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ERRORS IN ENGLISH WRITING OF GRADE 10 STUDENTS: A STUDY OF SCHOOLS IN DISTRICT PESHAWAR

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to identify, classify and highlight errors committed by Grade 10 students in different schools of district Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Participants of this study were selected through probability sampling from different schools in district Peshawar. An essay test was conducted from a total of 150 participants studying in Grade 10. After conducting the test, a careful effort was made to explore ratio, frequency and percentile of these errors. Varieties of errors were noticed during this study. These errors ranged from intralingual errors (errors caused by the target language itself) to interlingual (caused by mother tongue of the learners). A corpus of 150 essays was evaluated where a total of 1633 errors were pinpointed. First, these errors were identified, and then broadly divided into three main categories, i.e., grammatical, mechanical and incorrect word choice. A sum of 589 errors is related to grammatical category dominated by syntactical errors (298), 920 errors belong to mechanical category dominated by spelling errors (428), while 124 errors were directly related to incorrect word choice. These categories were subdivided in their respective types. Causes of the errors were also explored through a questionnaire. A set of 14 questions were asked from 49 teachers having different levels of experience. Three teachers, at the maximum, were selected from one school. All the teachers responded to all the questions. Reasons behind the errors were tabulated in different categories. However, majority of the respondents declared mother tongue interference as the main cause of

syntactical errors. Likewise, the unpredictable and complex nature of prepositions was considered as the main reason behind prepositional errors. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that carelessness and students' unawareness of the singularity and plurality of subject forms lead them to commit subject-verb disagreement errors. Article errors are mostly committed by the students due to their unclear and confused perception about articles. Most of the respondents argued that the root cause of punctuation errors is poor teaching and secondary importance given to them by the students.

INTRODUCTION
Having a colonial legacy, the position of English language in Pakistan can never be undermined. Rahman (2001) observes that English is not only the official language of the government, but it also enjoys a social prestige. He also notices that English language skills are considered an effective instrument for getting admission in colleges. Valika (2017) notices that standard of education is directly linked with the standard of English language. Warsi (2004) highlights that in Pakistan, employment opportunities have direct relation with English language skills. Better English language skills mean more opportunities of getting employed. In such a scenario, correct and incorrect use of English is more than important.

According to Brown (2000) all the errors in writing may be compartmentalized into interference errors/transfer and intralingual errors. Nunan (2003) notices that interference errors take place when first language of the learners affects writing of the students while learning a target language. Jarvis and Odlin (2000) termed this kind of errors as 'cross linguistic transfer.' Very often learners switch back to their native language when they do not find an appropriate parallel in the target language. According to Brown (2000) learners' errors in the second language result from the learner's assumption that the second language forms are like the native language (interlingual errors) and the negative transfer of items within the target language (intralingual errors).

Weissberg (1998), while conducting his studies in Africa, concludes that about 26 % of the students' errors belong to this category. He observes that students' English writing is affected largely by Namibian Language spoken in Namibia. Bhela (1999) also observes that EFL errors result from the word for word translation strategy or thinking in mother tongue. Selinker (1993) discussed two different types of transfer.

●   Positive transfer (facilitates learning)
●   Negative transfer (hampers correct learning)

Positive transfer occurs when learning in one situation facilitates learning or performing in another situation. In Selinker's (1993) words positive transfer is the result of parallel linguistics entities in two different languages. This kind of transfer is beneficial for learners because it is not erroneous in nature. Usually, positive transfer occurs in languages having same family i.e. with similar syntax or morphology. Positive transfer often results in getting into new conclusion. Waring

(1997) endorses that this kind of experience has long term impacts on learning of the new learners.

When a rule or entity is transferred from native language to L2 but it does not play the same role as it played in L1 it is termed as negative transfer (Selinker, 1993). This view is also shared by Green (1998). Here the previous learning of L1 does not facilitate learning in L2. Al-Harbi (2010) notices that this transfer negatively affects the learning process of the learners. Linguists, without any disagreement consider this kind of transfer a great impediment in the way of learning. Negative transfer is erroneous in its nature. Contrastive analysis recommends different measures for avoiding negative transfer but it is a natural phenomenon, where most of the time the learners may not help to avoid.

Students' first language is not the only source of errors. In the process of learning a language, a number of intralingual errors could be identified. Intralingual errors, according to Green (1998) refer to those errors which occur as a result of false analogy, overgeneralization of a rule or lack of knowledge of a rule. These errors take place within the premises of target language. Here no effect of native language is observed. The following section will clearly identify intralingual errors.

Overgeneralization takes place when foreign language learners opt for a deviant structure based on his/her previous experience within the target language. It is similar a phenomenon when a person see a mango having yellow color and concludes that all mangoes are yellow in color. Lee (2003) observes that overgeneralization takes place when new learners (whether that of L1 or L2) unjustifiably conclude what is true for some cases is true for all cases. When new learners come to know that by adding 's' or 'es,' a noun becomes plural, they conclude that all nouns become plural by adding 's' or 'es.' They also consider words like 'sheep' 'fish' etc as singular nouns.

Bennui (2008) observes that overgeneralization is not restricted to the faulty use of nouns only. It may be the case with verb form, degree of adjective, preposition and many more. He also notices that new learners use forms like 'most clever boy,' 'gooder person,' 'travelling on bus' and many more like this. All these faulty forms are the direct result of overgeneralization.

Hyland 2003) notices that overgeneralization of L2 learners in second language learning may sharply be compared with L1 learners in first language acquisition. Children's first language acquisition is not the subject of this work, however the shared phenomena of L1 and L2 learners which lead to faulty use of language i.e., overgeneralization is discussed here. Chomsky (1957) and other linguists believe that every child is born with an innate universal grammar for learning a language. This grammar is naturally set in every child's mind irrespective of language, color, race or geographical location. Whatever native language a child has, all human children undergo through the same process of language acquisition. Learners either of the first language or the second, over-apply language rules in the initial stages of

their language learning. Instead of saying, 'He went to the market,' the child will say 'He goed to the market.' It is the case with L2 learners as well. Often structure like 'wented to college,' 'beared difficulties' and 'thinked sharply' etc could be observed in second language learning.

Ellis (1996) observes that ignorance of rules restriction may be noticed when application of rules is learnt but its restrictions are not learnt. For example, a learner learns that every verb takes 's' or 'es' when used with a singular subject and construct a sentence like *"I go to the market". Here the learner has not learnt that 'I' is singular subject, but he/she fails in learning that 'I' is first person singular not a third person singular. The learner does not know that the rules have restriction in their application.

Ellis (1996) notices failure in fully developing a structure in target language. For example, previously a target language learner learnt a structure like "do you like to eat more?" And now the learner omits the use of 'do' and construct a structure like "*you like to eat more?"

Lexical errors are the errors related to incorrect word choices. These errors are not directly related to grammar. Collocation errors are the commonest of lexical errors. Combination of words which often go together in a language is termed as collocation (Yule 2013). Usually, ESL learners commit errors of word choices. Very often learners mean one thing and use a different set of words either because of lack of vocabulary or ignorance of rules. Many a time L2 learners know the meaning of words at individual word level but they produce incorrect expression when words are used in a context. According to Barcroft (2007), the ability to use words correctly depends upon the knowledge of the learner i.e., how much he/she know about the collocation of a language.

Karra, (2006) opines those incorrect lexical choices may not be tolerated by the listeners, because very often the writer/speaker fails to convey the intended meaning. Nothing may be more irritating to the native speakers than errors relevant to lexical choices. On the other hand, mistakes in syntax could easily be understood by the readers and speakers. However, when something goes wrong with lexical choices, the speaker or the writer fails to communicate the message effectively because lexemes often carry message contents. Wang (2008) notices that two different possibilities are there in case of lexical errors; either the message will not be comprehended at all, or it may be taken for what is not intended to convey (misinterpretation).

The most unfortunate feature of English language, in the view of Hanna (1986), is its spelling. Spellings in English language are often unpredictable. Rarely does it follow any sequence or orders. It is a dream of many learners that they may learn all the spellings in English language correctly. Doughty and Michael H (2003) notice that the main problem with English spellings is that there is no one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes. Phoneme, according to Yule

(2013) is the minimum unit of sound in a language while grapheme is the letter/s used for representing these phonemes.

Nunan (1999) observes that spellings directly affect the ability of reading and writing. In his views, spelling ability is not only important for writing but it also plays a significant role in reading as well. Often the readers take one word for the meaning of another word. As a result, they comprehend the text incorrectly. As reading is a receptive skill, it plays the role of input to the mind of learners. When input is faulty, it produces faulty output. When readers confuse some words for other than its actual meanings, they also produce it incorrectly in the form of writing. As a result, spelling mistakes take place in writing.

Fay (1971) observes that non-phonemic nature of English language makes it one the most unpredictable languages of the world. English language is largely characterized by inconsistencies of pronunciation. English sounds are not always represented by the same letter or combination of letters. There is a huge discrepancy between English spellings and its pronunciation. If we take the example of only I∫I sound, different letter or combination of letters like "tio", "ss", "s," "sio" "ch", Ci", "sh" etc are used for representing this single sound. This is only one example of no one-to-one correspondence between letters and English phonemes. Several other problematic zones like this are part of English phonetics which affects the spelling abilities of new learners to a greater extent.

Because of non-phonemic nature of English language, Titledstad (1999) reaches to the conclusion that English is the most unpredictable and perhaps the most difficult language for the teachers to teach. He repeatedly criticizes 'exceptional' cases in English language. He acknowledges that it is difficult to defend 'exceptional' cases before the students. Hasyim (2002) also expresses concern over the irregular pattern of English spellings. In his views, one may not always adhere to logic when dealing with English spellings. Because of this feature, English becomes one of the most unpredictable and illogical language for the teachers to teach.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Keeping in view the background in mind, the current research study is guided by the following two research questions:

●   What are the different types and frequency of errors committed by Pakistani students in their English writing?
●   What are major the causes behind these errors?

RESEARCH METHOD FOR DATA ANALYSIS
As this work is quantitative in nature, therefore all the steps of this study are the same which a quantitative study requires. Ellis' (1996) model of Error Analysis is followed for this research work. Ellis' model involves the following five steps.

1.   Collecting samples from the target language learners' writing.
2.   Identification of errors
3.   Description of errors
4.   Explanation of Error
5.   Evaluation of errors

In line of Ellis model, 150 samples were collected in 30 different schools in district Peshawar. After collection of samples, every single error was identified by underlining it. Each error was described and labeled according to its nature. After labeling the error, each type of error was counted and written at the bottom of the sample page. Number and frequency of errors were properly tabulated with the help of charts and graphs. Tabulation was followed by explanation and evaluation.

DATA COLLECTION

The participants of the study were matriculation male students of 30 different schools in district Peshawar. 150 students were selected randomly from 30 different schools of district Peshawar. Names of the students were written on small pieces of paper and thrown into a box. A student was asked to pick five pieces of paper after shaking it well.

Sampling Techniques

To enhance the probability of representativeness, simple random sampling technique was used for this study.

Instruments

Instruments used in this study were essays written by 150 participants of 30 schools in district Peshawar. General simple topics were given to the student about which all the students had a prior idea. All the students were told to write freely whatever comes in their mind, because the researcher was not interested in the quality of arguments students had but in their language.

For investigating the causes of errors, questionnaires were distributed among 49 teachers in 24 schools in district Peshawar. 20 female and 30 male teachers were asked to respond. A total of 14 questions were asked in the questionnaire. Not more than 3 teachers were selected from a single school. Schools were the same from where students' tests were taken. All the teachers responded all the questions. All the established norms and research ethics were considered during sample collection.

Test Procedure

All the students were given one hour for writing about different common topic. Topics like 'my native town,' 'my dreams in Life,' 'my first day at school,' 'major problems of our country,' 'impacts of load shedding,' 'the future of Pakistan,' 'my

favorite subject and why,' 'why or why not I love my math teacher,' 'parents role in family' and some other interesting topics which appeal to the students mindset were given. Students were asked to write 250 to 300 words on the given topic. Students were not informed that they were writing for the research purpose. The logic behind this was that students may come up with their pure writing. Only their teacher knew about this fact.

Presentation of Data

Microsoft Office (MS Excel) is used for the tabulation of all the errors. Bars, graphs and charts are given to highlight the ratio and frequency of errors. Apart, frequency of a single type of errors is compared with another type to highlight the weaker and average areas of the students. For questionnaire, SPSS is used for tabulation, graphing and comparison.

Results of the Study

This part of the study presents results and findings obtained from the sample of students' writing and teachers' questionnaires. Every single error is identified and made part of the research findings. Each error is placed according to its type and categorized accordingly. All the errors are compartmentalized in three major sections i.e., grammatical errors, mechanical errors and errors related to incorrect word choice.

Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors include errors in syntax, subject verb agreement, preposition, pronoun, article, pluralization, use of tense, auxiliary, adjectives, adverbs, infinitives, and transitional devices. A total of 589 grammatical errors have been identified which are placed in the following different categories.

Grammatical Errors 589		
Type of Errors	No of errors	Percentage
syntactical errors		**298 51%**
subject verb agreement errors		**68 12%**
preposition errors	**32**	**05%**
pronoun errors		**23 04%**
Article Errors		**32 05%**
error of pluralization	**20**	**3.2%**
incorrect uses of tense	**16**	**2.7 %**

| Other grammatical Errors i.e. -- ----- 10%	
Verb	16
Auxiliary	12
Adjective	12
Adverb	04
Infinitive	07
Transitional Devices	08
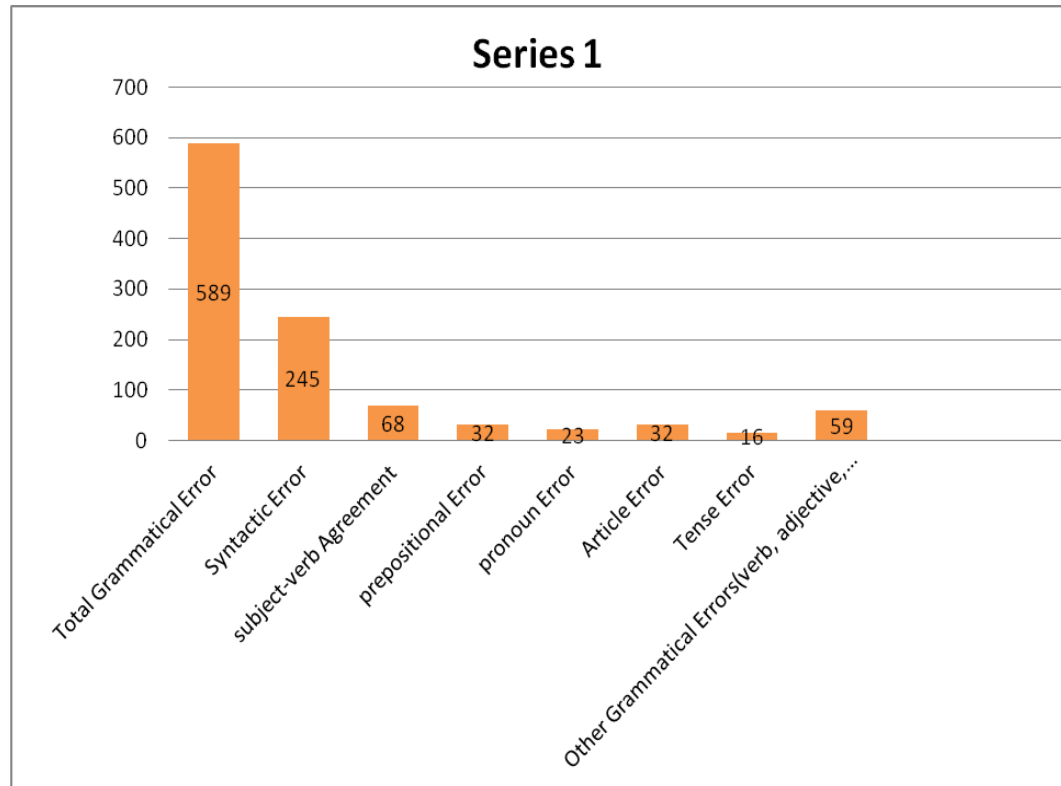
Mechanical Errors

Mechanical errors include errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. It is the most poorly performed area by Pakistani students. A total of 920 errors are identified in the corpus of one hundred essays. Every single mechanical error in students' essays is identified and classified.

Mechanical Errors 920	
Type of Error Percentage	No of Errors
Spelling Errors 46.5%	428
Capitalization Errors 41.7%	384
Punctuation Errors 11.7%	108
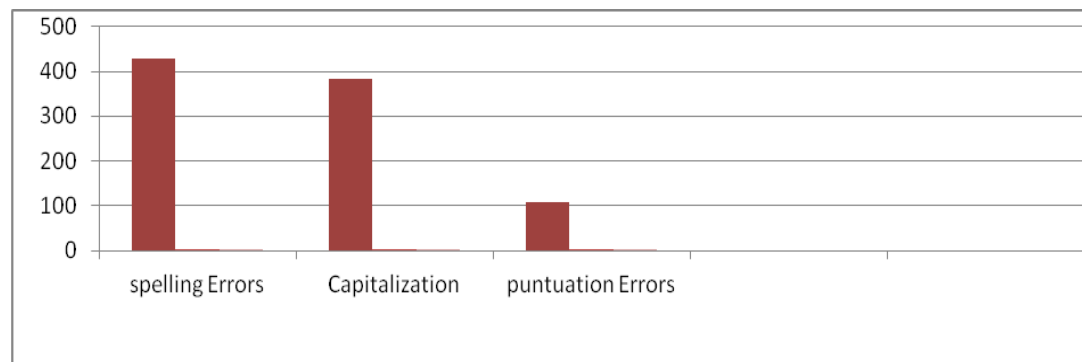
Errors Related to Incorrect Word Choice (IWC)

Lexical, semantic and collocation errors are studied under the topic of 'incorrect word choice' in this work. Lexical errors are those errors when inappropriate lexical choice is opted for conveying one's meaning.
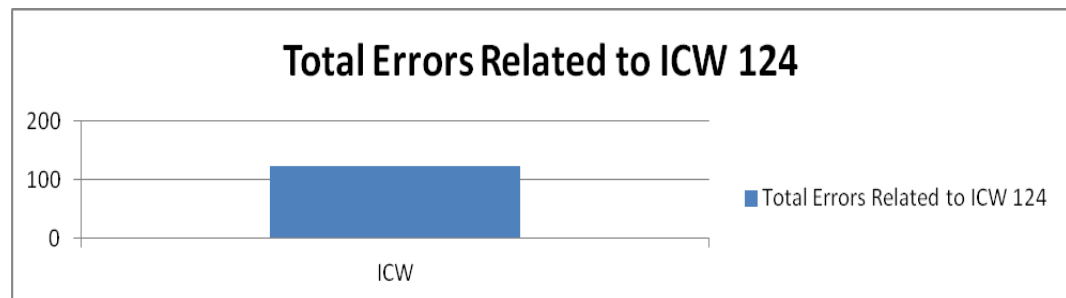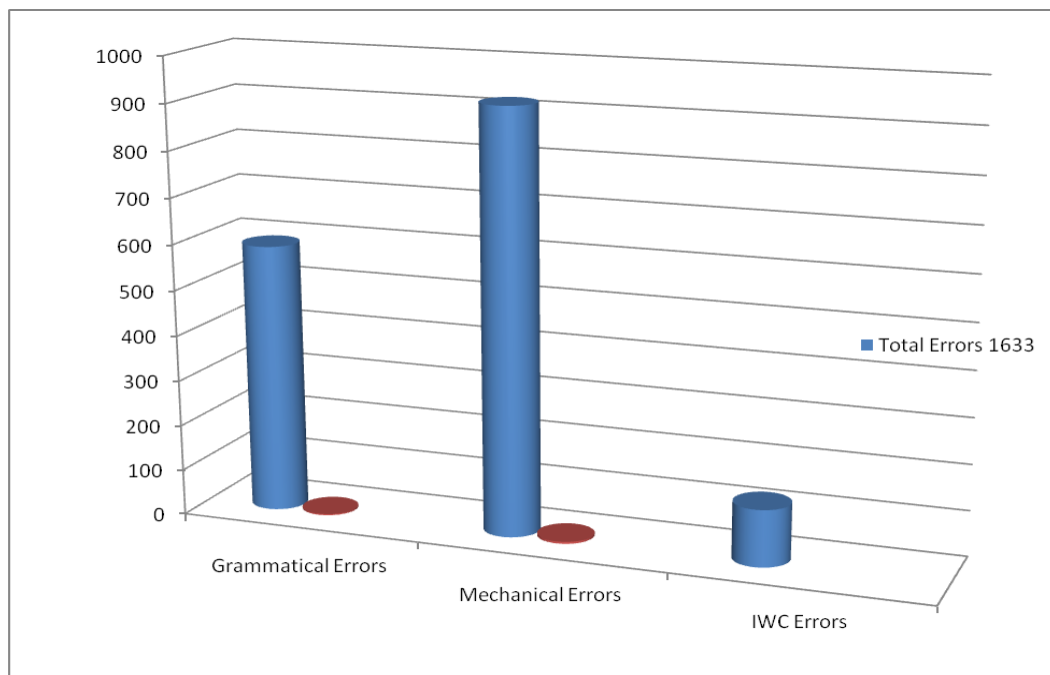
Causes of These Errors

To know the causes of these errors, questionnaires were distributed among 49 teachers (20 female and 29 male) in 24 schools in district Peshawar. Following reason are given by different teachers.

Syntactical Errors

When teachers were asked about the causes of syntactical errors, 69 % of the teachers responded that learners have first language in their mind while writing an English sentence. To be more technical, most of the respondents attributed L1 interference as the major cause of the syntactical errors. 20% of the teachers think that translation in schools leads to syntactical errors. Three out 49 respondents think syntactical errors take place because it is not taught well in schools, while 2 teachers give other reasons.

Prepositional Errors

A close look of students' samples verifies that students fail to connect different words or phrases with the help of preposition. When teachers were enquired about the causes of prepositional errors, 63% of the teachers thought that unpredictable nature of proposition itself caused an error. 14% respondents endorse those prepositional errors takes place because it is complex in nature. Two teachers attribute 'language interference' as a cause to prepositional errors while two teachers give other reason.

Subject Verb Agreement

When teachers were enquired for the causes of subject-verb disagreement, 57% of the teachers thought that students did not know the very idea of singular subject and singular verb. 22% teachers attribute this type of error to carelessness, while 20% think that students know the rules but fail in application.

Errors Related to Articles

71% of the teachers think that students do not have clear idea about article. 24% of the teachers think that article errors take place because students confuse one article with other. While 4% teachers give other reasons for article errors.

Punctuation Errors

45% of the teachers believe that punctuation errors take place in students' writing because students consider it unimportant. On the other hand, 39% of the teachers attribute punctuation errors to poor teaching, while 16% think that students' poor performance in punctuation take place because students confuse one marker with other.

Spelling Errors

59% teachers think that students commit spelling errors because there is no one-to-one correspondence between English letters and English sounds. 37% of the teachers endorse that lack of reading habit is responsible for poor spelling performance, while 4% attribute spelling mistakes to mother tongue interference.

Capitalization

57% of the teachers believe that students miss the essential knowledge of when to capitalize a letter. 37% of the teachers think that carelessness is major contributor to error related to punctuation, while 6% teachers believe that student think it unimportant that is why punctuation errors take place.

Rote learning and Errors

60% of the teachers believe that 'Rote Learning' impede students to go for the correct word choice when writing from their own mind (not rote writing). 37% of the teachers attribute these errors to lack of vocabulary on the part of the students, while 2% respond that students do not know semantic field of the words that is why incorrect word choice errors take place.

Investigating Errors in General

The above data is obtained from specifically directed queries to 49 teachers in district Peshawar. Apart from these queries, the researcher also asked some general open-ended questions about the causes of errors.

(i)   When teachers were asked to share their opinion about the leading responsible factor for errors in writing, 71% of the teachers think that 'rote learning' is the leading responsible factor which prevents students' correct English creative writing. 18% of the teachers think that Grammar Translation Method mainly causes errors in writing, while 10% attribute other reasons.

(ii)   When teachers were asked to share their views about why students have errors in their writing, 57% of the teachers think that students are weak in writing because students prefer science subject as compared to English. 18% teachers think that students have innate prejudice towards English; the other 18% hold the opinion that student do not know the very process of writing.

(iii)   When teachers were asked about the causes of poor performance in tense uses, 59% endorse those tenses are not fairly taught in schools. 26% of the teachers think that tense related errors take place because students confuse one tense with the other, while 12% attribute the cause to lack of interest on the part of the students.

(iv)   Rote learning always plays a decisive role in erroneous creative writing. Students' performance is far much better when asked to write about a topic they have already memorized, but it is deplorably poor when writing about a topic from their own mind. 67% teachers are on the opinion that rote learning is responsible to a 'greater extent' for flawed writing. 25% teachers consider it 'to some extent' responsible, while 8% hold the opinion that its role is 'to a negligible extent' in errors.

(v)   Similarly, teachers were enquired about the role of overgeneralization in committing errors. 78% of the teachers think overgeneralization is responsible to 'some extent' among the factors affecting correct writing. 10% of the teachers think its role to a negligible extent while other 10% think that it is affecting writing to 'greater extent'.

CONCLUSION
Mechanical errors are the most frequently committed errors. Students' writings display unexpected carelessness. Consistency of mechanical errors show that carelessness is not the only reason behind mechanical errors, but results confirm that students' knowledge is extremely deficient about punctuation markers, capitalization, and spellings. 920 mechanical errors are not a meager figure in one hundred short essays. Grammar lies at the backbone of academic success. Students' performance depicts a grave picture of their grammatical accuracy. Most importantly grammatical errors are dominated by syntactic errors which is a matter of serious concern for Pakistani academicians. Out of 589 grammatical errors, 298 errors are recorded which are directly related to poor performance in syntax. Students' essays also confirm the serious problem of subject verb agreement. Incorrect word choice is the other frequently seen problem in student essays. 124

times, student opted for an incorrect word choice. Most of the linguists agree upon the fact that incorrect lexical choice is the worse of whole language problems because native speaker of the target language could tolerate grammatical errors of the language learners, but lexical errors are often unpardonable because it impedes the very process of communication.

About the causes of errors, it is confirmed that mother tongue interference, thinking in learners' first language, unpredictable nature of the English language itself, poor teaching methodologies, reckless approaches on the part of the students, lack of knowledge about language rules and its restrictions and most importantly 'rote learning' are the major causes of errors.

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