GRAMMATICAL AND LINGUISTIC ERRORS IN EFL WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN DERA GHAZI KHAN

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Abstract

This study investigates the grammatical and linguistic errors commonly made by EFL college students in Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan. This study focuses on identifying the most frequent types of errors, using Corder's (1967) error analysis framework. The research aims to study the language development process of second-language learners through their written output. The study involved 30 female students in English language courses in their second and third years at a government college in Dera Ghazi Khan. The participants had studied English for at least ten years and were between 20 and 22 years old. The findings reveal that interlingual and intralingual errors are prevalent, with frequent issues related to verb tense, prepositions, pronoun use, and sentence structure. These results emphasize the need for targeted pedagogical interventions, including revised curriculum strategies and teacher training focused on EFL writing. The study holds practical implications for language instructors, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers aiming to improve writing proficiency in Pakistani EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL, Error Analysis, Essay Writing, Grammar, Vocabulary

Introduction

One of the most difficult and complicated language skills in learning a second language is writing, which requires the integration of lexical, grammatical, and cognitive abilities (Hyland, 2022). A significant barrier for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is still writing competency, particularly in non-native settings like Pakistan. Many Pakistani students still have difficulty with fundamental written expressions, even after studying English for more than ten years in formal school. They frequently produce documents that are

grammatically incorrect, semantically ambiguous, or structurally disorganized (Ahmad & Nisa, 2021).

Effective writing training is more important now because English is becoming increasingly important for Pakistani academic and professional mobility. At the secondary level, English is used as a teaching language and acts as a barrier to social and economic progress (Rehman & Azam, 2020). Educators and policymakers have turned their attention to the high level of English writing produced by EFL students. However, the ongoing challenges students have with writing, especially those who attend schools in underdeveloped or non-urban areas, point to structural flaws in curriculum development, teacher preparation, and language pedagogy (Naseem & Shah, 2022).

Error Analysis (EA), given by Corder in 1967, offers a useful perspective for analyzing the different types and origins of mistakes that students make in their writing. Unlike basic correction, EA offers educators practical insights into learner interlanguage by revealing the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms that contribute to learner errors (James, 1998; Hinnon, 2019). A recent study indicates that EA is an essential diagnostic instrument for improving learner autonomy and writing instruction (Fazilatfar & Soleimani, 2023).

Savic and Bratic (2020) categorize errors committed by EFL writers into two types: intralingual errors, resulting from improper application of target language principles or overgeneralizations, and interlingual errors, stemming from the learners' native language. The knowledge of the type and frequency of such errors by educators could help to design targeted interventions and corrective learning plans.

In particular, empirical studies have not sufficiently examined the nature of writing errors at the college level in less urbanized areas of Pakistan, such as Dera Ghazi Khan. Most earlier research has concentrated on general language acquisition problems or informal classroom evidence (Shahid & Aslam, 2021). This study intends to close this gap by analyzing the kinds and causes of writing mistakes produced by EFL students in this domain, thereby providing context-specific insights for enhancing writing instruction. This paper investigates, using a quantitative error analysis approach, the most often occurring lexical and grammatical mistakes in student writing samples. Recognizing these patterns advances the theoretical knowledge of writing in second languages and offers helpful suggestions for EFL instruction in Pakistani higher education.

Research Problem

Many EFL students in Pakistan still struggle with written expression, especially in areas like grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and punctuation, even after years of official English education. This problem is particularly common in underdeveloped areas like Dera Ghazi Khan, where there is a lack of access to modern learning tools, skilled teachers, and efficient teaching techniques. Students' language development and academic achievement suffer from these ongoing writing challenges. The nature and causes of errors among college students in semi-urban or rural Pakistani contexts have not been thoroughly studied empirically (Ridha, 2012; Liu, 2013). Teachers and curriculum developers find it challenging to create focused educational interventions in the absence of such localized analysis. To close this gap and contribute to the larger discussion on second language writing in similar contexts, this study

aims to analyze the writing errors made by EFL students in Dera Ghazi Khan systematically. In light of the above discussion, the current study proceeds with the following objectives:

Research Objectives

The research aims to examine the most common types of writing errors, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, and writing conventions,found in the English compositions of EFL college students.

1. To explore whether these errors are influenced by the learners' native language (interlingual errors) or by confusion within the English language itself (intralingual errors).

Research Questions

Q1. What are the most common types of errors made by EFL students in their English writing, especially in grammar, vocabulary, and writing conventions?

Q2. To what extent are these errors influenced by the student's native language, and how many can be attributed to difficulties within the English language system?

Literature Review

Writing in a second language is widely acknowledged as one of the most demanding skills for learners to master. Among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, writing is often the area where language difficulties are most visible, especially in grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation. This to analyzed writing errors, a central topic in applied linguistics. Corder (1967) made one of the fundamental contributions ns evidence of failure. They provide an understanding of how students absorb guidelines and negotiate several phases of language development.

Two basic categories of second language writing errors are often interlingual and intralingual. While intralingual errors are brought about by uncertainty or overgeneralization inside the second language itself, interlingual errors result from interference from the learner's first language. For instance, a student might apply rules inconsistently depending on limited experience or utilize English articles if their native tongue lacks such structures. Scholars like Savic and Bratic (2020) contend that knowing the cause of these mistakes is essential for giving teachers appropriate instructional support since it enables them to determine if students are experiencing internal rule creation or transfer problems.

Much research writing mistakes in various EFL environments has looked at According to Ridha (2012), most of the grammatical errors in writing among Iraqi undergraduates were connected to interference with first language acquisition. Kim (2001) noted, on the other hand, that many Korean students made mistakes because they misinterpreted English grammar norms instead of L1 flow. These variations highlight the need to give the learners' linguistic and educational backgrounds top attention. More recently, Liu (2021) did a longitudinal study on Chinese learners and showed that although their proportions fluctuated

depending on the degree of English writing task exposure, both intralingual and interlingual mistakes were common.

Regarding Pakistan, several structural elements aggravate the problems. Although English is required, the instruction of writing skills is sometimes underappreciated, particularly in rural locations and public-sector colleges. Many Pakistani students starting college struggle with sentence structure, verb tenses, and suitable word use, according to Ahmad and Nisa (2021). These shortcomings were ascribed not only to the native language effect but also to inadequate educational techniques and a lack of practice. In English, Shahid and Aslam (2021) also pointed out that, rather than via practice in building original texts, writing in English is sometimes taught by memorization and translation. This method reduces students' capacity to grow in confidence and fluency in written language.

Further investigation by Nawaz et al. (2020) revealed that problematic sentence structure and literal word choices are much influenced by the reliance on Urdu-English translation. They also underlined how poor preparation in second language writing pedagogy causes many teachers in many institutions to be unprepared to handle these problems properly. Rehman and Azam (2020) contended that reforms in curriculum and teacher education are desperately needed, particularly in areas like Dera Ghazi Khan, where access to resources and exposure to English are somewhat low, if real progress in writing abilities depends on them.

Although worldwide research has improved our knowledge of EFL writing mistakes, localised studies in semi-urban or rural Pakistan still fall short. Most of the current research is on university-level or large-city students. This results in many under-researched areas and college-level students who have been largely overlooked. Examining writing mistakes among Dera Ghazi Khan students helps the present study to fill in this gap. The study aims to support more targeted teaching strategies and inform future curriculum development in similar educational settings by identifying the types and reasons for these mistakes.

Methodology

Research Design

To analyze writing samples created by EFL college students, this study used a quantitative research design and document analysis. Grammatical and lexical errors in student writing were identified, categorized, and interpreted using the framework for error analysis developed by Corder (1982). This method was chosen to offer comprehensive insights into the kinds and causes of writing challenges that students encounter in an actual academic setting.

Data Collection

Sampling and sample

The study involved thirty female second- and third-year English language students at a government college in Dera Ghazi Khan. Having studied English for at least ten years, the participants, ranging in age from 20 to 22, had ten randomly chosen writing samples from

this group subjected to thorough error analysis to guarantee efficacy and targeted evaluation. The method of sampling was a simple random sampling.

Data Collection Procedure

Students were instructed to select from three narrative essay topics during regular class, which had already been reviewed for appropriateness and relevance by two English teachers. Each student had sixty minutes to complete a 300-word essay without the use of dictionaries or mobile devices. The completed essays were gathered and arranged for examination.

Data Analysis

Ten narrative essays from a total of thirty submitted by second- and third-year English as a foreign language students at a college in Dera Ghazi Khan were chosen at random by the researcher. Each essay was examined using quantitative content analysis by Corder's (1982) error analysis framework. Errors in vocabulary, grammar, and writing conventions were highlighted. Verb tenses, verb forms, the use of articles, prepositions, pronouns, spelling, punctuation, sentence fragments, and inappropriate word choice were among the types of mistakes that students made.

Based on their origin, the errors were divided into two main families: interlingual errors, which occurred when students used Urdu rules instead of English, and intralingual errors, which occurred when students used English rules inappropriately. This system made it simpler to comprehend language interference problems as well as developmental learning challenges. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate values like frequencies, means, and standard deviations to determine the prevalence of each error type. Researchers used one-way ANOVA analyses and t-tests to determine the significance of the differences between intralingual and interlingual errors.

Results and Analysis

1. **Types and Frequency of Errors**

1,310 grammatical, lexical, and writing convention errors were discovered in the essays in this study by the researcher. Based on whether the errors were intralingual or interlingual, they were categorized into different types. Just about half of the errors (506) were intralingual, while the majority (804) were interlingual. Numerous grammatical errors were associated with the verb's tense (130), improper prepositional usage (125), and various articles (79). In addition to selecting incorrect words and combining them with other words, many students also made grammatical errors by forgetting proper punctuation, spelling, and capitalization.

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Errors

Error Type	Frequency
Wrong Verb Tense	130
Wrong Verb Form	0
Pronouns (Addition/Wrong Choice)	29
Prepositions (Addition/Wrong Choice)	125
Articles	79

Nouns	68
Adjective (Position)	8
Adjective (Comparison)	5
Conjunctions	37
Infinitive and Gerund	48
Subject-Verb Agreement	32
Sentence Fragment	28
Translated Words	0
Word Choices	0
Confusion of Sense Relations	23
Spelling	88
Capitalization	61
Comma	108
Full Stop	23
Collocations	13
Question Mark	8

Out of all error types, Table 1 shows that grammatical errors—which are primarily related to the influence of native language, occurred most frequently. The majority of lexical errors were associated with incorrect word usage, misspellings, and improper collocations. The patterns show that learners still struggle with basic grammar and vocabulary even after spending a lot of time in English.
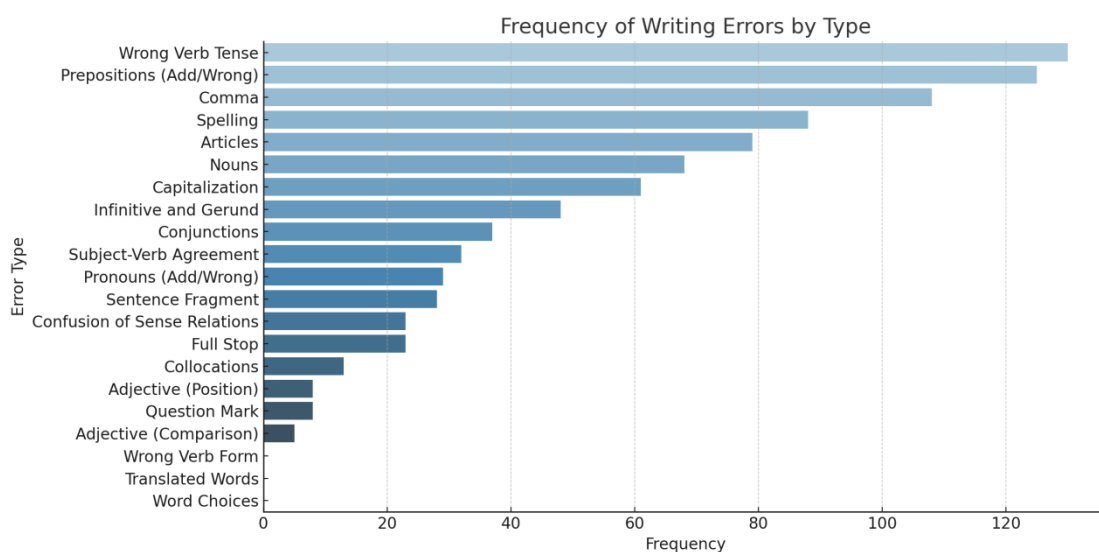

Figure 1. Types and Frequency of Errors

2.Descriptive and Inferential

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Linguistic Error Categories

Linguistic Category	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation

		(SD)
Grammar	15.9	3.79
Lexis	9.31	2.22
Writing conventions	7.1	2.09

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the frequency of different error types. Grammar errors were the most common (M = 15.90, SD = 3.79), followed by lexical errors (M = 9.31, SD = 2.22) and writing conventions (M = 7.10, SD = 2.09). When the means of the three groups were compared using a one-way ANOVA test, it was discovered that there were significant differences between them [$F_{(2,117)}$ = 154.19, $p < .001$]. According to an analysis of the data, grammatical errors were more common than lexical or writing conventions.
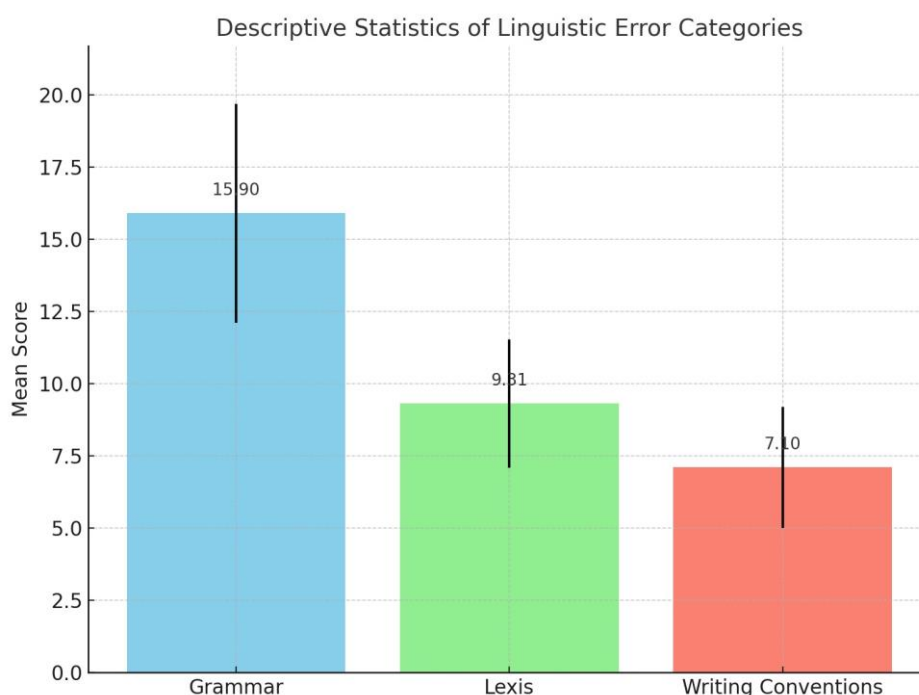

Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics of Linguistic Error Categories

Table 3. Inferential Comparison: Interlingual vs. Intralingual Errors

Error Source	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t-value	p-value
Interlingual	21.02	1.64	14.85	< .001
Intralingual	14.61	1.51		

The number of mistakes made in each type of language mixing was examined using a paired-sample t-test to see if there was a difference. According to the results, learners made more interlingual mistakes (M = 21.02, SD = 1.64) than intralingual ones (M = 14.61, SD = 1.51; $t(29)$ = 14.85, $p < .001$). This corroborates the finding that students' writing performance is significantly influenced by native language interference.
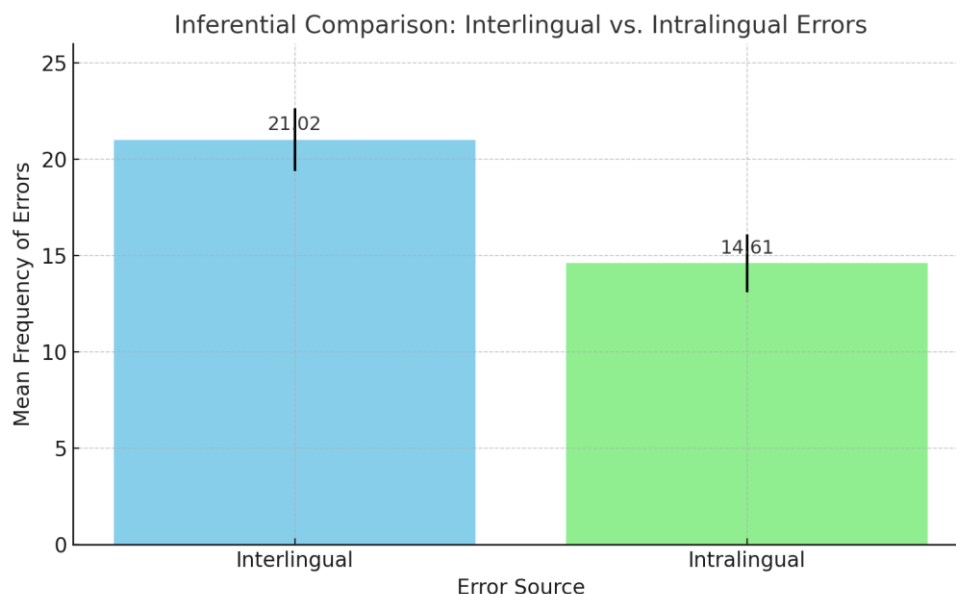
Figure 3. Inferential Comparison: Interlingual vs Intralingual Errors

2. **Error Categories: Examples and Interpretation**

Table 4. Error Categories: Examples and Interpretation

Error Type	Students Sentence	Corrected Version	Error Source
Literal Translation	He has a joke.	He has a good sense of humor.	Interlingual
Verb Tense Misuse	She send a text to me.	She sent a text to me.	Intralingual
Preposition Misuse	We came back to home.	We came back home.	Interlingual
Article Omission	She bought umbrella.	She bought an umbrella.	Intralingual
Word Choice Error	They are lovely to me.	They are kind to me.	Interlingual
Spelling Error	Every one was their.	Everyone was there.	Intralingual
Capitalization Error	i went to college yesterday.	I went to college yesterday.	Intralingual
Subject-Verb Agreement	He go to school every day.	He goes to school every day.	Intralingual

The expanded table of error examples highlights the numerous linguistic challenges that EFL students encounter when writing. The majority of mistakes are either intralingual, which occurs when learning English, or interlingual, which results from the students' Urdu background. Urdu influence was responsible for many of the mistakes, which led to poorly flowing sentences. "He has a good sense of humor" is the English translation of "He has a joke" in Urdu. Likewise, the fact that "to home" is used twice indicates that Urdu and English use place adverbs differently.

Sentences like "He goes to school every day" and "She sends me a text" demonstrate how many ESL/EFL learners still struggle with subject-verb agreement and the use of various tenses. The phrases "She bought umbrella" and "I went to college yesterday" further highlight how young students frequently overlook capitalization and articles, which are typically omitted from their initial language instruction.

Additionally, the use of "lovely" rather than "kind" (in "They are lovely to me") and "their" rather than "there" (in "Every one was their") demonstrates that the writer is mistaking similar-sounding words, has a limited vocabulary, and is not aware of their surroundings. Although these mistakes are easier to write, they impair the clarity and the degree to which others comprehend what is being said. These examples all point to the need for instruction to focus on the primary communication errors, particularly those involving tense, articles, sentence placement, and word choice. Teachers can address these issues by comparing Urdu and English grammar, teaching straightforward grammar, and providing constructive criticism. Students may gradually learn standard English if writing assignments are combined with form-focused comments.

Discussion

The research findings unequivocally demonstrate that Pakistani EFL students, particularly those residing in impoverished areas such as Dera Ghazi Khan, face significant challenges when it comes to writing in English due to the prevalence of grammatical, lexical, and writing convention errors. Previous studies found that the most common errors were misplaced prepositions, improper verb tenses, and missing articles; these errors drastically lower written communication and intelligibility (Ahmad & Nisa, 2021; Shahid & Aslam, 2021). The frequency of these mistakes emphasizes how urgently basic English grammar instruction, still underappreciated in many public schools, needs to be more targeted (Rehman & Azam, 2020).

Interlingual errors are more common than intralingual errors, according to the statistically significant difference the inferential analysis revealed between the two forms of mistakes. This suggests that students' writing concerns are more influenced by first-language interference. This supports the results of Ridha (2012) in addition to more recent studies by Liu (2021) and Nawaz et al. (2020), which also revealed that students from L1-dominant circumstances sometimes directly translate idioms and sentence patterns from their native tongue. Sentences like "We came back home" for instance, show structural interference from Urdu, where prepositional patterns vary from English.

Years of English education notwithstanding, intralingual mistakes, including improper verb conjunctions ("He go to school"), missing articles ("She bought umbrella"), and misspellings ("Every one was their") show that students have not entirely internalized the English grammar rules. These mistakes reflect developmental patterns seen in second language learning research (Fazilatfar & Soleimani, 2023; Hyland, 2022) and result from incomplete or erroneous rule generalizations. Learners' limited exposure to written English outside of academic settings may also aggravate their difficulties with proper usage, especially in spelling and grammar (Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

This amount of quantitative mistakes highlights even more the need to teach Urdu and English side by side so that students can grasp their differences from one another. Literal translations, such as "He has a joke" instead of "He has a good sense of humor," draw attention to semantic mismatches resulting from students depending too much on L1 models. Research on multilingual interference and L2 writing development has extensively reported on this problem (Savic & Bratic, 2020; Hanon, 2019).

These findings underline the need for clear grammar instruction and contextualized error correction in the classroom. Particularly in the areas of verb use, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement (Wang & Zhang, 2022), teachers should apply targeted feedback strategies that not only highlight mistakes but also explain the underlying ideas. Writing projects that raise metalinguistic awareness—such as peer reviews and teacher-student conferences—may inspire students to examine their language use more closely and help to lessen the fossilizing of common mistakes (Fazilatfar & Soleimani, 2023; Kim & Park, 2022).

At last, these results support the increasing understanding that specific strategies are required to solve Pakistan's regional differences in English instruction. Students in rural and semi-urban areas have fewer chances for significant language input and output since they usually lack access to qualified language teachers and extra learning materials (Naseem & Shah, 2022). Improving writing results requires addressing these gaps using specialized teacher training, revised curricula, and the inclusion of localized learner needs.

Conclusion

This study examined the causes of writing mistakes produced by EFL college students in Dera Ghazi Khan, demonstrating that grammatical and lexical errors can still develop even with plenty of formal English instruction. The study revealed that prepositional mistakes, article omission, lexical problems, and verb tense abuse constituted the primary difficulties. Two types of errors emerged: intralingual, derived from overgeneralization and rule ambiguity within English, and interlingual, derived from the influence of the native tongue. The much more frequent interlingual mistakes revealed how constantly the first language shapes English writing ability. The results highlight the need to change teaching methods to tackle these ongoing problems by providing clear grammar feedback, relevant writing tasks, and suitable corrections for each learning stage. Improving student performance in Pakistan's EFL environment depends on addressing these difficulties since English writing is a main indicator of academic competency and a path to chances for higher education.

Recommendations

To help students become better writers, teachers should give grammar—especially in terms of verb tenses, prepositions, and article usage—more of their focus. By highlighting the variations between Urdu and English using contrastive techniques, one can help reduce translation-based mistakes. Comments should be clear and instructive, helping pupils to understand their mistakes. Teachers should also encourage peer editing and revision so that students might grow into more self-assured writers. Crucially at the institutional level are revised writing-oriented curricula and better teacher preparation, especially in public universities. Future studies should center on successful classroom strategies for reducing mistakes among different student groups.

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