

An Error Analysis of Expository Essay Writing of English as Second Language (ESL) Undergraduate Learners in Pakistan

Moizza Ghyas¹

Hira Sakhawat²

Abstract: *This study focused on the expository essay writing of undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan. The study aimed to identify the most common errors made by these students and analyse the reasons behind those. The study used a quantitative method to conduct error analysis. A sample of eight expository essays written by undergraduate second language learners of the selected colleges was analysed, and the errors were identified and categorised. The data analysis identified grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organisation errors by second language learners in expository essays. The sample students also struggled for using the correct verb tense, forming proper sentence structure, and using accurate prepositions. The results of the study provided insights into the areas that needed improvement in learning English as a second language in Pakistan, as well as the strategies to address the identified errors. Further research may include more areas of grammar.*

Keywords: *error analysis, expository essay writing, grammatical errors, language learning strategies, syntax errors, vocabulary errors*

¹*M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Linguistics, Riphah International University. Lahore, Pakistan. mozzamir25@gmail.com*

²*English Language Instructor, The Citizen Foundation School. Lahore, Pakistan. hirasakhi63@gmail.com*

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Introduction

Learning a different language is sometimes difficult since the target language has different elements compared to the native language. These differences sometimes cause students to make errors while using them. Among

writing, reading, speaking, and listening in English; writing is the most complex aspect, but it is a crucial skill for students to learn. Students who have the ability and competency to write English will be able to express themselves effectively.

Background of the Study

Language is used by learners as a tool to shape their discourse, but, side by side, they talk about their feelings, who they are, and how they view relationships with the world (Norton, 2000). Second language learning and identity construction is a dominant area of research (Canagarajah, 1999). The English language was first established in the Indo-Pak subcontinent in the 16th century by British rulers (Mahboob, 2015). It has become a part of almost every single institution in Pakistan, which enhances the communication skills of students so they can easily communicate or argue with others. It is used by college and university communities not only as written communication or one of its programs but also as an intellectual activity, learning method, and instruction (Weigle, 2002).

Error analysis is a technique used to report the errors that appear in the learners' language, discover if the errors are systematic, and, if possible, explain

why they occur or what they are (Corder, 1976). An error is the use of a word, speech act, or grammatical item in such a way that it appears incomplete and is important to complete learning (Richard, 2002). Errors are 'signals' that indicate a real learning process and that the learner has not yet acquired a well-structured linguistic competence in the target language (Hendrickson 1987). It is the tool through which one can find errors in the text or anything. Rizaldi et al. (2022) supported the idea that it makes academics a much easier way to detect or figure out errors in the selected text. Techniques to identify, classify, and systematically identify receptive forms produced by a foreign learner using the principles and procedures of linguistics (Crystal, 2011).

The expository essay gives us accurate information based on facts in the study. It helps us find an experimental way of finding a solution to our problem. The specific language used in this is very simple or easy to understand because it helps us understand the sample quickly.

A collection of errors is called a “bundle of errors” or simply a “bug collection.” In linguistics, a collection of errors is called an “error corpus”. This is a compilation of language samples collected from learners of a second or foreign language that contain mistakes or errors in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or other aspects of the language.

Statement of the Problem

Error analysis is a process used to identify the errors made by second language (ESL) learners in their use of the target language. The problem of error analysis in the context of ESL undergraduate learners may include:

- a) Recognising the usual linguistic errors that occur in the writings of ESL undergraduate learners.
- b) Inadequate focus on error correction ESL learners may not receive enough feedback on their errors, which can hinder their progress. Overall, effective error analysis requires a comprehensive understanding of the

types of errors that ESL learners make, a systematic approach to identifying and categorising these errors, and a focus on providing meaningful and appropriate feedback to support language development.

Aim of the Study

The study aims to analyse the errors from the required sample, which is collected from college students in the form of expository essays, to find out what errors they make while writing and how to correct them and reconstruct the writing of the students by using the method of correction of errors. Interlanguage theory was used to analyse the study.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the most common errors made by ESL undergraduate students in their expository essays.

Research Questions

1. What are the most common errors ESL undergraduate students make in their expository essays?

Significance of the Study

The significance of error analysis in the context of ESL undergraduate learners can be highlighted using an expository essay. Error analysis provides valuable insights into the linguistic challenges faced by non-native speakers of a language. It can help to give them better instructions to meet the needs of their students in a better way.

Error analysis can provide information about the common errors ESL learners make, which can help us understand the areas in which their students may need additional support. For example, analysing errors made in verb conjugation or pronunciation may indicate a need for more focused instruction in these areas.

Saputra (2023) adds that error analysis can help us identify the sources of errors, such as interference from the learner's first language or a lack of understanding of grammatical rules. This information can be used to develop targeted instructional strategies to address the underlying causes of errors.

Limitations of Study

Despite its many benefits, an error analysis of expository essay writing by ESL undergraduate learners also has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. Some of these limitations are:

With a limited focus on individual errors, error analysis often focuses on individual errors rather than considering the overall coherence and meaning of the text. This can lead to a narrow view of the writing abilities of the ESL learner and may not accurately reflect their overall writing skills.

Error analysis may not consider errors to be a regular part of language development for non-native speakers. Some errors may reflect the learners' attempt to find a solution to a linguistic challenge rather than a lack of competence in the target language.

Error analysis may not consider the situational context in which the language was used, such as the topic, audience, or purpose of the text. This can limit the understanding of the errors made and

their impact on the overall meaning of the text.

Literature Review

The literature on error analysis in second language writing provides valuable insights into the nature of errors made by ESL learners and the factors influencing these errors. Understanding the underlying causes of errors is crucial for effective language instruction and curriculum development. This literature review synthesises key findings from recent studies on error analysis in ESL writing, focusing on grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organisational errors.

According to Corder (1976), an error occurs when a deviation arises due to a lack of knowledge. It represents a lack of competence. An error is a systematic deviation when a learner has not learned something and consistently gets it wrong (James, 2003). The errors can be defined in terms of the difference between the learner's utterances and the reconstructed version." In this way,

errors fall into four categories: omission of some required element, addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element, selection of an incorrect element, and disordering of the elements (Corder, 1976). Errors are due to what Richards (1971) mentioned: ignorance of rule restrictions and incomplete application of rules. The sources of errors in studying a language might be derived from the interference of the learners' mother tongue and the general characteristics of rule learning (Richards, 2015).

Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors are among the most common errors observed in ESL writing. According to Ellis (1994), grammatical errors occur due to a lack of knowledge or competence in the target language. These errors include incorrect verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement issues, and article misuse (James, 1998). For example, ESL learners may struggle to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns, leading to errors in article usage (Leki, 1990).

Research has also highlighted the role of first-language interference in grammatical errors. Chaudron (1986) suggests that ESL learners may transfer grammatical structures from their native language into English, resulting in errors such as word order inversion or incorrect use of prepositions. Additionally, sociolinguistic factors, such as language exposure and proficiency level, can influence the frequency and types of grammatical errors ESL learners make (Odlin, 1989).

Recent studies have employed corpus-based approaches to analyse grammatical errors in ESL writing. By examining large collections of learner texts, researchers can identify patterns of error occurrence and distribution (Biber et al., 1999). For instance, Bitchener and Knoch (2009) conducted a corpus-based analysis of ESL essays and found that grammatical errors were more prevalent in certain linguistic features such as relative clauses and modal verbs.

Vocabulary Errors

Vocabulary errors are another significant aspect of ESL writing, affecting the clarity and coherence of the text. These errors involve lexical selection, word form, or collocational patterns (Laufer & Nation, 1999). ESL learners often face challenges in accurately recalling and using vocabulary words in context, leading to lexical errors (Nation, 2001).

Research suggests that vocabulary errors can stem from a variety of factors, including limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of exposure to authentic language input, and ineffective vocabulary learning strategies (Schmitt, 2000). Moreover, L1 interference can influence vocabulary choice and usage in ESL writing (Corder, 1981). For example, ESL learners may rely on direct translation from their native language, resulting in inappropriate word choices or phrasing (Cook, 2001).

Recent studies have explored the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction techniques in reducing lexical errors in ESL writing. Nation and Macalister

(2010) advocate for explicit vocabulary instruction methods, such as vocabulary notebooks and word cards, to enhance learners' lexical knowledge and usage. Additionally, corpus-based analysis can provide insights into the frequency and distribution of vocabulary errors in ESL writing (Liu & Jiang, 2015).

Syntax Errors

Syntax errors refer to violations of grammatical rules governing sentence structure and word order. Muliawati and Arini (2023) agree that these errors can occur at various levels of syntactic complexity, from basic sentence formation to complex clause structures (Kroll & Stewart, 1994). ESL learners often struggle with syntactic features such as subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences (Ferris, 2002).

The acquisition of syntactic structures in a second language is influenced by factors such as language input, proficiency level, and cognitive processing capacity (Fotos & Ellis,

1991). For example, ESL learners may overgeneralise grammatical rules or apply syntactic patterns inconsistently, leading to errors in sentence construction (White, 2003). Moreover, syntactic errors can result from incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of target language grammar (Ellis, 2008).

Recent research has investigated the role of corrective feedback in addressing syntax errors in ESL writing. Ferris (2010) suggests explicit error correction techniques such as focused written feedback and peer editing, can help learners identify and correct syntactic errors. Furthermore, corpus-based analysis can facilitate the identification of common syntactic errors and their distribution across different learner populations (Boulton, 2009).

Organisational Errors

Organisational errors pertain to the overall structure and coherence of the written text. These errors can manifest as a lack of paragraph unity, unclear thesis statements, or inconsistent

argumentation (Hyland, 2003). ESL learners struggle with organising their ideas logically and cohesively, resulting in disjointed or poorly structured essays (Swales, 2004).

The development of organisational skills in ESL writing is influenced by factors such as genre awareness, rhetorical conventions, and writing proficiency (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

Recent studies have explored pedagogical approaches to enhancing organisational skills in ESL writing. Swales and Feak (2012) advocate explicit instruction in genre-based writing strategies, such as outlining and paragraphing techniques. Additionally, corpus-based analysis can provide insights into the organisational features of proficient academic writing and help learners develop effective organisational strategies (Charles, 2007).

In conclusion, error analysis in ESL writing encompasses a range of linguistic features, including grammatical, vocabulary, syntax, and organisational errors. Understanding the underlying

causes of these errors is essential for designing effective language instruction and supporting ESL learners' writing development. Recent research has employed diverse methodological approaches, such as corpus-based analysis and pedagogical intervention studies, to investigate error patterns and inform instructional practices in ESL writing classrooms. By addressing the specific needs of ESL learners and providing targeted feedback and instruction, educators can help facilitate their development as proficient writers in English.

Theoretical Framework

The term interlanguage was first introduced in 1972 in the field of literature by Selinker and Lamendella (1978). Selinker introduced the concept of interlanguage, based on Corder's previous work on the nature of language learners' errors.

Interlanguage theory is a linguistic theory that looks at the differences between a learner's native language and the language they are learning. It

suggests that a learner's native language influences their ability to learn a second language and that they use their native language grammar to construct the new language. The salient features of Interlanguage Theory include:

1. Use of an interlanguage different from the native language, as well as the target language
2. Development of the interlanguage in a systematic and rule-governed way.
3. A continuum of language forms from the native language through the interlanguage to the target language
4. Gradual transfer of the learner's native language rules and structures to the target language
5. The emergence of new and unique features of the interlanguage as the learner progresses.
6. Analysing writing tasks: Interlanguage Theory can be used to analyse the demands of different writing tasks and their impact on ESL

learners' ability to produce language in their second language. This information can be used to select writing tasks appropriate for ESL learners at different stages of proficiency.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm of this study is post-positivism. It sees research problems as an outcome of specific causes and then is interested in investigating the causes. There are empirical observations and experiments involved. Post-positivism is a philosophical approach that recognises that knowledge is socially constructed and subjective. In an error analysis of expository essays written by ESL undergraduate learners, post-positivism provides a framework for understanding the errors made by these learners due to their cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds.

Research Method

The study uses the quantitative method and collection of errors procedures of error analysis itself. This study identifies the students' errors in writing an English essay. On the other hand, the researcher calculates the errors and makes the corrections or reconstructions. The study also tries to find out the possible causes behind these errors. The study uses an English essay as a research tool. The students were asked to write essays on two different topics.

Research Design

The research employs document analysis as a research design. Quantitative research is a type of research that uses numerical data to analyse and test hypotheses. It emphasises objectivity, reliability, and validity.

Data Collection

The primary source of data used to find answers to the research questions is the written essays of 8 participants from the chosen college. The topics given in the essays were general but expository;

regarding collecting the data, the study provided a test in the form of an essay.

Data Collection Procedure

All eight participants were required to write on one of two different topics: 1) Why Do I love Pakistan? 2) My First Day at College. They were asked to write approximately 200 to 300 words within 35 minutes.

Data Analysis

The written essays were analysed using Corder's (1967) error analysis method. This method had three steps: (1) collection of sample errors, (2) identification of errors, and (3) description of the errors. The study presented a case of students of the 12th class and discussed the findings of its objectives. First, the errors made by the students were classified; second, the common errors were identified; and finally, these errors made by the learners were corrected.

The errors made by the students were classified; second, the common errors were identified with illustrative

examples; and finally, these errors made by the learners were corrected by examples.

Identification of Errors

In this step, the study collected the data and tried to find the grammatical errors by analysing them. The study analysed the data objectively.

Classification of Errors

Once the errors had been identified, the researcher classified them into the following categories of grammatical rules, for example:

- Errors in using verb forms
- Errors in the use of the article
- Errors in the use of prepositions
- Errors in the use of punctuation

Findings

The analysis was conducted on essays written by 12th-grade students, focusing on grammatical errors using Corder's

(1967) method of error analysis. The errors were categorised into five types: tense, spelling, article, preposition, and punctuation.

Table 1

Distribution of Grammatical Errors by Error Type

Error Category	Count of Errors
Tense	17
Spelling	20
Article	11
Preposition	9
Punctuation	12

Table 1 shows that a total of 69 grammatical errors were identified across the sample. These errors were further classified into specific categories. Further, Utilising Corder's (1967) method of error analysis, errors were categorised into tense, spelling, article, preposition and punctuation.

Table 2

Distribution of Grammatical Errors Among Students

Sr. No.	Stud ents	Spell ings	Art icle	Prepo sition	Punct uation	Te nse
1	01	3	2	1	2	3
2	02	3	1	0	1	1
3	03	2	0	1	1	4
4	04	4	3	3	2	2
5	05	3	1	2	2	3
6	06	2	2	1	1	1
7	07	1	0	0	1	2
8	08	2	1	2	2	1
Tot al	-	20	11	9	12	17

Table 2 presents a summary of the distribution of errors among the students. In total, 69 grammatical errors were identified across the essays. The distribution of errors varied among the students, with some demonstrating proficiency in certain areas while others were struggling.

Types of Errors

The most common errors were in spelling, with a total of 20 errors identified. These errors encompassed misspellings of words such as “Pakistani” instead of “Pakistan.”

Tense errors accounted for 17 instances, indicating challenges in using the correct verb tense within sentences. For instance, errors such as “I can felt love for my country” demonstrated difficulties with verb tense agreement.

Punctuation errors amounted to 12 instances, indicating issues with the placement and usage of punctuation marks. For example, the sentence “We had a meeting on the beautiful fresh and grassy ground” lacked proper comma usage.

Articles and prepositions accounted for 11 and 9 errors, respectively. Errors in articles involved instances where the wrong article was used or omitted altogether, while prepositional errors indicated difficulties in selecting the appropriate preposition to convey

meaning accurately. Examples of errors identified within the essays include:

Tense: “I can felt love for my country.”
(Correction: “I can feel love for my country.”)

Spellings: “Pakistani is a Islamic country.” (Correction: “Pakistan is an Islamic country.”)

Article: “I have great love of my country.” (Correction: “I have great love for my country.”)

Preposition: “I have been eaten it’s wheat.” (Correction: “I have been eating its wheat.”)

Punctuation: “We had a meeting on the beautiful fresh and grassy ground.”
(Correction: “We had a meeting on the beautiful, fresh, and grassy ground.”)

These findings provide insights into the common grammatical errors made by 12th-grade students in their essays, highlighting areas where further instruction and practice may be beneficial.

Discussion

Based on the collected data, the findings show that errors in tense usage are the most frequent, followed by spelling mistakes, punctuation errors, issues with articles, and errors involving prepositions. Here is a description of each error category and what the count of errors implies:

Tense (Total Errors: 17): This indicates that students frequently misuse verb tenses in their writing. They may have difficulty understanding when to use different tenses or how to correctly conjugate verbs for past, present, or future actions.

Spellings (Total Errors: 20): The number of spelling errors suggests that students struggle with the correct spelling of words in English, which could be due to the complex nature of English orthography or a lack of familiarity with the standard written form of words.

Article (Total Errors: 11): Errors in this category involve the misuse or omission of definite (the) and indefinite articles (a,

an). ESL learners often find article usage challenging because such distinctions may not exist in their native languages.

Preposition (Total Errors: 9): Prepositional errors involve incorrect use of words like “in,” “on,” “at,” and others that indicate relationships between other words in a sentence. These errors could stem from the subtlety of preposition usage in English, which can be difficult for learners to master.

Punctuation (Total Errors: 12): Punctuation errors include incorrect use or omission of commas, periods, question marks, and other punctuation marks that can alter the meaning of sentences and affect the clarity of the writing.

The table showing the breakdown of errors per student indicates individual areas where each student might need focused instruction or practice. For instance, the first student made three errors in both spelling and tense, suggesting a need for further learning in these areas. The analysis can help educators tailor their teaching strategies

to address specific weaknesses and thus improve the overall writing proficiency of ESL learners.

The data suggests that a multifaceted approach to teaching English writing skills is needed. The error analysis not only helps in identifying common errors but also provides a direction for curriculum development. Teachers can use this information to design specific lesson plans for each identified area. Additionally, more individualised feedback on student essays and other written assignments can be crucial in helping students learn from their mistakes and improve their writing abilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, error analysis provides valuable insights into the language challenges non-native speakers face and can help to better meet their needs. Error analysis of expository essay writing of undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan provides a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their writing skills. The study found that the

most common errors made by the participants were related to tense, punctuation, articles, and prepositions. Error Analysis of expository essay writing is important for undergraduate ESL learners in Pakistan as it helps to identify and understand the common mistakes they make in writing and improve their writing skills. This study concluded that students committed five types of errors: tense punctuation, spelling and preposition errors occur with mother tongue interference.

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