

Error Analysis of English Essays of Bangladeshi Undergraduate Learners

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Abstract

Making an error is a common issue among students in any context. In Bangladesh, it is more crucial to deal with the errors made by the students at different levels, especially at the tertiary level. The study's objectives are to identify the common errors made by the first-year English honors students, the reasons for making the errors, and the possible ways to solve them. The qualitative research method is used throughout the study. Three research instruments, including a codebook for analyzing the essays, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) question set for FGD with the students, and an in-depth interview question set, are used to collect the necessary data. Data is collected from the content analysis of 30 English essays written by the first-year students of the English department, three FGDs with 18 students, and in-depth interviews with nine English essay writing teachers. The study's major findings show that students make errors in spelling, punctuation, mechanics, preposition, subject-verb agreement, the right form of verb, parallelism, and modifiers. The major reasons for making the errors are as follows: having weaker foundation knowledge of the English language, negligence to learn the correct usage of English, unconsciousness while writing an essay, excessive use of informal English in social media tools, and lack of practice in the areas to improve. The teachers consider that providing corrective feedback, providing additional supports besides regular class schedules, assigning more practice writing, peer correction, and inspiration can help reduce the number of errors made by the students. This study also asserts that the social constructivist theory is applicable in reducing errors.

Keywords: Error analysis, essay writing, writing skills, second language, English teachers, and feedback

INTRODUCTION

A student's academic failure and success largely depend on their good and sound writing skills. It is also a basic communication skill for students, teachers, and job seekers (Ruane & Chappell, 2018). The future success of today's learners begins from their school, where writing skills is one of the prominent components (Compton-Lilly, 2014), which develops students' communication skills and develop their communicative competence (Kamal Hossain & Abdullah Al Younus, 2024).

Essay Writing

Writing is an important document that helps learners express their thoughts and ideas, emotions and feelings, facts and opinions Aqel and Mohammed (2017). Referring to writing an essay as a difficult task Amoakohene (2017) advised that learners should give much importance to the writing skills to communicate effectively in their respective fields. Considering its acceptance and importance, Heryanti, Sucipto and Makmur (2017) assert that skill could be defined as the ability of someone who exhibits his ideas and opinions. Moreover, writing is the most prominent skill that brings academic excellence and fame for qualified users (Hidayti, 2014). He added that in the field of teaching and learning, essay writing skills are prominent and significant. In my English class, it is found that students can write simple sentences, but they cannot explain their ideas and opinions while writing an essay. This may be a common problem in Bangladesh (Hossain, 2021).

Error Analysis

Error analysis is a significant area of second and foreign language learning. Error analysis was an alternative approach by behaviourism. Error analysis is systematic, and mistakes are not. The field of error analysis in second language acquisition was established in the 1970s by Corder. Corder talks about Error Analysis procedures used by teachers and researchers for practice in the language. According to Corder (1967), errors and mistakes are different phenomena, such as errors cannot be self-corrected. They represent the result of incomplete learning and a lack of competence. In contrast, mistakes can be self-corrected, and it takes place when the learner fails to perform to their ability. While dealing with Error Analysis, Corder (1974) suggested several steps about error judgment in error analysis research: 1. Collection of a sample of learner language; 2. Identification of errors; and 3. Description of errors.

Students at the tertiary level make errors in their writings in many ways. Richards (1971) distinguished three sources of errors –Interference errors, Intralingual and Developmental errors. On the other hand, Touchier (1986) talks about two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. Performance errors are made by learners when they are speaking fast. Competence errors are reflected in a learner's competence. Other researchers such as -Burt and Kiparsky (1972) talk about local and global errors. Global errors prevent the hearer from comprehending some aspect of the message. Local errors do not prevent the message from being heard and understood the meaning of an utterance (p.263). Likewise, Lennon (1991) suggests two related scopes of error: an error analysis should consider a domain and the extent (p.263). This study investigates the types of errors ranging from morphological to syntactic level.

This Study

In Bangladesh, standard academic essay writing is a major challenge because English is not our mother tongue. This is a common picture in the countries of the world where English is a second language. The problem of poor academic writing is not only a significant concern to the non-native speakers of English, but it is a significant concern to its native speakers too. For example, British university teachers and tutors are worried about their students' writing skills (Sultan, 2013). This study is confined to the

department where the researcher has involved themselves with the students and colleagues to find out the errors of English essays.

From the Bangladeshi perspective, errors are the mistakes by students while writing English fluently (Khan & Akter, 2011). An analysis of students' mistakes and errors in English Writing, Akhter and Khan (2011) talk about the English writing ability of Bangladeshi tertiary level students. Although they get twelve years of education and learn English as a compulsory subject, they still could not write confident, competent and error-free writings. They also found out that teachers hardly provide any constructive comments for accurate writing (p.6). The researchers found that the students who already had 12 years of the learning experience of English as a compulsory subject; make several mistakes and errors in the following fields: selection of words, tense, preposition, redundancy, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, article, spelling, coherence, punctuation, and syntax. Bangladeshi learners start practicing English writing from class one and it is compulsory till Higher Secondary Education. However, this long-time practice fails to bring any significant changes in their writing proficiency, for which they have to face difficulties in their Higher Education level. It is found that despite knowing grammar and vocabulary, they make errors while writing an essay (Marshall & Powers, 1969). They also face problems in writing coherently and restructuring their ideas. In most cases, the researchers have observed in their class that while writing an essay, students fail to establish their ideas by providing logic, critical thinking through constructive argument or debate. Past studies (Ferris, 2006; Ng et al., 2014) also showed that students are encountered with many errors like grammar, spelling, subject-verb agreement, punctuation marks, capitalization, etc. Hossain (2020).

The efficiency in English writing skills has great demand in English writing and casual discussions (Kafipour & Jafari, 2021) because of sound argument, reasons, and relevant evidence. Realizing its importance, Cheng (2009) regards writing skills as a fundamental need for an accurate writing style. The English honors students under the National University in Bangladesh have English writing skills in their first-year syllabus, where essay writing is significant. The aforementioned studies are conducted in different contexts. However, not much study has been done in the Bangladeshi context where the researchers base this study. Therefore, a study is needed to do an error analysis of English essays of Bangladeshi undergraduate learners. In this study, the researchers tried to reveal the writing problems through error analysis in students' essay writing. This study answered the following research questions to meet the gap of the study area.

RQ1. What are the common errors made by students in their essays?

RQ2. Why do the students make errors in writing an essay?

RQ3. How can we solve the error-making tendency among the students?

Theoretical Framework

This study applied social constructivism theory. Social constructivism emphasizes that learning occurs through interactions with other students, teachers, and the world-at-large (Vygotsky, 1978). Meaning construction is based on the experiences of the learner.

They acquire knowledge through inquiry, research, and investigation. As they construct their knowledge, they enhance their ability to think critically and analyze information. Even though we hear and receive information, it does not mean that we have learned it. New learning is assimilated into the learner's mental schema by connecting the new learning to the already present knowledge. New information that does not fit into the learner's schema is hard to understand. Meaning must be made by connecting the new learning to the old experience. It requires reflection, questioning, evaluating and exploring what is known, and personal investigation on the part of the learner. The goal of constructivism is not memorization of information. In a truly constructivist classroom, the learner will be more likely to retain and apply information. Students learn more by discovering their answers as opposed to passively listening to a lecture. This study explores the types of errors learners make, the reasons for making the errors, and the ways of overcoming the errors. Thus, constructivism theory is suitable to apply in this study. This theory suits more in the study as it focuses more on learning by interaction and connectivity. Nowadays, learners at the tertiary level learn through interaction and creating a vast network among their peers. Their error-making tendency can be reduced by using Scaffolding proposed by Vygotsky (1978), and they can gradually reach the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) independently. Thus, the researchers employ this theory to see how the error-making tendency can be reduced while writing English essays. The researchers will also see whether this theory is still workable in the Bangladeshi EFL context.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. From the qualitative perspective, a descriptive design is used to answer the research questions asserted. This study used content analysis for students' essays, Focus Group Discussion with the students, and in-depth interviews with the teachers. The three instruments are used so that the data found in one source can be compared with the other two, and thus a more reliable conclusion can be drawn.

Population and sampling

The population of the study is the hon's first-year students of the English department and the teachers of the same department. Students from the first year are chosen because they have the essay writing task. This list of students is collected from the course teachers. Likewise, teachers who teach English essay writing skills are chosen for interviews. As the first-year students are the samples of the study for Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the researchers selected the samples to represent the actual population of the context. The students selected as the samples for FGD are selected from three institutions. The institutions are located in a semi-urban area in Bangladesh. Moreover, the teachers from the three institutions are also taken as samples for in-depth interviews. Finally, the essay scripts of the students are taken as samples for analyzing the errors made by them.

Focus Group Discussion

To collect qualitative data for this study, six FGDs are conducted with tertiary-level learners. In each FGD, there are four to six students (Creswell, 2015) from the tertiary level. The ratio of male and female students is equal in each FGD. The study used a stratified sampling technique due to the uncommon features of the samples. If any student disagrees with taking part in the FGD, the researchers went for the next student on the list. The study conducted three FGDs with the students. In each FGD, there were six students. The participants for the FGDs are chosen using a stratified sampling technique. The three FGDs consist of three types of students: High performers, Medium performers and Low performers. This category in the FGD is done so that the real picture of the context is reflected in answering the research questions. Next, for FGD with the students, the researchers used a set of FGD questions or themes arising from the study's main research questions. The FGD questions contain both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The researchers asked the main question (usually open-ended) followed by follow-up, probing, and prompted questions. Some of the questions from the FGD are as follows: *What common mistakes or errors do you make in writing an essay? What are the reasons for making mistakes or errors? Explain with examples. Why do the errors related to spelling occur in writing an essay? Why do the errors related to organization occur in writing an essay? In your opinion, how can you avoid making such errors and mistakes in writing an essay?* The FGD question is attached in appendix-1 of the study.

Content-Student Written Essays

There are 200 students studying in the three classes. For content analysis, the researchers have taken 30 sample essays written by the students. The sample essays are selected following four criteria: an essay is written completely; essay is written in English; essay is examined, and the examiner grades essay. Finally, among the graded essays, three types of essays are taken for content analysis: high performers' essay, medium performers' essay, and low performers' essay. High performers, medium performers and low performers are selected based on their previous performance in writing essays. The researchers took help from the course teachers to know the level of performance of the students. Essays are chosen this way so that the content analysis presents the true picture of their writing. For this, official permission has been taken from the head of the institutions to use the scripts for the study. The researchers used a codebook with 10 coding categories for analyzing the sample essays. The coding categories are taken from past studies (Heryanti, Sucipto & Makmur, 2017; Anwar & Zaiyadi, 2017; & Amoakohene, 2017). The codebook is presented in Appendix-3.

In-depth Interview with Teachers

In-depth interviews give clear and rich data about a particular issue. The researchers selected nine English teachers for in-depth interviews. Teachers were chosen based on their experience, age, gender, and taught subjects, thereby using stratified sampling to select the teachers for interviews. Finally, for the in-depth interviews with the teachers, the researchers developed an interview question having 10 semi-structured questions. The stated questions were used as a guideline, although the interviewer had the freedom

to ask more follow-up questions based on the answers given by the students or teachers. Some of the questions from the in-depth interview question are as follows: *How long have you been teaching English essays among your students? Do you have any training in teaching essay writing? If yes, please explain. What common errors are made by your students in writing an essay?. How do you give feedback on error correction?* The in-depth interview instrument is attached in the appendix-2.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the in-depth interviews and FGDs, the researchers followed the steps of qualitative coding data recommended by Creswell (2003). In this study, the researchers used Neuman and Robson's (2007) six stages in conducting content analysis 1) formulate the research question, 2) decide on units of analysis, 3) develop a sampling plan, 4) construct coding categories, 5) coding and intercoder reliability check, and 6) data collection and analysis.

RESULT FOUND IN THE FGD

Common Errors

Students at the tertiary level often write English essays as part of their academic evaluation. All the students agreed that they write English essays for examinations or class tests. A few students responded that they write English essays from their interest also. In the FGD, most of the informants agreed that they make several errors in writing English essays. Their errors are more or less the same though a few informants mentioned that they do not make as many errors as their friends. One of the informants mentioned that,

"I make mistakes in the error of spelling, subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences, wordiness and right form of a verb."

The organization of the ideas in an essay is important to express the ideas clearly and meaningfully. In response to the question of organization, most of the informants agreed that they have problems organizing ideas in an essay. Their difficulties in the organization of the essay lie in not knowing the appropriate use of the cohesive devices. One of the informants stated that,

"I do make mistakes in the organization of ideas. My mistakes are related to the presentation of ideas, pieces of evidence, and data related to the essay."

Punctuation and capitalization are the two crucial elements in English essays. Frequent errors in these areas lower the esteem of the essay written by any writer. Most informants stated that they made mistakes in using a colon, semi-colon, exclamatory sign, comma, dash, and hyphen. The informants make these errors as they are not aware of making these errors. Thus, they make frequent errors in this area of writing in English essays.

Reasons of the Errors

There are several reasons for making errors by the informants in writing essays in English. In response to the question on the reasons for making these errors, informants

mentioned that they are not aware of these errors and do not even know the reasons for these errors. However, some of the informants have provided some reasons for these errors. One of the informants stated that,

“I was afraid of English from an early age. Maybe due to my being afraid, these errors occur frequently.”

Students make errors in spelling when they attempt to write unknown words or long words. They tend to forget the spelling of the long words or the words which are spelled differently. They also make errors in the organization of the ideas in the essay. This happens due to their less practice in writing essays. Moreover, the error occurs in the organization of the essay as the students are not skilled enough in using the cohesive devices properly. They usually misuse cohesive devices.

Ways to Avoid Making Errors

There are several ways to avoid making errors in writing essays in English. In response to how the students can overcome the error-making tendency in writing essays in English, most of the informants provided some suggestions they follow on their own. Most of the students stated and agreed that they need to write more and practice more in the areas where they make frequent errors. One of the informants stated that,

“We can overcome our errors in writing English essays by regular practice. Regular practice means writing every day and asking the teacher to check it and provide feedback.”

Some of the informants mentioned that if they can learn grammar and other language elements from the basic level, there would not be many errors in writing essays in English. Moreover, they find it helpful to discuss with their friends to reduce errors in writing an essay. Some of the informants agreed that knowing the basics of a syllable may help them reduce errors in the area of spelling. Their teacher can help them in enhancing their competencies in spelling and syntax level by guiding them continuously. One of the informants stated that,

“My teacher’s regular feedback on my written essay will help me reduce the number of errors I make now. However, I must follow the feedback provided by my teacher.”

Reading newspapers or other pieces of English writing may also help the students enhance their spelling and sentence structure knowledge. Most of the students stated that they prefer reading English newspapers and magazines to improve their reading skills and improve their spelling and sentence structure skills. The more they read, the more they improve their writing skills and reduce error-making tendencies. One of the informants mentioned that,

“I read English newspapers and magazines which help me develop my spelling skills and basic grammar. The stories of newspapers contain various words and sentence structure which help improve spelling and grammar skills.”

The informants also stated that their teacher could help them by providing additional support. They expect their teacher’s continuous support in suggesting good newspaper

articles and good English movies can help them improve their writing skills and reduce errors in writing an essay. They feel the need to write an error-free English essay. They repeatedly emphasize group studies, teacher's supports, multimedia classes, and the blessings of educational technologies. They also emphasize multimedia classes enhanced with audio-visual aids.

Result Found in the In-depth Interviews with Teachers

Common Errors Found by the Teachers

All the teachers stated that their students make errors from punctuation to sentence structure level. It is rare to find any students who do not make errors while writing an essay in English. One of the teachers stated that,

"Students make errors frequently in writing essays in English. I have not found any script where there are no errors. These errors make my job tough."

Almost all the teachers concluded that students make some common errors. According to the teachers, students make errors in choosing appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar rules. In reply to the question of the reason for making grammatical errors, the teachers replied that the students do not know grammar rules. As they do not know the rules of grammar, their essay writing becomes full of errors. One of the teachers mentioned that,

"Students make errors in the area of grammar. They cannot write correctly due to their lack of knowledge about English grammar."

Students also make errors in the use of punctuation and mechanics. They do not know the accurate use of the comma, full stop, colon, semi-colon, exclamatory sign, inverted comma, dash and hyphen while writing an essay in English. These errors are common in almost all the students they teach at their institution. Moreover, when the teacher examines the scripts and gives reformative feedback, the students do not improve much later. Their level of error-making frequency remains almost the same. Their tendency to make errors is in writing complex and compound sentences, appropriate prepositions, articles, parallelism, redundancy, dangling modifier, and subject-verb agreement. One of the teachers stated that,

"I find my students making frequent errors in writing the right form or verbs and appropriate use of the subject-verb agreement. They also make errors in selecting singular verb or plural verb to the subject of the sentence."

Another teacher mentioned that her students could not even recognize the subject in a sentence. So they make errors in choosing the correct auxiliary verbs. Thus, the written essay becomes full of errors and the meaning is lost sometimes. In the opinion of these teachers, this is not the case of one or two students; rather, this is common among most students in the class.

Reasons for Making Errors

There are many reasons for making errors in English essays in the opinion of the English teachers. As discussed before, English is still a foreign language in Bangladesh. Students

learn English as a compulsory subject and those who study it as a subject for bachelor degree. In response to the question related to the reasons for making errors in writing essays in English, teachers replied that there are many common reasons why students make errors in their writing. One of the teachers mentioned that,

“Our students do not learn English well in their secondary and higher secondary level. They do not get any exposure to the rules of writing essays and, therefore, they make an error in writing an essay in English at their honor’s level.”

Another teacher asserted that the type of errors does not only include their language and grammar errors. It also includes their frequent errors in organizing the ideas and maintaining the structure of the essay. This teacher finds his students not knowing the correct usage of cohesive devices, which help them to organize the ideas properly. Thus, in this teacher’s opinion, the errors made by the students are beyond the errors they make in the linguistic area.

Lack of practice in writing is another reason for making errors in the examination. Most of the students write only during their examination time. Due to not having enough practice, they cannot develop their writing skills. Three out of nine teachers concluded that they find only a few students highly interested in writing before the examination. On the contrary, most of the students are not interested in writing before the examination. One more critical issue has been emphasized by one of the teachers during the interview: although almost all the students go to private tuition after the regular classes at the institution, they are still found to have not improved much in their writing skills. They have the habit of making errors in prepositions, the right form of verb, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, and punctuation do not improve that much.

It is also true that English is not a native language to the students in the context. So, it takes time to learn the correct grammar and vocabulary usage by the students. In the opinion of this teacher, students are afraid of writing in English, which might cause them to make errors in writing essays in English. This fear or nervousness of using the English language did not come overnight among the students, but it came slowly from their studies in primary school, high school, and college. One of the teachers stated that,

“As their foundation is not so strong even after ten years of studying English as a compulsory subject, so improving their language skills at the honors level is not so easy. They improve to some extent though not to the expected level always.”

Also, the use of social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp causes problems with spelling. In the aforementioned social networking sites, they usually use informal English. This habit of informal English is reflected in their formal writing too. For example, they write ‘*wc*’ for *welcome*, ‘*tc*’ for *take care*, ‘*cu*’ for *see you*, and ‘*tyl*’ for *talk to you later* in their informal communications. When they write essays for examination, they unconsciously use these informal English usages in their formal writing. One of the teachers stated that,

“The excessive usages of social media cause both spelling and grammatical errors in the formal writing of the students.”

So, from the findings, it is evident that students' use of social media excessively causes errors in their essay writing. Maybe controlled use of social media tools may reduce the error-making tendency.

Overcoming the Errors

Overcoming the errors in writing essays in English is the prime concern to the teachers. Teachers try their best to improve students' writing skills in spelling, grammar, punctuations, mechanics and organization of ideas in the essay. Giving additional support to the students, providing immediate feedback, corrective feedback and inspiring the students are the major ways of helping them overcome the error-making habits. In response to the questions related to improving writing skills and overcoming the tendency in making errors, one of the teachers asserted that,

"I give corrective feedback to the writings submitted to me. I try my best to underline the errors students make. I show them their scripts and show the area of errors."

Peer checking is another strategy used by all the teachers interviewed in the study. Teachers assign the students to check their friends' scripts and find out the errors. In this error correction process, they found that students can identify most of the errors made by their friends. However, when they write their own, they make most of the errors they identify in their friends' scripts. In the opinion of one of the teachers interviewed, students make errors unconsciously or subconsciously. Many students make errors due to a lack of knowledge in English grammar, spelling, and proper use of punctuation.

However, most of the teachers agreed that students could improve their writing skills by reducing errors in the next draft of the essay through peer correction. The teachers also inspire their students to be more conscious about their writing skills and reduce errors. This inspiration helps some of the students to be motivated and work hard to enhance their writing skills. One of the teachers stated that,

"I always inspire my students not to make errors in writing an essay or any piece of write-up. This sometimes inspires them to be more conscious while writing essays in English."

For enhancing students' use of punctuation in an essay, teachers teach them the practical use of punctuation. They also arrange consultation hours for the weaker students to discuss and learn specific areas of weaknesses in the English language.

The most common errors in an essay are spelling, capitalization, subject-verb agreement, preposition of time, cohesive devices, and producing various sentence structures. Most of the teachers interviewed asserted that the students need to learn freehand writing and reducing errors in their writing. One of the teachers gave an example as,

"I assign my students to write at least three drafts before they write the final draft of the essay. In the first three drafts, they learn to know their errors regarding spelling, grammar and mechanics. And the final draft becomes almost error-free."

Result Deduced from Content Analysis

Topic Sentence and Thesis Statement

In analyzing the 30 essays, it is found that not all students can write the topic sentence, some are miswritten, and some are written correctly. Among the 30 essays, 19 essays contain a correct topic sentence. Another five essays are found with incorrect topic sentences. Among the 30 essays, six essays do not include any topic sentence. This shows that the students are not well known about writing a topic sentence in the essay. In analyzing the 30 essays, it is found that out of 30 essays, 11 essays include a correct thesis statement which includes the key points to be discussed later in the paragraph. These essays guide the reader properly on what will be discussed in the body paragraphs and conclusion. Another 12 essays do not contain a properly written thesis statement. Examples of incorrect thesis statements are as follows: "Environment is important for everyone" and "Our environment save us from danger". Here we can see that the examples of thesis statements do not contain the points discussed in the latter part of the essay.

Use of Cohesive Devices

In analyzing the essays, it was found that almost all the students have used more or a smaller number of cohesive devices. Among the 30 essays, 11 are found with appropriate use of cohesive devices. The rest 19 essays also contained cohesive device, although with prevailing mistakes in the appropriate use of the cohesive devices. The students used cohesive devices like *but, and, as, so, thus, if, then, also, when, though, although, however, moreover, next, finally, firstly, secondly and thirdly*, etc. However, it was evident that learners made mistakes in using the cohesive devices appropriately throughout the essay. They were not able to use cohesive devices like *though, although, however, and hence* correctly.

Use of Punctuations

In the analysis of the 30 essays, it was found that a few of the essays contained appropriate use of punctuation marks. On the other hand, most of the essays do not contain appropriate use of punctuation marks. Students make errors in using comma, colon, semi-colon, full stop, a hyphen, apostrophe, capitalization, and lower case, etc. There are some examples of errors made in using punctuation taken from the essays analyzed: "*The dead body of animals are thrown into the water; which causes pollution.*"; "*So our country has many cars.*", "*It's effected our human health;*", and "*Car's, buses, boat,*" etc.

Grammatical Errors

In the essays analyzed, it was found that students made a considerable number of errors in the grammar category mentioned in the codebook. Most of the students made errors from phrase level to sentence structure level. The use of auxiliary verbs, modals, pronouns, infinitives, gerunds, and principle verbs was not done correctly by most of the students. Moreover, students made errors in writing correct clauses. Most of the students have written sentences that do not contain any independent clause and, as a result, the

meaning was not delivered properly. The essays contain some fragments. For example, the students used *"As he was interested"*, and *"Because of air pollution..."*, in the essays which do not deliver the message clearly to the reader. Some other examples of errors in using numbers, prepositions, subject-verb concord and conditional sentences will give a clear idea of the type of errors made by the students: error in using apostrophe: *"Our countries air has polluted"*; incorrect use of preposition: *"It causes of human being."*; and error in producing conditional sentence: *"If we develop our country, we should very careful to solve the environment pollution."*

Moreover, students made errors in using the correct passive form, parts of speech and modal auxiliaries in their essays. The examples of these three types of errors are as follows: (i) *Environment pollution polluted many ways.* (Error in the use of passive voice); (ii) *Our illiteracy farmer's, It is only pollution for human 'uncareful'* (Error in the parts of speech) and (iii) *People should alared* (Error in the use of modal auxiliary verb). Another common error was found in the incorrect use of verbs when the subject is a third-person singular number. From the analysis, it was evident that most of the students make errors in this regard whether for lack of knowledge or due to their unconscious mind while writing the essay. For example, *"It also destroy..."*; *It cause..."* and *"Anyone need..."* are the errors made by the students in writing an essay.

Wrong use of passive voice is found utterly. For example, *"Then our farmers are used many chemical..."* was found in one of the sample essays analyzed by the researchers. Wrong use of subject-verb agreement has also been dominant in the essay. For example, *"Food are also polluted ourselves."* is found in one of the sample essays written by the students. In addition, students made errors in writing sentences in accurate tenses where necessary. One more typical error was found when the students attempted to write a gerund or participle. In most cases, students wrote past participle form of the verb instead of writing a gerund or participle. For example, the wrong use of gerunds was found in the following sentence, *"Environment pollution means polluted air."* Perhaps the student wanted to write *"polluting air"* instead of *"polluted air"* in the sentence mentioned. Students selected wrong auxiliary verbs and made wrong sentences. The use of plural verbs after "one of the" was also found mistaken in most of the essays. In the essays examined, it was found that students who write several incomplete sentences or fragments for what the ideas are could not develop well. In almost all essays, it was found that they have fragments in different numbers. The examples of a few fragments are: *"As he was interested"*; *"Because of air pollution..."*; *"So our country has many cars"*; and *"Because everybody suffer environment pollution are mentionable"*.

Errors in Spelling

Almost all the scripts had spelling mistakes. Students were good at writing the correct spellings of prepositions, conjunctions and articles. However, they made errors when the length of the word is somewhat longer. Moreover, while writing the verb form of a comparatively less used word, they made errors. Hence, the spelling errors occurred while writing the adjectives. Some of the examples of spelling errors are as follows: *"couse"*, *"pistiside"*, *"risky"*, *"bed effect"*, *"dangerous"*, *"chang"*, *"dangerious"*, *"controlling"* and *"factoris"*, etc. They made spelling errors in writing the words which are

terminologies of different fields. Most of the students were weak in writing the correct spelling of the past or past participle forms of the irregular verbs. Thus, spelling errors dominated their essays.

DISCUSSION

Common Errors Made by the Students

The students are found to make some common errors while writing essays in English. They have to write essays as part of their evaluation and practice sessions. Most of the students are found to have making errors in spelling English words. In the 30 essays examined following the 10 categories, it was found that students make more errors in spelling if the word is larger or contains more syllables. They make errors in the use of vowels in spelling large English words. In most cases, it was found that students, consciously or unconsciously or due to lack of knowledge, make errors in spelling unknown words. In spelling the unknown words, students could not even produce nearly close words to the accurate ones. They are not found to make errors in spelling shorter words like prepositions, articles and conjunctions. In the FGD and in-depth interview, both the students and teachers have also given the same opinion. They stated that due to lack of knowledge or unconsciousness, students make errors in spelling. The previous study conducted by Alharbi (2019) found that students make more errors in using the article (a, an, the) correctly, which is also found in this study. However, in this study, it is also found that students make errors in spelling and mechanics.

Grammatical errors are found to dominate the writings of the students. The 30 sample essays analysed represent the series of grammatical errors done by the students. The common grammatical errors are found in subject-verb agreement, using the right form of verb, parallelism and modifiers. Students are more into the use of wrong verbs that do not match the subject of the sentence. This is called the error of the sentence where the subject is a third-person singular number. Students are not good at writing complex and compound sentences. In most cases, it was found that the attempt to write any complex or compound sentence ended with an error either in the verb part or modifier part. The teachers interviewed also gave the statement that students make errors in writing simple to compound sentences. The teachers are tired of enhancing the students' writing skills by reducing the errors they often make. In addition, in the FGDs, students also mentioned that they make errors in sentence structure. So, the common errors are common in the writing of the students. The findings echo the past studies conducted by Fauzan, Aulya, and Noor (2020) that the errors are from spelling level to sentence structure. This study significantly found that students make errors in applying learned grammar while writing an essay.

Reasons for Making Errors

There are certain reasons for making the errors mentioned above. The reasons for making the errors can be analysed in a few categories. In the analysis of the 30 essays, it was noticed that students lack knowledge of grammar and other writing skills of an essay. They are found to make almost the same errors, although a few students' scripts are found better than their mates. Due to lack of knowledge, they write wrong sentences filled

in wrong grammar and structure. They even choose the wrong vocabulary to describe any situation that does not represent what the student wanted to mean. This happens due to a lack of knowledge. The same finding was shown by Aziz, Fitriani and Amalina (2020), where they showed that lack of knowledge causes errors in writing essays in English. However, the findings of this study showed that lack of practice and the influence of the first language is also responsible for making errors in English writing. Another study by Ying (1987) also showed that the impact of the first language is significant in learning a target language. The findings of this study agree well with the analysis by Atmowardoyo (2018).

In the FGDs, students gave some good information about their errors in writing an English essay. They sometimes remain unconscious while writing an essay in English. Due to unconsciousness or negligence, many errors occur in their essay. As the foundation of the students' English language knowledge is poor, they cannot improve their English skills overnight after studying Bachelor in English at the tertiary level. Their fear of the English language is also responsible for writing English correctly. The students stated that they become overburdened with the fear and anxiety of making errors every time they write something in English. Due to this, they make more errors in writing English essays.

Teachers have mentioned some reasons for making errors by the students. The students' anxiety of making errors, less practice, and poor background knowledge of the foreign language are the reasons for making repeated errors. In the opinion of the teachers interviewed, it was confirmed that students do not do enough practice before the examination. This, in turn, does not help them avoid making errors. Moreover, students come to the tertiary level with poor English backgrounds. All these are responsible for making errors in the English essays they write.

Ways of Reducing the Errors

From both the FGD with the students and in-depth interviews with the teachers of English, it was found that there are certain ways or strategies which may help students reduce errors in their writing. From both the teachers' and students' perspectives, it was found that regular practice can help the students reduce the number of errors they make at present in their writing. Both the teachers and students stated that corrective feedback helps them reduce errors, although a few teachers doubt whether all the students can be helped through corrective feedback or not. Peer checking is another strategy that may help the students in reducing the errors they make. Most of the teachers gave opinions in favor of peer checking of students' write-ups. Some of the teachers interviewed suggested that students need to read more to learn difficult words subconsciously. Teachers opined that more practice writings could improve those grammatical skills by the students and corrective feedback on the writing. Likewise, mechanics, punctuations, parallelism and modifiers can be taught to the students through corrective feedback. However, a few teachers doubt whether they will have ample time to support students this way as the class size is much larger here in the Bangladeshi context. Osatananda and Salarat (2020) also showed that engaging students in more practice writing sessions and providing corrective feedback could reduce the error-making tendency among the students. In the study of Alharbi (2019), it was showed that errors are part of learning and through

making errors, students learn English gradually. The study's findings showed that the teachers do not want their students to make errors for a long time; rather they want them to be aware of the errors they make and become good practitioners of the English language.

Implications of the Study

This study has implications for the English teachers, students, future researchers, institutions and policymakers of Bangladesh and beyond. The policymakers of the English language teaching-learning arena in Bangladesh may find it interesting and important to define new ways of teaching English and guiding the teachers of English to teach better. Thus, the gap in teaching English at the tertiary level may be reduced to a greater extent. The researchers can use the same instruments and investigate larger studies to see the factors affecting error-dominated essay writing. The findings of the study will create a new step in researching more insightfully into the same kind of studies, whether in Bangladesh or other contexts.

Limitations

Firstly, the study is based on an analysis of the essays, teacher interviews, and FGD with the learners of the English language at the tertiary level. The data was not collected from the government officials who work for these students in different examinations. Therefore, the study results show the errors, reasons for making these errors, and solutions from the student's and teachers' perspectives. The inclusion of the data from the education board officials could make the findings more reliable. Secondly, as the data is taken from the students, teachers, and content analysis, much care should be given to this issue while applying the results to the large population. The researchers found it mandatory to make several cross-cultural references to developed countries. Since there are cultural differences, these references might not be appropriate completely.

Recommendations

The researchers suggest that a similar longitudinal study could be conducted with the students of Higher Secondary level to see the type of errors, the reasons for errors, and the ways to reduce the errors. To strengthen the study, the researchers suggest conducting a longitudinal study on the same field so that the data collected would be more convincing.

CONCLUSION

As there was a gap of study in defining the common errors made by the students, the reasons behind the errors, and ways of reducing the errors, this study has investigated the three mentioned areas of errors in essay writing. This study investigated the common errors made by the students, the reasons for making the errors, and the possible ways to reduce the errors. The common errors found in the students' writings are the spelling of words, grammatical structures, parallelism, use of mechanics, subject-verb agreement, use of prepositions, and maintaining the structure of the essay. The significant reasons for making these errors are lack of practice in writing, negligence, poor English background, and anxiety. From the analysis of both the teacher interviews and student

FGDs, it was found that peer checking, corrective feedback, inspiration to write more, and encouraging regular practice can help students reduce the number of errors they make at present in their English essays. This study also shows that the social constructivist theory is still applicable in error analysis studies in the Bangladeshi context.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

FGD Questions for Students

1. How often do you write an essay?
2. What common mistakes or errors do you make in writing an essay?
3. Do you face difficulty regarding the organization and sentence structure in writing an essay? If yes, give examples.
4. Do you face difficulty regarding spelling and punctuation in writing an essay? If yes, give examples.
5. What are the reasons for making mistakes or errors? Explain with examples.
6. Why do the errors related to spelling occur in writing an essay?
7. Why do the errors related to organization occur in writing an essay?
8. Why do the errors related to mechanics and sentence structure occur in writing an essay?
9. In your opinion, how can you avoid making such errors and mistakes in writing an essay?
10. How can your teacher help you reduce the number of errors related to spelling and structure?
11. What additional support may help you reduce the number of errors related to sentence structure in writing an essay?
12. How can your skills in using mechanics appropriately be enhanced?
13. How can your overall error-free essay writing skills be enhanced? Please discuss.

Appendix 2

Interview Questions for Teachers

Teaching Experience:years

Age:years

Gender: Male/Female

Highest

Academic

Degree:

1. How long have you been teaching English essays among your students?
2. Do you have any training on teaching essay writing? If yes, please explain.
3. What do your students make common errors in writing an essay?
4. Do the students make mistakes in the organization of the essay? If yes, explain.
5. Why do your students make grammatical errors in writing an essay?
6. Why do your students make other errors (spelling, punctuation, articles, etc.) in writing an essay? Give examples.
7. How can we help students not to make the existing errors? Explain with examples.
8. How do you give feedback on error correction? E.g., self-correction, peer correction etc.
9. What errors are more common in students' writing?
10. What will be on your priority list in helping students to learn to write error-free essays in English?

Appendix 3

Codebook for Content Analysis

Sr	Content Analysis Checklist	Remarks/Number of Mistakes/Presence of Basic Elements of Essay/
1	Topic Sentence (Do all new paragraphs start with a topic sentence?)	
2	Thesis Statement (Is it written properly?)	
3	Number of Ideas	
4	Organization of Ideas	
5	Use of Cohesive Devices	
6	Use of Punctuations	
7	Grammatical Errors	
8	Use of Fragments	
9	Spelling Errors	
10	Conclusion (Written properly?)	