The Historical Development of Writing Instruction in an EFL Context: The Effect of Culture, Religion, Experience, and Globalization

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Abstract—Due to the growing importance of English as a foreign language (EFL) writing and its teaching, this study aims to understand how EFL writing instruction has developed in Saudi Arabia. Aside from its historical development, this study also aims to investigate features and practices associated with teaching EFL writing over time using two qualitative methods: 1) semi-structured interviews with 11 expert educators from Saudi Arabia, and 2) Qualitative Content Analysis of the pre-existing body of content related to teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia. Clarke and Braun's reflexive thematic analysis using MAXQDA software was used to analyse the interviews, while Roller and Lavrakas' Total Quality Framework using Excel Worksheets was used to analyse the qualitative content. It was found that teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia has undergone three periods of historical development, each with their own various features and practices. The study can contribute to existing research on EFL writing instruction in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular. Moreover, the study provides a focus for evaluating the difference between actual teaching and learning practices, and the outcomes expected from the EFL textbooks. This can help teachers and policy makers in implementing and designing more useful EFL learning approaches.

Index Terms—writing, writing practices, teaching writing, writing instruction, teacher education

I. INTRODUCTION

While the four skills of a language are equally essential, the writing skill holds more importance for future success in academic fields and the workplace compared to the other skills (Forbes, 2019; Yu et al., 2023). This is because writing is considered one of the most important tools to assess learners' performance in the academic disciplines (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016). Additionally, students are asked to write texts for the purpose of supporting and enhancing their knowledge and understanding of themselves, their relationships, and their worlds (Graham & Perin, 2007). Writing exercises also help students' performance on high-stakes achievement examinations in writing and other subject areas (Graham & Hebert, 2011).

The importance of English as a foreign language (EFL) writing has attracted a great deal of interest in its different aspects, and many studies have stressed the importance of English writing (e.g., Li & Deng, 2021; Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Nejad et al., 2016; Sun & Lan, 2023). In Saudi Arabia, such studies have investigated English writing instructors' views (e.g., Alkubaidi, 2019), the most frequent EFL writing errors (e.g., Khatter, 2019), and the different perceptions toward EFL writing (e.g., Alhojailan, 2021).

Although considerable research has been devoted to discussing EFL in general and different aspects of EFL writing in particular, less attention has been paid to the evolution and development of EFL writing, and teaching practices used to teach it at the school level in EFL context (e.g., Saudi Arabia) (Geng et al., 2022). In fact, Alsowat (2017) stated that 73.3% of the studies investigating teaching EFL skills in Saudi Arabia were at the university level, indicating a limited interest in research at the school level. To the best of our knowledge, no study has been conducted to investigate the historical development and practices of teaching of EFL writing in Saudi Arabia.

To fill this gap, our study takes a chronological approach, starting from the establishment of EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia, following its evolutionary periods (stages) in school English textbooks, and noting their present development. Historical inquiry can help 'identify what issues have been discussed, what questions have been posed, what solutions have been devised, and what consequences have come of those solutions—and why...understand the present and consider directions for the future' (Matsuda, 2005, pp. 33-34). Thus, examining the development of EFL writing can help language planners to prepare future programs for the teaching of writing in Saudi Arabia.

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This study attempts to answer the following questions:
- What different periods has teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia undergone?
- What are the features of teaching EFL writing practices in these evolutionary periods?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The History of Teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia

While various researchers have provided different dates for when EFL began and developed in Saudi Arabia, Alshahrani (2016) argued that the exact date when EFL was introduced to the Saudi educational system is still unknown. After reviewing the relevant literature, he pointed out that many dates have been suggested as the beginning of teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia. These include 1924, the year when the General Directorate of Education was established; or before 1932, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emerged; or in 1936, 1950, or 1958. Finally, Alshahrani (2016) assumes that "English was introduced for the first time in Saudi Arabia in the late 1920s", a few years before oil was discovered in the country (p. 43).

The most recent attempt in articulating the history of EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia is that of Al-Hoorie and his colleagues (2021). They pointed out that EFL was taught in intermediate and secondary schools from 1945 to 1958. Students at that time were taught EFL subjects from international publishers. First grade textbook content focused on vocabulary, spelling, sentence completion, and orthography, while second grade textbooks focused on spelling, orthography, simple grammatical rules, composition, and short stories. The textbooks for the third grade included complex grammar, punctuation, direct and indirect sentences, and letter writing, and those for the fourth grade had more writing topics, complex grammatical rules, and short essays. Finally, fifth grade textbooks focused on the expansion of English-English vocabulary usage, writing scientific articles, short literary stories, and trading letters.

The second historical development took place between 1959 and 1969, when EFL was taught in the intermediate stage from international publishers. During this stage, teaching EFL to the first grade focused on vocabulary memorisation, reading, grammar, and spelling; teaching EFL to the second grade focused on reading, writing, simple composition, and writing letters; and teaching EFL to the third grade focused on grammar and writing. As for secondary schools during the same period (1959-1969), the first grade textbooks focused on grammar and summary writing of long and short stories; the second grade textbooks focused on complex grammatical structures, comprehension, and composition; and the third grade textbooks focused on teaching students to write long answers and essays, conversation, dialogue completion, reading, and summarising stories.

The third historical development occurred from 1972 through 1988. For the intermediate stage, students were taught *Saudi Arabian Schools' English* from international publishers. The textbooks consisted of 24 units over two semesters, with each unit consisting of comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling, with composition being written in the workbook. For the secondary schools, students in all three grades were taught *Saudi Arabian Schools' English* from international publishers. The content was similar to the intermediate stage content, except that the language used was more advanced and encouraged further reading.

The last period was from 1989 to 2001. Before this period, in 1987, a project to introduce new curriculum was piloted, and at the end of the same year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) approved the final version of students' textbooks and teachers' materials. Gradually, the textbooks were taught, beginning in the first grade of the intermediate stage in 1990.

The last update from the MOE in teaching EFL was its decision to contract only the McGraw Hill series to be taught at all educational stages (Saudi Press Agency, 2020).

B. Features of EFL Textbooks Taught in Saudi Arabia

Numerous studies have been conducted to identify different features of EFL textbooks used in Saudi Arabia (e.g., Al-Seghayer, 2011). These investigations included, for example, the way the textbooks were presented, the textbooks' characters, and the different cultures included. Given that Islamic and Saudi cultures are rooted in the Saudi educational system, it was found that textbooks used to teach EFL, developed either locally or by foreign companies, should be related to Islamic teachings and reflect Saudi culture (Alhojailan, 2015).

Researching various features of *English for Saudi Arabia* textbooks, Al-Seghayer (2011) argued that the textbooks were designed without analysing students' needs. Thus, the textbooks for each stage do not prepare students to advance to the next stage. Moreover, the textbooks were not well-organised, and did not introduce English gradually, from simple to more complex. Similarly, he noted that the topics were not appropriate to students' ages, and not related to their interests or goals. He also observed that the textbooks emphasised imparting knowledge, rather than teaching skills. This means that the textbooks gave information without providing students with ample opportunities to practice what they learned. Regarding the exercises included, he commented that the textbooks 'contain mechanical exercises that outweigh the number of meaningful, interesting, contextualised, and involved exercises that are communicative in nature' (p. 49). Additionally, the exercises were not suitable for the allotted time and students' level.

C. Practices of Teaching/Learning EFL Writing in Saudi Arabia

(a). Saudi Educators' Practices When Teaching EFL Writing

Saudi educators have different practices when teaching EFL writing. These practices are 'guided and shaped by the wider social and institutional cultures within which the process of EFL instruction operates' (Al-Seghayer, 2017, p. 34). Saba (2014), for example, showed that Saudi EFL writing teachers introduce their students to pre-constructed models of guided composition. In fact, they require students to memorise a limited number of isolated pieces of writing for their tests. Therefore, teachers do not train their students to be engaged in EFL writing as a process, with the steps of planning, composing, and revising, and do not provide students with opportunities to think critically and use their own voice in their writing.

(b). Saudi Students' Practices When Learning EFL Writing

Al-Seghayer (2011) identified some of the Saudi students' general practices when learning EFL writing. First, some students are uncomfortable expressing their own ideas as they might differ from their class partners' ideas. Additionally, they do not pay serious attention to learning EFL as it is not directly related to their needs. Students attend EFL sessions passively, assimilating their teacher's explanations, and work through the textbook. Moreover, Saudi EFL students rely heavily on rote learning and memorisation to write their compositions in writing examinations. This latter view is echoed by Alkubaidi (2014), who stated that "[s]tudents are given paragraphs to memorize without sometimes understanding the whole meanings or indeed the way in which sentences are formed" (p. 83). In the same vein, Alrashidi and Phan (2015) said Saudi EFL students use memorisation as a primary strategy to learn EFL.

Saudi EFL students can be affected by certain social beliefs related to how people interact with their teachers and older adults in general, and some teaching approaches (e.g., product-oriented approach). For example, Alkubaidi (2019) attributed Saudi EFL students' difficulties in developing their EFL writing to their reliance on their teachers as the sole source of knowledge.

III. METHODOLOGY

Methods

Two methods based on the qualitative approach were used to answer the research questions: semi-structured interviews, and a qualitative content analysis of the EFL textbooks in Saudi Arabia.

A. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with 11 Saudi expert educators were conducted to investigate how EFL writing has developed in Saudi Arabia.

The Participants. We used the purposive sampling technique to select our participants, mainly focusing on two main attributes: participants' years of experience, and their students' level (i.e., elementary, intermediate, or secondary). We selected 11 participants, three were university professors (two males and one female), two were educational supervisors (one male and one female), two were secondary-school teachers (one male and one female), two were intermediate-school teachers (one male and one female), and two were elementary-school teachers (one male and one female). Participants were given pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity.

The Interview Questions. On the continuum of inductive and deductive orientations, our research is located in the middle, leaning more towards induction. Thus, our interview questions were not largely based on the literature, though some were derived indirectly from our readings and interpretations, while others were based on our own experience. This is because the research is descriptive and interpretive in nature, and hence does not require any theory or model as a basis. Besides, semi-structured interviews allowed us to ask more questions if needed. We had 20 interview questions, some discussing the stages of EFL writing development, while the majority discussed the features of teaching EFL writing during the developmental stages.

Data Analysis. Under Braun and Clarke's (2006) concept of thematic analysis, we made use of the reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019b) to analyse our data, which aims to 'identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that provide an answer to the research question being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision' (para. 10). The MAXQDA software was used to help us better organise and categorise the data.

To follow the reflexive approach of thematic analysis, we familiarised ourselves with data by transcribing, reading, and rereading them, after which the data were coded, and potential themes generated. Codes were any piece of data that gave a meaningful and independent idea, while themes were any group of codes that had shared aspects of meaning or ideas. When there were levels of abstraction, we assigned one-idea pieces of data as sub-codes, and groups of codes sharing a higher meaning as sub-themes. Figure 1 illustrates this process for the following interview excerpt using visual tools, the MAXMaps option in MAXQDA:

(Excerpt 1):

Introducing EFL writing was direct. I remember when I was in the third stage of intermediate school in 1406 AH (1986), when MOE developed our final exams, the questions were direct: 'Write about …' followed by guided words. No analyzing. No summarizing. (Mr. Turki, Interview Transcript, p. 64)
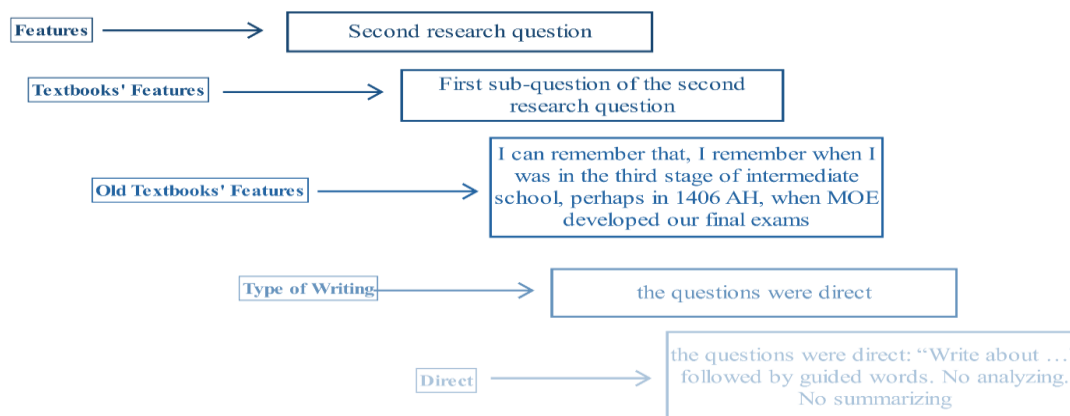
Figure 1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis of One Excerpt

Trustworthiness. For trustworthiness, we followed Nowell et al.'s (2017) outline as a practical process to meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria in thematic analysis.

B. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

The Sample. The sample to be analysed was the pre-existing body of content related to EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia that we had access to, which consisted of 97 EFL books taught in the country: 49 textbooks taught in secondary school, 29 textbooks taught in intermediate school, and 19 textbooks taught in elementary school.

Data Analysis. For the QCA, we followed Roller and Lavrakas' (2015) two-phase, eight-step process based on the definition that QCA is 'the systematic reduction (i.e., condensation) of content, analyzed with special attention on the context in which the data were created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations' (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 230). We analysed a sample of EFL textbooks taught in Saudi Arabia at all educational stages. The primary purpose was to examine how the teaching of EFL writing has developed in the country. More specifically, it aimed to follow the periods of change that teaching EFL writing has undergone, and the distinct features of each period.

Applying Total Quality Framework to QCA. To ensure trustworthiness, we followed Roller and Lavrakas' (2015) framework that associates all phases and steps of QCA with quality criteria, which is called the total quality framework (TQF).

IV. RESULTS

A. Evolutionary Periods of Teaching EFL Writing

(a). Emergence of Teaching EFL Writing

For the QCA, the oldest periods we could examine regarding teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia were 2004, 1980, and 1982, for the elementary, intermediate, and secondary stages, respectively.

(b). Historical Development of Teaching EFL Writing

Teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia went through different periods. For the elementary stage, it went through three periods of historical development: unknown period when teaching EFL was introduced at the elementary stage, and later removed; the second period from 2004 to 2014, when the EFL textbooks were introduced by the Saudi MOE; and a third period from 2008 to the present, when the EFL textbooks were introduced by international companies (e.g., MM Publications) under the supervision of the MOE, and later unified to be produced exclusively by McGraw Hill.

The intermediate and secondary stages also went through three periods of historical development. The first period covered the 1970s and 1980s, during which EFL textbooks were produced by international companies. The second period covered the years from the 1990s to 2014, when the EFL textbooks were introduced by the Saudi MOE. The third period lasted from 2008 until the present, when the EFL textbooks were produced by international companies under the supervision of MOE, and later unified to be produced by McGraw Hill only.

Some periods saw an overlap in introducing EFL textbooks. This meant that while piloting some material from international companies, there were some schools still studying MOE textbooks.

B. Features of Teaching/Learning EFL Writing

In this paper, we considered features as the characteristics that shape the learning process or educators' practices in EFL writing instruction. Two main types of features appear when teaching/learning EFL writing in Saudi Arabia: features adopted in the process of teaching EFL writing and related to how EFL textbooks addressed writing in different periods of time, and features adopted in the practices of supervisors, teachers, and students while teaching/learning EFL writing.

(a). Features of Teaching EFL Writing

Data from this section included three themes: features of the first period's textbooks (1970s-1980s), features of the second period's textbooks (1990s-2014), and finally, features of the third period's textbooks (2008-present). It also included seven subthemes: presentation, which included details about how writing sections were presented; topics that students were required to write about; ideas, which included information about the nature of the ideas included in the textbooks, differing from topics in that they could be more latent; the type of writing, which provided information about what types of writing were required in the textbooks; skills that should be acquired by students; culture, in which we tried to discuss what cultures were introduced to the students; and others, which included any other important information or finding related to the features that could not be coded under any other subtheme.

As for the codes and sub-codes, their number under each subtheme was different based on the density of content our participants provided, and the thickness of our QCA. For presentation, two basic codes emerged: pictures, which included whether pictures were provided in the textbooks and whether they were drawings or photographs; and colours, which indicated whether the books were printed in colour or not. This subtheme aimed to give a brief account of the textbooks' presentation.

The second subtheme was topics. Seven codes emerged from topics: relevance, which included a set of topics related to real life; generality, which included general topics with no clear features; commonness, which included topics fixed and repeated in different stages; recency, which included topics that could be considered recent and up-to-date; appropriateness, which included topics that were appropriate to the students' level and current conditions; necessity, which included topics necessary to students' needs in general, and their future needs in particular; and culturally linked topics, which were related to Islamic, Arabic, or Saudi culture.

The third subtheme was ideas. Six codes emerged: a focus on communication, where the ideas concentrated on communicative purposes; consideration of students, where the ideas viewed students as central and the priority; challenge, in which the ideas required students to make an effort to understand them; value-related ideas, where the ideas were related to values the students should have; openness, where the ideas were more open than previously; and biases, where hidden ideas or the language used in them was biased, specifically gender-biased.

The fourth subtheme was the type of writing, with two basic codes: direct writing and indirect writing. Direct writing included all types of questions in which details were given to students and they were required to write. It included, for example, tracing, copying, handwriting, fill-in exercises, controlled practice (in which students followed a model to write their own pieces), and free writing (in response to direct questions about the topic of the lesson or module, with no prior preparation). Indirect writing included types of writing where students could prepare before the writing task. Preparation could be done by brainstorming, filling in a web, completing a mind map, following the details in specific pictures, doing a survey, or completing a questionnaire—the basic criterion in this code was that the students were prepared before writing.

The fifth subtheme was the skills students were expected to acquire. This subtheme included five codes. Writing-related skills included all the skills students were expected to acquire in order to write. These were sub-coded into basic language skills, analytical skills, genre-based skills, and quality-related skills. Basic language skills included the basic skills students needed in order to write, such as capitalization, punctuation, word order, coherence, cohesion, indentation, spelling, abbreviations, symbols, structure, and paragraphing. Analytical skills included all the skills students needed to analyse different types of writing, including identifying the purpose, audience, and stylistic features of a specific text, and analysing its register, style, organisation, and formality. Genre-based skills included all the genres students were expected to acquire, such as writing formal letters, semi-formal letters, informal letters, emails, invitations, job applications, curricula vitae, recipes, instructions, notes, SMS messages, biographies, autobiographies, book reviews, advertisements, reports, stories, summaries, and others. Finally, quality-related skills included the skills students needed to write works of high quality, such as self-correction, peer review, and proofreading.

The second code was collaborative work skills that students needed for working in pairs or groups. The third code was communication skills that students needed to communicate effectively. The fourth code, thinking skills, included the skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, and learner independence. The fifth code was the technological skills that students need to be always updated and to integrate their studies with technology.

The next subtheme of the features of teaching EFL writing was culture. By culture, we tried to describe what cultures were addressed in the textbooks in different periods of time. Five facets of culture were analysed: the names that were used; the customs that were discussed; the clothes that were shown; the thoughts that were adopted; and the events that were introduced. We also included some findings about cultural openness, which refers to attempts to normalise communications and relationships between individuals from different cultures.

Finally, the last subtheme was others, comprising all other important information that did not fit elsewhere.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 provide timelines for the historical development of EFL writing instructions with the particular features of each era.
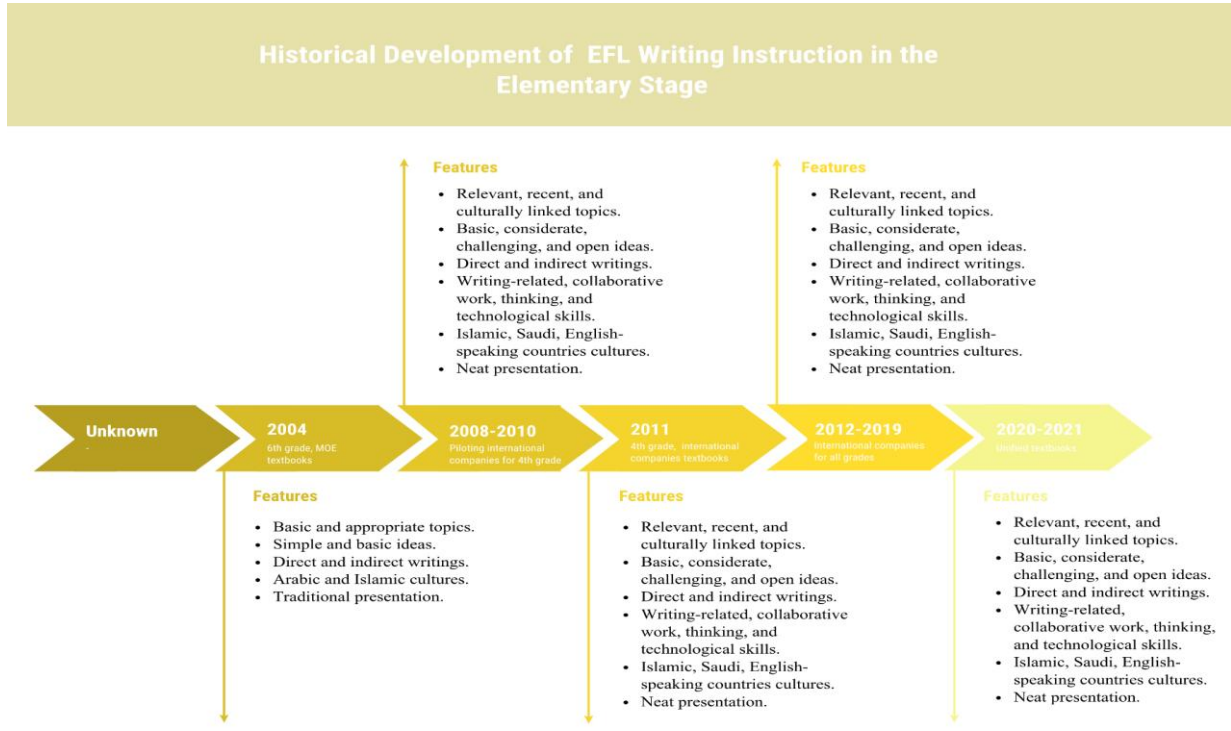
Figure 2. Historical Development of EFL Writing Instruction in the Elementary Stage
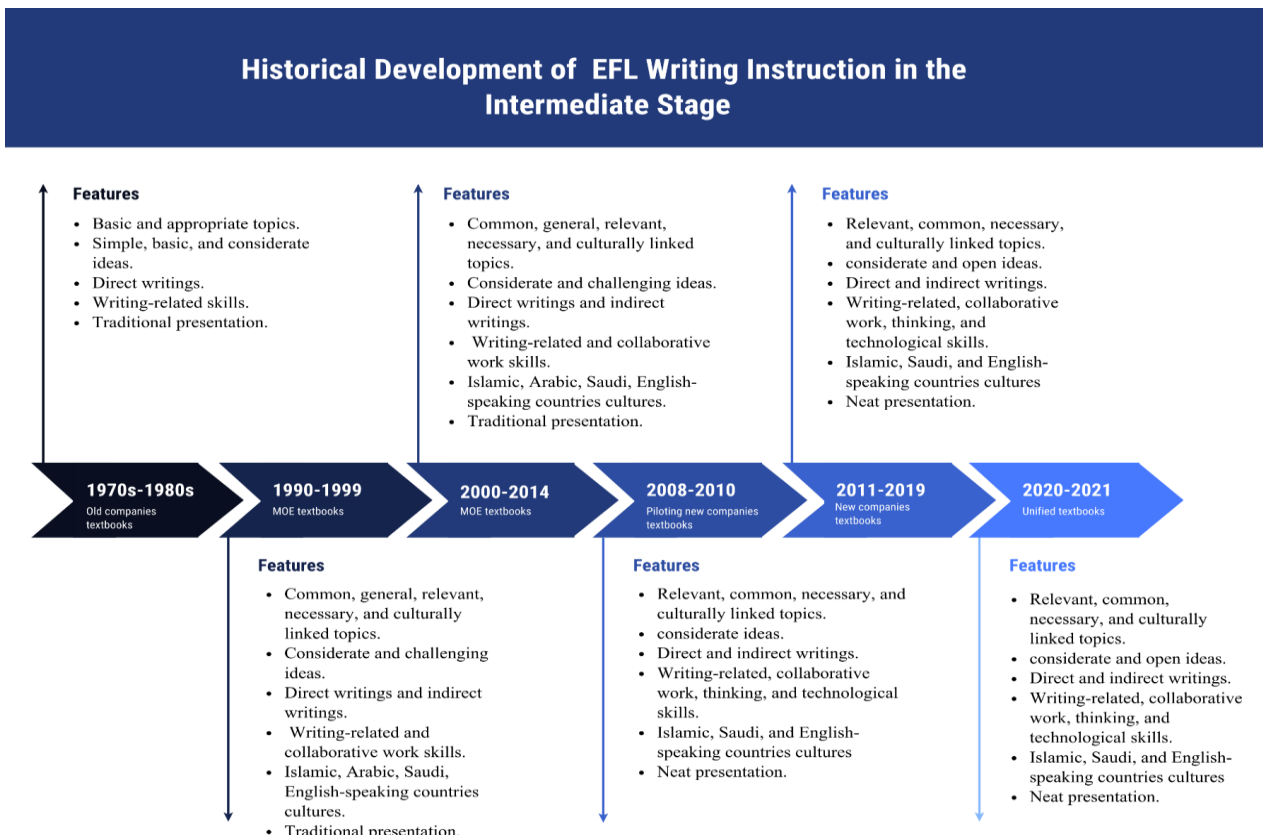

Figure 3. Historical Development of EFL Writing Instruction in the Intermediate Stage
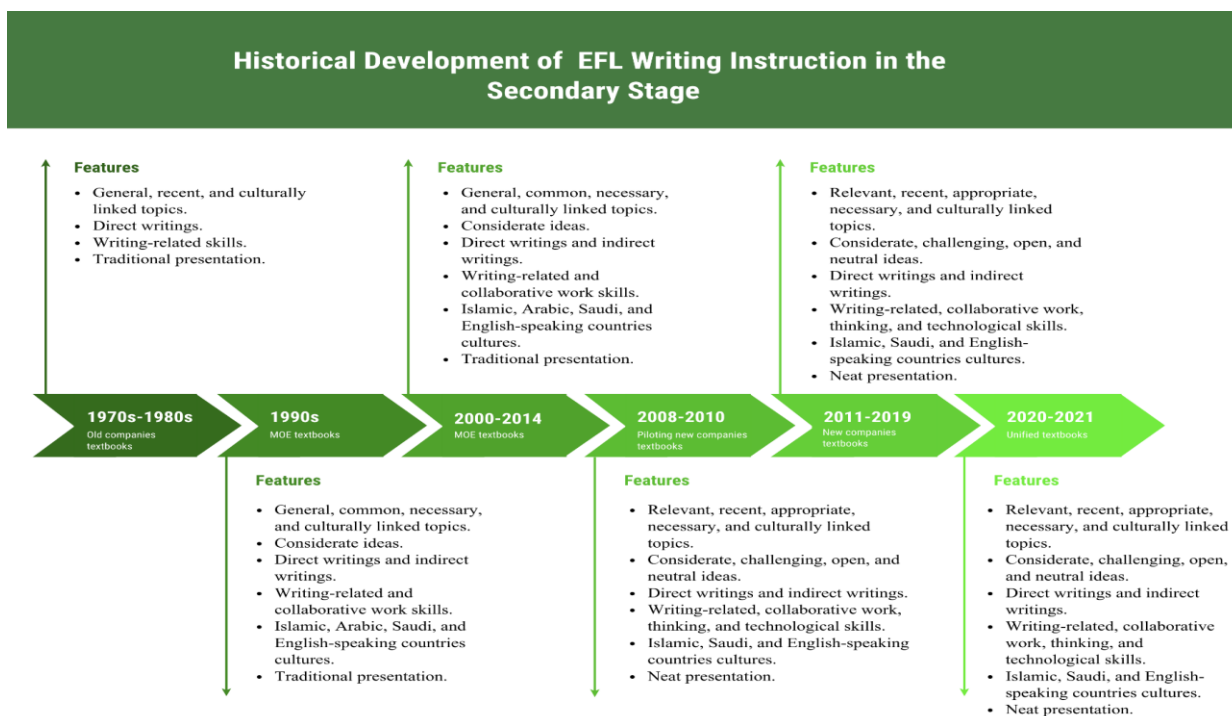
Figure 4. Historical Development of EFL Writing Instruction in the Secondary Stage

(b). Features of Practices Used in Teaching/Learning EFL Writing

Features of Supervisors' Practices. While there were many differences in how supervisors interacted with teachers, three codes emerged from the available data. These showed that supervisors' practices were flexible, compulsory, and when comparing female and male supervisors, females were more rigorous in their supervision.

Features of Teachers' Practices. While there were many differences in the way teachers teach EFL writing, two subthemes emerged from the available data: positive features, which included two codes—considerate and serious; and negative features, which included four codes—ineffective, traditional, neglectful, and underestimating the value of assessment.

For the positive features, teachers were considerate in that they paid conscious attention to what their students needed, wanted, and were able to do, encouraging them—for example, giving students complete responsibility in working on and conducting searches about their topics, especially in the secondary stage. Further, teachers were serious about teaching EFL writing. They taught in a thoughtful way, and made great effort to present the topic.

Regarding negative features, some practices were ineffective. These practices did not take all aspects of teaching EFL writing into consideration, and did not improve students' writing. Other practices adopted traditional methods and strategies to teach EFL writing. The third negative feature of teachers' practices was underestimating the value of assessment. This was done in different ways, as when teachers considered spelling to be the only criterion when correcting students' compositions, or not having clear guidelines or a rubric when evaluating student work. The last feature of teachers' practices was that some of them neglected writing skills. They neglected EFL writing in various ways, including by over-focusing on other skills, such as grammar.

Features of Students' Practices. In brief, students were different in the way they learned EFL writing. However, two subthemes—positive versus negative features—emerged from the available data, with one positive code (passionate), and three negative codes (weak skills, ignoring EFL writing, and worrying).

V. DISCUSSION

A. Historical Development of Teaching EFL Writing

The historical development of EFL writing instruction for the intermediate and secondary stages went through three distinct periods, while the elementary stage of instruction went through two periods. The first period was during the 1970s and 1980s, with textbooks produced by international publishers for the intermediate and secondary stages, as affirmed by Al-Hoorie et al. (2021). The use and adaptation of international textbooks at this time can be explained by the likely absence of Saudi expert educators to create Saudi textbooks.

The second identified period of the historical development covered the years from the 1990s until 2014, with textbooks produced by the Saudi MOE. This finding supports the work of Al-Hoorie et al. (2021) and Al-Seghayer (2011). Producing Saudi EFL textbooks can be attributed to a number of reasons, including the fact that the Saudi MOE was able at that time, with many experts, to produce national EFL textbooks. Moreover, replacing international

textbooks with Saudi ones could make EFL teaching more relatable to both Islamic and Saudi cultures. Producing Saudi textbooks written by Saudi experts might have been lower in cost as well, compared to signing with international publishers to adapt different textbooks, and reproducing them for Saudi students. Similarly, the MOE might have desired to be autonomous, rather than depending on external companies to prepare its materials.

The third period covered the years from 2008 until the present, with textbooks produced by international publishers, later limiting those publishers to make McGraw Hill the exclusive company producing EFL textbooks in Saudi Arabia since 2020. One possible explanation to introduce EFL textbooks produced by international publishers is that previous Saudi textbooks were not particularly helpful or adequate for teachers and students. Simultaneously, it is important to adopt recent and up-to-date textbooks that can meet students' needs and interests, while also understanding that globalisation has made the world into a small village. The reason to exclusively contract McGraw Hill to publish textbooks in Saudi Arabia could be because signing with only one company could save more time, money, and energy, than signing with three or more companies. It is further possible that the MOE considered it necessary for all students in Saudi Arabia to learn from the same books to achieve educational justice or related goals.

B. Features of Teaching EFL Writing in the First Period (1970s-1980s)

The textbooks in this period were presented traditionally with no pictures or colours. This can be explained by the limited access to the different multimedia available on the Internet at that time, as well as the little importance given to such topics, and a lack of research during that time discussing the benefits of including multimedia in education.

Moreover, participants reported that the topics and ideas were challenging, which could be due to their direct adaptation from foreign countries, without adequate alignment with Saudi culture or students' interests. Additionally, one can say that the textbooks did not consider students as foreign language learners, and that teaching English systematically was still in its infancy in Saudi Arabia.

For the intermediate stage, students were taught the basics and simple ideas. This is expected given that students were recently introduced to EFL. Furthermore, students were only asked to write directly. This finding supports the claim that teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia was taught using product-based approaches. A possible explanation is that teaching EFL writing was neglected at that time, with the focus on grammar and reading. Another possible explanation is that Saudi people were focusing on communication in English, as their necessity may have been speaking and understanding what others say (e.g., pilgrims and foreign employees who do not know Arabic and use English for communication).

As for the secondary stage, students were required to write about general, relatively recent, and culturally linked topics. Asking students to write about general topics, such as writing about pollution, weekend activities, or a famous person, seems inevitable. It can be that textbooks wanted students to be able to discuss general topics in English. Some topics were considered relatively recent for Saudi people living in a state that was building its modern life. This can be explained by the idea that such topics were familiar to people in the UK, where the textbooks came from, even if they were nor familiar to Saudi students. Some other topics were culturally linked to either Islamic or Saudi cultures, which was expected since one of the objectives of teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia was for students to be able to introduce Islamic culture. Additionally, students were introduced to different types of skills to acquire them, which can be attributed to the desire to consider students' level as they were preparing to enter higher education.

C. Features of Teaching EFL Writing in the Second Period (1990s-2014)

The findings about this period revealed several facets regarding EFL writing instruction. First, the textbooks included both real and printed pictures, and they were in colour. This was possibly an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of the previous period's textbooks. Moreover, access to the Internet and the availability of good quality printing houses could have helped in developing these textbooks.

Second, the topics were found to be general, culturally linked, common, and irrelevant. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. The topics students were asked to write about were limited, common, and repeated in different stages. This is consistent with Al-Seghayer's (2011) finding that MOE textbooks did not prepare students to advance to the next level. While it is difficult to explain this finding, it could be related to the lack of topics expected to be interesting to students, as there was no analysis of their needs. Moreover, the topics were not related to students' real life. This finding can be explained by the fact that teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia was based on traditional methods and rote learning. The textbooks were designed by Saudi experts, and their philosophies likely affected their design. It can be that they were not interested in the different communicative aspects of language and saw it as a merely grammar and vocabulary.

Moreover, students were provided with different types of writing—hand-writing, controlled practices, and direct questions. One possible explanation for this is that the textbooks were printed in 1998 or 1999, and introduced before EFL was taught at the elementary stage. Therefore, it can be said that these textbooks targeted students who were recently introduced to EFL, not students who had been learning EFL for three years.

Further, students in this period were not introduced to several necessary skills, including different strategies to help them enhance their writing ability. The participants indicated that the quantity of writing was the most important aspect of evaluation, with the quality of writing being neglected. This can be expected as teaching EFL writing was based on product-based approaches. Second, students were not encouraged to be independent and use critical thinking. They

were simply parroting content as passive members. In this sense, students lacked several opportunities to practice EFL. Given that respecting older adults, such as teachers, and honouring their experience, is a common Saudi value, for students to question everything or contradict their teachers' views could be seen as a lack of respect to teachers, rather than having an independent personality or critical thinking. In a similar vein, traditional teaching methods and teacher-centred classrooms may contribute to such practices. At the same time, it is possible that the students themselves were not interested in EFL writing, and hence were satisfied with traditional methods and rote learning.

Another finding was the dominance of Arabic and Islamic cultures, with a relative absence of any international perspective. In our own view, the most compelling explanation for this is that these textbooks were introduced as a replacement of earlier books that did not meet students' needs and interests. Hence, the new textbooks intentionally emphasised Islamic and Saudi cultures, while avoiding Western culture.

For some specific features of this period, students in both the intermediate and secondary stages were required to write directly and indirectly. This is inconsistent with Ezza (2010) and Al-Seghayer (2017), who argued that teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia is product-oriented. This discrepancy may be due to different definitions, and considerations given to different approaches for teaching EFL writing. Our definition of indirect writing was not limited to being preceded by brainstorming or a specific activity, but included any type of preparation assisting students to consider how to write their passages.

D. Features of Teaching EFL Writing in the Third Period (2008-Present)

The findings of this period revealed diverse aspects of EFL writing instruction. First, the textbooks were in colour, had a neat and attractive look with pictures attached to writing sections. One possible explanation for the inclusion of high-quality pictures is that they are considered an effective and practical medium, with a positive effect on students' learning. Given that the students employing these books were used to advanced technology and educational tools, the textbook designers possibly thought they would be valuable to students' EFL learning experience.

Second, the ideas of this era were open, considerate, and value-related. For ideas being more open than before, this may be due to how Saudi people have changed, and are more open to the external world. It can be further attributed to the fact that these textbooks were produced by foreign companies, with their own principles and attitudes. Additionally, the ideas were value-related. Teachers were required to link their instruction with various values; the textbooks attempted to broaden students' views, and help them think of different values in English. Many of these values were also similar to Islamic teachings, and could hence be seen as another way to strengthen students' Islamic culture.

Third, students were expected to have writing-related skills, collaborative work skills, effective communication skills, critical thinking, self-reliance, and technological skills. It is possible that students were introduced to different writing skills to enhance their writing ability, as Alhojailan (2015) stated that Saudi students had low scores in EFL writing. It can also be argued that students were taught EFL writing based on genre approaches, since students were introduced to different features of written works, including style, content, organization, tenses, formality, register, and the communication functions of a text. Moreover, quality of writing was emphasised through several means. These textbooks dealt with EFL writing differently, and did not teach writing using only one method or approach. As indicated in the QCA, different approaches and activities were integrated to teach EFL writing, with attempts to familiarise students with EFL writing, its conventions, and responsibilities.

As for collaborative work skills, it is possible that they were included to emphasise group work and collaborative writing. According to recent research (e.g., Pham, 2021), collaborative writing has an extremely positive effect on students' writing fluency. Moreover, effective communication skills were introduced, and this can be attributed to the textbooks' emphasis on communication and the use of language to communicate effectively. Students were further introduced to critical thinking and self-reliance. The introduction of such skills is important as students need them to be able to learn, solve problems, and be independent. Finally, technological skills were expected to be acquired. With the rapid growth of technology and its use in learning, it seems necessary to provide students with basic technological skills. This finding is in line with Al-Hoorie et al. (2021), who suggest that recent EFL textbooks mark a real integration of technology into EFL classrooms.

Finally, both Saudi and English-speaking countries' cultures were included, and cultural openness was normalised. This finding is consistent with Al-Hoorie et al. (2021). Including both cultures may be considered a reaction to the second period's textbooks being overloaded with Saudi culture. Another explanation is that one of the aims of recent textbooks is to enhance students' communication skills, to encourage students to communicate not only in their local environments, but also with people from different cultures. The designers could also be aware of the important role a foreign culture plays in the process of learning a foreign language; for instance, Alamri (2019) argued that learning a language separately from its culture can have negative effects on students' achievements.

Our analysis also found some additional aspects of teaching EFL writing. For example, in some textbooks for higher grades, such as *Flying High for Saudi Arabia 6* (Secondary Stage, no. 14, 2009), students were introduced to some deeper notions in EFL writing. One chapter in the textbook, for example, was entitled, 'Using Language Skills,' which included some details about learning different EFL skills. For example, in discussing writing (pp. 72-73), the book tried to familiarise students with tone of voice and levels of formality. Students were also asked to share their own learning tips regarding learning to write. These sections can be referred to as metawriting, suggesting that teaching EFL writing has developed and begun to follow more recent approaches to teach writing.

E. Features of Saudi Educators' Practices in Teaching EFL Writing

Male supervisors were found to be flexible, while female ones found to be more rigorous. However, it must be noted that how these terms are defined is important. The participant who made this statement, Mr. Turki, perhaps has different interpretations. We do not consider flexibility to mean neglecting essential components of any process. For instance, it cannot be termed flexible when some male supervisors are satisfied with materials prepared by one teacher and copied by others. As for female supervisors being more rigorous, they wanted every teacher to prepare her lesson by herself; this definition is also relative. Moreover, with a limited number of participants and pure qualitative design, caution must be applied, as these findings might not reflect the whole picture of Saudi male and female supervisors' practices and were based on what our participant revealed.

Another practice used by Saudi supervisors was requiring teachers to link all lessons to a religious value or aim. Although participants had different points of view regarding this topic, as some of them supported such practices while others did not, it seems difficult to link every lesson, particularly abstract language lessons such as grammar. And yet, this practice was considered compulsory, with supervisors required to assess teachers on such criteria. As noted before, as the national religion, Islam is rooted in the Saudi educational system.

Our data found teachers to be considerate of their students' needs and interests, providing them with encouragement, which is in contrast to the findings of Al-Seghayer (2017) and Alrashidi and Phan (2015). This inconsistency can be explained in the diversity of practices used by teachers in Saudi Arabia. Another inconsistency is our finding of teachers to be serious in teaching EFL writing and providing their students with effective feedback, which is different from Khan (2011), who assumed that teachers do not follow up on what their students have written. This discrepancy can be attributed to how different researchers define 'feedback'. Al-Seghayer (2017) argued that teachers neglect student-teacher conferences and peer-reviews, instead focusing on written feedback. This view of different types of feedback may be able to partly explain inconsistencies in the research on this issue.

Other features of Saudi EFL writing teachers' practices were ineffective, traditional, underestimated the value of assessment, and neglected EFL writing. Ineffective practices included teachers asking their students to memorise passages to write in their EFL examinations, which affirms the finding by Al-Seghayer (2011) and Saba (2014). Asking students to memorise indicates a weakness in the process of teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia. It could also indicate teachers' lack of confidence in their students' writing ability, and hence providing them with prewritten passages to make sure they can pass their course. On the other hand, it could be that some teachers neglected writing, and preferred their students to focus on grammar, for example. Teachers should know, however, that writing and grammar are different subjects (Kohnen et al., 2019). Another ineffective practice is the neglect of technology. Some teachers might have shunned using technology in favour of relying on textbooks. As mentioned before, Saudi Arabia's educational system is centred on the MOE's instructions and materials, to be followed by all teachers around the country. Many teachers might have decided it best to rely on the MOE's materials alone. At the same time, other teachers may have felt that Internet access was not possible for all students, and hence did not make use of technology; although Saudi Arabia is rapidly improving, there are still some small villages where accessing the Internet can be difficult.

Our research found that teachers also adopted traditional methods to teach EFL writing, and communicated with their students in Arabic, as affirmed by Al-Seghayer (2011), Saba (2014), Alrashidi and Phan (2015), and Al-Seghayer (2017). This could be because the teachers were not convinced of the unsuitability of traditional methods, or because they lacked the necessary training to use more recent teaching methods. The third negative feature of teachers' practices was that they underestimated the value of assessment, considering spelling and grammar, for example, as the most important assessment criteria, and did not have clear rubrics to correct student work. This can be related to the use of traditional teaching methods, whereby teachers pay more attention to the final product, without focusing on the linear EFL writing process. As for ignoring the use of rubrics, it may be that teachers wanted students to pass the course; failure would result in criticism of them. With regard to students' assessment, one participant argued that some teachers provided their students with incorrect comments and feedback. While it is difficult to explain such an occurrence, it could simply be the belief that there is more than one correct way. The fourth feature of teachers' practices was that they neglected EFL writing, which confirms the work of Al-Seghayer (2017). Such teachers might believe that mastering EFL grammar and memorizing a huge amount of vocabulary would produce EFL writers. Another explanation could be that teachers do not have enough time to teach EFL writing in an effective way; some participants noted that the time allotted to writing was not enough, especially as there were many exercises attached to each section.

F. Features of Saudi Students' Practices in Learning EFL Writing

Students' practices were categorised as having both positive and negative features. On the positive side, students were passionate about EFL writing. Students may recognise the importance of EFL writing either in their daily life or in their future. Additionally, it is possible that students were passionate because they received high-quality EFL writing instruction, and were encouraged to improve their skills.

As for negative features, certain student practices, such as memorization, could indicate a weakness in EFL writing, as affirmed by Al-Seghayer (2011), Alkubaidi (2014), and Alrashidi and Phan (2015). There are several possible explanations for this finding. Perhaps students were not introduced to writing-related skills so they could express their ideas in writing. Additionally, it is possible that students were more accustomed to rote learning, so they felt more

comfortable when memorizing. Moreover, teachers themselves could have asked students to memorise, rather than encouraging them to write on their own. Another negative feature was of ignoring EFL writing, specifically in examinations. The focus was probably more on other skills, mainly grammar and reading. It could also be that if only a few points were given to writing sections in exams, students may consider writing a waste of time, instead focusing on other sections with more points. The last negative feature was worrying. Certain student practices revealed they were anxious about EFL writing, which is similar to Al-Seghayer (2017) stating that Saudi students demonstrated significant EFL writing apprehension. This apprehension may be due to students' lack of confidence in their writing abilities, or to fear of negative assessments.

Taken together, our findings indicate a notable development in teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia. We suggest that the MOE is steadily making its own way to improve EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia. It is improbable that all negative aspects of teaching EFL writing can be eliminated, but there is clearly a positive transformation from one stage to another, together with an awareness of each stage's strengths and weaknesses.

VI. CONCLUSION

Given that EFL writing instruction in Saudi Arabia has passed through different stages of historical development, and has been considered a challenging and demanding skill to teach, investigating its historical development and the features associated each period was necessary. Not only did this study shed light on how teaching EFL writing developed in Saudi Arabia, but it also identified different features of teaching EFL writing, and the features of Saudi educators' and students' practices in teaching and learning EFL writing.

We expect this work will help improve research in EFL writing worldwide in general, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, in two specific ways. First, it may reveal more features of teaching EFL writing in relation to the outcomes of teaching writing. In this way, it is possible that the reality and development of teaching EFL writing can be systematically evaluated. Second, it may be helpful in showing the discrepancy between teachers' and students' actual practices inside classrooms, and the standard expectations or expected outcomes of the EFL textbooks. We argue that it is not enough to evaluate the content of the textbooks in relation to the outcomes, as actual practices play a vital role in different evaluation processes. We further expect this work to provide insights to EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. First, teachers can become more familiar with different features of teaching EFL writing during different periods of time. Second, they may benefit from how students think about EFL writing, and broaden their understanding. Finally, they can help evaluate each period with its curricula, features, and practices to narrate the story of teaching EFL writing in Saudi Arabia.

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