



A Study on the Errors in EFL Writing of Higher Secondary Level Students in Bangladesh

Research Paper

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Abstract

Errors in English as a foreign language (EFL)/English as a second language (ESL) writing are vital issues in assessing the students' language competency level in any educational setting. Error-free writing is imperative because a writing piece shows the writer's original thought if it is error-free. This study attempted to find the common errors in EFL writing of higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. The study mainly focused on the errors they made in their writing related to grammar and mechanics. This descriptive study was conducted during the period from January 2020 to February 2020. All the 80 participants of this study were Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level students; amongst them, 40 were from the rural, and another 40 were from the urban area colleges located in the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. The researcher gave the students a short composition writing test, and written documents were analyzed using content analysis to elicit data. The researcher found that most students made frequent mistakes in subject-verb agreement, linkers, articles, and punctuation marks. Incomplete sentences and spelling were two other types of errors that were produced mainly by the rural students.

Keywords: EFL writing, grammar, mechanics, errors, HSC level

1. Introduction

The writing skill is not only necessary for academic success but also professional development. Success in business and job immensely depends on good writing skill as Graham and Perin (2007) mention that good writing skill is not just an option for young people but is necessary. It can easily be assumed that writing skills indicate good writing ability in English as communication worldwide largely depends on the English language. Before starting a professional career, writing in English needs to be developed, which can be achieved at educational institutions. In Bangladesh, the educational system is divided into four levels: primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary. EFL/ESL is compulsory as a subject to be studied at all levels of education.

In comparison with other skills, EFL writing is considered essential in Bangladesh's testing system of all education levels. As a result, in EFL teaching and learning, writing attracts the central attention of the teachers and learners. In importance, EFL writing in testing and teaching at the higher secondary level of education is no exception. Being skilled in EFL writing is the most crucial issue for HSC level students to score a good grade in their English examination. The skill is essential for their next level of education and profession. Good writing skill refers to technical and grammatical error-free writing, and the writing should also be to the point, concise, coherent, and consistent. According

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to Renandya (2002), to make a piece of writing effective and standard, it is essential to go through some procedures, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing and those procedures depend on fluency of writing, grammatical accuracy, re-writing based on feedback given in a responding stage. Zhu (2004) mentions that good writing involves a clear understanding of relevant ideas and interaction as a foundation. To be a skilled writer, a writer needs to imagine and be creative in putting their thoughts in words (Hyland, 2015). Maghsoudi and Haririan (2013) mention that writing is a very complex skill as it "stimulates thinking, compels students to concentrate and organize their ideas, and cultivates their ability to summarize, analyse, and criticize". Studies show that writing is a skill that comprises many complex issues such as gathering coherent and concise ideas, technical and grammatical knowledge, and organizing all the phenomena in a well-organized way. This study explored the grammatical and technical errors made by HSC students in their EFL writing. The objective of this study was to investigate the errors in EFL writing of higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. The study mainly focused on finding the errors related to grammar and mechanics.

2. Literature Review

Language is considered to a complex phenomenon. Writing is the most important skill among the four English language skills as this skill is widely used in academic and professional fields. (Walsh, 2010). Though writing is an essential skill, it is very challenging to master and acquire this competence (Fareed et al., 2016). It is also challenging for native adult speakers to master writing in their mother tongue (Raimes, 1991). Thus, it can be easily assumed that writing in a foreign and second language is not a simple task; instead, it is a complex process that requires learning many subskills and strategies concerning the target language. As writing is a productive skill, it usually demands more effort and long-time from the learners to acquire it. Grammar is viewed as an essential aspect of language learning for second language learners. Besides, organizational skills, technical skills, mechanical skills, etc., are also required to master the target language. Many previous studies explored the common writing errors of the students. It should be mentioned that 'errors' are those that totally violate the rules again and again in a topic (Corder, 1973); if it is done unintentionally once or twice, then it is a mistake.

In a study, Younes and Albalawi (2015) explored some common errors in ESL writings of undergrad students. They found errors in the use of articles, tenses, prepositions, syntax, and subject-verb agreement. They also found errors in the use of punctuation marks, errors in spelling, ordering, segmentation, and using proper words. Karim et al. (2015) explored errors in the use of verbs in writing. He found that most of the EFL users in the high schools use verbs incorrectly. Hossain and Uddin (2015) further explored errors in grammar, punctuation marks, prepositions, articles, and auxiliaries made by the students in their writing. Their study revealed that the students made the highest errors in using the correct prepositions, articles, and auxiliary verbs. Afrin (2016) found common mistakes made by the students at the secondary school level were spelling, tense, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, numbers, pronoun references, words, articles, and capitalization. In a study, Miko (2018) revealed that the students made errors in formation, omission, ordering, addition respectively in their EFL writing. The study was conducted among undergraduate students of Indonesia. Hasan and Munandar (2018) conducted a study in the Department of English at a university in Indonesia to find out the grammatical errors made by the students in their writings. Their study identified the students' errors in writing as malformation, omission disordering, and addition. Mohammed (2016) has identified seven types of errors in EFL writing usually made by the students. He has identified errors in the use of verbs, like the finite and non-finite formation of the verb, use of right tense, right voice mode, right formation of the verb, use of the phrase, in the use of adverbial clauses like purpose, result, companion, concession, and manner, in the use of articles like definite and indefinite, in the use of relative clauses and interlingual errors like structural misrepresentation and simplification, and finally in the use of prepositions usually made by the students. The researcher found inadequate literature related to the witting errors of the higher secondary level students of Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted to explore the errors made by the students in EFL writing at a higher secondary level in Bangladesh. As this study was qualitative, 'testing' was deemed suitable for the mode of data collection. The participation of this study were higher secondary level students from rural and urban colleges of Mymensingh district in Bangladesh. As it was not possible to include the whole population, 80 college students (40 rural and 40 urban) were selected as the respondents of this study to collect data. To explore and analyze the errors in the writing of the students, tests were taken by the students. The writing sample was composition writing within 200 words but not less than 150 words for the participants. The students were given much scope to write a composition on the same previously selected topic with full concentration. They were given 40 minutes to write the composition and after completing their writing, they were asked to submit the written papers as academic requirements. The written documents were analysed using 'content analyses for data elicitation and presentation.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

The standard errors identified in this study are spelling, pluralization, suitable connectors, right words, determiners, subject-verb agreement, articles, adjectives, adverbs, linkers, punctuation marks, capitalization, tense models. It has been found that the highest number of students made errors in spelling. Many students were found to make errors in the use of a linker. In all writings, it was noticed that the students made common errors at 15 levels that are presented in the table below with categories and percentage.

Table 1. Errors made by the participants

SL	Identified Error Types	Participants in Test	Number of Participants Made Errors	Percentage of Errors
1	Errors in using punctuation mark	80	42	52.50%
2	Errors in using subject verb agreement	80	57	71.25%
3	Errors in using spelling	80	71	88.75%
4	Errors in using preposition	80	23	28.75%
5	Errors in using determiner	80	26	32.50%
6	Errors in using article	80	51	63.75%
7	Errors in using capitalization	80	8	10.00%
8	Errors in using tense	80	36	45.00%
9	Errors in using linker	80	62	77.50%
10	Errors in using model	80	27	33.75%
11	Errors in using pronoun	80	17	21.25%
12	Errors in using adverb	80	44	55.00%
13	Errors in using adjective	80	31	38.75%
14	Errors in using passive structure	80	22	27.50%
15	Errors in using apostrophe	80	8	10.00%

Table 1 presents the errors that have been explored in the writings of higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. The finding shown in the table reflects that 88.75% of students made errors in spelling. It was observed that 77.50% of students made errors in using a linker. 71.25% of students made errors to follow the subject-verb agreement. 63.75% of students were found to make errors in using the relevant articles in their writings. The table reflects that 55.00% of students made errors in using proper adverbs. Then, 52.50% of students were found to make errors in using punctuation marks in their writing composition. 45.00% of students made errors to follow proper tenses. 38.75% of students made errors in using adjectives; 33.75% of students made errors in using the right models. 32.50% of students were found to make errors in using determiners. Then it was found that 28.75% of students made errors in using prepositions, and 27.50% of students used the proper passive structure of English. The finding reflects that 21.25% of students made errors in using the right pronoun. 10% of students made errors in using apostrophes and capitalization.

The findings of this study reflect that the students have made the highest errors in spelling. Then, many students were found making errors in the usage of linkers and subject-verb agreement. Many students were found to make errors in using punctuation marks, articles, adverbs, adjectives, and tenses. They have also made several errors in using prepositions, determiners, capitalization, pronouns, and apostrophes.

5. Conclusion

English is a foreign language in Bangladesh, and it is not unthinkable that the students do not make any errors in their writings. It is very different from our mother tongue. It is difficult to learn for Bangladeshi learners without performing any errors. As writing is the primary way to justify the students' merits in our country's education system, they need to acquire better writing skills and make fewer errors. The researcher recommended intensive care arrangements for the students to develop their writing capability in all educational institutions. However, more research should be conducted to find out the causes of errors made by the students in their writings, and measures should be taken to reduce the percentages of errors in students' writings.

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