
An Assessment of Acquiring English Attributive Adjective Order by Saudi University Freshmen and Senior EFL Students

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المخلص

أصبح اكتساب بعض القواعد النحوية المعقدة مثل ترتيب الصفات المتعددة للاسم موضوع بحث على نطاق واسع بسبب صعوبات التعلم لجميع متعلمي اللغة، فبغض النظر عن خلفياتهم اللغوية قد يعتبر طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية الذين لغتهم الأولى ليست الإنجليزية أنه من الصعب اكتسابها بسبب الأنماط النحوية المختلفة بلغتهم الأم خصوصاً فيما يتعلق بترتيب الصفات في اللغة العربية. ولذا تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث مدى الصعوبة التي واجهها المشاركون السعوديون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في تحديد ترتيب الصفات المتعددة الصحيح. علاوة على ذلك قام البحث بتقييم أداء طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في السنة الأولى والأخيرة بشكل منفصل لتحديد التحديات في إتقان ترتيب الصفات وفعالية أساليب التدريس التي مروا بها. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف تم تصميم اختبار (اختبار تقييم ترتيب الصفات الموضوعية قبل الأسماء) والذي تكون من ثلاث مستويات من عبارات ترتيب الصفات: عبارات فيها صفتان وأخرى فيها ثلاث صفات وأخرى فيها أربع صفات. شارك ٨٠ طالباً في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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في البحث طواعية. تم استخدام SPSS ٢٧ لتحليل البيانات كميًا. كشفت نتائج اختبار t و ANOVA عن اختلافات كبيرة بين أداء المجموعتين. كان أداء طلاب السنة الأخيرة أفضل من السنة الأولى الذين اعتمدوا في كثير من الأحيان على معرفتهم السابقة بقواعد تكوين الصفات في اللغة الأم (العربية). وأظهرت النتائج أن المشاركين وجدوا العبارات ذات الأربعة صفات هي الأكثر صعوبة، تليها ثلاثة، ثم اثنان. واجه ٥٠٪ من المشاركين صعوبة متوسطة في اختيار تسلسل الصفات الصحيح، في حين واجه ٤٨٪ صعوبة منخفضة. أبرز النتائج هي حول دور المعلمين في تدريس القواعد النحوية، حيث قال ٢٢,٢٪ من المشاركين أن المعلمين لم يشرحوا القواعد النحوية لترتيب الصفات، وهو أمر مثير للقلق. أفاد ٤٦,٩٪ أن المدرسين قاموا بتدريس القواعد لكنهم ما زالوا غير واضحين في تطبيقها. ويشير إلى أن التعرض المبكر والتدريس المركز لتدريس ترتيب الصفات يمكن أن يفيد الطلاب الجدد. كما يمكن أن تساعد منهجيات التدريس المتقدمة ومراجعة منهج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية الطلاب على تعلم ترتيب الصفات المتعددة بشكل أفضل.

Abstract

The complex structure of English nominal pre-modifications, particularly the adjective word order, has emerged as a significant area of research. This complexity causes learning difficulties for language learners, irrespective of their linguistic background. English as a foreign language (EFL) students whose first language (L1) is not English may face challenges in language acquisition due to the different syntactic patterns of their native language, like Arabic, especially in terms of noun phrases. This study intended to investigate the difficulty level Saudi EFL participants faced in identifying the correct adjective order. Moreover, the research evaluated the performance of freshmen and seniors separately to identify the challenges in mastering adjective order and the effectiveness of the teaching methods they had experienced. To achieve these objectives, a pre-nominal adjective test (a test assessing the order of adjectives placed before nouns) was designed. It consisted of four levels of adjective order statements. The first level starts with a basic two-adjective sequence and advances to three-adjective combinations like quality, size, and age. The third level consists of a four-adjective order: material, origin, and purpose. Finally, the fourth level

integrates the categories like quantity, quality, size, age, shape color, origin, and purpose to evaluate the command of the complex adjective structure. EFL students participated in the research voluntarily. SPSS 27 was used to analyze the data quantitatively. The findings of the t-test and ANOVA revealed significant differences between the performance of both groups. The senior students performed better than the freshmen, who often relied on native language structure. The results showed that participants found the four levels of adjectives most challenging, followed by three, and then two. 50% of the participants had moderate difficulty choosing the correct adjective sequence, whereas 48% faced low difficulty. The most notable findings are about the role of teachers in teaching grammatical rules, in which 22.2% of participants said that teachers never explained the grammatical rules of ordering adjectives, which is alarming. 46.9% reported that instructors have taught the rules but they still face challenges in applying them. The outcomes suggest that early exposure and focused teaching could benefit freshmen. Advanced teaching methodologies and revision of the EFL curriculum could help students learn accurate adjective order.

Keywords: Pre-nominal, post-nominal, adjective order, Arabic speakers, teaching methods

1. Introduction

Writing in a foreign language causes various challenges for students, particularly when managing grammatical complexities. Due to complex sentence structures such as adjective order, foreign language students often struggle with writing. This issue has been observed in Arabic-speaking EFL learners, as the syntactic rules of Arabic significantly differ from the English adjective order. When foreign language (FL) classes do not sufficiently address this area, students face challenges in learning such productive skills, further affecting their writing proficiency.

According to Derakhshan and Karimian (2020), writing accurate sentences is among the most critical skills that should be emphasized in foreign language classrooms. However, mastering grammar can be challenging for EFL learners when the syntactic rules of their native language differ from those of the foreign language. Learning grammar is essential if you plan to write in a foreign language. Achieving this competence can be hard if the grammatical structures of the two languages differ (Al-Khresheh, 2010, 2011). The particular difficulty for many EFL learners is the linear ordering of adjectives, an attribute that significantly contrasts between English and other languages, including Arabic. This study

examines Saudi EFL students, analyzing how undergrads (freshmen) and senior students maintain English adjective order.

Research has further highlighted that the difficulties EFL students face go beyond written expression. Students have faced a wide range of grammatical difficulties including syntax, phonology, and morphology, nevertheless, the specific problem of mastering pre-modification structures such as adjective order has been particularly highlighted by Alhaysony (2012) and Al-Khresheh (2015).

Native speakers of Arabic who took part in a relevant study were found to be challenged by ordering such pre-modifications (Khatter 2019). In all syntactic theories, word order flexibility is of great interest because every language seems to be different in this regard. The basic elements of some languages offer a great degree of flexibility, while others do not (Dixon 2004). It's not clear how things will develop when learners take up a foreign language whose word order is more or less flexible than the order of their native language, imposing a new order in the process (Gershkoff-Stowe and Goldin-Medow 2002).

In English and Arabic, there are two different frameworks for ordering adjectives. Due to this distinction, learners who are heavily reliant on their native language when acquiring a second language may encounter significant challenges. In the context of EFL, one should teach word order with great care because it differs between languages significantly and the correct order in a foreign language is hard to pick up (Al-Khresheh 2010).

Since the attributive adjective in Arabic is mostly post-nominal, Saudi students often struggle to master English attributive adjective order, even after years of study, particularly when dealing with multiple adjectives. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the potential difficulty encountered by Saudi University EFL students, undergoing four years of language learning. A test was carefully designed for this purpose and administered through Google Forms among 80 students from the English department of King Saud University, including freshmen and seniors. The results could highlight the extent of the student's exposure to some attributive adjectives and the way they learned how to order them.

1.1 Aim of the Study

The current research aims to explore the knowledge of English adjective order among Saudi EFL students, particularly freshmen and senior undergraduate students. It is to determine the regularities in their understanding and application of the principles defining the adjectives' order

that is important for effective communication. It is therefore dealing with typical word order of adjectives; opinion, size, age, form, color, origin, substance, and purpose and aims at determining common problems faced by students and improvement in their knowledge of adjectives order throughout their education. The findings may be useful for educators and curriculum developers to enhance EFL practices to support enhanced linguistic skills.

1.2 Research Questions

- 1- How difficult is acquiring the attributive adjective order in English by the Saudi university freshmen and senior students?
- 2- To what extent the students are exposed to the grammatical aspects of multiple adjective order? And how well have they internalized such aspects?

2. Literature Review

The syntactic structure of language determines adjective order. In the English language, attributive adjectives typically precede the noun within the noun phrase known as prenominal, whereas in Arabic, adjectives generally follow the noun known as post-nominal. This distinction is rooted in language typology and is shaped by factors like cultural preference, historical development, and stylistic norms (Richards 1975). A language's evolution can play a role in determining adjective placement. Stylistic preferences and cultural factors contribute to the placement of adjectives, for example, aesthetic reasons to place an adjective in a specific position.

Moreover, the semantic relationship between the noun and its modifying the adjective can also influence word order. In some languages, adjectives that express essential or inherent qualities may appear before the noun, while those that indicate temporary or subjective qualities may follow it, especially in languages that allow for both pre-nominal and post-nominal positioning (Richards 1975). Apart from this, phonological factors like the ease of pronunciation also affect adjective placement. Certain sound combinations may feel more natural or comfortable when the adjective precedes the noun while the opposite may be true for others. Different languages exhibit varying patterns of agreement between nouns and adjectives, which can impact their positioning. In some languages, adjectives may agree with nouns in terms of number, gender, etc., and this affects their order.

In English, both the intuition of native speakers and corpus research provide evidence that the order of attributive adjectives within the noun phrase follows a fixed pattern (Rasato 2013). More specifically, adjectives comply with the following attributes in this exact order:

- Quantity or number.

- Quality or opinion.
- Size.
- Age.
- Shape.
- Color.
- Proper adjective (place of origin such as nationality, material, etc.)
- Purpose or qualifier

For example, a native speaker might say: "He has five gorgeous big old oval red Swiss makeshift houses". The fixed order is typically observed in natural speech and writing (Wulff, 2003). This order mainly reflects how speakers have naturally structured their language throughout its historical development.

A native speaker of English would say:

- a. A big black box
- b. A beautiful white Japanese house.

If someone tried to change the order of the adjectives, a native speaker of English would say the expressions were grammatically wrong, for example:

- a. A black big box
- b. A white beautiful Japanese house.

These incorrect examples show that specific patterns govern the ordering of multiple adjectives in English. It is worth noting that native English speakers order adjectives intuitively without conforming to some rule consciously. Therefore, it would be interesting to study how non-native English speakers would order English adjectives when there is more than one in the noun phrase (NP), particularly for speakers whose first language has a different syntax in terms of the NP, such as Arabic.

The Arabic language follows different guidelines for adjective order. In practice, these guidelines may be flexible. Typically, the definite article precedes the noun. For example, al- kitab means "the book." This also applies for numbers: thalaath kitaab means "three books." Demonstrative pronouns ("haatha," "haathihi," "dhaalika," "tilka") also precede the noun: haatha al-kitab means "this book." Demonstrative adjectives come after the noun for clarity or emphasis. In addition, adjectives describing basic or innate qualities, such as color, size, shape, or material, traditionally come after the noun. For instance, bayt Kabeer - "a big house."

Furthermore, adjectives that give additional information or qualify the noun may come after it. This includes adjectives introduced by a relative

pronoun (al-ladhi) in relative clauses. For example, in "the girl who is tall", "tall" follows the noun due to the relative clause.

Scholars confirm word order is a critical tool in discriminating between agents (doers) and objects (receivers) in languages like Arabic and English (Al Mahmoud, 2014; Gershkoff-Stowe and Goldin-Medow, 2002). These differences play a critical role in the placement of adjectives, and in the broader syntactic structure as well. Some languages have very strict word orders, such as English, which follow a subject-verb-object structure. This grammatical rigidity extends to adjectives. French also belongs to the language group, but its rules are comparatively less strict. French generally prefer to position the adjective before the noun phrase. Other languages may have different grammatical systems but notably, most of the languages are seen to provide only one unmarked option in this context (Dixon 2004; Tomlin 1986).

Moreover, another crucial aspect of the distribution of word orders of high complexity is the significant closeness of correspondence between lower-order language choices and higher-order language sequences. This study highlights the notable difference in perception between native English and native Arabic speakers regarding adjective placement. The English language follows the rule of Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), where adjectives typically precede the noun they modify. Whereas the Arabic language follows the rule of verb-subject-object (VSO), adjectives come after the noun (Arche et al., 2014).

This differential relation is evident in many widely known syntactic parameters, including the head direction parameter given by Chomsky (1981). A native speaker of English would positively switch up "Black big car" with "Big black car" but Arabic speakers would not consider "Black big car" incorrect. According to Al-Khresheh (2010), English allows for the conjunctions of multiple prenominal adjectives, while Arabic offers numerous post-nominal combinations.

Furthermore, several research studies have identified that native English speakers prefer using specific adjective order to modify nouns, verbs, and sentences. Adjectives are one of the most often used modifiers of word meaning (Jiang, 2009). However, learning the correct order of adjectives in English is difficult for non-native learners, especially for those whose first language contains post-nominal adjectives, such as Arabic. Particularly this is true for Saudi EFL students, who need to adjust to a syntactic structure that significantly differs from their native language.

Thus, the differences between Arabic adjectives and their likely English equivalents increased the difficulty. Zawahreh (2013) showed this in selecting the best English translation of Arabic adjectives for English learners whose native language is Arabic. Rosato (2018) used an alternative approach. In her study, she selected phrases with incorrect, but interesting adjective orders and had participants read these phrases out loud. Her goal was to determine whether they did not accept the adjective order based on pauses in their speech, tone, and accent.

Amer (2013) applied the same descriptive-analytical approach to examine the differences in the order and placement of adjectives in the English and Arabic languages. He also discussed the implications of teaching adjectives in these languages. His study revealed that the syntactic structures of Arabic and English are different which is why Arabic EFL learners struggle with placing and ordering English adjectives. In his 2013 study, Amer observed that "Arab learners of English encounter great difficulty in constructing sentences involving several adjectives," attributing this to "the linguistic differences between the adjective position and order in English and Arabic." He also suggested some pedagogical implications, emphasizing that English teachers should teach inductively for students to use adjectives accurately.

El Shaban (2017) investigated the adjective errors in Arabic-speaking English language learners. He concluded that Arabic caused some sequencing errors. As the essence of his adjective order test remains unknown, details are lacking. El Shaban did assert that progression errors, which are not caused by the mother tongue, were far more significantly more common. Andayani (2018) also held brief interviews with participants, asking them specific questions about the extent, to which they were familiar with adjective order and how they applied their knowledge in practice. In regards to Arabic language data, within a minimalistic framework, Oteef (2018) looked at the order of adjectives. However, he never talked of the use of two or more adjectives at the same time, nor how we can justify the order regarding the use of adjectives.

Moreover, the relationship between background knowledge and understanding of adjective order sequence has been overlooked in the past. It is necessary to pay attention to it. This knowledge entails recognizing elements like gender and general language competence. Additionally, it would also be interesting to delve into specific categories of adjective order that cause difficulty for EFL learners, particularly due to the noticeable difference in their native languages.

Alotaibi (2017) investigated how Kuwaiti EFL students acquire pre-nominal adjective order at various levels of competence. The study intended to know the extent to which Kuwaiti EFL learners were familiar with the pre-nominal adjective order system in English. He concentrated on the difficulties they faced concerning the correct order of adjectives. He also assessed the learner's background knowledge of English proficiency and how it affected their test results. The main focus of his work was on English learner's use of adjective order and its grammatical accuracy.

In this study, participants were given sentences and asked to rearrange the groups of disorganized adjectives in brackets to fit inside them. Each sentence contained multiple semantic categories for ordering (such as color, size, or another feature). The study employed Svenonius' (2008) notion of patterns, which encompasses seven lexical categories: size, form, origin, condition, color, opinion, and age. It also alludes to Quirk, Greenbaum, and Svartvik's (1985) notion of patterns, which includes eight semantic categories: size, shape, color, quality, age, material, participle, and country. Both studies address the issue of cross-linguistic influence.

The findings revealed that skill level (proficient vs. intermediate) was a major factor in the ordering of English adjectives. There was a statistically considerable distinction between proficient and intermediate students (65% and 35%, respectively). The study found that proficient students were more likely to order adjectives correctly. It also demonstrated that the most visible mistakes made by students were the result of negative first language (L1) transfer. This was particularly noticeable in the learners' inability to correctly order adjectives before the nouns, as adjectives come after the nouns in Kuwaiti Arabic. As per Alotaibi (2017): "Kuwaiti Arabic (KA) acts the same as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) about of adjective order, as normally post-nominal adjectives". Pre-nominal adjectives appear in Arabic exclusively in the "Adjectival Synthetic Genitives (SGAs)".

Connolly (2020) also demonstrates the pronounced impact of an English learner's native language. When one does not know English grammar rules, one will inevitably fall back on their native language's rules. Alotaibi (2017) observed that Kuwaiti learners had difficulty ordering pre-nominal adjectives correctly in KA. Because adjectives are post-nominal, displaying the idea of L1 transfer. The study delves into more detail on some of the challenges regarding language transfer, it examines the impact of the first language on the process of acquiring the pre-nominal adjective order in English.

The sequence of adjectives is among the less studied subfields of English grammar, so it is critical to investigate this topic, especially in the context of

EFL instruction. Understanding how learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, such as Saudi-Arabic speakers, master English adjective order may cultivate more effective teaching strategies. It may also address the recurrent challenges students face while acquiring this structure. EFL teachers should be aware of what EFL students typically struggle with, their existing knowledge and skills, and what they find easy to learn in English. Overall, there are few studies on the process of native speakers of Arabic learning adjective order in English. Studies like the present one aim to measure productive and receptive adjective order knowledge with a high degree of accuracy. Furthermore, learners' proficiency can be evaluated in terms of both implicit and basic explicit knowledge.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Method

The present study utilizes a quantitative research design to investigate how Saudi EFL students learn attributive adjective sequences and their familiarity with the adjective order structures. A pre-nominal adjective test is used to evaluate Saudi EFL learners' ability to correctly arrange adjectives before nouns following grammatical rules. The results will provide empirical insights into students' skills in implementing the correct adjective order. It will also evaluate their exposure to grammatical components of diverse adjective structures.

3.2 Research Design

A quantitative research design was employed to efficiently meet the main research objectives, as it is observed as a fast, scientific, and practical method. This method allows the collection and analysis of data systematically (Rasinger 2008). Dörnyei (2007) emphasizes its use in comparative studies while Brown and Rodgers (2002) underscore its importance in evaluating learner's performance. It is more accurate due to the utilization of statistics and targets fewer variables. It can help eliminate biases from the research and increase the validity of the findings. Large sample sizes are typically easier to gather, which is an extra benefit (Azarian 2011; Gay and Airasian 2005; Babbie 2005). With the research design established, the following section outlines the participant demographics critical to the study's outcomes.

3.3 Participants

The study consists of 80 participants, including senior and freshman students majoring in English at King Saud University. All these participants have the same linguistic background Arabic is their first language. The

sample is carefully selected to be as homogeneous as possible, since all participants are members of a similar socioeconomic class and linguistic environment, reducing variability external to the experiment. A purposive sampling technique to select individuals who represent the target population best for this study to maintain relevance to the research objectives. The approach improves the validity of findings by identifying people with the characteristics that help answer the questions posed by the study.

3.4 Research Tool

The pre-nominal adjective test is used as a research instrument to assess how well freshmen and seniors understand the proper adjective order in noun phrases. The assessment contains three sections. The first section includes demographics such as level and gender. The second segment focuses on phrases related to adjective order, and the third component contains questions designed to assess participants' grammatical comprehension of attributive adjectives. The test has twenty-two multiple-choice questions. The last two questions are added to check the grammatical exposure of participants and the role of the teacher. Participants are prompted to select the appropriate adjective order. Each question consists of a noun phrase with two, three, or four pre-modifying adjectives. The language used in the phrases is simple and adjectives are arranged precisely (quality, size, age, temperature, form, color, and size).

3.5 Data Collection

The data has been collected through a Google form. It was shared online via email and social media platforms with two groups of students: freshmen from the 2024-2025 academic session and seniors from the 2020-2024 cohort of the English department at King Saud University. The form featured a prenominal adjective test designed to evaluate learners' comprehension of adjective order in English noun phrases. Additionally, clear instructions were stated at the beginning of the test to complete it independently without any external help to maintain transparency in the results.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

At the beginning of the test, participants were informed about the primary objective of the research. The test was conducted with the consent of all participants, and they were assured that their data would be kept confidential and would only be used for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and students were told they could leave the study at any time.

3.7 Data Analysis Technique

SPSS is considered the most appropriate tool for quantitative data analysis due to its user-friendly features (IBM 2020; Ong and Puteh 2017). The

gathered data was analyzed using SPSS 27. The tabulation method was used for data representation. 0 and 1 were utilized to code the incorrect and correct responses. A correct response indicates that the participant rightly identified the adjective order, whereas an incorrect response demonstrated a mistake. The mean accuracy score was computed for each test item. It further provided empirical insight into overall performance.

4. Data Analysis

The main study was conducted with 80 participants, excluding those 30 participants who participated in the pilot study. To determine the extent to which Saudi EFL students face problems in recognizing the right order of English adjectives before the head noun, the overall test results were ranked from top to bottom and divided into three categories: high score (14- 20), medium score (7-13), and low score (0-6). The percentage of each category was scrutinized as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants' Receptive Scores and Difficulty Levels

Score Range	Category	Count	Percentage	Difficulty
0-6	Low grades	1	1.2%	High
7-13	Medium grades	40	50%	Moderate
14-20	High grades	39	48.78%	Low

Only one student fell into the low-score category, accounting for just 1.2% of the total participants. A significant portion—50% of students—achieved medium-level scores, indicating that they found recognizing the correct adjective order moderately difficult. Meanwhile, 48.78% of the participants secured high scores, suggesting that nearly half of them experienced little to no difficulty with adjective ordering. This distribution shows that a large group of students had a solid grasp of adjective order. To better understand the degree of difficulty across different types of adjective modifiers, each category of test items was analyzed separately.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Receptive Assessment Across Test Items

Adjective Modifiers	Mean	Median	SD	SE	Range	Difficulty Rank
Four Modifiers	0.6203	1	0.4884	0.055	1	1
Three Modifiers	0.8734	1	0.3346	0.0376	1	2
Two modifiers	0.6456	1	0.4814	0.0542	1	3

According to this analysis, participants experience more difficulty in recognizing adjective order with four modifiers. Comparatively, they find it easier to deal with three modifiers and are more convenient with two modifiers. Furthermore, to identify the statistically significant difference between Saudi EFL students according to their level (freshmen and seniors), the t-test was performed.

Table 3: t-test of Independent Sample

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-statistic	p-value
Freshman	11.43	2.79	-3.06	0.0038
Senior	13.60	3.02		

The mean of the freshman's total score is 11.43, the standard deviation is 2.79, and the negative t-statistics -3.06 showed that the average score of freshmen is lower than that of the senior students. The p-value is 0.0038 which is less than 0.05, indicating that the difference between freshman and seniors scores is statistically significant. These findings indicate that the performance of senior students was better than that of freshman students.

A one-way ANOVA test was performed to identify the statistically significant differences in participants' mean test results based on their level.

Table 4: The One-way ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-statistic	Significance (p-value)
Between Groups	6804.152	1	6804.152	8.977053	0.003677
Within Groups	757.9494	78	9.843498		
Total	7562.101	79			

The ANOVA analysis gives a clear understanding of the differences between the scores of freshman and senior students. The sum of squares between groups is 6804.152, suggesting notable variation between the two groups. Whereas, the sum of squares within groups is 757.9494 indicating that the variability within the scores of freshmen and seniors is comparatively low. Moreover, F-statistic is 8.977053 which reflects that the difference between the groups is significantly greater than the variation within the groups. The result is further elaborated by the p-value which is 0.0037 signifying a clear statistical difference between the scores of freshmen and seniors.

To determine how well Saudi EFL students understand the grammar requirements of adjective order and the role of the teacher in teaching these rules, two statements were added to the assessment tool designed by the researcher. The responses of the participants to each question are recorded and the results are presented in percentages.

Table 5: Results of Question 1 (How many times has your teacher explained the grammatical rule for ordering adjectives in English?)

Response of Participants	Percentage of Answers
Never	22.2%
2-3 Times	59.3%
More than 3 times	18.5%

It is observed that 22.2% of participants said that the teacher never explained the grammatical rules for ordering adjectives in English. 59.3% chose the second option, indicating that the teacher taught the rules two or three times in class. 18.5% of students believe that the rules are taught to them more than three times. The findings suggest that such grammatical principles should be taught to students to improve their English language skills, notably their ability to rank adjectives. It also highlights the necessity to examine the course outlines of functional English taught to EFL students and underscore the inclusion of such rules. Furthermore, teachers must put extra effort into educating the EFL students about these grammatical norms. The second statement was also recorded and the results are displayed in table 6.

Table 6: Results of Question 2: (Do you feel that you have successfully understood and applied the rule?)

Response	Percentage
Fully understand and apply easily	30%
Understand but struggle to apply	46.9%
Still unclear about the rule	22.2%

30 % of the participants agreed that they understand the rules fully and can readily apply them. 46.9% believe they know the norms but struggle to implement them, suggesting that they must practice them repeatedly to master them. EFL teachers can assist them in achieving this goal. Finally, 22.2% stated that they are still unsure about the rules; this percentage corresponds to the first response to question number one, in which 22.2% of students accepted that the rules of ordering adjectives were not previously

introduced to them, illustrating the interdependence of both issues. The findings indicate the importance of implementing advanced EFL teaching approaches and specific activities to teach these norms to students.

5. Discussion

This study intended to explore the difficulties Saudi students face while learning the correct order of English adjectives and to what extent they are familiar with its grammatical norms. The results provide valuable insights into students' performance and their challenges in acquiring this particular aspect of English grammar.

5.1 Difficulty in Acquiring Attributive Adjective Order

The findings reveal that most participants demonstrated a solid understanding of the correct adjective order. The 50% of students scoring in the medium range indicated that ordering adjectives remains a moderate challenge for learners. Students whose first language is not English often struggle with understanding complex grammatical structures, such as adjective ordering. They find it more difficult when their native language has a distinct syntactic pattern (Alsaif and Milton, 2012). This aligns with Schmitt's (2008) and Webb's (2005) research, which emphasizes that regular practice is essential for internalizing complex language structures. Schmitt (2008) highlights the importance of engaging EFL students with multiple language activities in different contexts to overcome the challenges of acquiring grammatical rules. More targeted instructions and practice can help students to master correct adjective order.

Furthermore, the results imply that the difficulty level increased with more adjectives. The findings (Table 2) show that students find it complicated to identify four-level adjective statements as compared to two and three. Cinque (2010) pointed out that adding more adjectives increases the complexity of ordering them. It can overwhelm the learner. Sweller's (2011) cognitive load theory suggests that the arrangement of several modifiers puts pressure on the memory of learners. Thus, it becomes harder for them to apply grammatical rules and execute the correct adjective order. That is why students often struggle with longer strings of adjectives.

5.2 Exposure to and Internalization of Grammatical Rules

Apart from that, the findings reveal a significant issue. According to tables 5 and 6, 22.2% of students reported that they had never been exposed to the rules of adjective order. Those who know are still struggling to apply these rules. The acquisition of grammatical rules relies on practice and repeated exposure (Ellis 2005). 46.9% of students said that they had initial

exposure, but they struggled to apply the rules correctly, indicating a need for reinforcement and practice to help them internalize these concepts.

Moreover, the students who reported being taught the rules more than three times were more confident in applying these rules. It signifies that continuous practice and meaningful use of grammatical structures lead to better and long-term retention (Nation and Newton 2009).

5.3 Comparison Between Freshman and Senior Students

The results of the t-test and ANOVA identify a significant difference in the performance of freshmen and seniors, which aligns with the previous research on language acquisition. Language competence and performance tend to improve with more practice and exposure as students develop more proficiency in using grammatical structures (Lightbown and Spada 2013). In this study, seniors performed better as compared to freshmen due to their more years of study and exposure to the English language. Their experience makes them more comfortable with complex structures, like adjective ordering.

However, the results also suggest that early exposure and focused teaching could benefit freshman in their studies. Alqahtani (2015) identifies the lack of practice and depth in EFL grammar instruction settings. That is why many students still struggle to apply these rules instead of being taught. This underscores the need to revise and improve the curriculum and ensure that critical rules like adjective ordering are taught and practiced regularly.

5.4 Conclusion

This study revealed that, although most Saudi EFL students have a basic understanding of grammar rules of adjective ordering, still they face challenges dealing with multiple adjectives, especially freshmen. Previous research emphasizes the importance of reinforcement and consistent practice to fully comprehend complex grammatical structures. Senior students perform better because they have enough exposure and experience with the English language. They also have more opportunities to apply these rules in context.

However, conversely, the freshmen's performance suggests that foundational grammar rules must be taught more explicitly through targeted exercises and revisited continuously throughout their coursework. Modern and advanced teaching methodologies and additional instructional time will help to teach grammar concepts like adjective ordering and ensure students' strong understanding, helping them to deal with challenges as they progress.

5.5 Future Recommendations

Future research should explore various teaching approaches to teach English as a second language, such as digital literacy, AI-based activities, and interactive tools to support students in mastering grammatical rules. Additionally, more research on teaching methods and the challenges faced by learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds will help to improve learning outcomes.

Students' performance could be tracked over time to observe how early and explicit instructions on adjective ordering influence long-time learning. Moreover, research should examine how often and in what ways students need to practice grammar to acquire proficiency. This could include observing classroom activities and identifying which methods work better to improve learning.

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