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Error Analysis in English Writing Among Secondary Students by Dr. Umar Farooque , Assistant Professor in English, Harsh Pati Singh Degree College, Dharmanand Nagar, Madhpur, Madhubani, Bihar

Abstract

Error analysis plays an important role in second language learning as it helps identify and interpret the challenges learners encounter in writing. This study explores the nature and sources of errors in English writing among secondary-level students by using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered from 60 students through structured writing tasks and questionnaires, while secondary data were obtained from scholarly articles and prior research.

The findings indicate that grammatical errors—especially those related to tense, subject–verb agreement, and sentence formation—are the most common. These are followed by mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary usage. The study also highlights several contributing factors, including interference from the mother tongue, limited lexical knowledge, insufficient understanding of grammar rules, and lack of consistent writing practice.

The results emphasize the importance of adopting effective instructional strategies such as targeted grammar teaching, regular writing exercises, and meaningful feedback to enhance students' writing abilities. The study concludes that a systematic approach to error analysis can significantly improve the writing proficiency of secondary school learners.

Keywords: error analysis, second language learning, writing errors, language interference, vocabulary limitation

1. Introduction

English functions as a global medium for communication, education, and career advancement (Crystal, 2003; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Among the four core language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—writing is often regarded as the most complex, particularly for second language learners (Nunan, 2003; Hyland, 2003). It requires not only grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge but also the ability to organize ideas clearly and logically (Brown, 2007).

At the secondary level, students are expected to develop strong writing skills for academic purposes. However, many struggle to produce grammatically accurate and meaningful sentences. Their written work frequently includes errors such as incorrect tense usage, subject–verb disagreement, weak sentence structure, and spelling inaccuracies (Corder, 1974; James, 1998). Such issues can obstruct effective communication and indicate gaps in language acquisition.

Error analysis serves as a useful tool to examine these problems. It involves systematically identifying, categorizing, and explaining learners' errors (Corder, 1967). Through this process, teachers can better understand students' difficulties and modify their teaching approaches accordingly. It also helps differentiate between persistent errors caused by lack of knowledge and occasional mistakes due to carelessness (Ellis, 1994).

Since secondary education is a critical stage in language development, improving writing skills is essential. Therefore, this study aims to investigate common writing errors among students, explore their causes, and recommend suitable remedial strategies.

2.Objectives

1. To examine common errors in students' English writing
2. To categorize different types of errors
3. To investigate the reasons behind these errors
4. To propose strategies for improving writing skills

3.Methodology

This research adopts a structured approach to examine writing errors among secondary students. A mixed-method design combining quantitative and qualitative techniques is used to provide a comprehensive understanding.

- The study follows a descriptive framework.
- A sample of 60 students was selected through random sampling.
- Primary data were collected via writing tasks and questionnaires.
- Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, and research articles.

Data were analyzed by identifying and grouping errors into categories such as grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical. Frequencies and percentages were calculated, and qualitative explanations were used to interpret the causes.

In a study on **Error Analysis in English Writing Among Secondary Students**, secondary data refer to information that has already been collected, recorded, or published by other researchers, educational institutions, or government agencies and is used to support the research. Secondary data complement primary data (such as students' writing samples, tests, or interviews) by providing background information, comparative evidence, and contextual understanding.

4. Types of Errors in English Writing

Errors in English writing among secondary students can be broadly categorized based on linguistic features. Identifying these types helps in understanding students' weaknesses and improving their writing skills effectively.

4.1 Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors are the most common in student writing. These include:

- **Subject-Verb Agreement Errors:**

Example: She *go* to school instead of She *goes* to school

- **Tense Errors:**

Incorrect use of past, present, or future tense

- **Article Errors:**

Misuse or omission of *a, an, the*

- **Preposition Errors:**

Incorrect use of words like *in, on, at*

4.2 Lexical Errors (Vocabulary Errors)

These errors occur due to improper word choice or limited vocabulary:

- Use of incorrect or inappropriate words
- Direct translation from the mother tongue
- Repetition of simple words due to lack of vocabulary

Example: He did a *big mistake* instead of He made a *big mistake*

4.3 Syntactic Errors (Sentence Structure Errors)

These errors affect the arrangement of words and phrases in sentences:

- Incorrect word order
- Incomplete or fragmented sentences
- Run-on sentences

Example: Very happy I am today instead of I am very happy today

4.4 Mechanical Errors

Mechanical errors relate to writing conventions:

- **Spelling Mistakes:** e.g., *recieve* instead of *receive*
- **Punctuation Errors:** Missing commas, full stops, etc.
- **Capitalization Errors:** Incorrect use of capital letters

4.5 Morphological Errors

These errors involve incorrect word forms:

- Wrong plural forms (*childs* instead of *children*)
- Incorrect verb forms (*goed* instead of *went*)
- Misuse of prefixes and suffixes

4.6 Semantic Errors

Semantic errors affect meaning:

- Sentences that are grammatically correct but meaningless or unclear
- Misuse of words that changes the intended meaning

Example: The food was *too much delicious*

Summary

The major types of errors identified in English writing include:

- Grammatical errors (most frequent)
- Lexical errors
- Syntactic errors
- Mechanical errors
- Morphological errors
- Semantic errors

Understanding these categories helps teachers and researchers systematically analyze student writing and apply appropriate corrective measures to enhance writing proficiency.

5. Causes of Errors

5.1 Mother Tongue Interference

Students often translate directly from their native language, leading to incorrect structures.

5.2 Lack of Grammar Knowledge

Insufficient understanding of rules results in frequent grammatical mistakes.

5.3 Limited Vocabulary

Students struggle to express ideas due to lack of appropriate words.

5.4 Overgeneralization

Applying one rule to all situations (e.g., adding "-ed" to all verbs).

5.5 Lack of Practice

Writing skills require continuous practice, which is often lacking.

6. Analysis and Interpretation (Primary Data)

Error Type	Percentage (%)
Grammatical Errors	35%
Spelling Errors	20%
Punctuation Errors	15%
Sentence Structure Errors	18%
Vocabulary Errors	12%

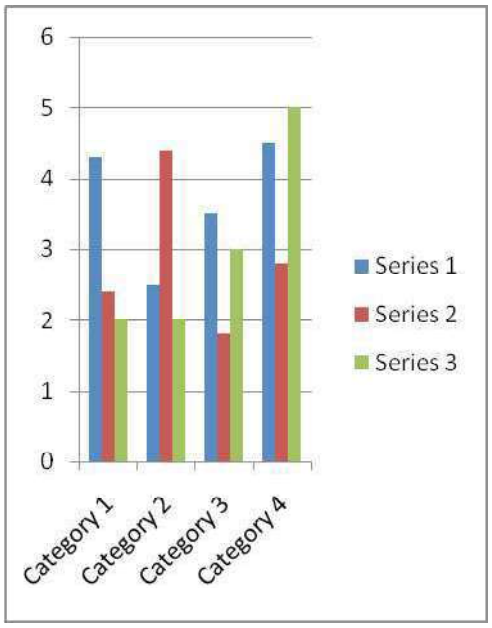


Chart showing Analysis and Interpretation of Primary Data

Interpretation:

- Grammatical errors are the most dominant
- Mechanical errors (spelling & punctuation) are also significant
- Vocabulary errors are comparatively less but still impactful

7.Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that grammatical errors constitute the largest proportion of errors in students' English writing (35%). This suggests that many secondary-level learners have difficulty applying grammatical rules accurately, particularly in areas such as tense usage, subject–verb agreement, articles, and prepositions. These findings support the views of Corder (1967) and Ellis (1994), who argued that grammatical errors are a natural consequence of second language learning and reflect learners' incomplete knowledge of the target language.

Sentence structure errors accounted for 18% of the total errors. This indicates that students experience challenges in organizing words and ideas into coherent and meaningful sentences. Problems such as incorrect word order, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences suggest inadequate mastery of English syntactic patterns. Similar findings have been reported by James (1998), who observed that syntactic difficulties are common among second-language learners due to differences between native-language and target-language structures.

Mechanical errors, including spelling (20%) and punctuation (15%), together represented 35% of all identified errors. The high frequency of these errors indicates insufficient attention to writing conventions and limited exposure to standard written English. Such errors may also result from carelessness, lack of proofreading habits, and inadequate writing practice. Harmer (2004) emphasized that regular

writing activities and corrective feedback are essential for improving accuracy in spelling and punctuation.

Vocabulary errors accounted for 12% of the total errors, making them the least frequent category. However, these errors still affected the clarity and effectiveness of students' written communication. Limited vocabulary knowledge often forced students to use inappropriate words or direct translations from their mother tongue. This finding is consistent with the observations of Hyland (2003), who noted that lexical limitations significantly restrict learners' ability to express ideas accurately and fluently.

Hyland (2003) views second-language writing as a socially situated and purposeful activity that requires learners to develop both writing-process skills and an understanding of genre conventions. He argues that successful L2 writing instruction should integrate planning, drafting, revising, feedback, and genre awareness to help students communicate effectively within specific academic and professional contexts.

Norrish (1983) views learner errors as systematic and meaningful deviations that reflect the learner's developing knowledge of a second language. He distinguishes errors from mistakes, arguing that errors arise from incomplete learning, whereas mistakes are inconsistent lapses in performance. Norrish emphasizes that the analysis of learner errors provides valuable information about language acquisition processes and helps teachers design effective instructional interventions.

Jack C. Richards (1974) views learner errors as an essential source of information about the process of second language acquisition. In contrast to earlier approaches that regarded errors merely as signs of failure or poor learning, Richards argues that errors reveal how learners actively construct and test hypotheses about the target language. Therefore, errors should be studied systematically to understand language learning

The study further revealed that mother-tongue interference, lack of grammatical knowledge, overgeneralization of language rules, limited vocabulary, and insufficient writing practice were major causes of students' errors. Among these factors, mother-tongue influence appeared particularly significant, as many students translated ideas directly from their native language into English, resulting in grammatical and structural inaccuracies. Similar conclusions were drawn by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), who identified language transfer as a major source of learner errors.

Overall, the findings confirm that grammatical competence remains the most challenging aspect of English writing for secondary-level students. The results are consistent with previous research in error analysis, which highlights grammar, sentence structure, and writing mechanics as persistent problem areas in second-language writing. Therefore, teachers should emphasize grammar instruction, provide opportunities for guided writing practice, encourage extensive reading, and offer constructive feedback to help students improve their writing proficiency.

8.Conclusion

This study investigated the nature, frequency, and causes of errors in English writing among secondary-level students through the analysis of both primary and secondary data. The findings reveal that students commonly experience difficulties in various aspects of writing, particularly grammar, sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary usage. Among these, grammatical errors emerged as the most frequent, accounting for 35% of the total errors identified, indicating that learners face significant challenges in applying grammatical rules accurately in written communication.

The study further found that mother-tongue interference, inadequate knowledge of grammar, limited vocabulary, overgeneralization of language rules, and insufficient writing practice are the major factors contributing to students' writing errors. These findings are consistent with established theories of second-language acquisition, which view learner errors as a natural and inevitable part of the language-learning process.

Error analysis proved to be an effective tool for identifying specific areas of difficulty and understanding the underlying causes of students' writing problems. The results suggest that teachers should adopt learner-centered instructional strategies that emphasize explicit grammar instruction, vocabulary development, regular writing practice, extensive reading, and constructive feedback. Such approaches can help students gradually overcome recurring errors and develop greater confidence and competence in English writing.

In conclusion, improving writing proficiency among secondary-level learners requires continuous support, systematic error correction, and meaningful opportunities for language use. By recognizing errors as valuable indicators of learning rather than mere failures, educators can design more effective teaching interventions that contribute to the overall development of students' communicative and academic writing skills.

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