake (break)	iv. *mail (male)
v. *right (write)	vi. *week (weak)	vii. *buy (bye)	viii. *by (buy)

Table 9. Homophonous endings leading to misspelling by Saudi EFL learners

i. *conclution (conclusion)	ii. *sentense (sentence)	iii. *permition (permission)	iv. *tempracher (temperature)
v. *decition (decision)	vi. *sentre (centre)	vii. *rise (rice)	viii. *exersise (exercise)

Sometimes, the spelling errors originate from the lack of knowledge of compounding process. The students break the compounding and commit errors like "*some time", "*now a days", "*home less"; or apply incomplete compounding like "*beautifull", "*desireable", "*well come" (Table 11).

Erratic/Forced Compounding

When the EFL learners learn the concept of compounding, they, sometimes, tend to apply compounding where it is not applicable. As a result, there are spelling errors: (Table 12).

Impact of Social Media on the Spelling Proficiency of the Learners

Today's EFL teachers are faced with the challenge and opportunity to use technology to teaching the target language in the class. Computers, smart phones and tablets are amazing educational tools, but they can also be a huge distraction to learning especially when comes to spelling. The Internet, instant messaging, email and games are a constant temptation for EFL students and can prove to be double edged weapon. The guided and supervised use of these devices can facilitate language learning in a big way but the unguided use of technology, especially by the EFL learners trying to improve their writing skills, leads to wrong spelling habits leading to faulty written outcomes. The present day learners are constantly exposed to the bizarre writing system used in online social media, chats and messaging. This system encourages them to use digits or reduced number of letters or both for words for fast communication. This habit results in spelling errors in academic writing. To removes these distractions and give teachers the tools and confidence to teach in a 21st century classroom, it is both pertinent and highly desirable that the teachers keep in mind the following spelling errors creeping in the written academic language of their learners and guide them from time to time (Table 13).

Reasons for Saudi EFL Adult Learners' Spelling Errors

It is obvious from the spelling errors categorization that there are mainly two important reasons for the errors committed by the Saudi EFL learners: in the influence of their mother tongue Arabic and the complexity within the English language. However, there are some other important factors as well: spelling teaching at school level, teachers perception about the importance of teaching spelling to the EFL students in PYP, teachers training in teaching spelling strategies and parental support in teaching spelling to EFL learners.

Many EFL learners in Saudi Arabia encounter problems distinguishing between the two sounds /p/ in pen and /b/ in bin because these two sounds are represented by one character in Arabic, which is (ب). There are other examples of similar problems such as the letters /q/ in queen and /k/ in king which are represented in Arabic by the letter (ك). Additionally, the sounds /s/ in similar and /c/ in cinema which represent the letter (س).

The difficulty of spelling seems to be obvious because many adult EFL learners write the word 'write' as 'right' or 'rite' in sentences such as 'write your name' because they are not able to distinguish the silent and redundant letters in English. Because silent letters do not exist in Arabic, most adult EFL learners think that English letters do not include silence or redundancy. El-Helou (2001) has mentioned that the correct spellings of many words do not always approximate the sound represented and is therefore considered one of the primary reasons for problems encountered by Arab learners of English because they usually write what they do not read such as the silent *t* in listen, *k* in knowledge and s in island and so on.

Table 10. Overgeneralization/ignorance of morphological spelling rules leading to misspelling

i. *gos (goes)	ii. *stoped (stopped)	iii. *easyer (easier)	iv. *applyed (applied)
v. *traped (trapped)	vi. *familys (families)	vii. *Gooses (geese)	viii. *boxs (boxes)
ix. *wifes (wives)	x. *happyer (happier)	xi. *tooths (teeth)	xii. *flys (flies)
xiii. *payed (paid)	xiv. *takeing (taking)	xv. *studing (studying)	xvi. *eated (eaten)

Table 11. Breaking the compounding/incomplete compounding leading to misspelling

i. *miss use (misuse)	ii. *some time (sometime)	iii. *now-adays (nowadays)	iv. *beauty full (beautiful)
v. *well come (welcome)	vi. *home less (homeless)	vii. *where as (whereas)	viii. *how ever (however)
ix. *desire able (desirable)	x. *to wards (towards)	xi. *there fore (therefore)	xii. *bath room (bathroom)

Table 12. Erratic/Forced compounding leading to misspelling

i. *alot (a lot)	ii. *its (it's)	iii. *there (they are)	iv. *your (you're)

Table 13. Impact of social media on the spelling proficiency of the Saudi EFL learners

i. *thanx (thanks)	ii. *g8 (great)	iii. *u (you)	iv. *plz (please)
v. *r (are)	vi. *4get (forget)	vii. *v (we)	viii. *becoz (because)
ix. *kum (come)	x. *b4 (before)	xi. f9 (fine)	xii. *2morow (tomorrow)

Because of a lack of training in teaching spelling, some ESL teachers may not feel qualified to teach spelling. This dilemma, which has led some ESL teachers in Saudi Arabia to avoid teaching spelling in the classroom, is worth noticing. Because of a lack of training and instruction in teaching spelling, most ESL teachers feel that they are unable to teach spelling in the classroom so that they treat spelling as a subject separate from other English language skills. Lackwood and Masino (2002) have mentioned that many teachers think that memorization is the key to mastering spelling, so they continue to use the spelling textbooks series and neglect any other strategies that may help students to learn spelling effectively and easily.

Teachers do not make spelling a priority because they are not familiar with different strategies that can be used to teach spelling. Many English teachers in schools in Saudi Arabia focus on the alphabet/letters rather than the phonetics and phonemics of the language. The nature of English language, unlike Arabic, is such that there are glaring discrepancies between the spelling and sound systems. It requires training of the learners on the two tracks simultaneously right from the beginning: focus on alphabets/letters/spellings side by side focus on phonetics/phonology/phonemics. Not have such simultaneous training, many EFL learners are surprised when they discover that there are many letters that in some situations are silent and redundant.

Many EFL learners are not good spellers at a very early age; however, it is not noticed until later (Lackwood and Masino, 2002). The teachers at school level in Saudi Arabia do not focus on spelling strategies which results into more problems later when they apply it in their written work in university life.

Wrong approach to teaching spellings also aggravates the problems for EFL adult learners in Saudi Arabia. Instead of teaching and training their students about the correct selling strategies, some teachers tend to give their entire class a spelling list that may not meet the needs of the students. Therefore, the students who have difficulty with spelling strategies may find the spelling list frustrating, lose motivation and self-confidence and stop working on their spelling errors in a spirited way.

A lack of parental support at school level in particular can be problematic for the EFL learners when they grow into adult learners. Even though parents understand that teaching spelling is a crucial skill, they do not reinforce spelling skills at home (Lackwood and Masino, 2002). So, parents should be informed about the development stages that their children will go through so that they become able to support them in their learning.

Remedies for Saudi EFL Adult Learners' Spelling Errors

English spelling is difficult because the pronunciation of a word is not always an accurate guide to its spelling. Most adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia consider spelling as one of the most difficult skills to learn. Despite the fact that many EFL teachers work hard to solve the learners' problems in spelling, it is sometimes difficult to deal with them. Both the

teachers and the learners need to apply and integrate various spelling approaches and strategies that can help improve the learners' proficiency in the area of English spellings. For example, EFL learners should do spelling-based activities inside the classroom with more focus on the commonly misspelled words. In addition, even Speaking Skills EFL teachers should pronounce words correctly and should not ignore their student's spelling errors. They should keep highlighting the sound-spelling discrepancy while conducting speaking activities in the classes. Spelling in Arab countries continues to be problematic for both EFL teachers and learners. Therefore, not only do Arab learners need to be involved in intensive courses that focus on spelling problems but also EFL teachers should attend some training programmes that concentrate on how spelling should be taught.

Teaching spelling must include teaching various spelling strategies. "Learners must draw on several strategies because no single strategy can be used to overcome all irregularities in written English" (Toping, 1995, p.374). Lackwood and Masino (2002) believe that using only one strategy causes boredom but using different strategies and techniques should be used to teach spelling. So, EFL learners need a variety of strategies to learn spellings effectively; self-selected words, worthwhile spelling instruction, spelling dictionaries, breaking words up and word sorts are some of the various strategies that adult EFL learners should adopt/made to adopt in order to improve their spellings. Following are some strategies that may help EFL adult learners to improve their spellings.

"Breaking words up is another effective strategy that can be used when teaching spelling" (Lackwood & Masino, 2002, p.18). This strategy means separating the word into smaller parts so that a word is more easily remembered. So, the word can be divided into syllable chunks. For example the word (powerfulness) can be divided into- power/ful/ness. When the students know how to spell the smaller words, they will know the spelling of the long words by breaking and dividing them into small words.

Gill (1996) mentions another strategy which is "a manipulative activity in which individual words are printed on small cards and are grouped or categorized according to a specific feature" (p.91) to teach spelling effectively. Words sorts are a strategy that can be used in teaching and learning the spelling of new words. Using word families is a good technique that teachers should use to teach common sounds and help learners become aware that categories of words may have similar sounds. Word families can be found in the rhymes, poems and songs that are written on the walls of the classrooms. The learners can read and brainstorm words for each word family that are found around the classroom. The following table 14 clarifies and presents some word families.

Table 14. Most common word families

___an	___on	___it	___at
Can	Ton	Pit	Mat
Pan	Con	Sit	Gat
Fan	Son	Nit	Cat

The teachers of adult EFL learners should teach their students how to group and categorize the words based on their endings or sounds. Some words such as *ability*, *capability*, and *reality* can be grouped together in one category. In addition, Schonell (1985) has organized the Essential Spelling List into small groups that include the same visual structure such as 'call', 'tall' and 'well', and the role of the teacher in this case it to emphasize the visual element which is common to all the words. Moreover, the adult EFL learners should be taught sometimes in rhyme which is a great way to learn spelling. They should start with words that look similar (car, far) and then progress to words that only sound the same, for example cut, nut, but and so on.

El-Helou (2001) has stated that 'spelling is essential for speaking and listening in the classroom especially when unseen dictation activities are involved. The general practice in such activities is that the teachers pronounce words, and the students listen to what the teacher says and then write what they hear'. The teachers may use spelling dictation as a method to help the students to become aware of their spelling progress. This technique can be applied with the entire class, sounding out letter by letter and word by word in order to help the students determine their strengths and weakness in spelling. Many EFL teachers working in Saudi Arabia prefer the strategy of spelling dictation. In dictation, a long passage may be divided into short paragraphs, and students may be made to concentrate on each part separately. This may help them to focus on spelling more carefully. Moreover, while dictating the passage, the teacher may stop sometimes to ask the students about the spelling of some difficult words (Bundq, 2003). This helps the weaker students to work with more confidence as they correct their spelling while doing the activity and, thus, saves them from embarrassment of seeing a draft marked all in red ink.

Making students write a lot may help them correct the spellings over the time. Mere writing may not be sufficient in this regard. The teachers must mark their writing and make them aware of their spelling errors. They should be encouraged to spell correctly in order to improve their writing. Before the submission of the next writing drafts, the students must be made to double check their spellings. This will help them manage their own learning.

Involving the EFL learners in their efforts of spelling correctly through certain means can be quite beneficial. What Toping (1995) has said about the children that **"Children should manage their own learning"** (p.374) is quite true in case of adult EFL learners as well. Teachers should give the adult EFL learners the opportunity to check and evaluate their spelling skills and writing skills in order to become more active in learning how to spell (Lackwood and Masino, 2002). The learners should be allowed to correct each others' papers. The teachers should ask them to exchange their papers and just supervise their correction work. Teachers in this case should work side by side to observe and recheck papers from time to time and in order to make sure that they do not have difficulty correcting the work. Another effective strategy to teach spelling is to "hold [learners] accountable for what they learn as well as [personalizing] the spelling curriculum for learners with different needs" (Chandler,

2000, p.91). This strategy is what some researchers have called "word banks". When the learners learn new words, they would like to enter them into their personalized word bank. A word bank could be a note book, a file card box or any convenient container. Having a note book or personal dictionary is essential for EFL learners to write new words in order to refer to them in their writing whenever they want. So, the personal dictionary is a kind of word list that can be learned more quickly, remembered longer, and transferred more to new contexts (Horn, 1961).

Teaching spelling may accelerate if the EFL learners are made responsible for their spelling development. Toping (1995) points out that "children with spelling problems made better progress when they were actively involved in a self- selected learning strategy than when similar routines were imposed by teachers" (p-374). This technique can also be used effectively to motivate adult learners to learn because they pick up the words that interest them and feel ownership of their work. Moreover, they can refer to them as often as necessary until they can spell them effectively. This means that giving the students the opportunity to choose by themselves the words that they want to learn to spell is an essential factor in the field of teaching spelling. After the students choose the words that they want to learn, they may work in workshop activities that enable them to strengthen their visual memory such as spelling games, word building and dictionary activities.

Peripheral learning may also facilitate in spelling teaching/learning. The use of flash card, realia, pictures can make the classroom more interesting, lively and at the same time more rewarding. Ellis (2008) defines peripheral learning as a learning of more difficult information "incidentally" rather than "consciously". 'Peripheral learning' refers to a sort of perception occurring implicitly and incidentally as a result of continuous *exposure* to the increasing quantity of information (Bahmani et al., 2012). In simpler words, peripheral learning is learning without attention. It may prove to be a beneficial strategy for learning vocabulary and spelling if exploited skillfully. Rokni (2014) used pictures plus texts, posters and bulletins to investigate the effectiveness of peripheral learning on EFL learners' peripheral learning. He found out that the participants who focused on realia and pictures learned better than those who did not. Thus, learning the spelling of words depends on how deeply the students can process them. Working out the meaning of the words (peripheral learning) and practicing them in a series of exercises (intentional learning) is the deepest level of processing and ensures the best learning.

CONCLUSION

The study shows novelty and originality because it found that the Saudi EFL learners have many problems in their spellings due to the interlingual and intralingual transfers. In the interlingual transfers, the spelling errors occur due to the impact of the absence of L2 consonants in L1, absence of L2 vowels in L1, lack of consonant clusters in L1 and the loan words. In the intralingual transfers, the Saudi EFL students commit spelling errors due to the impact of pronunciation

and, in some cases, mispronunciation on the orthography, the confusions caused by the differences in the vowel-combinations, the impact of homophones and homophonous endings, the overgeneralization/ignorance of morphological spelling rules, incomplete compounding or breaking the original compounding, forced compounding and the impact of social media on spellings. The study has analyzed all these errors, their causes in detail and also presented some workable remedial solutions/techniques drawn from the earlier research as well as the experiences of professionals working in the field of EFL in Saudi Arabia.

Proficient spellings make the students good writers and help them get a good job. On the other hand, poor spellings reflect negatively on the students and become a barrier in their effective language performance. It is hoped that this study will help the policy makers, program administrators and the course designers understand the importance of spellings to give due recognition to this area of language teaching/learning. Moreover, it will be of essential help to the EFL teachers in planning and administering their teaching techniques in consideration with the causes of the spelling errors committed by the students and make it a success.

The study concludes that the Saudi EFL learners usually use interlingual and intralingual transfer strategies due to problems in phonemic differences, loan words; phonemic, orthographic, homophonous, morphological and compounding confusions; ignorance or overgeneralization of spelling rules, and the impact of social media. Spelling errors committed by the Saudi EFL students only, but the categories of the errors and teaching techniques recommended here can be beneficial to all the EFL teachers. Thus, there is a scope for future researchers to investigate the issue in other contexts to find out the cognitive strategies.

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