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Investigating Writing Errors Made by Third Year Students at the Faculty of Education _El-Mergib University تحديد الأخطاء الكتابية التي يرتكبها طلاب السنة الثالثة في كلية التربية- جامعة المرقب

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ملخص الدراسة:-

هدفت هذه الورقة إلى تحديد وتحليل أخطاء الكتابة الأكاديمية الأكثر تكرارا التي يرتكبها طلاب السنة الثالثة في مهامهم الكتابية واقتراح طرق لتصحيح هذه الأخطاء. أجريت الدراسة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية - كلية التربية / جامعة المرقب. كانت طريقة البحث المستخدمة هي منهج البحث الوصفي. تم اختيار عينة من 28 طالبا باستخدام إجراء أخذ عينات عشوائي بسيط. تم توجيه الطلاب لكتابة فقرتين قصيرتين كجزء من مهمتهم في مادة أكاديمية معينة. تم جمع البيانات من الفقرات التي كتبها طلاب السنة الثالثة. وكشفت النتائج أن هؤلاء الطلاب الجامعيين لديهم أخطاء ومشاكل في الكتابة على مستويات النحو و التهجئة والمفردات. ارتكب الطلاب العديد من الأخطاء في الكتابة الأكاديمية فيما يتعلق ببنية الجملة واختيار الكلمات والكتابة بالأحرف الكبيرة وعلامات الترقيم والهجاء واستخدام أدوات التعريف واستخدام حروف الجر وأزمنة الأفعال وأشكال الأفعال والاتفاق بين الفاعل والفعل. وتراوحت الأخطاء من الأكثر تكرارا إلى الأقل فيما يتعلق بجوانب مشاكل الكتابة الأكاديمية. وجدت الدراسة ان معظم الاخطاء التي ارتكبها الطلاب كانت اخطاء لغوية بينما بعض الاخطاء كانت بسبب اللغة الأم . ستساعد الدراسة المعلمين على التحقق من أنواع الأخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلاب في الكتابة وفي النهاية توفر الحلول الكافية لمنع الطلاب من تخزين وتكرار مثل هذه الأخطاء. في ضوء هذه النتائج تم تقديم عدد من التوصيات: من المفيد دائما إخبار المتعلمين بمراجعة وتحرير أعمالهم المكتوبة بصوت عالٍ. عندما يتحدثون ، سوف يتوقفون بشكل طبيعي وهذا سيساعدهم في علامات الترقيم. يمكن تصحيح الأخطاء الإملائية باستخدام القواميس أو المدققات الإملائية. ستخفي أخطاء الاستخدام والقواعد في النهاية ، إذا قرأ الطلاب على نطاق واسع باللغة الإنجليزية.

Abstract

This paper aimed at identifying and analyzing the most common academic writing errors made by third year students in their writing tasks and suggesting ways of remedying those



errors. The study was conducted at the Department of English- Faculty of Education/El-Mergib University. The research method used was the descriptive analysis research method. A sample of 28 students were selected using a simple random sampling procedure. The students were instructed to write two short paragraphs as a part of their task in a certain academic subject. Data were collected from the paragraphs written by third year students. The findings revealed that those university students had various writing errors and problems at the levels of grammar, mechanics and vocabulary. The students made many errors in academic writing in relation to sentence structure, word choice, and capitalization, punctuation, spelling, use of articles, use of prepositions, verb tenses, verb forms and subject-verb agreement. The errors ranged from the most frequent ones to the lowest in relation to the aspects of academic writing problems. The study found that most of the errors made by third year students were intralingual while some of the them were interlanguage. The study will help teachers check the types of errors made by the students in writing and ultimately provide sufficient remedies to prevent students from internalizing such errors. In the light of these findings a number of recommendations have been made, namely, it is always helpful to tell learners to revise and edit their written work aloud. When they speak, they will make natural pauses and this will help them in punctuation. Spelling errors can be corrected by using dictionaries or spellcheckers. Usage and grammar errors will eventually disappear, if the students read extensively in English.

Keywords: *EFL writing, errors, error analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most important skills that foreign language learners should master at school and after (Mukulu et al. 2006). It is a thinking tool through it people as addressers can transmit their ideas to addressees through a text. Students who are able to achieve communicative competence in writing can develop their language and succeed in their academic life at all levels of education (Adams & Keene, 2000; Dudley-Evans, 2001). However, writing is a difficult skill for nonnative learners of English because they have to take into account other issues in their writing such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and using correct punctuation, spelling and capitalization. Their writing should be accurate in grammar and acceptable in meaning. For these requirements, writing in a second language is complex and demanding. Therefore, students encounter many problems such as the ability to write well- developed paragraphs in English. They usually think in Arabic and apply the rules of their first language at the time they write in English. Consequently, they make errors in word order and sentence structure. According to Ellis (1996), identifying errors of writing made by students helps in determining the remedies for these errors made by students. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to identify and analyze third year university students' errors in academic writing.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study is that third year university students at the Faculty of Education encounter difficulties in revising their writing assignments especially in exams. Consequently the students commit errors in terms of grammar, spelling and punctuation,



which affect their performance in writing. It is also thought that third-year students at the university level think in their mother tongue; that is, Arabic when writing a paragraph and then translate it into English, which results in many errors at the levels of sentence structure and word choice. Moreover, very limited knowledge of English grammar, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary leads the students to commit errors in writing.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include the following:

1. To investigate the writing errors made by third year students at the Faculty of Education when writing paragraphs.
2. To identify the frequency of writing errors performed by third year students at the Faculty of Education _ El-Mergib University when writing English paragraphs.
3. To classify writing errors into categories and sub-categories and to rank them from the highest range to the lowest ones.
4. To suggest the ways to improve students' writing skills and help them avoid making those errors in the future.

Questions of the Study

The academic writing problem was investigated on the basis of the following research questions :

1. What are the difficulties students face in academic writing ?
2. What are the most frequent types of errors that students made in academic writing?
3. Why do students make those errors in academic writing ?
- 4-How can those errors be remedied?

Hypothesis of the Study

It is hypothesized that although good writing requires good vocabulary, correct grammar and spellings along with perfect punctuation, third year university students at the Faculty of Education make errors in those linguistic components.

Significance of the Study

The results of the present study could be beneficial in many ways. It identifies the most frequent errors made by third year students when writing paragraphs. By doing this study, students would be aware of the errors they commit when writing English paragraphs, and they would be in a better position to avoid committing these errors in the future. Error analysis assists teachers to identify the common language errors systematically, so they can pay more attention to these types of errors. Generally, the present study informs students and teachers about the types of writing errors committed by students. Therefore, proper strategies, techniques, teaching methods could be taken into consideration to avoid the committed errors.

Review of Related Literature

Definitions of Writing

Generally, writing" can be defined as the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form.



Additionally, the definitions of writing are variously stated by some experts; for example, Rivers (1981: 294) states that writing is conveying information or expression of original ideas in a consecutive way in the new language. Brown, (2001: 336) also claimed that writing is a thinking process. Furthermore, he states that writing can be planned and given with an unlimited number of revisions before its release. In addition, Elbow (1973) in Brown (2001: 336) also says that writing is a two-step process. The first process is figuring out the meaning and the second process is putting the meaning into language. Writing represents what we think. It is because the writing process reflects things, which stay in the mind. The students find difficulties when they start producing written sentences. Urquhart and McIver (2005: 5-6) state that writing is a recursive process, which means students revise throughout the process, frequently moving back and forth among the stages. Moreover, Harmer (2004) states that writing encourages students to focus on accurate language use. It is because students consider the language used when the students engage in their writing process. Byrne (1996) defines writing as encoding a certain message or idea through writing it in the shape of a sequence of sentences put together in a systematic way. The way of ordering the written sentences should include some conscious mental effort such as making notes, drafting, and revising (Byrne, 1996). Furthermore, White and Arndt (1991) define 'writing' as "a form of problem-solving which involves such process as generating ideas, discovering a voice with which to write, planning, goal setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written, and searching with language with which to express exact meanings"(p.3).

Errors in the Foreign Language Learning

Committing errors is an inevitable circumstance that occurs in human learning, including language (James, 1998:1). Brown (2014) defined an error as “a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, which reflects the competence of the learner.” (p. 249). Errors used to be recognized as the undesirable problems which teachers tried to prevent. An error is perceived as the evidence resulting from the language learning process in which the learners use various strategies in learning a new language as well as test the hypotheses. Basically, an error refers to an identifiable alteration of the grammatical elements of a native speaker, presenting the learners’ competence in the target language (Brown, 2007:257-259). Errors are viewed as the non-native outcomes of the learners’ inadequate linguistics knowledge. Corder (1973) defined an error as “those features of the learner’s utterances which differ from those of any native speaker” (p.260). In addition, errors in language learning occur systematically and repeatedly without any notice by the learners (Gass & Selinker, 2008: 102). The errors are identifiable only by teachers or others who possess an accurate knowledge of the grammatical system. According to Ferris (2011:3), errors are morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms that deviate from rules or target language, violating the expectations of literate adult native speakers. Dulay et al (1982:138), stated that errors are a flawed side of learner speech and writing.

Sources of errors

Previous studies indicate that interlanguage interference and intralingual interference are the two main sources of errors found in EFL and ESL learners' pieces of writing.

Interlingual errors:



Richards (1971:205) defined interlingual errors as transfer errors caused by the interference of the native language; that is, Learners' mother tongue (Arabic). These errors are the results of the learners' application of the native language elements in their spoken or written performances of the target language. When encountered with new language, people tend to consciously or unconsciously draw a connection between what they already know and what they do not. Learners carry over the existing knowledge of their native language to the performance of the target language (Ellis, 1997: 28). In most cases, it is inevitable to learn a foreign language solely without depending on some linguistic features of the language which have already been acquired. At any rate, interference can occur in various areas of linguistics components including phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, lexis and semantics (Ellis, 2008:350).

Intralingual errors:

These errors are referred to the errors that occur because of the ineffective traits of learning such as faulty application of rules and unawareness of the restrictions of rules (Richards, 1971:206). The intralingual errors, therefore, are irrelevant to the native language interference, but led by the target language itself. In the language learning process, these errors normally occur when the learners have acquired insufficient knowledge (Kaweera, 2013:13). Also, Richards (1971) explained that developmental errors are the errors that occur when “the learner attempts to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or text-book” (p.209). It can be noted that errors in writing produced by EFL learners are the results of learners' incomplete knowledge of the target language, imperfect implementation of rules and false concepts.

Types of errors performed frequently by EFL learners in English writing Frequent writing errors are of many types as following:

a. Missing Word

Missing word is slightly similar to the term of omission. According to Dulay et al (1982:154) omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance.

Incorrect: Mary the president of the new company. (the to be verb “is” was absent).

Correct: “Mary is the president of the new company.”

b. Unnecessary Word

Unnecessary word has slight similarity with the term of addition. Dulay et al (1982:154) stated that addition errors are opposite to omission. They are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance.

Example: She doesn't knows my name(The correct sentence should be “He doesn't know my name”, the verb “knows” should be “know” without adding ‘s’).

c. Noun Singular/Plural

Number is the form of a word that shows it is singular or plural. According to Glencoe (1976:47) A singular noun names one person, place, thing or idea, for example: child, corner, piano and religion. A plural noun names more than one. Most plural nouns are



formed by adding “-s” to the singular form. Words that end in “ch, sh, s, x, or z” for the plural by adding “-es”. Words that end in consonant and “y” form the plural by changing “y” to “i” and adding “-es”, for example: books, glasses, flies.

d. Verb Tense

Glencoe (1976:141) stated that verb tenses show time. Tenses tell when events happen, happened or will happen.

e. Article

The indefinite article “a” (before a consonant sound) or “an” (before a vowel sound) is used with countable nouns in the singular. And the definite article “the” is used with countable nouns in the singular/plural and uncountable nouns in the meaning “contextually known”, “mentioned earlier”.

f. Punctuation

Types of punctuation according to Glencoe (1976:245) are period (.) is used at the end of a declarative sentence and at the end of a polite command, the exclamation point (!) to shows strong feeling and indicate a forceful command, the question mark (?) to indicate a direct question, the colon (:) to introduce a list, especially after a statement that uses words such as these, the following or as follows, the semicolon (;) is used between two independent clauses connected by conjunctive adverbs, commas (,) is used between the main clauses in a compound sentence. Place a comma before a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, yet and for) that joins two main clauses. Dash (-) to set off an abrupt break or change in thought within a sentence, the parenthesis { () } to set off material that is not important enough to be considered part of the main statement, the quotation mark (“”) to enclose a direct quotation, the apostrophe (‘) and “-s” is used to form the possessive of a singular, even one that ends in “-s” and use an apostrophe alone to form the possessive of a plural noun that ends in “-s” and use an apostrophe and “-s” to form the possessive of a plural noun that does not end in “-s”, the hyphen (-) is used after any prefix joined to a proper noun or proper adjective.

g. Subject Verb Agreement

According to Glencoe (1976:161) subject verb agreement means that the subject and verb in a sentence must agree. In the present tense, add –s or –es to the base form for the third-person singular, for example: Michael studies at the library every day,

They study at the library every day.

The verb be, have and do change form to agree with their subject .For example: He has reached the top, They have reached the top.

h. Word Form

Word form is the change form of words based on grammatical rules. Glencoe (1976:293) explained that the main part of the word is its root. When this is a complete word , it is called a base word. A root is often combined with a prefix (a part attached to the beginning), a suffix (a part attached to the end), or another root. Prefixes and suffixes often change the direction of a word’s meaning, for example: quick (adjective), quickly (adverb).



i. Sentence Fragment

According to Glencoe (1976:123) a sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence. It may lack a subject (the thing doing the action), a verb (the action) or both. Sentence fragment may be a subordinate clause that cannot stand alone, for example: Although he bought the tie for his brother. (Although he bought the tie for his brother, he kept it for himself.)

j. Spelling errors

Many spelling mistakes occur when incorrect homophones (words with the same pronunciation, such as “right,” “rite,” and “write”) are used in a sentence.

Incorrect: Watch you're words! Spell-check may not see words that are miss used because they are spelled rite!

Correct: Watch your words! Spell check may not see words that are misused because they are spelled right!

k. No comma after an introductory phrase

An introductory phrase provides some background information and is usually followed by a comma. The comma is optional when the phrase is very short.

Incorrect: While a Thanksgiving commercial played on the TV she was at the library trying to study for her final exams.

Correct: While a Thanksgiving commercial played on the TV, she was at the library trying to study for her final exams.

L. Error analysis

Definitions of Error Analysis

According to Richards (2010; 5), error analysis is an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking. Corder (1967) defined it as a procedure in which the researcher or the teacher collected samples of the learners' language in order to identify, describe, and classify the errors regarding their causes and nature (as cited in Heydari and Bagheri, 2012). Error analysis also is the study of errors made by the second and foreign language learners. Another concept of error analysis is given by Brown. He defined error analysis as the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learners. For Abi Samra (2003), EA is defined as that kind of linguistic analysis that concentrates on errors performed by ESL or EFL learners. Ridha (2012, p. 26) views EA as "the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second languages and then to reveal the systems operated by the learner". According to Hasyim (2002, p.43) error analysis is carried out in order to: (a) find out how well someone knows a language, (b) find out how a person learns a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. From the definitions above, it can be concluded that error analysis is an activity to identify, classify and interpret or describe the errors made by someone in speaking or in writing and it is carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by someone in speaking or in writing English sentences.



Previous Studies

A number of studies have been conducted earlier to investigate the writing errors committed by students and thus this study incorporates five studies as follow:

Ghabool et al. (2012) investigated the challenges faced by students in writing in three aspects, particularly conventions, punctuation and use of grammar. The sample of the study consists of 30 ESL students from the upper and lower secondary school Form 1 to Form 5 and ten teachers with different teaching experiences. The data were collected through two instruments, a questionnaire and an essay test. The results indicated that Malaysian ESL students have challenges in using grammar and punctuation at the time of writing tasks. The interference of the mother tongue has clear influences on students' writings. The study comes up with some recommendations and practical methods to solve students' difficulties in writing skills.

The aim of Abdul Kareem's study (2013) was to find out the problems that faced Arab students in academic writing. Eighty five postgraduate students who studied at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) participated in the study. They are from different countries in the Arab world like Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Algeria, Libya, Palestine and Syria. The data of the study were collected by using a questionnaire and writing task. The writing task was given only to five students. They are asked to write two short paragraphs about topics related to their fields of works. The papers of the writing task were corrected by an expert teacher to identify the errors made by the respondents. The findings of the current study revealed that most of the errors made by the Arab students were related to sentence structure and vocabulary. Fewer errors were made in expressing ideas among students from different countries. The study concluded with some recommendations for future research.

Al-Khairiy (2013) investigated the types of academic writing problems and the reasons behind these problems among Saudi English-major undergraduate students at Taif University. The study also aims to find out the solutions to overcome these writing problems. Seventy five English major students participated in the study. Descriptive statistics such as mean score and standard deviation were used to analyze the data of the study. The results of this study indicated that the university students who are specialized in English made many errors in academic writing tasks. They made silly errors at the simple sentence level of essays. The study came up with some recommendations for the sake of developing students' English language skills in general and academic writing skills in particular.

The aim of Huwari and Al-Khasawneh's study (2013) was to explore the reasons behind the weakness of writing in pre-year students at Taibah University in Saudi Arabia. 10 male students participated in the study from Yanbu Branch for the academic year 2012-2013. The design of the study is qualitative and the data were collected through using semi-structured interviews. The results of this study indicated that students were so weak in writing because of the grammatical errors made by them at the time of writing their tasks. Additionally, they have no enough knowledge of the writing processes and have less practice of writing in English. All these reasons and the weak educational background



that most of the students have, lead to this low level of ability in writing skills. The results of this study may help the teachers and policy- makers to find a solution to this problem. It is hoped that this study might provide contribution to students in Arab world and beyond.

Simbwa (1987) investigated the causes of syntactic errors in the English essays among Taiwan university students. The sample of the study contained 94 males and 14 females' students of the academic year 1985. The participants were chosen randomly from four schools in Kambala (the capital city of Uganda). The results of the study showed that the predominant errors among male students were prepositions, pronouns and tenses, the most predominant error type for females was prepositions.

Based on the previous studies, the current study investigated students' academic writing errors in English language at a university level at the College of Education, El-Mergib University - Libya.

Research Methodology

Research Design

In this research, the researcher used descriptive quantitative research. According to Schreiber and Asner-self, descriptive studies simply describe some phenomenon using numbers to create a picture of a group or individual (Schreiber, 2011). Besides, quantitative research is based on the measurement of quantity or amount. It is applicable to phenomena that can be expressed in terms of quantity (Kothari, 2011). It means that descriptive quantitative research is describing some phenomenon of a group or individual in numerical form. Therefore, the researcher decided to use quantitative data because the researcher was to know the students errors in writing skill, so that the researcher obtained data by administering two writing tasks (Gene, 2016). The writing tasks were used to obtain the data about writing errors made by university students. This instrument was chosen because it was the appropriate instrument to know the students' ability in writing. Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that by using descriptive quantitative research, the students' writing errors in grammar, vocabulary and mechanics had been identified. Then, the researcher described the results of the students' errors in writing.

Sample of the Study

The participants of this study were 28 out of 30 total population of third year students majoring in English at the Faculty of Education- El-Mergib University. The students were at the age of 20 and 22 years. The participants were chosen randomly from third year university at the Faculty of Education _El-Mergib University for the academic year 2019. The topics given to the participants were narrative paragraphs which allowed them to write freely. The students were asked to write two paragraphs one about their daily routine at college and another about differences between school life and college life as written tasks. The paragraphs written by third year university students were analyzed in this study to investigate the types of errors made by undergraduate students in writing. The errors in written paragraphs were detected by the researcher who worked to determine types of errors,



and categorize the errors into classifications. The study took place at the Faculty of Education in Al-Khums.

Data Gathering Instruments

The instruments used in the present study were the participants' written paragraphs. The study sourced its data from the 28 short paragraphs of the third year university students as part of a written test. The written paragraphs were all based on the same topic and title. An error analysis model adapted from Brown (2001) and Gayeta (2002) was used to evaluate the paragraphs in terms of vocabulary, mechanics, and grammar or language use. The above-mentioned categories were further divided into some subcategories.

Technique of analyzing data According to Kothari (2004:122), the procedures to analyze data as follow:

a. Editing

Editing of data is a process of examining the collected data raw (especially in survey) to detect error and omission and to correct these when possible.

b. Coding

Coding refers to the process of assigning numerals or other symbols to answers so that responses can be put into a limited number of categories or classes. Such classes should be appropriate to the research problem under consideration.

c. Classifying

In this classification, the researcher classified the errors into categories and subcategories.

d. Tabulation

Tabulation is the process of summarizing raw data and displaying the same in compact form (in the form of statistical table).

e. Using of Percentages

According to Hariyadi (2009:24), the formula used as follow:

$P = \frac{\text{Frequency of error occurred}}{\text{Total Frequent}} \times 100$

$P = \text{Frequency of error occurred} \div \text{Total Frequent} \times 100$

f. Interpretation

According to Kothari (2004:344), interpretation is the device through which the factors that seem to explain what have been observed by the researcher in the course of the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Type, Frequency & percentage of errors made by third year students in writing

Item	Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage of error
1	Spelling	24	17%
2	Article	18	13%
3	Preposition	12	9%
4	Capitalization	11	8%
5	Missing subject or verb	11	8%
6	No full stop	11	8%



7	Sentence structure	10	7%
8	Missing comma	10	7%
9	Verb form	10	7%
10	Word choice	6	4%
11	Subject-verb agreement	5	4%
12	Verb tense	5	4%
13	part of speech	2	1%
Total number of errors		135	

Table 1 presents an analysis of errors made by third year students based on two types of analysis ;1) type of error, frequency and percentage of errors. The results indicate that the two most frequent errors that third year students performed were: Spelling (17%) followed by Articles (13%), The next noticeable errors were Prepositions (9%), Sentence Fragment (8%), Capitalization (8%) and Full Stop (8%) respectively. Next were Sentence Structure (7%), Verb Form (7%) and Comma After Introductory Words (7%) equally. Other errors that amounted less were Subject-verb agreement (4%), Verb Tense (4%), Word Choice (4%) and Part of Speech(1%).

This finding represents an answer to the first question in the current study; that is, 1-What are the most frequent types of errors that students made in academic writing?

The most frequent writing errors made by third year students were in the following linguistic elements:

Spelling, use of articles, use of prepositions, capitalization, omission of subject or verb, no full stops at the end of sentences, sentence structure ,missing commas, verb forms word choice, subject-verb agreement, verb tenses and parts of speech.

Moreover, this result fulfills the first and second objectives of the present study.

Table 2: Classification of errors in the students' writing tasks

Category of error	Sub-category of error
Grammar	Article- Preposition- Sentence Fragment (Missing subject or verb)- Sentence structure- Verb form- Subject/verb agreement- Verb tense- Part of speech
Vocabulary	Word choice
Mechanics	Spelling – Capitalization_ Comma after introductory words - Full stop

In table 2, the writing errors committed by third year students were divided into three categories of errors : grammar, vocabulary and mechanics. The three categories were further divided into subcategories as follow:

Most grammatical errors made by third year students were in articles, prepositions, sentences fragments, sentence structure, verb forms, subject-verb agreement, verb tenses and



parts of speech. Therefore, more attention and practice should be given to these subcategories in the teaching of writing skills.

Regarding vocabulary, the results showed that third year students encountered few difficulties in word choice ; consequently, this subcategory should be given more emphasis in teaching writing.

The results revealed that most mechanical errors made by students were in spelling and punctuation, namely, capitalization, comma and full stop. As a result, these sub-categories should be prioritized in teaching writing.

These results confirm that third year students have actually encountered problems in the following linguistic categories: grammar, vocabulary and mechanics when they produce their own pieces of writing. Therefore, teachers should concentrate more on these points in the teaching of writing skills.

Furthermore, the findings obtained from table 2 accomplish the second objective of this study by classifying the various errors performed by students into categories and sub-categories

Table 3. Common errors in grammar

Item	Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage of grammatical errors
1	Article	18	
2	Preposition	12	
3.	Missing subject or verb	11	
4.	Sentence structure	10	
5.	Verb form	10	
6.	Subject-verb agreement	5	
7.	Verb tense	5	
8.	Part of speech	2	
Total of Grammatical errors		73	Per: $73 \div 135 \times 100 = 54.07\%$
Total of errors		135	

Grammatical Errors

The participants assigned the highest percentage of 54.07% to the first item indicating that the use of grammar is the major problem that students face in their academic writing. The grammatical errors made by third year students were in articles, prepositions, sentence structure, sentence fragment, verb forms, verb tenses, subject verb agreement and part of speech. This result implies that third year students face difficulties in grammar; moreover, grammar is extremely significant to convey a correct message. Hutchinson & Waters (1987) strongly suggested that it is important to identify the grammatical forms needed for academic programs and they should be included in the syllabus to acquaint the learners with them for smooth progression.



Table 4. Common Errors in Mechanics

Item	Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage of mechanical errors Per: $56 \div 135 \times 100 = 41,48\%$
1.	Spelling	24	
2.	Capitalization	11	
3.	Missing full stop	11	
4.	Missing comma	10	
Total of mechanical errors		56	
Total of all errors		135	

Errors in Mechanics

The percentage of errors in mechanics is 41.48%. This result indicates that mechanics is the second major problem facing students in writing. Third year students made major errors in spelling, capitalization, commas, and full stops; consequently, all these sub-categories should be focused in teaching writing skill.

Table 5. Common Error in Vocabulary

Item	Type of error	Frequency of error	Percentage
1.	Word Choice	6	Per= $6 \div 135 \times 100 = 4,4\%$
Total of errors in vocabulary		6	
Total of all errors		135	

Errors in Vocabulary

In terms of vocabulary, the students made minor errors in word choice (4.4%). Therefore, students have few problems in the category of vocabulary.

This finding indicates that some students were unable to express themselves appropriately in their writings due to their limited vocabulary.

Table 6: Ranking of the categories of errors committed by third year students in writing

Item	Category	Percentage
1.	Grammar	54.07%
2.	Mechanics	41,48%
3.	Vocabulary	4.4%

As revealed in table 6, grammar ranks first with a percentage of errors of 54.07%. Mechanics ranks second with a percentage of errors of 41.48%. Vocabulary follows mechanics, with a percentage of errors of 4.4%. This finding achieves the second objective of the current study; that is, ranking the categories from the highest ones to the lowest.



Table 7: Examples of grammatical errors in the students' pieces of writing

Type of error	Examples	Corrections
Missing / wrong article	I get up at 7:00 <u>in morning</u> . I go to <u>cafeteria</u> to have breakfast. At school the student <u>enters to</u> classroom in same time. At college the student is <u>a</u> free.	I get up at 7:00 in the morning. I go to the cafeteria to have breakfast. At school the student enters the classroom at the same time. At college the student is free.
Wrong / Missing Preposition	<u>In the first</u> , I go to college at 7:45. I <u>get</u> the university at 8:00.	At first, I go to college at 7:45. I get to the university at 8:00.
Missing subject	In the school ? get the information from the book only. Every day in my college ? take it the same subjects. At university ? behave as adults. After that ? drink coffee with cake.	At school, I get the information from the book only. I take the same subjects every day at college. At university, students behave as adults. After that, I drink a cup of coffee with a piece of cake.
Sentence structure	School <u>attends/attending</u> compulsory. <u>University difficult subjects and</u> <u>exams two mid</u> .	At school, attendance is compulsory. At university, study is difficult and there are two exams: mid and final.
Verb form error	It's <u>take</u> two hours. When it <u>finised</u> , I take rist. Sometimes I <u>preparing</u> my homework or reading. I <u>am study</u> English language. It <u>is end</u> at 10:00. I <u>am get up</u> early 6:00 every day.	It takes two hours. When it ends, I have a rest. Sometimes, I write my homework or read my lessons. I study /am studying English. It ends at 10:00. I get up early at 7:00 every day.
Subject-Verb Agreement error	My class <u>start</u> with at 8:30. In school student <u>do not</u> need speaking skill.	My first class starts at 8:30. In school, students do not need speaking skill.



Verb tense	I <u>am eating</u> breakfast and go to the college at 7:00. When I <u>came</u> to college, I <u>went</u> to the lecture. I <u>am going</u> to the college at 7:45. I take a rist until the second lecture <u>came</u> .	I eat/have my breakfast and go to college at 7:00. When I come to college, I go to the lecture. I go to the college at 7:45. I usually take a rest before the second lecture begins.
part of speech	25. <u>Different</u> between school and college.	Differences between school and college.

As shown in table 7 above, most errors made by third year students occurred due to the incomplete learning of target language (i.e. intralingual errors) except examples 5, 12 and 24 were interlingual errors (i.e. errors due to the interference of the students' first language namely, Arabic whereby the students use their linguistic knowledge of L1 on some linguistic features in the target language; however, it often leads to making errors).

Table 8: Examples of Mechanical errors

Type of error	Examples	Corrections
Spelling	<u>liecture, leacture, lictures, lucture, lecature, lacture</u> <u>Collage, collge</u> <u>grammer</u> <u>rist</u> <u>som</u> <u>fried</u> <u>coffiteria, cafetra, cafeterea</u> <u>cask</u> <u>bisy</u> <u>calss, calass</u> <u>liburary,</u> <u>univeresity, unvisitey</u> <u>exited</u> <u>catein</u> <u>chieldren, cildren, childeren</u> <u>teenger, tengger, teneegeres</u> <u>healty</u> <u>cloutis</u> <u>lecurer</u> <u>o'ckloc</u>	lecture College grammar rest some afraid cafeteria kiosk busy class library university excited cantin children teenager healthy clothes lecturer o'clock
Capitalization	<u>at</u> school attendance is compulsory	At school attendance is



	<p><u>in</u> school the teacher gives the topic. <u>all</u> my life were changed. this is poetry.</p>	<p>compulsory. At school, the teacher gives the topic. All my life has changed. This is poetry.</p>
Missing comma after introductory words	<p>First ?I go to my first class at 8:30. After that I go to library and study about an hour</p>	<p>First, I go to my first class at 8:30. After that, I go to the library and study for an hour.</p>
No full stop	<p>In the university you can wear everything? At 11:30 I go to the second class?</p>	<p>In the university you can wear everything. At 11:30, I go to the second class.</p>

As shown in table 8 above, the examples include intralingual errors in spelling and punctuation which are due to the students' inadequate knowledge of spelling and the rules of punctuation.

Table 9: Examples of semantic errors in the students writing

Type of error	Examples	Corrections
Word choice error	<p>I go to cafeteria to <u>breakfast</u> with my friends. At school you cannot <u>tend</u> your phones but in university you can <u>tend</u> your phones. <u>Reading</u> in school start 8 and finished 1:30.</p>	<p>I go to the cafeteria with my friends to have breakfast. At school you cannot bring your phones but at university you can. At school, classes start at 8 and finish at 1:30.</p>

As revealed in table 9, the errors made by students in examples 1 and 3 are interlanguage where third year students think in their first language; that is, Arabic and express their ideas in English which results in wrong word choice. However, the error in the second example is intralingual where the students do not know the appropriate vocabulary.

Finally, the examples of writing errors mentioned in tables 7, 8 and 9 answer the second question of this study (i.e. why do students make those errors in academic writing ?) by assuming that the writing errors were caused either by target language interference or by the students' first language interference.



Conclusion

It can be concluded that second language writing is more difficult skill than any other skills for students to master, and that teaching second language writing can be said to be one of the most challenging tasks second language teachers have to undertake. Writing is also a demanding and slow skill (Reid,2002) ;therefore, the skill of writing requires practice, effort and time on the part of both teachers andEFL learners.This is why current study has aimed to identify the most common types of writing errors made by third year students at the College of Education - El-Mergib University in order to find applicable remedies and solutions. Results have shown that students have difficulties in revising their own pieces of writing as they hardly detect their mistakes. As a result, third year students committed many errors in academic writing. When the categories were ranked, results revealed that third year students had the most difficulties in grammar, mechanics and experienced fewer difficulties in vocabulary. In grammar, they had errors in sentence structure, subject - verb agreement, prepositions, verb forms, verb tenses and use of articles. In mechanics, on the other hand, they committed errors in punctuation, spelling and capitalization. In vocabulary, they had only difficulties in word choice. Consequently, emphasis and priority ought to be given to those categories that rank higher through greater time allotment and more intensive lessons and activities because students find more difficulties in those areas. More attention should be given to the use of language (Mohseni & Satariyan, 2013); therefore, more writing practice exercises should be given to students. In addition, error analysis should be done regularly to provide learners feedback regarding their writing performance. Teachers should, however, be knowledgeable in providing feedback, especially in marking errors. Satariyan and Reynolds (in press) assert that students can become more empowered with their own learning if teachers apply some particular strategies in their writing pedagogy. Thus, giving feedback should be done in a facilitative and constructive way. Additionally, engaging students into the writings and informing them of how to use the vocabularies and their collocation rules in sentence can be a way to develop students" metacognitive strategies to become self-editors of their own writings and compositions (Reynolds & Satariyan, in press; Mohsen).

Furthermore, it has been concluded that the majority of writing errors made by third year students were due to intralingual interference; namely, inadequate knowledge of grammar, punctuation and vocabulary; whereas, fewer errors were due to interlingual interference. Finally, the study concluded by suggesting a set of recommendations to deal with the problem. The recommendations suggested by the researcher provide an answer to the third question of the current study: How can those errors be remedied?

Recommendations

In the light of the findings obtained from this study, the following recommendations can be suggested:

- 1.Teachers should reteach the language elements such as grammar items or punctuation rules, which the students have wrongly used in their paragraphs, with more examples or using other situations and this teaching should be more interesting to the students so that they may understand the elements better.
- 2.Teachers should highlight the importance of writing to students and raise their awareness of its significance.



- 3.The teaching material should be enriched with tasks and activities that can make students practice the writing skill more.
- 4.Teachers should raise awareness of self-editing and proofreading. That is, students should be always recommended to check their writing works for correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and vocabulary use.
- 5.Teachers should exert more effort to help students write in accordance with a plan and an outline.
- 6.Another way to improve students writing skills is to read - as they read they pick up new vocabulary and engage with different writing styles. The more they read in English, the more they are exposed to different ways of expressing ideas. The grammatical structures and style of the writer will eventually start to show up in their own writing and they may learn some new vocabulary at the same time.
- 7.Free writing practice is a good exercise for improving one's writing ability. Writing is a skill and therefore it is learned by practice just like any other skill.
- 8.Note taking is also very helpful in enhancing the way writers generate ideas.
- 9.Teachers have to play a role in motivating students to become better writers. 10.Teachers should also help students believe that they can be successful writers if they practice and exert some effort; they must believe that writing is a skill gained through hard work.
- 11.For spelling errors, it's helpful to advise students to use a dictionary or computer spell checker to check their spelling and also keep a record of any words that they misspell.
- 12.Practice, practice, practice! The more students write, edit, and proofread, the better they get at it.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to the common writing errors committed by third year university students with regard to grammar, mechanics and vocabulary. The study was conducted at the College of Education / El-Mergib University in 2019. The sample was randomly selected from third-year students majoring in English. 28 out of 30 students participated in this study. All of the participants were female, ranging in age from 20 to 22, and students were asked to write two paragraphs, one on their daily routine at college and the other on the differences between college and school. Two students were excluded from the study because their writing works were illegible and full of errors in sentence structure and spelling. The researcher faced a difficulty in determining the time of the writing tasks because the students were on a public holiday due to the Corona Covid 19 Epidemic. Therefore, the researcher chose the time of midterm exams to assign the students the writing tasks. Time allocated to the writing tasks was one hour.

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الفهرس

الصفحة	اسم الباحث	عنوان البحث	ر.ت
1-23	يونس يوسف أبونايجي	وضع الضاهر موضع الضمير ودلالته على المعنى عند المفسرين	1
24-51	محمد خليفة صالح خليفة محمود الجداوي	دراسة استقصائية حول مساهمة تقنية المعلومات والاتصالات في نشر ثقافة الشفافية ومحاربة الفساد	2
52-70	Ebtisam Ali Haribash	An Interactive GUESS Method for Solving Nonlinear Constrained Multi-Objective Optimization Problem	3
71-105	احمد علي الهادي الحويج احمد محمد سليم معوال	العوامل الخمسة الكبرى للشخصية وعلاقتها بالذكاء الوجداني لدى طلبة مرحلة التعليم الثانوي	4
106-135	محمد عبد السلام دخيل	في المجتمع الليبي التحضر وانعكاساته على الحياة الاجتماعية "دراسة ميدانية في مدينة الخمس"	5
136-158	سالم فرج زويبيك	الاستعارة التهكمية في القرآن الكريم	6
159-173	أسماء جمعة القلعي	دور الرياضات العملية الصوفية في تهذيب السلوك	7
174-183	S. M. Amsheri N. A. Abouthferah	On Coefficient Bounds for Certain Classes of Analytic Functions	8
184-191	N. S. Abdanabi	Fibrewise Separation axioms in Fibrewise Topological Group	9
192-211	Samah Taleb Mohammed	Investigating Writing Errors Made by Third Year Students at the Faculty of Education El-Mergib University	10
212-221	Omar Ali Aleyan Eissa Husen Muftah AL remali	SOLVE NONLINEAR HEAT EQUATION BY ADOMIAN DECOMPOSITION METHOD [ADM]	11
222-233	حسن احمد قرقد عبدالباسط محمد قريصة مصطفى الطويل	قياس تركيز بعض العناصر الثقيلة في المياه الجوفية لمدينة مصراته	12
234-244	ربيعة عبد الله الشبير عائشة أحمد عامر عبير مصطفى الهصيك	تعادم الدوال الكروية المناظرة لقيم ذاتية على سطح الكرة	13
245-255	Khadiga Ali Arwini Entisar Othman Laghah	λ -Generalizations And g - Generalizations	14



256-284	خيري عبدالسلام حسين كليب عبدالسلام بشير اشتيوي بشير ناصر مختار كصارة	Impact of Information Technology on Supply Chain management	15
285-294	Salem H. Almadhun, Salem M. Aldeep, Aimen M. Rmis, Khairia Abdulsalam Amer	Examination of 4G (LTE) Wireless Network	16
295-317	نور الدين سالم فريوع	التجربة الجمالية لدى موريس ميرلوبوتي	17
318-326	ليلى منصور عطية الغويج هدى على التقبي	Effect cinnamon plant on liver of rats treated with trichloroethylene	18
327-338	Fuzi Mohamed Fartas Naser Ramdan Amaizah Ramdan Ali Aldomani Husamaldin Abdualmawla Gahit	Qualitative Analysis of Aliphatic Organic Compounds in Atmospheric Particulates and their Possible Sources using Gas Chromatography Mass Spectrometry	19
339-346	E. G. Sabra A. H. EL- Rifae	Parametric Tension on the Differential Equation	20
347-353	Amna Mohamed Abdelgader Ahmed	Totally Semi-open Functions in Topological Spaces	21
354-376	زينب إمام أبو راس حواء بشير بالنور	كتاب الخصائص لابن جني دراسة بعض مواضع الحذف من ت"392" المسمى: باب في شجاعة العربية	22
377-386	لطيفة محمد الدالي	Least-Squares Line	23
387-397	نادية محمد الدالي ايمان احمد اخميرة	THEORETICAL RESEARCH ON AI TECHNOLOGIES FOR LEARNING SYSEM	24
398-409	Ibrahim A. Saleh Tarek M. Fayez Mustafah M. A. Ahmad	Influence of annealing and Hydrogen content on structural and optoelectronic properties of Nano-multilayers of a-Si:H/a-Ge: H used in Solar Cells	25
410-421	أسماء محمد الحبشي	The learners' preferences of oral corrective feedback techniques	26
422-459	أمينة محمد العكاشي ربيعة عثمان عبد الجليل عفاف محمد بالحاج فتحية علي جعفر	التقدير الإيجابي المسبق لفاعلية الذات ودوره في التغلب على مصادر الضغوط النفسية " دراسة تحليلية "	27



460-481	Aisha Mohammed Ageal Najat Mohammed Jaber	English Pronunciation problems Encountered by Libyan University Students at Faculty of Education, Elmergib University	28
482-499	الحسين سليم محسن	The Morphological Analysis of the Quranic Texts	29
500-507	Ghada Al-Hussayn Mohsen	Cultural Content in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching	30
508-523	HASSAN M. ALI Mostafa M Ali	The relationship between <i>slyA</i> DNA binding transcriptional activator gene and <i>Escherichia coli</i> fimbriae and related with biofilm formation	31
524-533	Musbah A. M. F. Abduljalil	Molecular fossil characteristics of crude oils from Libyan oilfields in the Zalla Trough	32
534-542	سعدون شهبوب محمد	تلوث المياه الجوفية بالنترات بمنطقة كعام، شمال غرب ليبيا	33
543-552	Naima M. Alsharif Mahmoud M. Buazzi	Analysis of Genetic Diversity of <i>Escherichia Coli</i> Isolates Using RAPD PCR Technique	34
553-560	Hisham mohammed alnaib alshareef aisha mohammed elfagaeh aisha omran alghawash abdualaziz ibrahim lawej safa albashir hussain kaka	The Emergence of Virtual Learning in Libya during Coronavirus Pandemic	35
561-574	Abdualaziz Ibrahim Lawej Rabea Mansur Milad Mohamed Abduljalil Aghnayah Hamza Aabeed Khalafllaa ³	ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TOWARDS USING MOTHER TONGUE IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN SIRTE	36
575-592	صالحة التومي الدروقي أمال محمد سالم أبوسته	دافع الانجاز وعلاقته بالرضا الوظيفي لدى معلمي مرحلة التعليم الأساسي "ببلدية ترهونة"	37
593-609	آمنة سالم عبد القادر قدورة نجية علي جبريل انبية	الإرشاد النفسي ودوره في مواجهة بعض المشكلات الأخرية الراهنة	38
610-629	Hanan B. Abousittash, Z. M. H. Kheiralla Betiha M.A.	Effect Mesoporous silica silver nanoparticles on antibacterial agent Gram- negative <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> and Gram-positive <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i>	39
630-652	حنان عمر بشير الرمالي	برنامج التربية العملية وتطويره	40
653-672	Abdualla Mohamed Dhaw	Towards Teaching CAT tools in Libyan Universities	41



673-700	عثمان علي أميمن سليمة رمضان الكوت زهرة عثمان البرق	سبل إعادة أعمار وتأهيل سكان المدن المدمرة بالحرب ومعوقات المصالحة الوطنية في المجتمع الليبي: مقارنة نفس-اجتماعية	42
701-711	Abdulrhman Mohamed Egnebr	Comparison of Different Indicators for Groundwater Contamination by Seawater Intrusion on the Khoms city, Libya	43
712-734	Elhadi A. A. Maree Abdualah Ibrahim Sultan Khaled A. Alurffi	Hilbert Space and Applications	44
735-759	معتوق علي عون عمار محمد الزليطني عرفات المهدي قرينات	الموارد الطبيعية اللازمة لتحقيق التنمية الاقتصادية بشمال غرب ليبيا وسبل تحقيق الاستدامة	45
760-787	سهام رجب العطوي هدى المبروك موسى	الخلج وعلاقته بمفهوم الذات لدى تلاميذ الشق الثاني بمرحلة التعليم الاساسي بمنطقة جنزور	46
788-820	هنية عبدالسلام بالوص زهرة المهدي أبو راس	الصلابة النفسية ودورها الوقائي في مواجهة الضغوط النفسية	47
821-847	عبد الحميد مفتاح أبو النور محي الدين علي المبروك	ودوره في الحد من التمر التوجيه التربوي والإرشاد النفسي المدرسي	48
848	الفهرس		52